“CHOOSE RED”: UNIVERSITY BRANDING AND THE ELABORATION LIKELIHOOD MODEL

by

Heather M. Hickerson

An Abstract
of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in the Department of Communication and Sociology
University of Central Missouri

December 12, 2012
ABSTRACT

by

Heather Hickerson

State budget cuts, increased competition and a decreasing pool of new students are pushing higher education institutions to use marketing to try to differentiate themselves and gain market share.

This is an explanatory, single-case study meant to provide a greater understanding of how the “Choose Red” campaign at the University of Central Missouri impacted the university’s enrollment, as well as how it affected the attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of students, faculty and staff members. The researcher collected quantitative and qualitative data.

The study found that the “Choose Red” campaign did result in an increase in Web traffic to the websites that were promoted through the advertising. The researcher also found that while inquiries for information fluctuated from year-to-year, the overall enrollment of new students trended upward from 2007 through the first two semesters of 2012. Finally, the researcher found that the campaign had a positive effect on the attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of students, faulty and staff members toward the university.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables ........................................................................................................................................ 8

List of Figures ...................................................................................................................................... 9

**INTRODUCTION** ................................................................................................................................. 10

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE** ............................................................................................................... 12
- Branding in Higher Education ........................................................................................................ 12
- Marketing Problems in Higher Education .................................................................................. 15
- Elaboration Likelihood Model ....................................................................................................... 18
  - Central Route .............................................................................................................................. 20
  - Peripheral Route ......................................................................................................................... 23
- ELM and Advertising ..................................................................................................................... 24
  - Problems with ELM and Advertising ....................................................................................... 25
  - Marketing Campaign ................................................................................................................ 27
- Research Questions ......................................................................................................................... 33

**METHODOLOGY** ............................................................................................................................. 34
- Quantitative Research .................................................................................................................... 34
- Qualitative Research ..................................................................................................................... 36

**ANALYSIS** ...................................................................................................................................... 39
- Media Purchases and Web Traffic .................................................................................................. 39
- Enrollment Data ............................................................................................................................. 45
- Survey ............................................................................................................................................. 48
  - Attitudes Toward the “Choose Red” Campaign ....................................................................... 48
  - Behavior Change from the “Choose Red” Campaign ................................................................. 52
- Focus Group .................................................................................................................................... 53
  - Attitudes Toward the Tone and Design of the “Choose Red” Campaign .................................. 53
  - Behavior Change from the “Choose Red” Campaign ................................................................. 54

**DISCUSSION** .................................................................................................................................. 56
- Limitations ....................................................................................................................................... 57
- Future Research .............................................................................................................................. 57

**REFERENCES** .................................................................................................................................. 59

**APPENDIX A** .................................................................................................................................. 61

**APPENDIX B** .................................................................................................................................. 64
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: UCM Media Buys

Table 2: Top 15 Most Repeated Words or Themes
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: 2011-2012 Media Purchases

Figure 2: Choose Red Website

Figure 3: Future Students Website

Figure 4: Transfer Students Website

Figure 5: Year-to-Year Admissions Funnel (Academic year)

Figure 6: Year-to-Year Admissions Funnel (Academic year)

Figure 7: Attitude Toward “Choose Red” Tone and Design

Figure 8: Attitude Toward UCM
CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions across the United States are being asked to do more with less. Between cuts in state funding, increased competition from other universities and colleges, and a decreasing pool of potential new students, institutions are forced to legitimatize themselves through marketing the value of their services to the public.

Even before the Great Recession began in 2007, nearly every state was collecting less revenue. With the rise of health care programs such as Medicaid and the cost of K-12 education, most states have cut funding for programs such as higher education. "Always a target during economic downturns, higher education is now facing an entirely new funding crisis wrought by record state budget gaps and forecasts of anemic revenue growth" (Pattison & Eckl, 2011, p. 1).

To examine the amount of money states spend on higher education can be misleading because even though the total amount states spent on higher education has increased over time, its overall share of state funds has decreased. “The percentage of total state funds devoted to higher education over the last 15 years averaged 10.6 percent, peaking at 11.4 percent in FY 2000—the height of the dot com boom—and falling to a low of 10 percent in economically troubled recovery year of FY 2010” (Pattison & Eckl, 2011, p. 4).

The University of Central Missouri is a mid-size university in Warrensburg, MO with more than 11,000 students at the time of this study. In 2010, a newly hired university president addressed the university by stating the governor wanted to increase the
percentage of Missourians with a college degree by 21 percentage points, or approximately 462,000 people (C. Ambrose, “State of the University Address”). With this mandate, combined with funding appropriation cuts, UCM began to consider ways to increase the number of students who attend UCM.

By the following year, the state of Missouri announced that state higher education appropriations would be cut by $58 million for in-state colleges and universities for fiscal year 2012, which would result in a $3.8 million cut to UCM’s state appropriations (C. Ambrose, personal communication, June 21, 2011).

Compounding the problem is the projected decrease in college-eligible students. According to a survey by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (2008), the Midwest will experience a four to 10 percent decline in high school graduates between 2009-2014.

Facing these obstacles, in the fall of 2010 UCM’s administration directed the Office of Enrollment Management and the Office of University Relations to find new ways to increase enrollment as a revenue raising measure. What resulted from the Office of University Relations was the “Choose Red” campaign.

As marketing higher education is relatively new territory to most institutions, this paper will examine how one mid-sized, Midwestern university developed and implemented a recruitment-based marketing campaign and how it affected the university’s brand.

This paper presents a case study of the “Choose Red” campaign at the University of Central Missouri. The objectives are to determine if the campaign had its desired effects on enrollment, attitude and perception at UCM.
CHAPTER TWO:
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Traditionally, universities have existed outside of the perils of the marketplace. However, today's competitive higher education field is pushing universities to navigate the ups and downs of an increase in competition, a decrease in state and federal funds and more selective students. More and more institutions are attempting to differentiate themselves through marketing initiatives. The review of literature outlines the need for marketing and branding in higher education; the pitfalls institutions often fall into; the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1980), a theoretical model that could help guide marketing planning and influence with consumers; and a detailed description of the case that will be studied, including how one university devised a recruitment campaign to meet its strategic goals.

**Branding in Higher Education**

For years, universities have grappled with declining state appropriations and increased competition from other universities and colleges for a dwindling pool of potential new students. To address these needs, many institutions have adopted an approach long proven effective in the business sector—marketing. Marketing the services of higher education requires that an institution understand its values and assets, where it is positioned in the marketplace and how to best communicate its brand to the institution’s numerous constituent groups. Although this paper will focus on a specific marketing campaign for one institution, it is important to understand that a campaign should support
the brand and is not the brand itself. In this section, we will be examining the body of knowledge associated with branding in higher education.

Within the past decade, marketing has become part of the dialog, if not part of the strategic planning, for most institutions of higher learning. Despite this, the “scholarship to provide evidence of the marketing strategies that have been implemented by higher education institutions on the supply-side remains limited, and this is relatively unchartered territory” (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006, p. 318). However, we know that marketing an effective brand should result in a competitive advantage that leads to increased market share and profitability (Chapleo, 2011).

The relative newness of marketing higher education has left the debate open as to what it is and what its goals should be. According to Kotler and Fox (1985), marketing education is “the analysis, planning, implementation and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with a target market to achieve organizational objectives” (p. 7). If effective, a university’s brand can positively affect new business as applicants consider if their values are congruent with those of the university they are considering (Jevons, 2006).

Universities must approach marketing themselves differently than their commercial counterparts because, as a public sector entity, they do not respond to market forces in the same way as private sector businesses (Liu & Dubinsky, 2000). It is also generally agreed upon that higher education is a service, not a product, and therefore warrants a different approach. The key difference is that service marketing is people-based and emphasizes the relationship with customers (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006).
Understanding an institution’s performance and position in the marketplace is essential to reaching its desired outcomes. To fully understand where a university is positioned, it is best to conduct a market analysis so as to present its image most effectively (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006) to its target audience(s). With increasing competition in the academic market, budget restrictions and an ever-changing operating environment, evaluating a university’s market position is essential to developing a healthy brand (Liu & Dubinsky, 2000).

Defining the brand can be the most difficult part of marketing an institution. “It is argued that university branding concerns defining the essential and distinct essence of the institution, encapsulating this and clearly articulating it through distinct, clear and consistent messages to multiple stakeholders externally and internally” (Chapleo, 2011, p. 419). Compiling the qualities that make up the whole range of values for the institution and then using those to differentiate itself from its competitors is only part of the battle. To truly determine if its brand is effective in the marketplace, institutions must identify measurable outcomes to determine its return on investment (Chapleo, 2011).

Identifying values, assets, market position and measurable outcomes begins with good strategic planning. Marketing should be an integral part of an institution’s strategic planning to stay ahead of rapidly changing consumer behaviors and to anticipate long-term trends in consumer decision-making (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006).

According to Liu and Dubinsky (2000):

Traditionally, universities have sought to maintain or enhance their competitive position with activities chiefly directed at student recruitment,
particularly through the use of aggressive promotional activities. With the tumult and dynamism in the present environment, though, university administrators cannot rely primarily on student recruitment efforts for success. They will need to adopt a strategic marketing approach and enfold it into their strategic management activities. (p. 1316)

Branding in higher education will help institutions identify what sets them apart in the marketplace and how to best communicate clearly with their target audiences. However, marketing higher education presents its own challenges from internal stakeholders, knowledgeable consumers, a lack of understanding of marketing and shrinking resources.

**Marketing Problems in Higher Education**

Higher education presents its own challenges when institutions are developing marketing strategies. A marketer may encounter problems such as: a lack of faculty, staff and administrative buy-in; complex institutions with too few resources and too many stakeholders; relative newness of marketing to higher education; savvy consumers; inclination to focus on quick-fix advertising campaigns; and messaging that does not hit home with its many audiences.

Internal acceptance of a university’s brand can be the institution’s biggest battle. For many administrators and faculty members, marketing is seen as merely a tool for fundraising and admissions (Liu & Dubinsky, 2000). There is a perception that to focus on “selling” a university takes the emphasis off of teaching and learning, which is the true purpose of the institution. However, “in today’s environment, social spending on education
outpaces economic growth; so the education system confronts increasing difficulties maintaining requisite funding levels. Hence, educational institutions now are required to legitimatize themselves through the value they offer” (Liu & Dubinsky, 2000, p. 1316). When internal stakeholders resist a university’s brand, they can potentially damage the institution’s efforts to market itself effectively (Chapleo, 2011).

In some cases, the very nature of a university can become a marketing challenge. Universities are arguably too complex with too many stakeholder groups to deliver a succinct brand proposition, their culture is inherently resistant to marketing initiatives and they lack the resources to implement an effective marketing strategy in the same way as their commercial counterparts (Jevons, 2006).

Various stakeholders bring their own unique values and ideas to an institution. According to Harris (2009):

Administrators, faculty, students, alumni, employers and legislators are among the many groups who are heavily invested in the institutional brand. As a result of these continuous interactions, higher education branding is remarkably difficult to implement in a meaningful way for the diverse values of each constituency. (p. 288)

The complex nature of a university and its diverse constituent groups lead to the conclusion that marketing education will differ from the conventional marketing and branding exercises (Jevons, 2006) that have been successful in the private sector. In exactly what ways the marketing of education will differ from conventional marketing are still being discovered. Adding to the challenge of internal resistance and diverse constituent
groups is greater scrutiny from tech-savvy consumers who are sensitive to authenticity and sophisticated about evaluating marketing messages (Whisman, 2009).

Building a brand and seeing any return on investment can take years, which is why marketing requires a long-term perspective. Whisman (2009) points out that due to poor understanding of branding and a lack of resources, universities all too often focus their energy on “quick-fix solutions,” such as flashy advertising campaigns, instead of developing a strong internal brand and working from the inside out. “Because schools have focused their brand efforts on external visual executions like logos, taglines and advertising campaigns, they often fail to think of their brands in terms of culture change” (Whisman, 2009, p. 369). When an institution focuses on advertising campaigns instead of brand building, they reinforce concerns from important stakeholders about the purpose of the brand and what it represents, and are therefore less likely to take ownership (Whisman, 2009).

Another common problem universities encounter is communicating their messages in the most effective way to separate themselves in the marketplace. When studying the messages from college and university advertisements during college football and basketball bowl games, Harris (2009) found that institutions of higher learning tended to focus on selling campus characteristics, academics and co-curricular activities while neglecting the larger purposes of higher education, such as institutional mission, innovation, service functions and economic development in the state.

Universities must identify messages that represent their brand proposition without compromising their institutional values, all while differentiating themselves from their
competitors. Harris (2008) found that by focusing on cutting edge technology, long-standing traditions, research opportunities and national rankings, institutions were unable to differentiate themselves in the marketplace.

The challenges facing higher education—decreasing state funding, increasing competition from other college and universities, and fewer potential students—lead institutions of higher education into the new and relatively unchartered territory of marketing education. Universities must develop marketing strategies that show they understand their values, their position in the marketplace and how to best communicate their brand values. Along the way, universities are facing internal resistance, diverse stakeholders, savvy consumers, the propensity to form short-term solutions and mixed messages. Nevertheless, branding has become essential to the strategic planning of the university. Although a brand is not a marketing campaign, a campaign can greatly impact a university’s brand. The next section will describe how the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1980) has been applied to understand the effects of communication in marketing and advertising.

**Elaboration Likelihood Model**

Marketing and advertising professionals often use a tool called the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), developed by social psychology researchers Richard Petty and John Cacioppo (1980), to explain how attitudes are formed during the process of decision-making by consumers. Petty and Cacioppo's ELM says that individuals will process a message through a central route, which involves elaborating on the message (high cognitive ability and motivation), or the peripheral route, which does not (low cognitive
ability and motivation). The ELM is important because it adds a key component to decades of research that demonstrates a strong link between attitudes and subsequent behavior (Morris, Woo, & Singh, 2005). If consumers process a message positively along the central route, they are more likely to be persuaded toward taking action (likely purchasing) a product or changing an attitude, and that persuasion will persist over time. If consumers process a message along the peripheral route, they will be less likely to be persuaded, or, if they are persuaded, it will be a weak persuasion that is easily altered over time.

“The central route and the peripheral route are poles on a cognitive processing continuum that shows the degree of mental effort a person exerts when evaluating a message” (Griffin, 2009, p. 194). Most messages fall somewhere in between these two poles until something triggers consumers to elaborate further or just let it go (Griffin, 2009). There are two main areas that must be met in order for elaboration through the central route to take place. First, there must be a level of motivation by the persuadee to engage with the message. This motivation is related to relevance and need for cognition. The persuadee must find the topic relevant or important to him/herself. Need for cognition is the innate trait of individuals who like to know information, like to figure things out, and/or analyze and critique messages.

However, having the motivation to analyze a message is not enough. The persuadee must also have the ability to elaborate on the message. Ability is related to being free from distractions and the appropriate level of knowledge. Free from distractions means that there cannot be any internal distractions (e.g., feeling sick, other issues on mind, etc.) or external distractions (e.g., noise in the background, cold temperature of the room, etc.) that would
inhibit the persuadee from elaborating on the message. Finally, the persuadee must have
enough background knowledge to understand the message. For example, if a persuasive
message is given to a college class and a 5th grade class without adapting to the level of
education of the audience, the 5th graders might simply not have enough background to
understand the message; and therefore not have the ability to elaborate. If these conditions
of motivation and ability are not able to be met, the persuasdee will not elaborate on the
message and be impacted by it through the peripheral route.

Central Route

The central route involves evaluating messages based on issue-relevant arguments
and requires high cognitive effort (Griffin, 2009). To consider a message centrally, an
individual’s motivation and ability must be high in order to carefully analyze the
information in an advertisement (Montoro-Ríos, Luque-Martínez, & Rodríguez-Molina,
2008).

According to Petty and Cacioppo (1984), when people’s motivation and ability are
high, they are likely to:

(a) attend to the appeal; (b) attempt to access relevant associations, images,
and experiences from memory; (c) scrutinize and elaborate upon the
externally provided message arguments in light of the associations available
from memory; (d) draw inferences about the merits of the arguments for a
recommendation based upon their analyses of the data extracted from the
appeal and accessed from memory; and (e) consequently derive an overall
evaluation of, or attitude toward, the recommendation. (p. 673)
Not only must an individual have high motivation and ability to evaluate a message, but he or she must also find it personally relevant or he/she will relegate it to the peripheral route (Griffin, 2009). “The central route emphasizes high relevance of the message to the individual. The greater the relevance and the more interest that the individual shows in the subject of the message, usually a product, the higher the chances that they will think or elaborate on the message” (Morris, et al., 2005, p. 81).

What prompts an individual to consider a message in the central route and make a change in behavior? Central route cognition usually concentrates on message content, such as text, words and written material (Morris, et al., 2005). However, some cues are more attention grabbing than others. “The most obvious cues are tangible rewards linked to agreement with the advocate’s position. Food, sex, and money are traditional inducements to change” (Griffin, 2009, p. 198). Since college is such a big financial investment, it is assumed that potential students would process messages through the central route.

There are also tactical ways to guarantee a message makes it to the central route. Repetition can be used to ensure a point comes across, but too much distraction will impede consideration of the message, regardless of how much repetition is used (Griffin, 2009, p. 196). Another approach is to use an appealing spokesperson or expert. “Four decades of research confirm that people who are likable and have expertise on the issue in question can have a persuasive impact regardless of what arguments they present” (Griffin, 2009, p. 198). Generally speaking, tactical approaches such as these resemble peripheral routes of persuasion as opposed to central routes. However, if the persuadee views the spokesperson as an expert with a great deal of knowledge, then the persuadee may
evaluate the spokesperson as another “good argument,” rather than a “pretty/handsome face.”

The ELM predicts thoughtful consideration of issue-relevant arguments through the central route will lead to the desired effects of the persuader.

According to Petty and Cacioppo (1984):

When the elaboration likelihood is higher, there should be evidence for the allocation of cognitive resources to the persuasive appeal. Second, the resultant attitude is expected to be relatively enduring since the thoughts and associations upon which it is derived are central to the attitude object and, as a result of the issue-relevant thinking, the attitude is an integrated part of the schema for the attitude object. Finally, the attitude is expected to be relatively predictive of subsequent behavior because: (a) the recipients are more likely to have related the incoming information to their previous experiences with and knowledge about the attitude object; (b) achieved a temporally stable and accessible evaluation of the object, making it more likely that the measured attitude will be accessible at the point of behavior; (c) considered appropriate actions regarding the attitude object across a wide range of personally relevant settings, minimizing the need for individuals to reconsider their attitude when faced with the costs of a relevant behavior. (p. 673)

The ideal outcome for the ELM will cause an individual’s “change in position to persist over time, resist counterpersuasion, and predict future behavior”—the ‘triple crown' of
interpersonal influence” (Griffin, 2009, p. 197). This is, of course, ideal for marketers who are trying to determine consumers’ attitudes toward a brand, which, in turn, predicts purchase intention (Montoro-Rios, et. al., 2008).

Peripheral Route

Cognitive elaboration (CE) can be high or low, and describes the degree to which we process information. Most of us do not elaborate on many advertisements, so CE is generally low (Chow, & Luk, 2006). According to the ELM, when CE is low, messages are processed through the peripheral route, which offers a quick acceptance or rejection of a message without evaluating the issue-relevant arguments in the advertisement (Griffin, 2009). Therefore, in the peripheral route, consumers will make a decision or form a reasonable attitude based on superficial analysis (Cacioppo, & Petty, 1984). In the peripheral route, “the individual concentrates on heuristic cues such as attractive expert sources and numbers rather than the content of arguments employed by the message in order to process it” (Morris, et al., 2005, p. 81). Other peripheral route message cues could be color, design, personal characteristics (Morris, et. al., 2005), perceived credibility (Griffin, 2009) and mood of the listener (Griffin, 2009).

Most people approach mass media with low CE because of the number of advertisements to which they are exposed. Because people are only casual viewers of ad messages, the low cognitive processing of ads causes, at best, weak attitude change (Chow, & Luk, 2006). The ELM says low CE will merely produce a short-lived and unpredictable change in behavior (Morris, et al., 2005). With weak attitude change and low cognitive motivation and ability, the peripheral route is not the ideal route to long-term, persistent
persuasion. If marketers are trying to determine consumers’ attitude toward a brand and intention toward taking some kind of action, they should avoid messages that direct consumers to use the peripheral route.

**ELM and Advertising**

The Elaboration Likelihood Model tells us that a consumer who analyzes an ad’s message through the central route is more likely to be persuaded. However, this cognitive approach does not factor in the role emotions—generally considered a peripheral characteristic—can play in decision-making (Morris, et al., 2005). In his study, Morris, et al., (2005) found that “cognitive elaborators had higher pleasure, arousal, dominance [PAD] scores, as well as higher purchase intent scores” (p. 92). This research study proved that cognition has an emotional core and can result in a longer-lasting change in attitude when coupled with issue-relevant reasoning (Morris, et al., 2005).

Age is another peripheral factor that plays a part in cognitive elaboration in advertising. A study by Te’Eni-Harari, Lampert, and Lehman-Wilzig (2007), found that “as age increases, positive attitudes toward advertising decrease, as well as purchase intent” (p. 334). This study also found that, in contradiction to adults, children and young adolescents do not use the two routes to process information (Te’Eni, et al., 2007). They tend to rely on heuristic cues, such as colors, characters and music, to evaluate a message.

High cognitive elaboration is most likely to occur when a consumer closely analyzes a message, so advertisers pay close attention to the content of a given ad. “Message-based persuasion describes the scenario in which consumers are interested in learning about the
advertised product and, therefore, carefully consider the ad’s content” (Darley, & Smith, 1993, p. 100).

Advertisers must routinely decide what to say and how to say it, so that an ad will result in strong, enduring attitude change and future purchase behavior (Darley, & Smith, 1993). This often comes down to what kind of claims to advertise.

According to Darley and Smith (1993):

Copywriters and ad managers should consider using factual language whenever they expect consumers to centrally process ad claims. Moreover, combining tangible attributes with factual description to produce maximally objective message content was shown to be the most effective copy strategy of the three tested. (p. 111)

Problems with ELM and Advertising

The ELM is a very useful tool for advertisers because it directs them toward two routes a consumer could take when forming or changing his or her attitude toward a product or brand (Bitner, & Obermiller, 1985). However, it does not tell marketers how to get a consumer to process a message through the central route. “A better understanding of these specific circumstances would be very useful to explaining the diversity of consumer behavior and for designing marketing strategies appropriate to varied circumstances” (Bitner, & Obermiller, 1985, p. 422). Even with research and professional creative services applied to an advertisement, there is no guarantee a message will receive high CE, therefore marketing strategies are difficult to plan for diverse audiences and circumstances.
One obstacle in cognitive elaboration is that even if an individual has the motivation to evaluate the content of a message, he or she may not have the *ability* to do so (Griffin, 2009). “Issue-relevant thinking (elaboration) takes more than intelligence. It requires concentration. Distraction disrupts elaboration” (Griffin, 2009, p. 196).

If motivation and ability are both present, one still may not process information in a reasonable and objective manner. Because we are only able to process a limited number of ideas, most messages do not get fairly elaborated. “Petty and Cacioppo refer to biased elaboration as top-down thinking in which a predetermined conclusion colors the supporting data underneath. They contrast this with objective elaboration, or bottom-up thinking, which lets facts speak for themselves. Biased elaboration merely bolsters previous ideas” (Griffin, 2009, p. 197). Despite biased thinking, Petty and Cacioppo believe consumers want to make reasonable positions in our search for truth (Griffin, 2009).

The ELM fails to identify which specific cues are processed centrally and which are processed peripherally. What one person may perceive as a peripheral cue (such as background music) another might perceive as a central cue (Bitner, & Obermiller, 1985). “In an environment where attention is free to roam, many peripheral cues such as music, images, humor, may attract enough attention to elicit central processing of their own. The role of such elaborate, but irrelevant, processing in affect formation is not well understood and not currently addressable with the ELM” (Bitner, & Obermiller, 1985, p. 421).

In the absence of central cues, such as useful information or prior knowledge, consumers may be forced to rely on peripheral cues, such as décor, physical features and
personality traits (Bitner, & Obermiller, 1985). When this occurs, consumers are using peripheral cues as cognitive elaborators to form a conclusion.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model offers two routes of cognition (central and peripheral) that explain the process of decision making by consumers. The “central and peripheral routes represent positions on a continuous dimension ranging from high to low elaboration likelihood rather than two mutually exclusive and exhaustive “types” of message processing” (Cacioppo, & Petty, 1984, p. 673). When motivation and ability lead to high CE, an individual is more likely to be persuaded, maintain his or her position against counterpersuasion and behave in a predictable manner in the future. However, most messages are low on the CE continuum and therefore are not good indicators of long-lasting persuasion. Many obstacles hinder the ELM from being a perfect indicator of persuasion and behavior prediction, but it is still a useful tool for marketers and advertisers when considering the best way to communicate a message or brand to consumers.

**Marketing Campaign**

Following years of state budget cuts to education—especially after the Great Recession of 2007—the University of Central Missouri was facing another round of deep cuts from the state government. New university president Charles Ambrose charged the Office of Enrollment Management (which includes the Office of Admissions) and the Office of University Relations (UR) with finding new ways to increase enrollment at the university to offset the anticipated budget cuts.
Robin Krause, director of marketing and promotions in the Office of University Relations, said UR was asked to find ways to raise the university’s profile, not, specifically, to form a new advertising campaign (personal communication, August 2, 2011).

“The objective was to help Enrollment Management increase the fall 2011 enrollment. Initially, that was the charge. We did not have specific numbers associated with that. Since then, they have determined we want to increase semester credit hours by 3.4 percent” (R. Krause, personal communication, August 2, 2011).

Once UR had the directive from the university president, it began to lay the groundwork for making the university more appealing to prospective students. UR decided a new marketing campaign was needed to appeal to a high school and traditional-aged students (16-20 years old) using various types of media. "We decided to create a campaign because of all the media we were going to be using to promote the school" (R. Krause, personal communication, August 2, 2011).

With the primary objective of increasing enrollment, secondary objectives identified were to increase awareness about UCM and to create “buzz” about the university that would have a positive effect on morale and institutional pride.

Sarah Murrill, Web and advertising coordinator in UR, said, “The objectives were to create a campaign that was going to create buzz and eventually help increase enrollment on campus. Also, to create knowledge about who we are, where we’re located and what we offer to incoming students, and why people should choose this school” (personal communication, August 2, 2011).
In the beginning, the UR staff identified key elements that made UCM stand out among other universities in the region. The most evident element to be included was the school’s mascot, the mule. UCM is the only school in the country with the mule as its mascot, and the mule is the official state animal of Missouri. It is also a key visual identifier in the athletics and alumni realms (S. Murrill, personal communication, August 2, 2011).

The first step of the development of the campaign included input from all staff members from UR and Printing Services, which was a branch of UR at the time. Everyone had the chance to submit statement lines, design ideas and campaign concepts.

The next step was to whittle down the pool of concepts to three that could be developed further. Once the UR staff had narrowed down the concepts to three, I in my full-time job as the marketing writer/editor for UR, wrote mock-ups for each one.

As the development of each concept was progressing, the design was also taking shape. In trying to appeal to a younger audience, student designers became important contributors. “It was extremely important to have student involvement in the concept phase of the design for the campaign, and [to know] what appealed and didn’t appeal to them” (S. Murrill, personal communication, August 2, 2011).

As the three concepts were still being developed, the UR staff met to see each one and provide feedback.

“We got the University Relations creative group together with the consultant [Dennis Cryder]. We put them up on the wall and just started talking about what we like and didn’t like about them. Really, it was out of that final conference, that we settled on ‘Choose Red’” (R. Krause, personal communication, August 2, 2011).
From the three campaign concepts, “Choose Red” was selected because it had the greatest potential to “speak” directly to prospective students. “Choose” asking students to select UCM as their college of choice, and “Red” because the school’s colors are red and black.

As the marketing writer/editor on this campaign, I was very influenced by the inspirational, lofty and youthful messages that I was researching from popular culture, from other universities and from my favorite poems and speeches. The campaign was to convey college as a time for exploration, adventure, promise, achievement and hope. I think, especially when people are young, they naturally maintain a sense of hope and a belief that they can do anything. At the time, I was only three years out of college myself, so I could identify with the feeling of ‘we can change the world,’ so I knew I wanted it to inspire that feeling in young people.

Lead designer, Sarah Murrill, said she wanted the look to be fresh, youthful and energetic (personal communication, August 2, 2011). “We wanted something that would catch the attention of the 12- to 18-year-old age group. The goal was for students to be able find and recognize UCM. We also wanted a strong usage of the mule mascot on all media” (S. Murrill, personal communication, August 2, 2011).

To catch the attention of prospective students, the design staff had to break from tradition. “We went out of the box from what this university has seen, probably ever. It’s a lot less conservative, a lot more youthful. Almost everything has a roughed-up, textured look with layers, pops of color, outlines and a collage look to it. The textures and distressed
effects help add to the youthful energy. It is an energetic campaign for an energetic campus” (S. Murrill, personal communication, August 2, 2011).

As the design and copy for various types of media began were being developed, the director was working to solidify the media buying and ad preparation (R. Krause, personal communication, August 2, 2011).

“My part was to pick the things that I thought would be best in terms of what media to buy, which newspapers to run ads in, whether we were going to run special programs on KMOS, etc. That was one track, all the media buying. Then, I had to take that information and get presidential and Cabinet approval because it involved a lot of additional money” (R. Krause, personal communication, August 2, 2011).

The total budget for the development and implementation of the “Choose Red” campaign—including television, radio, print and billboard media buys, consultation with a media buying agency, promotional items, a live call-in TV show, and a video editor (new position)—the cost was $150,000 (R. Krause, personal communication, August 2, 2011).

Once all the media was bought and the creative elements developed, R. Krause presented the concept and timeline to the university president and the Board of Governors (personal communication, August 2, 2011). The TV commercials targeting prospective students and their parents began airing on January 31, 2011 in Kansas City, KS and MO and ran through March 2011. Then, in February, billboards that targeted transfer students were placed in the Kansas City metropolitan area (R. Krause, personal communication, August 2, 2011).
Just before the TV commercials started airing, the UR marketing staff members promoted the new campaign with a guerilla marketing campaign using social media (Facebook and Twitter) in Kansas City. The staff members distributed posters and trading cards with “Choose Red” designs at coffee shops and restaurants in Lee’s Summit, MO and Overland Park, KS, as well as the Brookside, Country Club Plaza, Westport, downtown and River Market areas of Kansas City.

To create awareness of the new campaign on campus, the UR staff threw a launch party in the newly opened Student Recreation and Wellness Center. The university president hosted the event, and the faculty, staff and students were invited to attend.

According to Krause (2011):

We had some snacks, the TV commercials were running in the lobby, we had tables where people could sign up to win T-shirts and other UCM apparel. When we invited the campus to the event, we got the president involved and had his office send the invitations. So we had a really good turnout, particularly of faculty and staff, and the president spoke at the event. More than anything else, it gave legitimacy to the campaign to the rest of the campus. (personal communication, August 2)

The “Choose Red” campaign was created and launched in a very short time—approximately three months. It was developed as a marketing tool for the university to recruit, primarily traditional-aged, undergraduate students to attend UCM. It was given a youthful, energetic treatment in the copy and design, to inspire new students to be excited
about attending the university while making current students and internal stakeholders proud to be part of the institution.

**Research Questions**

Marketing the services of higher education has become increasingly important as institutions compete for a decreasing pool of potential students, and struggle to fill the financial gap left by decreasing state funds. As colleges and universities turn to marketing to reach new students, they are competing in a crowded marketplace for the attention of young adults. How the campaigns communicate with these consumers plays a big role in how the would-be students decide where to invest in a college education.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model tells us that consumers who have a personal interest in the decision-making process are more likely to closely evaluate an ad’s message based on the information given (central route). This central route cognition will result in long-lasting persuasion. However, peripheral route cognition will result in, at best, weak persuasion. This paper will examine the “Choose Red” campaign and its effectiveness at the University of Central Missouri.

RQ1: Was there a link between the campaign media purchased and an increase in Web traffic?
RQ2: Did the “Choose Red” campaign increase the number of inquiries for information and total number of newly enrolled students at UCM compared to previous years?
RQ3: Did the “Choose Red” campaign have an effect on the attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of university students, faculty and staff members toward UCM as an institution?
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This case study is meant to highlight the growing importance of branding initiatives in higher education institutions. On the theoretical basis of the Elaboration Likelihood Model, the research should find that because of the hefty financial and personal investment involved in higher education, students should process the “Choose Red” campaign’s messages through the central route. And because of faculty and staff members’ investment in the university as a workplace, they too should process the campaign’s messages through the central route.

The study was an explanatory, single-case study with an intrinsic design meant to provide a greater understanding of how the “Choose Red” campaign at the University of Central Missouri impacted the university’s enrollment, as well as how it affected the attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of students, faculty and staff members. The researcher provided quantitative and qualitative analyses to determine if the campaign reached its desired outcomes.

*Quantitative research*

The quantitative research determined (1) if there is any link between the times the media were airing and an increase in the Web traffic. To do this, the researcher collected data from the advertising buys and Web traffic. The university’s contracted media buying agency, Ruth Burke & Associates, provided the purchased advertising charts.
(2) For the Web data, the researcher examined the traffic flow to certain UCM Web pages using Google Analytics. The data also was collected for February 1, 2011 to February 29, 2012 to encompass the 2011-12 academic year (spring, summer and fall semesters).

Collecting this data allowed the researcher to determine, essentially, if there is any link between when the university's ads were airing on the various media, if there was an increase in Web traffic on UCM Web pages that were promoted in a majority of the ads and if there was an increase in subsequent action taken (i.e. requests for information, etc).

The researcher determined (3) if the “Choose Red” campaign had its desired effects on enrollment at UCM. The researcher gathered data from the Office of Enrollment Management at the University of Central Missouri from two points of the admissions process: inquiries for information and total number of new students enrolled. These data was collected from February 1, 2011 to February 29, 2012 to encompass the 2011-12 academic year (fall and spring semesters). The researcher also collected data from the same time period from the previous five years (beginning February 2007) to establish if a trend is present and to get pre-recession data.

The researcher also circulated a brief questionnaire (see Appendix A) to 2,000 students, faculty and staff members using the campus email system. The questionnaire measured attitudes and perceptions toward the “Choose Red” campaign, and any change in behavior as a result of the campaign. A brief, 15-item questionnaire was emailed to 1,500 current students and 500 faculty and staff members of the university using the campus email system. The survey received 481 responses, representing a 24 percent response rate among those surveyed overall. Among student respondents, females made up 70.8 percent
and males made up 29.2 percent. The mean age was 22.7 years old. White students made up the largest percentage of respondents (87.5), followed by black students (9.2) and Hispanic students (1.7). Lastly, 32.5 percent of respondents were transfer students and 67.5 percent were traditional undergraduate students.

Among faculty and staff respondents, females made up 59.7 percent and males made up 40.3 percent. The mean age was 46.5 years old. White faculty and staff made up the largest percentage of respondents (92.2), followed by Hispanic and Asian (2.4) and other (1.9).

The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section had five items and asked demographic information (age, sex, ethnicity, year in school, faculty or staff). The second section had eight items and asked attitude questions (Do you feel the campaign is speaking directly to you; Is the campaign youthful looking; Does it make you feel positively about the university, etc). One attitude question was open-ended (Describe the “Choose Red” campaign in three words). The third section had two items and asked behavioral questions (Have you told anyone to attend the university as a result of this campaign; Would you consider telling someone to attend this university as a result of this campaign).

The questions were rated on a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree). The participants had one week to complete the survey and received a follow-up email three days after the initial email to encourage greater response.

*Qualitative research*
The qualitative research determined if the “Choose Red” campaign had its desired effects on the attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of UCM.

The researcher also conducted two focus groups to gain insight into current students’ attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of the campaign. Due to time and availability constraints, the researcher used a convenience sample of current UCM students and hosted one focus group in the spring 2012 semester and one in the fall 2012 semester. The researcher did not conduct a focus group with faculty or staff members as they were not considered as the primary audience targeted by the “Choose Red” campaign.

The first focus group had nine participants—five females and four males—and was comprised of three sophomores, four juniors and one senior. Two participants were also transfer students.

The second focus group had three participants—all females—and was comprised of two freshmen and one sophomore.

The researcher provided both groups with campaign materials—including publications, advertisements and videos—for participants to view during the discussion. The researcher asked open-ended questions to both of the student focus groups (see Appendix B) designed to promote discussion. The group facilitator used a pre-determined question guide to steer the discussion, but the respondents were encouraged to expand upon their ideas and opinions. The focus groups lasted approximately 30-45 minutes, and were tape-recorded and then transcribed. The transcriptions were used for thematic analysis to look for common themes based on the participants’ feedback.
These data were influential in determining if the “Choose Red” campaign had an effect on the perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of the students, faculty and staff members about the university. Once the quantitative and qualitative data are examined, this case study can evaluate if the “Choose Red” marketing campaign caused the university to reach its enrollment goals.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS

In order to answer the three research questions, data was analyzed from various aspects of the case study. Each of the research questions are addressed in their given order.

Media Purchases and Web Traffic

The first research question in this case study asks if there is any link between the “Choose Red” campaign media purchased and an increase in Web traffic during the months in which media was airing.

In order for the university to gain awareness in the Kansas City and surrounding area—which has the largest concentration of high school and community college students, and includes a majority of towns, cities and counties in which many UCM students are from—it made a significant investment in purchasing media and advertising.

The university’s contracted media buying agency, Ruth Burke & Associates in Kansas City, MO provided the researcher with the media purchase spreadsheets from 2009
through 2012. The researcher also collected and compared media purchase data and Web traffic data from the first year of the “Choose Red” campaign spanning February 1, 2011 to February 29, 2012.

*Table 1* shows months of the first year of the “Choose Red” campaign in which the university purchased media.
Table 1: UCM Media Buys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Months</th>
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<th>2012</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>April</td>
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<tr>
<td>May</td>
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<td>June</td>
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<td>July</td>
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<td>August</td>
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<tr>
<td>September</td>
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<tr>
<td>October</td>
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<td>November</td>
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<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>no</td>
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</table>

The “Choose Red” campaign began airing TV and radio commercials the first week of February 2011, and Table 1 shows the university utilized media advertising in February, March, July, September, October and November of 2011; January and February of 2012, which rounds out the first year of the campaign.

The university promoted the “Choose Red” campaign through a variety of advertising mediums, including print, radio, television and outdoor billboards during the months shown in Table 1.

Figure 1 shows the types of media that were utilized through the media buying agency the first year of the “Choose Red” campaign and the amount of money spent on each type of media.
In total, the university spent $479,069 on media and advertising during the first year of the “Choose Red” campaign. Unfortunately, the researcher did not have the budget information for media purchased from the years prior to 2011-12.

While it is difficult to tell if the university realized a direct and significant return on its investment from the advertising that was purchased, one would expect that the university’s Web traffic would be higher. The next section will examine if the university’s Web pages, which were promoted in the majority of the advertising, saw an increase in traffic during the months in which ads aired.

The purpose of gathering data from the university’s website was to determine if there was any link between when the university’s “Choose Red” ads aired on TV, radio, print and billboard media, and if there was an increase in Web traffic on sites that were
addressed in a majority of the ads. The researcher gathered data from the first full year of the “Choose Red” campaign (February 1, 2011-February 29, 2012).

The majority of the ads that ran on the various media directed the viewer to one of three websites: the “Choose Red” website, the future students website and a transfer students website.

The “Choose Red” website was created specifically for the campaign as an entry point for prospective students who had seen the “Choose Red” advertising to easily access information about the university that was specific to their interests. The website contained a request for information form, videos, student testimonials and links to a list of UCM’s majors, financial aid information, admissions requirements, etc.

*Figure 2* shows the number of unique hits the “Choose Red” website received each month during the first year of the campaign. Months in which the university's “Choose Red” advertising was airing are shaded in grey.

*Figure 2: Choose Red Website*
As the researcher expected, the site received more hits during the months in which the university had purchased “Choose Red” media, except for July. It is interesting to note that the month following the campaign’s launch (March, 2011) saw the largest number of unique visitors to the “Choose Red” site with 938 visitors, followed by September, 2011 with 525 visitors, respectively. This could, however, be attributed to normal cyclical patterns as March and September are peak months in the college selection process.

The university’s future students website is the main portal for prospective students to navigate the UCM website and is the default landing page for all users. Because of this, the website’s number of unique hits per month is disproportionately higher than other pages within the site. However, many “Choose Red” ads directed audiences to the future students page to get more information, so it is worth examining if the site received more Web traffic during the months in which the university had purchased media for “Choose Red.”

Figure 3: Future Students Website
Figure 3 shows that the future students website did receive more Web traffic during the months in which the university had purchased media except March and July.

The “Choose Red” campaign was directed, primarily, at undergraduate freshmen and transfer students, so many of the ads were targeted to transfer students. These students were directed to a landing page with information specific to them, including admissions requirements, deadlines and financial aid information. The university used two separate URLs for tracking which types of ads were getting the target audience to respond, but they landed on the same website. The URLs were [www.ucmo.edu/transfer](http://www.ucmo.edu/transfer) and [www.ucmo.edu/finish](http://www.ucmo.edu/finish).

Figure 4 shows the Web traffic for transfer students targeted in the “Choose Red” ads. The total hits for both URLs were added together for this figure.

**Figure 4: Transfer Students Website**

![Chart showing web traffic for transfer students](chart.jpg)

Figure 4 shows that transfer students also visited the transfer website more in months when “Choose Red” ads were airing than when they were not.
To answer the first research question—Was there a link between the campaign media purchased and an increase in Web traffic—these data support there was a positive link between when the ads aired on various media and an increase in the university’s Web traffic.

*Enrollment Data*

The second research question in this case study asks if the university saw an increase in two stages of the admissions process—inquiries for information and the total number of newly enrolled students—during the first year of the “Choose Red” campaign.

The university’s Office of Enrollment Management and the Office of Technology provided data for the two stages of the admission process, or “funnel,” from the first year of the “Choose Red” campaign (February 2011 to February 2012) and the five preceding years to determine if there is an increase due to the campaign and to compare it to prerecession data.

*Figure 5* shows the inquiry stage of the admissions funnel from the academic years of 2007-2012. The academic year is comprised of the summer, fall and spring semesters; therefore it straddles two calendar years. However, at the time of this study, the researcher could only gather data for the 2012 summer and fall semesters, and not the spring 2013 semester.
Figure 5: Year-to-Year Admissions Funnel (Academic year)

As shown in Figure 5, inquiries for information fluctuate greatly from year-to-year. Figure 5 shows that there was actually a decrease in the number of inquiries for information in the 2011-12 academic year, which is when one would expect to see the greatest increase as it is the year after the “Choose Red” campaign began. However, inquiries are up in the first two semesters of the 2012-13 academic year, and are projected to be even higher when the spring 2013 data is available. This volatility in the inquiries from year-to-year indicates there is no trend present, even with the “Choose Red” marketing campaign.

Figure 6 shows the total number of newly enrolled students for the academic years of 2007-2012.
Figure 6 shows that the overall pattern is up for newly enrolled students. The campaign seemed to have its greatest effect on enrollment for the academic year directly after it was launched. The decrease for 2012 could be because it only takes into account two of the three semesters that make up the full 2012-13 academic year. It could be reasonably assumed that the number of newly enrolled students in 2012-13 will meet or exceed the number from 2011-12.

To answer the second research question—Did the “Choose Red” campaign increase the number of inquiries for information and total number of newly enrolled students at UCM compared to previous years—Figure 5 and Figure 6 show that while inquiries for information fluctuated greatly from year-to-year, the total number of enrolled students steadily increased over the five years studied, including a substantial increase the year
after the “Choose Red” campaign began, which is when one would expect to see the greatest increase.

SURVEY

**Attitudes Toward the “Choose Red” Campaign**

The third research question in this case study asks how the attitude, beliefs and perceptions of the university students, faculty and staff members were affected by the tone and design of the “Choose Red” campaign. To gain greater insight, the researcher conducted a survey and two focus groups.

In the survey, participants were asked to rate their opinions (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree) regarding the campaign’s tone and design on three statements: 1. When I see “Choose Red,” I think it is speaking directly to me; 2. The tone of the words in the “Choose Red” ads and materials makes me feel like I can achieve my goals; 3. The design and look of the “Choose Red” ads and materials is youthful and cool.
Figure 7: Attitude Toward “Choose Red” Tone and Design

![Bar chart showing attitudes towards "Choose Red" campaign]

Note: * Represents a statistically significant difference at p=.05 or less.

Figure 7 shows that more than half of all students, faculty and staff members responded positively toward the tone and design of the “Choose Red” campaign, as all of the means are above the midpoint of the scale (3). The students were significantly more positive than the faculty/staff in two of the items. A statistically significant difference appears between students and faculty/staff when asked if the “Choose Red” campaign speaks directly to them and makes them feel like they can achieve their goals. This is what one would expect to find as the “Choose Red” campaign was primarily directed at students.

The survey also asked participants to rate their attitude toward UCM (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree) on three statements: 1. The “Choose Red” campaign makes me feel positively about UCM; 2. The “Choose Red” campaign has changed my attitude in a positive way about attending UCM (if student) or working at UCM (if faculty/staff); 3. The “Choose Red” campaign has increased my pride in UCM as my university of choice.
Figure 8: Attitude Toward UCM

![Bar Chart showing attitudes towards UCM with data points:]

**Note:** *Represents a statistically significant difference at p=.05 or less.*

*Figure 8* shows that more than half of all students, faculty and staff members had a positive attitude (all the mean scores above the midpoint of the scale) toward the university as a result of the “Choose Red” campaign. In fact, a statistically significant difference appears between students and faculty/staff when asked if their attitude toward the university changed in a positive way as a result of the “Choose Red” campaign. Again, as in the previous figure, the students had statistically more positive attitudes than the faculty/staff. It appears that the campaign appeals to students and may indicate that students are more likely to process “Choose Red” messaging through the central route resulting in the attitude change toward the university.

The survey also asked participants if the “Choose Red” campaign made them feel negatively about UCM (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree). The mean for students was
1.79 and for faculty/staff the mean was 1.91, which are both well below average. This again supports the positive impact of the campaign.

In the survey, the researcher asked participants to describe the “Choose Red” campaign in three words. Table 2 shows the words or themes that were repeated most often in survey participants’ responses.

Table 2: Top 15 Most Repeated Words or Themes

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catchy</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple/Simplistic</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confused/Doesn’t make sense</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bold</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color/Red</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic/Mules/Jennies/Spirit</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride/Proud</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cool/Creative/Young</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing/Campaign</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose/Direct</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorable</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCM/University of Central Missouri</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It’s interesting to note that the words “catchy,” “simple/simplistic,” and “fun” were repeated most often, followed by a more general theme of confusion about the campaign. Twenty-nine participants responded that they were confused, didn’t know or didn’t understand the “Choose Red” campaign. However, the majority of words or themes repeated most often in the top 15 indicate those surveyed responded positively toward the “Choose Red” campaign.

Behavior Change from the “Choose Red” Campaign
The survey asked participants two yes/no questions relating to their behavior in relation to the “Choose Red” campaign. When asked “Would you consider telling someone to attend UCM as a result of the “Choose Red” campaign?” 62.2 percent of students responded yes while 37.8 percent of faculty/staff responded yes. The Pearson Chi-Square Test was run and indicated that the difference between students and faculty/staff members’ behavior is statistically significant. This indicates students were more likely to have considered telling another person to consider attending UCM than the faculty/staff.

When asked “Have you told anyone to consider attending UCM as a result of the “Choose Red” campaign?” 64.5 percent of students responded yes while 35.5 percent of faculty/staff responded yes. Again, the Pearson Chi-Square Test was run and indicated that the difference between students and faculty/staff members’ behavior is statistically significant. This indicates that not only were students more likely to tell someone to consider UCM, they actually did tell someone to consider attending the university.

The survey results positively answer the third research question: Did the “Choose Red” campaign have an effect on the attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of university students, faculty and staff members toward UCM as an institution? Not only does it positively answer the question, but in some questions, there is a statistically significant difference between students’ attitudes and behaviors toward the “Choose Red” campaign and the attitudes and behaviors of faculty and staff members. Since the “Choose Red” campaign was primarily directed toward students, this is what one would expect to find. Also, there is evidence that students are processing the messages of “Choose Red” through the central route and it is resulting in a behavioral change.
FOCUS GROUP

Attitudes Toward the Tone and Design of the “Choose Red” Campaign

To describe the tone of the campaign, focus group participants used words such as “unique,” “friendly,” “proud” and “memorable.” Both groups expressed a sense of ownership in the campaign because they had all “chosen red” (decided to attend UCM) and were connected to each other and the institution, which gave them a sense of pride. Participants said students like the use of the word “red” because it is the school’s primary color and it’s important. Many believed the tone was directive in that it pushed people to make a decision and assured them they had made the right decision. Students also noted that the tone was competitive in that it was making an identifying statement (i.e., “I chose red”) to friends and students who had chosen to attend other schools.

To describe the design and look of the campaign, participants used words such as “dark,” “modern,” “athletic,” “catchy” and “friendly.” Both groups said they liked the design because it was different from the other universities they had seen. They said they liked the use of the school mascot because it looks “tough” and “original.” However, both groups said they wanted to see more of the campus and student life in the photos and videos, specifically football games, residence halls, recreation center and classrooms.

The focus group data indicates that while students wanted to see more student life, they experienced a strong sense of pride and ownership in the “Choose Red” campaign, and were positive about the tone and design.

Most of the students in the focus group did not report a change in attitude or perception about the university, but did comment on an increased level of awareness about
the university as a result of the “Choose Red” campaign. However, most students noticed the campaign more once they visited the campus and received promotional items such as T-shirts and publications with the campaign slogan and design on them.

Behavior Change from the “Choose Red” Campaign

The focus group data indicates that while students felt positively about the campaign after they became current students, they did not report a change in attitude or perception about the university as a result of the “Choose Red” campaign. Both focus groups commented on taking more of a personal ownership of “Choose Red” after they became current students rather than when they were deciding where to go to school.

More than half of the focus group participants said they had told at least one person to consider attending the university as a result of the “Choose Red” campaign, even if they did not use the words “Choose Red” specifically. Also, more than half of the focus group students said they would now consider telling someone to attend the university as a result of the campaign.

The focus group results positively answer the third research question: Did the “Choose Red” campaign have an effect on the attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of university students, faculty and staff members toward UCM as an institution? Focus group students repeated the sentiments of individual ownership, positive attitude toward the university and pride in the institution as a result of the “Choose Red” campaign, which is what one would expect to find as students were the primary audience for the campaign.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative data collected from the case study helped the researcher to get definitive answers and valuable insights into the way students,
faculty and staff members of the university felt about the “Choose Red” campaign. These data positively support and answer the three research questions of this case study.
CHAPTER FIVE:
DISCUSSION

The “Choose Red” campaign is an example of how marketing campaigns can be effective for universities to recruit new students and increase institutional pride. This case study found that there was a link between when “Choose Red” media was airing and an increase in university Web traffic. This is what one would expect to find when making a significant investment in advertising.

This case study also found that, during the admissions funnel, inquiries for information fluctuated greatly from year-to-year, including the academic year directly after the launch of the campaign, which is when one would expect to see the greatest increase. However, the enrollment data also showed that new student enrollment steadily increased from year-to-year, including a substantial jump in the year directly after the launch of the campaign, which is the campaign’s ultimate goal.

Finally, this case study found, through a survey and two focus groups, that the “Choose Red” campaign did have an effect on the attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of university students, faculty and staff members. While the survey feedback was positive overall, students were more positive toward the campaign than faculty and staff, and on some questions, significantly more positive. Not only did students report feeling more positive about the campaign, but they were also significantly more likely than faculty and staff members to act on those feelings by recommending the university to others. Current students repeated the positive feelings and willingness to act on them during focus group conversations.
The students’ positive feelings toward the campaign and their willingness to act indicate they were processing the “Choose Red” messages through the central route. One would expect students to have the high cognitive ability and motivation (Griffin, 2009) it takes to process messages through the central route as they are making a significant investment of time, energy and resources into their college education. This thoughtful consideration of issue-relevant messages through the central route (Griffin, 2009) is causing some of the students studied to change their behavior by telling others to consider attending UCM.

Higher education marketing, at this point, is still relatively new compared to its corporate counterparts (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). This case study shows that colleges and universities can use marketing principles to aid weak enrollment numbers, as well as to have an effect on the attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of on-campus constituents.

Limitations

This case study did have some methodological and analytical weaknesses. For instance, the researcher did not have the complete enrollment data for the 2012-13 academic year at the time of this study, so one has to make predictions on future inquiries and newly enrolled students. The researcher also had limited focus group participants based on a convenience sample. Also, the questionnaire only sought feedback from on-campus constituents.

Future Research
To improve this case study for future research, the researcher could hold focus groups with prospective students while they are visiting campus to get the perspective of those students and parents who are still in the college decision-making process. The researcher could also survey off-campus constituents, such as: alumni, community members, parents and prospective students who are still in the college decision-making process. In the future, the researcher could also compare how much money was spent on marketing versus how much revenue was gained by the university from each newly enrolled student.

In conclusion, the “Choose Red” campaign was successful in recruiting new students to enroll at the university and in positively affecting institutional morale, especially among students, especially, but also faculty and staff members. This study shows that marketing campaigns can be effective for higher education institutions.
REFERENCES


Murrill, S., (2011, August 2). Personal interview.


APPENDIX A

SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Age:

2. I am
   a. Male
   b. Female

3. I am
   a. Hispanic/Latino
   b. American Indian or Alaskan Native
   c. Asian
   d. Black or African American
   e. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   f. White
   g. Other

4. I am a
   a. Freshman
   b. Sophomore
   c. Junior
   d. Senior
   e. Faculty member
   f. Staff member
   g. Other

5. Are you a transfer student?
   a. No
   b. Yes

6. Use **three** words to describe the “Choose Red” campaign.

Complete the following statements.

7. When I see “Choose Red,” I think it is speaking directly to me.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree
8. The tone of the words in the “Choose Red” ads and materials makes me feel like I can achieve my goals.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

9. The design and look of the “Choose Red” ads and materials is youthful and cool.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

10. The “Choose Red” campaign makes me feel positively about UCM.
    a. Strongly agree
    b. Agree
    c. Undecided
    d. Disagree
    e. Strongly disagree

11. The “Choose Red” campaign makes me feel negatively about UCM.
    a. Strongly agree
    b. Agree
    c. Undecided
    d. Disagree
    e. Strongly disagree

12. The “Choose Red” campaign has changed my attitude in a positive way about attending UCM (if student) or working at UCM (if faculty/staff).
    a. Strongly agree
    b. Agree
    c. Undecided
    d. Disagree
    e. Strongly disagree

13. The “Choose Red” campaign has increased my pride in UCM as my university of choice.
    a. Strongly agree
    b. Agree
    c. Undecided
    d. Disagree
    e. Strongly disagree
14. Have you told anyone to consider attending UCM as a result of the “Choose Red” campaign?
   a. Yes
   b. No

15. Would you consider telling someone to attend UCM as a result of the “Choose Red” campaign?
   a. Yes
   b. No
APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What year are you in school?

2. Are you a transfer student?
   a. No
   b. Yes

3. How did you decide to attend UCM?

4. Describe the “Choose Red” campaign.

5. If you are a new student, did the “Choose Red” ads or publications affect your decision to attend UCM?

6. When you see “Choose Red,” what main idea comes to mind (something it stands for)?

7. How do you describe the tone of the words in the “Choose Red” ads and materials?

8. How do you describe the design and look of the “Choose Red” ads and materials?

9. How does the “Choose Red” campaign make you feel about UCM?

10. Has the “Choose Red” campaign affected your perception of UCM?
    a. No
    b. Yes. If so, how?

11. Has the “Choose Red” campaign changed your attitude about attending or working at UCM?
    a. No
    b. Yes. If so, how?

12. Have you told anyone to consider attending UCM as a result of the “Choose Red” campaign?

13. Would you consider telling someone to attend UCM as a result of the “Choose Red” campaign?