

2020

## Strategies to Enhance Department Store Improvement of Brand Marketing

Theodore Turner  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Theodore Turner

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Walden University  
2020

Abstract

Strategies to Enhance Department Store Improvement of Brand Marketing

by

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MS, American Military University, 2014

BS, American Military University, 2012

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

June 2020

## Abstract

In the United States, 46% of retail businesses fail to increase revenue due to ineffective marketing strategies. Retail business leaders who do not implement successful and viable strategies are at a high risk of failure. Grounded in Alderson and Cox's marketing theory and Bastos and Levy's marketing-driven branding functional standards, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies department store marketing managers use to improve brand marketing. The participants were 5 department store marketing managers in the Northeastern region of a metropolitan area in Virginia who improved the brand image of their retail stores. Data were collected using semistructured, face-to-face interviews, and reviews of company documents and websites. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis with 4 themes emerging: market research, customer retention, branding, and marketing knowledge. A key recommendation includes improving marketing knowledge and empowering marketing managers to sustain long-term business operations. The implications for positive social change include the potential to improve the longevity of business leaders' operations to develop a positive economic activity and employment opportunities to enhance local low-income community standards of living.

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## Dedication

First, I would like to give thanks to God, my mother, Dorothy Grier, my dad, Theodore Turner, and my aunt, Nancy Turner, their spirits are always with me. I also would like to thank my wife, Jessica Turner, and my son, Theodore Tavon Turner for your loving support while enduring this journey with me physically, mentally, and spiritually.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Syaekhoni, Alfian, and Kwon (2017) said that a challenge to business economies across the globe involves overcoming failure rates among retail department stores. The effect on customers and product markets such as customer retention, customer satisfaction, product innovation, branding strategies, and sales promotion derive from internal marketing and corporate brand marketing activities (Syaekhoni et al., 2017). The concern for maintaining a competitive edge has put emphasis on sales and market share growth rather than constructing a better strategic plan to acquire desired marketing skills to assist brand image enhancement (Niyogis, 2016). Considering the challenges of identifying suitable technology in emerging markets, business leaders developed a strong marketing mix to improve affordability, accessibility, acceptability, and awareness of products and services (Dadzie, Amponsah, Dadzie, & Winston, 2017).

### **Background of the Problem**

In the 1980s, department store strategies were a failure compared to those of other global retailers in Europe and Japan (Pauwels, 2016). The reasons for failure were no vision for success, misguided strategies, and a lack of focus on long-term retailing (Mattingly & Kusher, 2016). In 2016, retail department stores found themselves trapped in an unpleasant circle due to not making the right decisions to achieve their aim to improve sales (Syaekhoni et al., 2017). Chen, Lin, and Chen (2016) found that many department store managers needed to start with defining metrics that would plug the gap between promise and practice of effective measurement of data and integration of online and offline skills.

Furthermore, many department store managers skipped the step of generating frontline tools and people to create business value that provided a common language to discuss the essentials of high returns (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 2016). This problem was undefined, unresearched, and deserved further research to demarcate the quality model of marketing strategy (Hamlin, Bishop, & Mather, 2016). Explications and measurements of strategic quality presented difficulties for researchers who had evaded definitions and the use of unidimensional measures to seize the whole concept (Chari, Balabanis, Robson, & Slater, 2016).

### **Problem Statement**

Retailers often fail at positioning brands to optimize a competitive advantage (Witeck-Hajduk & Grudecka, 2018). Between 2018 and 2019, retail market sales decreased from 16.3% to 12.4%, a decrease of \$127 billion (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). The general business problem is some retail marketers lack strategies to improve branding. The specific business problem is that some department store marketing managers lack strategies to improve brand marketing.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore department store marketing managers' strategies to improve brand marketing. The targeted population included department store marketing managers from five department stores located in the Northeastern region of a metropolitan area in Virginia who improved the brand image of their retail stores. The findings, conclusions, and recommendations could contribute to positive social change by enhancing business practices to improve overall competition and revenue growth. Society may benefit through additional tax revenue and more employment opportunities.

### **Nature of the Study**

Lenger (2019) shared that researchers use qualitative research methods to explore the participants' perspectives and experiences concerning a bounded issue. A qualitative research method helps to discover and understand experiences and is suitable for collecting in-depth data regarding department store brand marketing strategies used by business managers. The quantitative research method helps researchers explain relationships or differences among variables by using statistical methods to test hypotheses (Marti, 2016). A quantitative research study was not appropriate for the study because a quantitative researcher examines relationships of statistical data. The mixed method is the combination of the qualitative and quantitative research methods that require an extensive process of collecting, interpreting, and analyzing data (Kwiek, 2017), which was not required to address my specific business problem. Using the qualitative method provided the appropriate means to explore and interpret participant experiences in terms of marketing strategies, customer retention, and level of knowledge to improve business practices for future success.

The potential key qualitative research designs are narrative, phenomenology, ethnography, and case studies (Lewis, 2016). The focus of narrative researchers is on analyzing individual accounts in a social and cultural context (Lewis, 2016). The narrative design was not appropriate because I did not examine life experiences. Phenomenological researchers focus on understanding the essence of a phenomenon by examining the meaning of the experiences of participants with the subject phenomenon (Kwiek, 2017), which was not suitable because I am exploring experiences on brand marketing strategies, customer retention, and the level of knowledge to improve business practices. Ethnographers interpret, learn, and share language,

behaviors, and cultural beliefs (Caronia, 2018). An ethnographic design was not appropriate because the purpose of the research is not on culture or group. A multiple case study is an empirical inquiry that helps researchers explore modern phenomena in depth and within its real-world context when phenomena and context boundaries are not evident (Yin, 2014). The multiple case study design aligns with my study in which I was able to explore strategy experiences and the knowledge capacity on unique marketing performances.

### **Research Question**

What strategies do department store marketing managers use to improve brand marketing?

### **Interview Questions**

1. How do you describe strategies department store marketing managers use to improve brand marketing?
2. What traditional marketing strategies department store marketing managers use to improve brand marketing?
3. What are some challenges do department store marketing managers face when improving brand marketing?
4. What are some of the barriers to implementing strategies for department store marketing managers attempting to improve brand marketing?
5. What were some of the digital marketing strategies that department store marketing managers have successfully used to improve brand marketing?
6. What (if any) changes to customer loyalty did department store marketing managers notice while improving brand marketing?

7. What strategies were unique to department store marketing managers who successfully improved brand marketing?
8. What employee training, if any, was implemented by department store marketing managers to improve brand marketing?
9. What additional information can you share regarding effective marketing strategies department store marketing managers used to successfully improve brand marketing?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework selected for this multiple case study was brand marketing theory. According to Bastos and Levy (2012), marketing-driven branding has functional standards that create experiential components to reinforce the symbolic value of the brand. Centeno, Hart, and Dinnie (2013) proposed a conceptual framework for branding in which they identified five phases of brand building: product, symbol, differentiation, identity, and growth. Mowle and Merrilees (2005) agreed that the branding framework supports the practical importance of developing value associated with the brand.

Alderson and Cox (1948), through the economic behavior of consumers, defined concepts of the marketing theory as a need to understand buying behavior, perception of supply and demand, product-price adoption, and revenue growth. Analyzing marketing functions with this marketing theory indicates the intent to determine an economic hybrid and strategic approach to marketing performance (Alderson & Cox, 1948). Alderson (2006) stated that the marketing theory provides a potential basis for understanding the marketing strategy concepts for



targeting, engagement, and marketing technology for which marketing managers can introduce innovative products and create profitable growth.

Since 1948, Alderson and Cox established a strong reputation across the business industry. The focus of Aldersons' and Cox's marketing theory was on productivity growth and market culture that established a connection between cultural values and marketing strategy preferences. Broadening marketing concepts incorporate economic and social dynamics for a clear direction of functional strategies (Alderson & Cox, 1948).

### **Operational Definitions**

*Branding:* A process of promoting selected images to create a positive reputation (Cassia & Magno, 2019).

*Brand Image:* A brand characteristic perceived through advertisements (Sasmita & Mohd Suki, 2016).

*Brand loyalty:* A long-term relationship between customers and suppliers by rational and normative motives (Pedeliento, Andreini, Bergamaschi, & Salo, 2016).

*Brand marketing:* A promotional product and service that places interest towards the overall brand (Pauwels, Aksehirli, & Lackman, 2016).

*Brand orientation:* A developed product that revolves around the creation and protection of identity with target customers (Chang, Wang, & Dennis, 2018).

*Customer orientation:* An adequate understanding of targeting customer needs with the ability to sustain value (Tokman, Richey, & Deitz, 2016).

*Customer relationship management:* A strategic approach for creating value from developing relationships with a variety of customers (Maecker, Barrot, & Becker, 2016).

*Direct marketing:* A communication tool that potentially leads to consumer concerns about information privacy (Pusnar & Bratina, 2018).

*Market segmentation:* A group market with customer needs, buying behaviors, and multiple variables (Venter, Wright, & Dibb, 2016).

*Marketing strategy:* A potential plan to converge with a customer needs and enhance business performance (Finoti, Toaldo, Schwarzbach, & Marchetti, 2019).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are thoughts that researchers accept as true before gaining facts (Davidson, Thompson, & Harris, 2017). I assumed the participant's would provide information to answer the overarching question. Another assumption was that participants provided truthful detailed responses to the interview questions.

#### **Limitations**

Limitations are constrictions that challenge scholars conducting research (Knapp, 2017). A limitation of this study was that the sample size of participants was small and only from the Northeastern region of a metropolitan area in Virginia, and thus, my study findings may not be generalizable to other cities, states, or countries. Another limitation was participants may not have accurately recollected information regarding the success of their business.

#### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are the scope and boundaries of research (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Since I decided to explore the strategies that department store marketing managers use to improve brand marketing, I selected participants who successfully improved brand marketing in

department stores. Secondly, I restricted my selection of participants to the Northeastern region of a metropolitan area in Virginia.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study may be of value to the practice of business because department store marketing managers may improve their processes and strategies to improve brand marketing for future success. My findings, conclusions, and recommendations could help business leaders focus on improving brand marketing strategies, pursue lucrative opportunities, and improve decision-making capabilities. Erkmen and Hancer (2019) stated that developing a unique brand might motivate consumers and augment a competitive advantage that benefits business owners and their employees.

### **Contribution to the Value of Business Practice**

This qualitative multiple case study may contribute to effective business practices by exploring strategies for improving consumer experiences and brand marketing. Cortez and Johnston (2017) argued that business markets heighten or diminish depending on the form of marketing capability dispersion. The brand name of a product or service sold by a particular company must become one that consumers learn about and purchase in order for marketing and product sales to expand (Strizhakova & Coulter, 2016). Creating a unique name and image for a product or service in the consumer's mind can enhance competitive advantage and customer recognition (Chon, 2016). The results of the study may provide business leaders with information regarding valuable brand marketing strategies that can stimulate consumer referrals and improve staff knowledge. The findings may clarify potential barriers concerning brand

marketing strategies and provide insight into how business leaders can maintain a competitive advantage.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The implications for positive social change include improving the longevity of business leaders to develop a positive economic activity that may enhance the standard of living.

Business leaders may better understand how to sustain their businesses to improve the quality of their brand marketing strategies to reduce risks of failure and create life-changing opportunities for the local community. The results might contribute to positive social change by revealing cultural factors that enhance brand marketing strategies to increase sales for business leaders. Increasing sales produces more revenue for businesses to enhance sustainability and their ability to provide employment and institutional opportunities to different cultures to improve their dignity and self-worth to society.

### **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

This literature review involves a comprehensive analysis and synthesis of the research topic. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to identify and explore marketing strategies that department stores use to improve brand marketing. In this literature review, I organized information pertaining to marketing theory and concepts used in my conceptual framework followed by branding, marketing theory, fundamentals of marketing strategies, customer loyalty, customer behavior, relationship marketing, marketing resource advantage, advertising, and market segmentation.

I conducted an extensive literature search to gain an understanding of brand marketing strategies and to identify a conceptual framework for my study. I used various search engines,

which included Bing, Google Scholar, Google, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, Sage, Emerald, Science Direct, Health Science to examine and evaluate peer-reviewed articles, books, and journals. The key search terms maximized the relevancy of the results to ensure a close exhaustive search. The following key search terms used were: *advertising, aggressive marketing, branding, customer behaviors, customer orientation, customer relationship management, customer segmentation, market analysis, marketing, advantage, marketing mix, marketing resource value, marketing segmentation, marketing strategies, marketing theory, product development, price strategies, relationship marketing, retail marketing, social marketing, and strategic marketing.*

To maintain business sustainability and brand marketing, managers must create and implement strategies to meet and exceed organizational objectives (Rockute, Minelgaite, Zailskaite-Jakste, & Damasevicius, 2018). Given the complex nature of interactions between department stores and customers, existing literature related to strategies that department store marketing managers' use may be limited and fragmented in scope. Through literature reviews, researchers form an understanding of conceptual frameworks, identify a basis for the research topic, and support continuing research. Since limited literature was available regarding marketing strategies within the retail industry, I expanded this literature review to include a broad range of international organizations. Complete reviews of existing literature will help to understand the true nature of the subject under investigation (Chen, Wang, & Lee, 2016).

Analysis and synthesis of various sources involved summarizing extant literature, comparing existing qualitative and quantitative studies related to the research topic, and contrasting existing literature. Kegler and Allegrante (2016) stated that establishing comparability between and across research studies to facilitate the evidentiary process and

strategies is essential to the researcher. The literature I reviewed for this doctoral study includes sources published between 1948 and 2020, and 86% were peer-reviewed. The literature review includes 196 published sources, which include journals, periodicals, and books. One hundred and ninety-six of the sources had publication dates between 2016 and 2020 (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Literature Source Content*

Literature Source Content	Total #	Total Published between 2016 and 2020	% Published between 2016 and 2020	Total Published before 2016	% Published before 2016
Peer-reviewed journals	371	320	86%	25	7%
Non peer reviewed journals	0	0	0%	0	0%
Dissertations	0	0	0%	0	0%
Books	4	0	0%	4	100%
Total Sources	375	320	86%	29	8%

## Branding

Conceptualization of branding strategies across the brand relationship field spans from a branded house strategy with all products sharing the same brand name to a house of brand strategy where a product carries its brand without being connected to other brands of the same company (Cassia & Magno, 2019). For each product, marketing leaders must make the fundamental trade-off between leveraging the trust of an existing brand versus leveraging specific brand identity and needs (Florek, Herezniak, & Augustyn, 2019). Customer loyalty is higher for a house of brands strategy while the branded house strategy leads to growth in customer attachment and improvement in the quality of customer relationships (Zenker & Braun, 2017).

Branding is the process of promoting selected images to create a positive reputation (Cassia & Magno, 2019). Managers should create a favorable impression in the consumer's

mind where brands can be of value (Chang, Li, Yan, & Kumar, 2019). If an organization's product or service acquires a positive and solid reputation, this becomes an asset of enormous value to continue a healthy margin for a consistent brand image (Braun, Eshuis, Klijn, & Zenker, 2018). Creating and maintaining positive brand images ensures prosperity and progress (Chan, Boksem, & Smidts, 2018; Kaporcic & Halinen, 2018). A strong and positive brand image helps to differentiate from other brands (Srivastava, 2019). Identifying a brand distinguishing functions make them a powerful influence on consumer thinking, attitudes, and behavior (Switala, Gamrot, Reformat, & Bilinska-Reformat, 2018).

In a marketing world where consumers prevail, an extremely significant problem for business management is determining motivational brands (Chang et al., 2018). While no commonly accepted definition of brand performance is available in marketing literature, the view of brand performance is an important result of business activities and general business strategies (Chang et al., 2018). Values such as price flexibility, price bonus, brand market share, cost structure, and category success are among the basic criteria used in evaluating brand performance (Datta, Ailawadi, & van Heerde, 2017). Numerous factors such as consumer attitudes, family, relations with the seller, and friends affect brand loyalty (Datta et al., 2017). Consumer's brand loyalty help forms a psychological connection with the brand (Rubio, Villasenor, & Yague, 2017). Many cultures may have a significant effect on brand personality and brand performance, and this significant effect indirectly influences brand loyalty (Rubio et al., 2017).

There is a significant relationship between brand personality and brand preference (Unurlu & Uca, 2017). Brand personality guarantees the success of the brand in the market,

improves the market share of the brand, and contributes to the competition skill of the brand (Unurlu & Uca, 2017). Moreover, brand equity includes a brand personality that is of the utmost importance in sustaining the long-term performance of the enterprise (Scriven, Clemente, Dawes, Trinh, & Sharp, 2017). Aside from the marketer's concern about the expense and lack of positive long-term effects, there is also worry that price promotions may train consumers to become deal prone, moving their loyalty from brands to the deal itself (Scriven et al., 2017). There are three main patterns in buying brands on and off promotion, which are the tendency for a high proportion of brand buyers to buy a brand only when it is on promotion and related to the total amount of sales bought on promotion for a brand (Datta et al., 2017; Scriven et al., 2017). Next, are consumers who buy a brand on promotion and are a little more likely than regular-price buyers to buy other brands when they are on promotion, but buying a brand on promotion does not lower a shopper's likelihood of buying other brands at normal price (Scriven et al., 2017). Lastly, more volume sold on deals has a stronger relationship with regular-price buyers buying the same brand on promotion, compared to buying different brands on promotion (Scriven et al., 2017).

Price promotion, therefore, does not create big divisions in markets between the deal-prone and those buyers who are not, but rather creates the possibility for most buyers to take advantage of promotions when they are available (Scriven et al., 2017). Buying on a deal is a reflection of the tendency of brands to sell a lot on promotion rather than of consumers to seek out deals (Scriven et al., 2017). It is a common thought that buying a brand on the deal is the antithesis of brand loyalty (Unurlu & Uca, 2017). Brands represent more than a set of images to promote a product or organization; they are about trust and respect (Michaelidou, Micevski,



Kadic-Maglajlic, Budhathoki, & Sarkar, 2019). Campelo, Altken, and Gnoth (2011) agreed that symbols and values represented by brands not only reinforce the identity and uniqueness of destinations but also reassures the people, values, and symbols of their own culture. The potential of brands to re-construct individual identities and reconnect collective ones is particularly relevant in a post-modern world where identity is fragmented and purpose is unclear (Switala et al., 2018). Gomez, Fernandez, Molina, and Aranda (2018) stated that brands are symbols around which social actors including firms, suppliers, supplementary organizations, the public, and indeed customers construct identities.

A brand is a combination of identity and image (Durgee, 2016). Managers of a firm can use branding to create positive competition, identify and differentiate between products and services (Ishtiaq & Siddiqui, 2016). Brand name or a symbol serves as the most influential element with which consumers associate a brand (Gaustad, Samuelsen, Warlop, & Fitzsimons, 2019). Elements of brand image are the trustworthiness of the brand, creative marketing, effective management and administration, customer satisfaction, effective communication, and strategic positioning of the brand (Popp & Woratschek, 2017). The corporate brand image refers to the entire set of perceptions that stakeholders, both internal and external, have for a corporate brand depending on the functional and emotional attributes of the products (Popp & Woratschek, 2017).

Stakeholders play an important role in developing a corporate brand and enhancing the credibility of the product and services (Chen, Nguyen, Melewar, & Dennis, 2017). The management process of creating and maintaining a coherent corporate brand image in the minds of the stakeholders is vital to achieving an overall favorable corporate reputation (Conz, 2019).

Corporate brand identity includes tangible and intangible features that differentiate the business, its products, and services from its competitors based on the functional and symbolic value (Gaustad et al., 2019). The first stage of corporate brand building is the brand formulation or development of the brand vision (Biraghi & Gambetti, 2016). The second stage is brand orientation and gaining brand buy-in (Biraghi & Gambetti, 2016). The final stage is the brand strategy implementation (Biraghi & Gambetti, 2016).

Managers develop the corporate brand identity as a continual and ongoing interaction between the identities of the business and the consumers (Michaelidou et al., 2019). It requires a cohesive strategy to convey brand values and identity through advertising, promotion, packaging, and design (Lee & Lee, 2018). A corporate brand is the direct responsibility of both, the entrepreneur and top management (Biraghi & Gambetti, 2016). The organization should have a central corporate communication team to guide corporate branding activities (Conz, 2019). A corporate brand emphasizes the need to focus on organizational values, culture, communication, and workers leading to positive associations (Durgee, 2016). A corporate brand helps to maintain corporate identity and communicate positioning and marketing (Koporcic & Halinen, 2018). Corporate branding is a marketing tool and provides critical stakeholders with the necessary information (Koporcic & Halinen, 2018). The marketing personnel of business-to-business companies prefer corporate branding to product branding (Sheth & Sinha, 2016).

Branding is more complicated in business-to-business because of multiple stakeholders leading to the corporate preference of branding over product branding (Sheth & Sinha, 2016). The relationship between the corporate brand, the product brand, and the employer brand is that corporate brand carries the values, vision, and mission of the company (Koporcic & Halinen,

2018). The main components of a corporate brand interpret corporate values for the target groups of stakeholders (Braun et al., 2018). Employer brand creates a favorable impression of the company owner as an employer, creates an image of the company, and provides attraction, retention, loyalty, and engagement of staff (Sheth & Sinha, 2016). Successful branding has a clear vision and meaning with a psychological attachment built by the consumer (Lee & Lee, 2018). The stronger the product brand, the more attractive the company is as an employer (Koporcic & Halinen, 2018).

Brand architecture of a company could have a matrix of branding similarities and dissimilarities between their products and services (Chen et al., 2017). Two industry factors affecting brand strategies are the cost to build and maintain separate brands and the rate of innovation (Panda, Pandey, Bennett, & Tian, 2019). Older companies have a more significant number of brands than younger companies (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007). The firm sometimes has brand baggage of weaker brands that need to be stored (Panda et al., 2019). Company managers influence brand identification, commitment, and loyalty through internal branding leading to their performance to fulfill a brand promise (Chen et al., 2017). It is essential to encourage employees to adopt the key characteristics of their service brands (Koporcic & Halinen, 2018). The objective of internal branding is to ensure that employees transform brand messages into brand reality (Anees-ur-Rehman, Wong, Sultan, & Merrilees, 2018). Internal branding is an appropriate approach for communicating the brand internally (Anees-ur-Rehman, et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2017).

Coherence between internal and external communication is an essential part of a good branding strategy (Wong, Sultan, & Merrilees, 2018). Through effective internal

communication, managers can influence employees and their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors thereby shaping their commitment, vision, service, loyalty, and satisfaction (Lechuga-Sancho, Martinez-Martinez, Larran-Jorge, & Herrera-Madueno, 2018). Therefore, even while recruiting staff, it is necessary to focus on value congruence apart from the emphasis on technical and operational skills (Chen et al., 2017). Senior management of organizations bases strong brands on the relationship that exists between the consumer and the brand in an emotional manner induced by the content of the marketing communication system (Kaufmann, Loureiro, & Manarioti, 2016). Strong brands can develop through involving brand managers and consumers (Kaufmann et al., 2016). Unclear branding will affect organizational identity and brand performance (Maier, 2016).

The Internet has changed the way company managers do branding (Lechuga-Sancho et al., 2018). The speed and intensity of information dissemination and the interconnectedness of communication between firms and customers in a digitally empowered age are happening at a very rapid pace (Lechuga-Sancho et al., 2018). Control and empowerment, offline and online activities, brand coherence and fluidity, marketing effectiveness, and brand evolution are various facets due to the technological growth (Erdem, Keller, Kuksov, & Pieters, 2016). The Internet is a powerful branding tool, and online branding has become necessary for service providers who do not have tangible products (Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair, & Okumus, 2016). An organization's website offers useful insight to the customers, and it is better than conventional media, because of its interactivity. Social media provides a communication platform for the brands and the consumers and allows the development of online communities (Barreda et al., 2016). Online or

offline communities allow interaction for members and participation in fostering the development of social identity (Kaufmann et al., 2016).

Exploring knowledge acquired from social media to improve organizational understanding and knowledge makes firms more alert to market opportunities (Kaufmann et al., 2016). The online community is an important source for radical innovations to fulfill latent needs with product innovations that the customers did not even know they wanted (Efrat & Asseraf, 2019). Social media and product returns during a product crisis can also lead to a significant adverse effect on firms (Efrat & Asseraf, 2019). Word of mouth heightens this adverse effect, and if the company does not engage in social media appropriately, the responses can adversely affect the firm (Erdem et al., 2016).

Besides product branding and service branding, destination branding is also possible. A positive association triggers in place branding so that travelers can distinguish one place from another place (Kladou, Kavartzis, Rigopoulou, & Salonika, 2016). One of the differences between place branding and product branding is the lack of control over the place by the people responsible for branding it (Kladou et al., 2016). Place brands are static, depend on the way the message is transmitted and do not behave like commercial products or firms (Kladou et al., 2016). The identity, logo, and slogan are the core of the brand apart from various communication mediums in place branding (Kladou et al., 2016).

Sustainability marketing and brand building if linked with economic, social, and environmental initiatives can lead to a better outcome regarding organizational positioning (Sharma & Joshi, 2019). Similar to Sharma and Joshi (2019), Adnan, Ahmad, and Khan (2017) also studied branding and sustainability. From a sustainability perspective, the most valuable

brands are those generating ethical surplus for the brand community because the members of a community together define the values and ideas of sustainability (Adnan et al., 2017).

### **Marketing Theory**

Researchers use a variety of theories to amplify the marketing strategies of business (Dadzie et al., 2017). Using marketing theory help researchers understand buying behavior, perception of supply and demand, product-price adoption, and revenue growth (Varadarajan, 2018). Esteban and Hernandez (2017) argued that marketers could enhance performance by targeting and engaging the sales of potential customers. Therefore, marketers can invest to better attract customers to innovative and existing products (Esteban & Hernandez, 2017). Most current research is on developing marketing tools and creating competitive advantages within the retail markets (Varadarajan, 2018).

The theories of marketing expanded since the early contributions of Robert Bartels and Wroe Alderson, which addressed aggregate levels of marketing phenomena (Achrol & Kotler, 2012). Alderson and Cox (1948) discussed that theory in marketing started with the establishment of the Parlin Memorial Lecture. According to Alderson and Cox (1948), institutions launched courses in marketing theory because the interest level rose in several areas. The improved growth of business education powered marketing academia and abetted the rapid growth in the marketing field (Wilkie & Moore, 2012). Hence, educational institutions and researchers focused on developing a theory to use within marketing. Alderson and Cox (1948) stated that the interest in a marketing theory consists of two principals: (a) justifiable conviction that marketing students benefit from their efforts a small harvest of significant generalization and

(b) evident belief among some viewers that marketing students' accomplishments in setting fundamental problems for themselves were inconsequential.

Alderson persisted to develop a marketing theory during the annual American Marketing Association conferences (Alderson & Cox, 1948). However, Alderson did not establish an apt marketing theory that would apply to all disciplines of marketing before his bereavement in 1965 (Dixon, 2011). The understanding of markets is through the economic behavior of consumers and the importance of the exchange concept (Catoiu & Tichindelean, 2012). The development of formal marketing helped with projected business growth in a competitive market (Wilkie & Moore, 2012). Several researchers established theories connecting to a variety of marketing concepts based on Alderson's book, *Dynamic marketing behavior: A functionalist theory of marketing* (1965). Marketing scholars synthesized the fundamental premises of marketing into general theories beyond the exchange of goods and services, and other resources of value (Catoiu & Tichindelean, 2012). In addition, marketing theories extended to exchange with employees, the competitors, the public, suppliers, customers, and other types of organizations (Achrol & Kotler, 2012). For example, Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995) relationship theory, Kim and Mauborgne's (2005) blue ocean theory, Martineau's (1958) brand identity theory, Porter's (1985) competitive advantage theory, and Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory.

Marketing theory has evolved, especially with the addition of innovative technologies. Although the original 4Ps developed in 1960 focused strictly on the product, price, place, and promotion, social media has presented challenges to the 4Ps of marketing (Resnick, Cheng, Simpson, & Lourenco, 2016). Scholarly analysis of this topic indicated that this method of creating a marketing mix was missing critical components, but there has not been widespread

agreement on how to modify the marketing mix (Resnick et al., 2016). Gordon, Tapp, and Spotswood (2013) agreed the 4Ps of marketing have been in the need of refinement since the inception of social marketing. Various scholars have presented alternative theories to enhance or replace the traditional 4Ps of marketing (Gordon et al., 2013). Some of those include the associative network theory that consumers can establish pathways in their minds leading to networks of connections in consumer memory (Koll, Von Wallpach, & Kreuzer, 2010). The theory indicates that a consumer can influence a brand without realizing it through techniques like free association influencing their buying behavior and other consumers (Koll et al., 2010).

Previous marketing studies address Roger's theory of diffusion concerning the implementation of new technologies (Barnes & Jacobsen, 2013). Gordon et al. (2013) explored the confusion surrounding the 4Ps and presented a new model: capability opportunity motivation social marketing. The capability opportunity motivation social marketing model provides a broad scope for quick and effective implementation (Koll et al., 2010). Focusing on the scope and scale of social marketing within the marketing mix can help link consumer behaviors to social media marketing efforts (Gordon et al., 2013). Anitsal, Girard, and Anitsal (2012) agreed that the traditional 4Ps marketing mix does not account for important components of people, process, and physical evidence that are unique to service marketing. People represent personnel or customers who interact with one another, the process includes procedures and policies such as handling customer interaction, and physical evidence refers to the environment in which customers may interact or purchase services (Anitsal et al., 2012). Applying these new components to the marketing mix provides stronger relationships between consumers and businesses, which can lead to increased brand loyalty (Anitsal et al., 2012).



Yip and Chan (2012) also used the conceptual framework of Booms and Bitner's 7Ps of marketing for its widespread, accessible, and comprehensive application ability. Jain (2013) suggested the current marketing mix containing only 4Ps lacks a customer-oriented focus that is necessary in the current business world. The marketing mix requires realignment with emphasis on relationships and consumer-focused marketing messages, especially for services marketing (Yip & Chan, 2012). Jain (2013) recommended a new marketing mix that integrates additional 4Ps into marketing tactics using Booms and Bitner's 7Ps theory and supporting the use of the extended marketing mix theory as a conceptual framework for further investigation into marketing strategies. Resnick et al. (2016) studied the effect the extended marketing mix had on consumers' purchasing behaviors in the restaurant industry due to a lack of understanding among marketers regarding the influence of this theory in the fast-food environment.

The theory is widely applicable in the retail industry because the three additional components (people, process, and physical evidence) can help the retail industry gain the advantage in a highly competitive industry (Resnick et al., 2016). Salman, Tawfik, Samy, and Artal-Tur (2017) explored the influence marketing strategies, including the extended marketing mix, had on customer satisfaction within the hospitality industry. Due to the distinctiveness of tangible and intangible components of offered services, hospitality marketing is challenging to ensure the highest level of customer satisfaction (Salman et al., 2017). The hospitality marketing mix focused on product/service, presentation, and communication aspects but did not include vital components of service marketing like variability, intangibility, inseparability, and perishability accounted for in the extended marketing mix (Salman et al., 2017).

Marketers in the hospitality industry must focus on all proposed 12Ps to find the balance that provides the most effective marketing strategy for their customers (Salman et al., 2017). Bangre, Ghangale, and Ghaisas (2016) agreed that the extended marketing mix included an intangible aspect of the service industry and the influences involved in offering services. Customers in the IT industry completed questionnaires to describe their satisfaction regarding each of the seven elements of the extended marketing mix (Bangre et al., 2016). An analysis of data revealed there was a relationship between the use of the extended marketing mix and an increase in customers within the IT industry (Bangre et al., 2016).

Each element of the extended marketing mix did not have equal influence on customers and therefore should not get equal attention when developing a marketing strategy (Bangre et al., 2016). The service, price, and people involved in the process were the most vital aspects to customers in the IT industry (Bangre et al., 2016). The place component of the marketing mix did not have as much influence on customers primarily because IT firms usually operate from a single location (Bangre et al., 2016). Kuria (2015) studied how the extended marketing mix affected customers' selection of a vacation or holiday camp. Interviews of customers indicated that a variety of elements played a role in their purchasing decisions, and all seven elements of the marketing mix were important in the decision-making process (Kuria, 2015). Specifically, place and people were major influencers in the selection of a particular holiday camp while price and promotion were important components of the decision-making process (Kuria, 2015).

Marketing is a major function in any organization, which generates valuable relationships through effective communication (Lo, 2012a). The characteristics of marketing comprise of product promotion and services, public relations, and advocacy (Brown & Albright, 2013).

Achrol and Kotler (2012) emphasized that marketing networks, sustainable development, and consumption experiences are shifting from phenomenal marketing. Although researchers developed theories connecting to core marketing concepts, business organizations continue to experience marketing challenges to preserve customers (Filip, Vranceanu, Georgescu, & Marinescu, 2016). Different models and processes exist through which marketers can make their approach evident to their organization's overall marketing strategy (Wind & Robertson, 1983). Marketing strategies help organizational leaders obtain and allocate resources to access marketing risk for future marketing investments (Kozielski, Dziekonski, Pogorzelski, & Urbanek, 2017). Market-oriented principles are yet to take root in emerging markets because of the many years of transitioning with centrally planned economies (Boso, Debrah, & Amankwah-Amoah, 2017)

In recent decades, significant changes occurred in the marketplace (Sharma, Tam, & Wu, 2018). With every growing role of multicultural marketplaces in the global economy, the market shift from cross-national to global (Sharma, Tam, & Wu, 2018). Because multicultural markets are complex, dynamic, and diverse, innovative challenges and opportunities may exist for markets to strive and identify new marketing strategies (Mayo, van Knippenberg, Guillen, & Firfiray, 2016). Most organizations' key goal is achieving competitive advantage through innovation and originality and building core competencies that lead to increasing effectiveness (Brem, Maier, & Wimchneider, 2016). Some researchers considered Porter's strategy theory as the dominant framework that provides competitive strategies (Salavou, 2016). Porter applied strategy theory in 1980, in which researchers described Porter's competitive strategy as the most

effective in business literature (Govindarajan, 1986). Salavou (2016) emphasized that scholars should revise Porter's theory for a better fit for current business challenges.

In contrast, the emphasis of the marketing strategy is on the intensive efforts to create new products and new ways to access potential markets. Gadde and Hulthen (2016) stated that Aldersons' marketing theory is a key component for differential advantage in relation to the competition. Leaders need to acquire and invest innovative knowledge and skills constantly for organizations to maintain high performance and obtain competitive advantage (Leiblein, Chen, & Posen, 2017). An organization's marketing strategy and capability affect customers' brand loyalty and eagerness to pay for products and services (Pehrsson, 2016). The key objective of any business is to accomplish a competitive advantage over rival organizations (Leiblein et al., 2017).

### **Fundamentals of Marketing Strategies**

Businesses should have a clear marketing strategy that supports firm performance (Surmi, Cao, & Duan, 2020). Marketing strategies can provide a business advantage for leaders seeking better ways to understand current and future consumer needs (Leiblein et al., 2017). Marketing is an essential aspect of primitive, advanced social life, and a dynamic component of the exchange process of goods and services (Leiter, 2014). Measuring marketing actions is essential for marketing metrics and marketing investment returns (Lee, Kozlenkova, & Palmatier, 2016). The relationship with developing marketing tools and marketing strategies are corporate performance, competitiveness, and corporate growth (Lee, Kozlenkova, & Palmatier, 2016). Retail department store managers must develop strategies to support yearly strategic initiatives and contribute to achieving growth opportunities (Syapsan, 2019). Businesses must work to

leverage customer interactions (Lee & Griffith, 2019). Identifying insight, trends, and cultural concepts of consumers through marketing contributes to the assessment of cost-saving initiatives and organizational growth (Hanssens, Wang, & Zhang, 2016).

A proper conception of culture is a major component in developing an effective marketing strategy and best practice of economics (Hanssens et al., 2016). Hofstede's (2001) four-dimensional model: individualism versus collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity versus feminist emphasizes on a resistive economy establishing a connection between cultural values and marketing strategy preferences. Managers of distinctive cultures incline to choose differentiation and niche marketing strategies over mass marketing strategy (Rasouli, Somarin, & Jahan, 2016). Broadening marketing concepts incorporate economic and social dynamics for a clear direction of functional strategies (Cortez & Johnston, 2017). Functional marketing strategies may have a significant influence on marketing capabilities that balance and moderate an organization's performance (Sharma, Nguyen, & Crick, 2018). Considering the design of marketing strategies, communication quality stimulates cross-functional integration, which may affect strategy consensus (Finoti et al., 2019). The underlying assumption is that successful marketing strategies depend on a proper fit amid the controllable variables within an organization and the uncontrollable variables in the organization's external environment (Mohsen & Eng, 2016). These variables indicate that a business has a certain amount of identifiable strategies with a different pattern of investment and competitive position (Mohsen & Eng, 2016).

Marketing managers use advertising, promotion, public relations, and fundraising as principles of marketing operations and strategy (Pomering, 2017). When implementing

marketing strategies consumer insight and organizational innovation for long-term growth keep customers aware of new products (Lee, Kozlenkova, & Palmatier, 2016). Establishing and employing a harmonized marketing plan for fresh and current products and services may assist managers to enhance or modify in the competitive landscape (Lee, Kozlenkova, & Palmatier, 2016). Although centralization, formalization, and departmentalization prodigiously suggest negative antecedents to market orientation, the mix of practical effects are frequent (Lee, Kozlenkova, & Palmatier, 2016). Organizations are continuously probing for competitive advantage, and the emerging global landscape defines the firm's opportunities and challenges (Rasouli et al., 2016). The complexities of managing several markets and managing market communication strategies are as problematic as managing geographical, cultural, and political barriers as factors that hinder organizational success (Pomering, 2017).

The political factors in marketing strategy to include the types of leaders and their viewpoints and relationships contribute to the views that assist organizations with future decisions (Brooksbank, Subhan, Garland, & Rader, 2016). Most defined general strategies are regarding competitive actions undertaken by a business instead of the types of action intended by management (Hamel & Prahalad, 2005). A significantly capped limitation is because the differences between planned and realized strategies can be an ineffective implementation of the proposed strategy (Lee & Griffith, 2019). Strategic marketing encompasses a variety of sequential stages such as setting marketing objectives, situation analysis, undertaking a strategic, designing the marketing organization, formulating a marketing strategy, and conducting strategic marketing control (Brooksbank et al., 2016). A business should involve using marketing programs as a basis to segment the market, target customers, and develop a positioning strategy

(Taherdangkoo, Mona, & Ghasemi, 2018). Strategic marketing contributes to managers maintaining close connections with important players in the marketplace as a means of affirming that strategic marketing does not lose connection with operating reality and marketing focus (Nuntamanop, Kawranen, & Igel, 2013). Stakeholders can provide a valuable perspective to a company on their business strategies because stakeholders are financially involved (Wang & Sengupta, 2016).

Organizations should position and tailor their market capabilities to the needs of consumers who have relatively homogeneous requirements (Wang & Sengupta, 2016). The application of an aggressive marketing strategy veers from the turbulence of competitors (Lee & Griffith, 2019; Venter & Rensburg, 2014). Pleshko, Heiens, and Peev (2013) demonstrated the ability to apply contingency theory as a primary focus that drove organizational factors of size, technology, and environmental uncertainty. Given the intricacy of markets and competitive conditions, Pleshko et al. (2013) stressed the fundamental assumptions in marketing strategy and related disciplines that had no universal strategic set of choices that existed optimally for businesses. Managers of small and mid-sized organizations should use cross-level involvement with an emphasis on intra-organizational partnerships, inter-organizational partnerships, and training as a marketing strategy (Brem et al., 2016). Implementing marketing principles and the essentials of market research for the entire staff is necessary (Damayanti, Koeswo, & Sarwiyata, 2018). There is a direct relationship between social cultures and marketing that depends greatly on consistency (Rasouli et al., 2016). The significance of cross-leveling marketing strategies urges organizational cultures to seek long-term benefits to alleviating managers from creating generic brands and covering the whole market (Song, Moon, Chen, & Houston, 2018). Applying

aggressive cross-level marketing should allow leaders to deliver a variety of capabilities compared with competitors', connect to supply and demand, and provide quality products (Mathooko & Ogutu, 2016).

Organizations must have a basis to focus and transform the potential of their marketing strategies (Pehrsson, 2016). Maqin and Hendri (2017) applied a strategy analysis of the macro and micro-marketing environment in a study leading to creating a strategic set of marketing alternatives. Aligned with marketing theory, the execution of marketing with the sole purpose of combining offer and demand has an evolution path of variation while creating product stimulation (Brem et al., 2016). Theoretically, organizations choose different strategies conditioned by company-wide policy reflecting an organization's level of marketing usage (Mathooko & Ogutu, 2016). Marketing strategies elevated to a higher level of consciousness should grow beyond solving minor problems in addressing significant long-term problems (Baldassarre & Campo, 2016).

Webster and Lusch (2013) asserted that marketing theory needs a new role correlating to its purpose of a social and economic environment that adopts a systems viewpoint. The perspective must entail all leaders and social roles focusing on transactions, exchange, and buyer-seller activity that dominated the marketing field in recent decades (Kennickell, Kwast, & Pogach, 2016). By focusing on the thoughtlessly inspired customer first and giving secondary consideration as a consuming citizen, marketing has been ignoring the most significant issues facing the business system and the fundamental goal of economic activity to deliver an improved standard of living and quality of life (Pehrsson, 2016). Scholars and practitioners have debated



that the development of a stronger marketing framework should consider the consequences of vast and insignificant thinking and action systems (Shultz, 2016).

### **Customer Loyalty in Brand marketing**

Major marketing variables and consumer characteristics significantly affect the choices of brands (Pauwels et al., 2016). Consumers adopted a diverse strategy that dealt with problematic economic situations (Pauwels et al., 2016). Diallo and Kaswengi (2016) noted sales growth outpaced the growth of national brands during the twenty-first century increasing retail revenue in European nations and private labels (Sigalas, 2016). Price and quantity are essential factors that consumers consider during shopping situations. Furthermore, Diallo and Kaswengis' prior research revealed that heavy store brand users earn lower-income and exhibit price sensitivity. Consumers with specific characteristics are up against known brand attributes that enhanced the choice of quantity (Pauwels et al., 2016). During an economic shock, consumers decrease their consumption expenses and shift to inexpensive options (Pedeliento et al., 2016).

Periods of economic tightening provide consumers with incentives to experiment with lower-priced brands (Berendt, Uhrich, & Thompson, (2018). The implications for marketing research and managerial orientations for retailers and manufacturers are selling different products in a challenging economy (Tan, Fu, & Yi, 2016). Manufacturing promotion activities strongly affected performance so that retailers can counteract by encouraging consumers to choose brands (Lapoule & Colla, 2016). Retailers and manufacturers encountered increasing pressure to develop the effectiveness of marketing investments and consumer targets (Chakravarty, Kumar, & Grewal, 2014). Because store brands enjoy price advantage,

manufacturers should avoid price wars that may improve consumer price sensitivity (Takashima & Kim, 2016).

Organizations struggled with their investments during the establishment and maintenance of brand pages to meet their expectations on the development and the retaining of customers (Berendt et al., 2018). In a qualitative study conducted by Maecker et al. (2016), the interactive roles through corporate media channels in customer relationship management determined that clients who interact with brands on social media are more profitable than brick and mortar. While scholars have researched several channels in a multi-channel customer management approach, social media enabled interaction between a company and its customers; creating brand relationships (Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2016). Engaging customers using social media is an effective way to increase sales (Al-Zyoud, 2018). Without knowing the customer influences of social media, organizations struggled to assess investment returns (Hudson, Huang, Roth, & Madden, 2016). The uncertainty of social media interactions with customers depends on previous customer service experience (Maecker et al., 2016). The implication of company uncertainty relates to revenue and cost effects of social media interactions towards upselling behavior, churn, and service contacts (Hudson et al., 2016).

Rotich, Moriasi, Korir, Rono, and Asienyo (2016) found that retailers must strengthen their marketing strategies in advertising, packaging, and store brand imaging. There is a huge gap between store brands and manufacturing brands in developing brand image (Hirvonen, Laukkanen, & Salo, 2016). Huang and Chao-Chin (2017) asserted that the perceived quality of the brands should improve the beliefs about the brand and association to reinforce consumer brand satisfaction. The customer interactions in certain forums may be reflections of underlying

or forming of attitudes towards the product and services at hand (Rotich et al., 2016). The significant differences in profit among marketing groups with or without consumer brand interaction are relevant to marketing managers (Hirvonen et al., 2016).

It is essential to comprehend the interactions between consumers and brands, products, and services (Popp & Woratschek, 2017). The intellectual framing of psychological ownership provided marketing practice with the means to comprehend consumer product and service relationships and decision making of innovative concepts on corresponding strategies (Venkatesan, 2017). Retaining consumers is reliant on marketers developing a strategy that influences a consumer's emotional connection with the product or business (Venkatesan, 2017). Organizations offering loyalty programs benefit from the examination of their current understanding from ownership perspectives. Popp and Woratschek (2017) noted that understanding the elements of interaction that triggers consumer loyalty would provide an opportunity to optimize consumer experiences across product lines and meet demands in real-time, increasing customized execution.

Consumers who focus on promotions desire choices that are easily justified and maximizes the overall experience with the same effect (Scriven et al., 2017). Lemon and Verhoef (2016) argued that the motivation underlying attraction effect has the essential implications of processed information. The promotion threshold of consumers has a lower effort threshold to seek out easily justifiable decisions while prevention-focused consumers seek out the best option with a greater effort threshold (Rotich et al., 2016). The researchers found that increasing brand frequency may improve product influence and should motivate the consumer's desire to compare alternatives (Scriven et al., 2017).

The asymmetrically dominated brand decoy provides a reason for the dominant target brand selection (Amaldoss & Shin, 2016). The relationship may help consumers justify the decision for the target brand as opposed to the selection of the competitor brand (Amaldoss & Shin, 2016). The underlying motivation should base the need to simplify the decision rather than attribute value (Dessart et al., 2016). The implications of research displayed the debate between motivations, attraction effect and the mechanisms underlying the overall effects (Lee & Jung, 2018). On managerial implications and the process of information, promotion, and prevention focus, individuals have dissimilar efforts to seek specific brand options while mere exposure to different products can induce a promotion versus prevention-focused goal orientation (Lee & Jung, 2018). Contextual priming and the task has an impact on chronic regulatory focus where an individual's orientation may be a state or trait that measures the reliability of brands (Chiang & Yang, 2018).

Retail marketers should organize strategic procurement of store brands from national brand manufacturers to help quality levels of the store and national brands, reduce cannibalization, and improve channel profits (Keller, Dekimpe, & Geyskens, 2016). Amaldoss and Shin (2016) extended an aggregated model that examined the positioning of store brands and national brands. According to the aggregated model, Amaldoss and Shin found that it is profitable for the retailer's store brand to be close to lower the wholesale price of national brands, develop the market, and improve profitability. Managers should consider familiarizing themselves with image spillover of private labels and national brand products to make improved brand decisions for future introductions (Keller et al., 2016). Leaders who consider the

performance of private labels should consider the effect on national brand retailers that require combined performance metrics (Morone, Nemore, & Schirone, 2018)

Tonder, Saunders, Lisita, and Beer (2018) agreed that retailers benefit from negotiating manufactured national brand power and customer loyalty to retailers. Focusing on retail equity and retailer image should affect sales motivation and customer loyalty (Ciuvoa-Shuleska, Palamidovska-Sterjadovska, Osakwe, & Ajayi, 2017). Managers should encourage positive brand opinions of customer behaviors, attitudes, and brand commitment (Spotts, Weinberger, & Weinberger, 2016). Presenting a strong brand may offer an essential asset that should create a marginal cash flow, great customer loyalty, and chances for brand extensions (Gonzalez-Benito, Martos-Partal, & Fustinoni-Venturini, 2016). Organizations must exploit their brands frequently taking into account the high cost of developing the brand (Scriven et al., 2017).

Leveraging brand marketing and brand extension remains a profitable and consistent marketing strategy (Yigit & Tigli, 2018). Athanasopoulou, Giovanis, and Avlonitis (2016) argued that the essential part of brand value derives from the contribution of introducing new products through brand extensions. Brand extension theorists identified no integrated and empirically tested framework of marketing strategy affecting brand extension success (Mitchel, Dan, & Chaudhury, 2014). Internationally, organizations moved from multi-local to a global brand strategy with limited adoption to local markets (Sichtmann & Diamantopoulos, 2013). Because of the reduction of costs, leveraged economic terms of research and development (R&D), logistics, manufacturing, and marketing should accommodate improved consumer brand acceptance (Yigit & Tigli, 2018).

Seimiene and Kamarauskaite (2014) agreed that customer preferences and loyalty for a brand resulted in improved levels of customer bond stimulation on brand trust and loyalty (Rakhi, 2016). Customers often inclined to provide better ratings to a brand that displayed a stronger personality (Rakhi, 2016). In a quantitative study, Seimiene and Kamarauskaite applied a brand personality theory that determined that brand personality dimensions associated with competence and modernity. Furthermore, excitement, sincerity, and competence affect brand loyalty while competence and modernity of brand personality affect brand quality ratings (Rakhi, 2016). Consistent uses of a brand name or symbol create a recognizable brand for customers and bring brand personality and its associations (Bock, Mangus, & Folse, 2016). Altering brand personality is possible through a direct or indirect experience that customers have with a brand (Unurlu & Uca, 2017).

### **Customer Behavior**

Customer satisfaction is the key to customer loyalty, but the vision of quality as an essential factor for differentiation in an organization succeeds by customer experience (Rubio et al., 2017). The products and services offered by retailers may contribute to life satisfaction (Rubio et al., 2017). Fara, Vyt, Mevel, Morvan, and Morvan (2018) identified crowding, queuing, and checkout problems customers respond to by switching channels. Organizations should create a format that contributes to life, financial, and family satisfaction (Fara et al., 2018). The identity of customers viewed centrally and a high degree of self-congruity may permit consumers to navigate choice, true preference, and represent their identity (Rubio et al., 2017). Employees or department leaders engaging in customer behaviors may clearly moderate the level of achievement through experience and integration (Pulles, Schiele, Veldman, &

Huttinger, 2016). Customer engagement behaviors support the formation of principles that connect organizations with a competitive advantage over product-dominant marketing strategies of other organizations (Leckie, Nyadzayo, & Johnson, 2018). Customer engagement behaviors could provide an outlet for organizations to align value propositions with customer needs because the consistent dialogue is encouraged throughout value chain activities (Habibi, Laroche, & Richard, 2016). By employing innovation, retailers can modify or create a pliable retail business model that will improve value (Pulles et al., 2016).

Some retailers have crossed over to multichannel to grow from simple selling to a meaningful customer relationship (Leisen, 2017). Establishing new methods of customer engagement, creating innovative activities, formats, governance, and synthesizing operations contribute to effective gains (Lee & Johnson, 2018). By providing opportunities for value creation, retailers may improve customer relationships and loyalty (Sivapalan & Jebarajakirthy, 2017). Retailers create value and customer loyalty through consumer experience (Rubio, Villasenor, & Yague, 2019). Customer spending is the basis for business performance (El-Manstrly, 2016). Leaders should focus on customer cross buying to capture customer behaviors and relationships with a business (Kumar, Bezawada, Rishika, Janakiraman, & Kannan, 2016). Although firms are investing in social media, firm-generated content may help businesses benefit from social engagement efforts and uncover the effectiveness of customer segments (Kumar et al., 2016).

Leveraging customer engagement data through social media identified three metrics: spending, cross buying, and customer effectiveness (Jensen & Cornwell, 2017). Customer spending may capture the transactional values of customer-to-firm that harness the influences of

the firm generate content on advertising and e-mail marketing (Leisen, 2017). Cross buying indicates customer relationship strengthens when firms better the customer services that improve customer loyalty (El-Manstrly, 2016). Customer effectiveness combines total net profits accrued per period on firm performance of purchases made by customers (Kumar et al., 2016). Retailers should use cross-selling methods because they may help customer relationships, improve switching costs, and contribute to revenues and profit (Pulles et al., 2016).

### **Relationship Marketing**

Relationship marketing is a mutual practice across organizations that functions as a viable competitive advantage source (Wang & Kim, 2017). Lee, Tang, Yip, and Sharma (2018) demonstrated the marketing tactics of reward programs as a consumer autonomy threat that resulted in decreased purchase intentions and negative word of mouth. The accomplishment of a relationship marketing strategy rests on the inclinations of consumers and their desire variation to establish relationships (Jensen & Cornwell, 2017). It is essential for firms to build relationships with consumers and stakeholders, which contributes immensely to the value proposition of the firm (Boateng, 2018). Finch, O'Reilly, Hillenbrand, and Abeza (2016) conducted a study of relationship marketing theory and found overall attitudes concerning relationship marketing connected with a favorable reaction to specific relationship marketing practices. Confident consumers affect participation in rewards programs and pursue relationships with customized products (Wang & Kim, 2017).

Business practitioners should advise firms to strengthen ties with customers to experience their marketing viewpoints (Filipe, Marques, & Salgueiro, 2017). Categorizing relationship marketing into three levels of social, structural, and financial may influence sales and incentives



(Filipe et al., 2017). Aligned with a marketing orientation, Abdulrazak and Gbadamosi (2017) emphasized that commitment, interdependence, and trust are central to marketing brand relationships and behavioral loyalty. The dominant influence over costumers and other stakeholders play an increasingly dynamic role in building relationship commitment and trust (Brodie, 2017). Customer orientation, teamwork, and flexibility shared values correlated to the development of relationship marketing orientation (Gligor, Gligor, & Maloni, 2019). The close relationship organizations have with customers along with market orientation gives them a competitive advantage over other businesses (Rocco & Selinsek, 2019). The method of relationship marketing necessitates the knowledge foundation of customers' emotional, economic, and moral needs to assist and satisfy customers efficiently (Filipe et al., 2017).

Proper application of relationship marketing assists marketing managers in effectively appealing to and maintaining lucrative customers (Sleep, Lam, & Hulland, 2018). Executives may recognize customer needs as they organize application design with product strategies and marketing initiatives (Cacciolatti & Lee, 2016). Influencing customers through relationship marketing to accomplish improve sales volume and target margins should provide a competitive advantage in the market industry (Shams, 2016). Relationship marketing exemplifies an overall winning position for customers and assists the current needs and interests of customers to focus on creating positive relations (Gao, Liu, & Qian, 2016). Improved level of customer commitment that includes a relationship marketing strategy is relevant to business executives because it leads to customer retention (Chang, Zhang, Wang, & Dong, 2020).

The most effective relationship marketing strategy across migration paths can assist organizations to promote and prevent deterioration of performance (Martin, Javalgi, & Cavusgil,

2017). Zhang, Watson, Palmatier, and Dant (2016) applied a multivariate hidden Markov model to a six-year longitudinal data set of 552 business-to-business relationships kept by a Fortune 500 firm. Zhang, Watson, Palmatier, and Dant (2016) found four underlying buyer-seller relationship states, according to the customer's commitment level, dependence, relational norms, and trust, it sparingly captured three positives and two negative migration mechanisms across customer migration relationships. Customers and sellers could improve value by investing in specific relationship assets that improve exposure to opportunism (Martin et al., 2017).

In recent years, marketing has refocused from customer acquisition to customer retention to achieve customer loyalty (Wei, McIntyre, & Soparnot, 2016). Debnath, Datta, and Mukhopadhyay (2016) concluded that relationship-marketing theory offered minimal insight into strategies that managers use to influence customer's migration from different relationship states and how different migration strategies eventually affect performance. Debnath et al. (2016) conceptualized relationship marketing as a philosophy of doing business. According to Toufally, Fallu, and Ricard (2016), well-managed organizations should work hard with customers to develop relationships and grow. Considering loyalty affects profit, managers should construct strong relationship strategies that ensure positive customer relationships and customer loyalty (Zhang, Watson, Palmatier, & Dant, 2016).

According to Agarwai (2018), loyalty programs often include relationship building as an objective that encompasses reward cards, gifts, tiered service levels, and other methods that positively influence customers' attitudes and behaviors toward the brand or business. Agarwai, (2018) experienced loyalty programs as an additional focal point surging in the activities of relationship marketing global competition. Rasul (2018) indicated relationship marketing and

loyalty programs differ across global markets establishing a comprehensive plan of relationship marketing and loyalty program mechanisms. Relationship marketing and loyalty programs represent critical differentiation strategies in the modern marketplace that improve global competition and commoditization of products and services (Martin et al., 2017).

The strength of the relationship between equivalence reciprocity and quality relationships varies depending on the culture (Mishra, 2016). Customer loyalty is an important variable in marketing and customer relationship management that may lead to positive attitudes and influential behaviors (Ngoma & Ntale, 2019). Ananda, Hernandez-Garcia, and Lamberti (2016) emphasized the focus on the expectations of relationship marketing program exchanges. Scholars pointed out a need to motivate national culture relationship programs to enable firms to achieve greater effectiveness and efficiencies in relationship marketing (Hughes, Vafaes, & Hilton, 2018). National cultures affect relationship marketing through social norms and behaviors (Hughes et al., 2018). Since demonstrating components of national culture affect relationships, Mishra (2016) concluded that reciprocity trails affect performance satisfaction.

Engaging relationship marketing strategies that include lasting communication methods to acquire customer points of view generate customer loyalty (Thakur, 2018). Brown, Foroudi, and Hafeez (2018) posited that retail-marketing executives should develop effective marketing strategies that align business strategies and encompass customer outlining, and market competitors. Businesses should develop close working relationships from a value-based perspective (Skarmeas, Zeriti, & Baltas, 2016). Micro-marketing, one-on-one marketing, loyalty marketing, interactive marketing are mainstay concepts under relationship marketing (Nikunen, Saarela, Oikarinen, Muhos, & Isohella, 2017). The longer a brand is in the market the greater the

brand's ability to affect customer relative share advantage (Saetang & Pathomsirikul, 2016).

Leaders should focus on providing new customers with relational benefits (Lee, Lee, & Breiter, 2016). Simbolon (2016) advanced the aspects of relationship marketing that include accelerating relationship marketing orientation, developing a manageable platform for customer satisfaction, and the conceptual plane of customer loyalty.

Assurance and belief are important for supporting long-term relationships through the relationship marketing approach (Yang, Song, Chen, & Xia, 2017). Marketing managers should take advantage of grievances from customers and use it as a means to build long-term relationships (Huang, Cheng, & Chen, 2017). Constructing a follow-up process for networking activities, increasing referrals, and concentrating on target markets as strategies, retail-marketing managers should implement to improve marketing activities (Lee, Lee, & Breiter, 2016). Firms with high levels of network competence should be more realistic and market innovation to establish paths and develop a relationship marketing strategy for selling new products (Naude & Sutton-Brady, 2019).

Firms should settle on international relationship marketing because it helps develop quality relationships that reduce real costs in uncharted territories (Naude & Sutton-Brady, 2019). According to Ahola, Aaltonen, Artto, and Lehtinen (2019), the main factors within relationship marketing consist of trust, commitment, shared values, cooperation, information sharing, relationship quality and investment, reciprocity, and reputation. Shi and Gao (2016) asserted that leaders in international markets would gain acceptance by producing tools of governance to manage with foreign businesses and improve performance. The importance of

relationship marketing and service quality enhances collectivism through behavioral intentions (Huang et al., 2017).

### **Marketing Resource Advantage**

Organizational size, cost leadership, market coordination degree, global market participation, and exporting activity intensity moderate effects on adoption performance relationship (Martin et al., 2017). Nicholson and Khan (2016) agreed to a theoretical understanding of the resource-advantage theory that affected the marketing mix relationship, cultural intelligence (CQ), manager's metacognitive intelligence, and valuable resources of marketing strategies and export performance. The cultural, economic, and regulatory environment differences required marketing strategy adoption (Witeck, 2014). The response to internal and external resources by organizations implementing the export strategy is integrated marketing mix adaption based on cultural, administrative, geographic, and economic differences (Mu, Bao, Sekhon, Qi, & Love, 2018).

Managers implementing effective international marketing strategies offer effective recruitment and development to export managers (Mu et al., 2018). Magnusson, Westjohn, Semenov, Randrianasolo, and Zdravkovic (2013) identified several influences expanding the foundation on contingency theory and resource advantage theory that emphasized on manager control and environmental factors. Leaders often encountered environmental opportunities turning into market opportunities when an environment fit of organizational resources and capabilities are in position as market opportunities (Hunt, 2017). Mi, Kang, and Liu (2020) identified organizations with different entry points that may control various resources that should improve the probability of advantage-generated resources with value and without duplication.

Entry resources and order of market-related entry advantages have little effect on entry order (Pazgal, Soberman, & Thomadsen, 2016).

Conceptualized marketing capability is a deployable marketing resource that achieves the objectives of customer-oriented marketing capabilities (Lussier & Hartmann, 2017). Marketing resources represent a broad value proposition that affects stakeholders in any organization with deployable resources gaining a competitive advantage (Sundar & Noseworthy, 2014). Davcik and Sharma (2016) agreed that market-based resources are essential factors of performance because of its focal role in obtaining market knowledge, brand, and building marketing relationships. Marketing scholars and practitioners may identify different marketing resources in their direct and indirect role to competitive advantage (Eisend, Evanschitzky, & Calatone, 2016). Organizations adopting a resource-based view produce a market offer for a specific segment of the market (Pazgal et al., 2016).

Newly assessed resources help organizations create superior paths and overcome the recycling of tacit knowledge (Lussier & Hartmann, 2017). In an empirical study, Othman, Arshad, Aris, and Arif (2016) found that resource-based view theory highlights the tangible and intangible resources boosted with sophisticated technology that improves production, services, and business operations. Organizations should employ physical assets to obtain a competitive advantage on resources (Qun & Sousa, 2016). The propensity concerning transactions depends on financial resources and innovative strategies to maximize profits (Bermudez-Edo, Hurtado-Torres, & Ortiz-deMandojana, 2017). The availability of adequate resources is critical in adopting green infrastructures and supporting a green marketing strategy (Papadas, Avlonitis, & Carrigan, 2017).

A cross-functional discipline in resource advantage theory sustains marketing and economic growth (Cacciolatti & Lee, 2016). Actions of competitors, suppliers, and customer behavior are operational practice models of resource advantage theory. Marketing is a solution for small organizations to allocate limited justifiable resources (Schriber & Lowstedt, 2016). Organizations forced to understand consumer needs, absorbed market information, and revised implemented resource strategies, developed a sustainable competitive advantage that should create first-mover advantages, and resource position barriers (Lim, Darley, & Marion, 2017). In a quantitative study, Yu, Ramakrishnan, and Nath (2017) found that the influence of environmental marketing strategy on competitive advantage is greater in competitive situations, while market dynamism does not affect resource relationships. Capabilities serve to bind different resources to detect effective and efficient resources that exploit market opportunities and terminate competitive threats (Qun & Sousa, 2016).

Marketing capabilities provide innovative products and market advantage matched with new product advantages (Cacciolatti & Lee, 2016). Kim, Shin, and Min (2016) found that implementing new marketing resources provides diverse opportunities for firms to help adjust efforts of continuous constructive productivity in market circumstances that are short-lived and unstable. Leaders should fine-tune their marketing resources and market capabilities to improve contribution to commercialization (Ahmadi, O’Cass, & Miles, 2014). Marketing resource and marketing capabilities need to combine to enhance a firms’ venture ability to recognize customer needs and better customer offers (Guesalaga, Gabrielsson, Rogers, Ryals, & Cuevas, 2018).

The key influences of growth are access to resources, the organization, and the strategic decisions of the organization (Guesalaga et al., 2018). Small retail businesses need to possess a

higher strategic orientation (SO) to endure or advance of the competition (Tho, 2019). The availability of resources may help businesses to experiment with proactive, risky, and aggressive strategies that contribute to growth (Martensen & Mouritsen, 2014). Despite various explorations of strategic orientation, the linkages between firm resources have been challenging, and firms need to create adequate valued resources to have a competitive advantage (Davicik & Sharma, 2016).

### **Advertising**

The objectives marketing managers pursue through advertising involve providing significant information to customers about the business and product source (Martin & Sigue, 2017). McAlister, Srinivasan, Jindal, and Cannella (2016) argued that the central objective of marketing managers' drive for thorough promotion is to trigger senses that provoke customers to purchase. Managers in cost leading firms should differentiate advertising and brand equity (Maegan & Yan, 2013). Advertising may broaden by publicizing the level of sale expenditures and the value of the firm (Puzakova, Kwak, Ramanathan, & Rocereto, 2016). Relationships among marketing strategies, advertising, and consumer appeal may bridge the gap of brand marketing for different platforms of product strategy (Yan, Cao, & Pei, 2016).

Marketing managers should create acceptable standard products that help minimize costs and avoid marginal customers (Hanssens et al., 2016). Building from the concept that advertising informs customers, McAlister et al. (2016) asserted that a firms' advertising should improve sales deriving from a competitive advantage or cost leadership. The more affluent network of brand associations built should make customers become less product sensitive and more receptive to brand marketing and brand extensions (Pontes, 2017). Modig and Rosengren



(2013) found that advertising creativity and price have been functioning as marketing signals to help customers improve quality perception. The effects of advertising creativity on brands may improve signal efforts, marketing origin, and provide a positive effect on brand marketing and knowledge (Rubio et al., 2017). A business should develop a media plan of sites that index high on consumers with specific demographic characteristics to engage specific consumer behaviors (Fulgoni, 2018).

Marketing managers need to show the distinction between the hard-sell and soft-sell advertising to help boost sales and develop a brand (Kennedy & Northover, 2016). A business needs to examine the effect of shocking advertisement and consumer behavior because it may generalize information for better identification of consumer buying behavior (Yang, Li, Zeng, & Jansen, 2018). Marketing managers that view customers as rational agents in creative tactics of advertising may create the desire for a customer to respond with important thoughts and feelings to help decision-making (Kennedy & Northover, 2016). Marketing managers should be skeptical of new elements and examine resources for validation (Nelson, Ham, & Ahn, 2017). Leaders need to demonstrate complete transparency for customers to respond to significant deals and acquire a diverse response (Simon, 2017).

The competitive product market induces consumer memory; leaders should provide support for advertising media channels to help create common firm effects of spending (Caulkins et al., 2017). In a practical study, Spotts et al. (2016) found that publicity and advertising have distinctive effects on marketing productivity. Stakeholders need to protect the corporate brand with positive publicity to manage sales and firm value (Spotts et al., 2016). Considering trade-offs could help firms maximize joint results and achieve strategic integration that should improve

advertising performance (Shrihari, Germann, Kang, & Grewal, 2016). Spotts et al. (2016) used a theory-based classification of media advertising and found that exposing media channels improved communication among customers, and created a premium brand building for regional, national, and online advertising.

Amid retail markets competitiveness, marketing managers need to introduce flexible, innovative products that appeal and excite customers and surpass rivals (Caulkins et al., 2017). According to Yenipazarli (2016), several markets introduced 500 brands in 50 product categories, and 47 % scaled back due to focusing on popular products without adoption being a monolithic process (Yenipazarli, 2016). Retail managers should distinctively improve existing products that may provide an adequate incentive for customers to purchase (Yan, Myers, Wang, & Ghose, 2014). Creating perception simplifies purchasing decisions for new products, price regimes, advertising expenditures, and warranty for short and long-term success (Yan et al., 2014). Complementarity and advertising affect product performance; leaders should consider segmentation, customer demand, product-specific costs, and bundling to influence marketing strategies (Caulkins et al., 2017).

### **Market Segmentation**

The significance of effective marketing and communications between all leaders is a fundamental theme in the literature (Saleem, Eagle, & Low, 2018). Converting from broad marketing to direct marketing is more effective because of customers' increasing their focus on marketing activities (Venter et al., 2016). Numerous methods exist that define target markets are demonstrating an attraction for specific offers (Saleem, Eagle, & Low, 2018). Grouping customers together with comparable preferences and buying behavior helps businesses deal with

market heterogeneity and resource allocation (Venter et al., 2016). Strategic segment alignment should include conceptual and managerial implications for developing competitive advantage and achieving effective resource allocations (Thomas, 2016). Leaders challenging multistage marketing and collaborating with firms may benefit from the understanding of customer alignment and network marketing (Ranfagni, Camiciottoli, & Faraoni, 2016).

Social media has advanced business-to-customer satisfaction through Omni-channels; leaders need to engage customer involvement in increasing customer satisfaction and brand credibility (Ranfagni et al., 2016). Marketing position is an essential market issue that refers to target market choice; businesses need to adopt information communication and technology methods to engage products, customers, and transactions (Rakic, Rakic, & Stanojevic, 2018). Defining potential customers through psychographics proposes recognizable standards useful in characterizing homogenous target markets (Rakic et al., 2018). Significant homogenous target groups help marketers generate superior products, create value propositions, and communicate benefits to customers (Saleem, Eagle, & Low, 2018).

Consumer beliefs and behaviors can influence interest in specific products or services (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Demographic data illustrating income or education, age or marital status, or gender can help identify potential customers with a tendency to acquire certain products (Tsai, Hu, & Lu, 2016). Researchers can simply gather such data through classification systems of residential areas (Djokic, Salai, Kovac-Znidarsic, Djokic, & Tomic, 2013). Marketers use demographic data consistently because it is easy to acquire and low development cost outcomes (Djokic et al., 2013). Market segmentation may be useful for customer needs and

resonance but can affect market communication unexpectedly in many ways (Mittal, Chawla, & Sondhi, 2016).

Market segmentation strategies addressing components or characteristics of targeted markets must involve marketing communication techniques while considering product value propositions (Raskovic, Ding, Skare, Dosen, & Zabkar, 2016). Alignment through value proposition should not only be with targeting customer needs, but also align communication methods to grasp the target market (Kim, 2013). Historically, retailers have supported the role of purchasing agent for native customers, but customers' automated access to product information and acquisition may convert leaders from product-dominant marketing to service-dominant marketing (Gronroos, 2017). Market trends from 2011–2016 indicated per-capita apparel consumption has decreased according to Tsai, Shyu, Ou, Hsu, and Lee (2016), and forced retailers to change their objectives. In the least competitive setting, retailers need to differentiate innovative marketing segments (Kardes, 2016).

Marketing segmentation should become an essential tool so that retailers can recognize homogenous groups of new customers (Raskovic et al., 2016). The degree of comparison between the target segment and relevance could be a significant achievement factor in target marketing communication (Scheuffelen, Kemper, & Brettel, 2019). Retailers often realize the competitive advantages of customer proximity-concentration in medical, museums, research, and library establishments (Melancon & Dalakas, 2018). Additional research could explore other factors about specific outcomes in the sales volume of products and services (Tsai, Shyu, et al., 2016). Developing promotions that appeal to specific consumers may improve the effectiveness and efficacy of those promotions (Fernandes & Calamote, 2016).

Social marketing promotions should be non-discriminatory to ensure groups are not favored systemically at others' expense (Fernandes & Calamote, 2016). Practitioners and managers in social entrepreneurial ventures should become involved in adopting social marketing and implementing social change (Liu, Ko, & Chapleo, 2018). Singh, Saini, and Majumdar (2016) conducted a study that utilized a ground theory approach and case study design that identified social marketing leaders should use social marketing strategies to achieve social and promotional objectives. Applications of marketing discipline may help businesses social marketing issues and develop solutions to marketing intervention (Daellenbach, Parkinson, & Krisjanous, 2018).

### **Transition**

At the beginning of Section 1, I provided the foundation and background knowledge that aligns and justifies the problem statement, purpose statement, and research question. The chosen method and design was the qualitative research method with a multiple case research design. A central research question was used to create the content of the interview questions. After the conceptual framework, I presented a review of the professional and academic literature regarding marketing theories, strategies, and brand marketing.

In Section 2, I started with a restatement of the purpose of the study, the role of the researcher, the participants, research method and design, population and sampling. I also explained the procedures involved in ethical research, data collection instruments, data organization techniques, and analysis of data. I concluded the section with the reliability and validity of the study.

Section 3 began with a presentation of the findings, recommendations, and the prospects for future research. I also included the application of the professional practice, implications for social change, and a conclusion of the study.

## Section 2: The Project

The goal of the doctoral study was to explore how department store marketing managers improve brand marketing in the Northeastern region of a metropolitan area in Virginia. Section 2 will commence with the purpose statement, role of the researcher, and participant information, followed by the research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection, and data analysis technique. The section will also contain reliability and validity information that will address the dependability and credibility of data.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore department store marketing managers' successful strategies to improve brand marketing. The targeted population included department store marketing managers from 5 department stores in a Northeastern region of a metropolitan area in Virginia who managed the improvement of brand marketing. Gaining an in-depth understanding of the strategies used by department store marketing managers may influence business leaders, investors, and policymakers to improve their business practice.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role as the researcher in this study was to be the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, explore and develop information, and minimize researcher bias. Researcher bias may influence the data collection phase, interpretation, and analysis (Cridland, Jones, Caputi, & Magee, 2016). Researchers should identify sources of personal bias from previous experiences, as well as assumptions and factors that can limit bias (Bossuyt & Kenhove, 2018). I had no relationship with any participant on the topic of the study. My relationship experience in the retail industry was limited; however, I gained further understanding of the

importance of brand marketing in regards to organizational performance. As the researcher, I collected notes and conducted observations during in-depth and semistructured interviews with open-ended questions as a primary source of data collection.

Bracketing gives researchers the ability to improve the rigor of the study and improve the process of data analysis (Sorsa, Kiiikkala, & Astedt-Kurki, 2016). The bracketing method helps researchers subdue their personal experiences and avoid influence (Sorsa et al., 2016). During collecting data and the analysis phase, I reviewed notes to refrain from researcher bias. Roulston and Shelton (2016) agreed that researchers should use reflective journaling methods during data collection to reduce potential personal bias. Reflective journaling method improves the researchers' understanding of events by eradicating inner thoughts and ideas (Burns, 2016). Researchers benefit by utilizing the reflective journal method by improving thinking skills (Padden-Denmead, Scaffidi, Kerley, & Farside, 2016). I used reflective journaling and took notes to create a detailed and comprehensive trail of events and observations during the interview.

I offered participants a summary of my interpretations of the interview for accuracy and content correctness. Member checking is a technique researchers may use to ensure data saturation and improve research reliability and credibility (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). During member checking, researchers submit their interpretations or transcripts to the participants and complete a follow up with them to acknowledge accuracy and completeness (Simpson & Quigley, 2016). Hamilton (2020) stated that reflexivity involves continuously assessing perceptions and bias of the researcher and avoiding any bias. Reflexivity is a way of promoting critical thinking (Zori, 2016). Moller and Parvinen (2016) stated that



following research participants while collecting data rather than leading the conversation may reduce personal bias in terms of interpreting the participants' responses.

Researchers have the responsibility to conduct research in an ethical manner (Moller & Parvinen, 2016). I employed ethical principles and guidelines for human research as provided by the Belmont Protocol Report (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979), and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) web-based training course. The Belmont Report requires participants to sign an informed consent form for interviewing, researchers to respect freedom of judgment and voice, protect individuals and society from harmful practices, and treat individuals equally (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). I created a risk-free environment where participants were able to respond freely to interview questions without fear of responses being rejected. The informed consent expressed the individuals' willingness to participate with details outlining the expectations of the interview.

Researchers use interview protocols to enable participants to define their experiences and prioritize opinions through open dialogue (Farrell, 2016). Implementing an interview protocol contributes to in-depth engagement with interviewees and helps clarify potential miscommunications (Farrell, 2016). I created an interview protocol that included interview questions which aligned with the research question. The interview questions explored marketing strategies used by 5 department store marketing managers to improve brand marketing successfully. The interview questions were consistent for each participant to ensure no researcher bias.

## Participants

The participants for this multiple case study were senior department store marketing managers who successfully improved brand marketing in the Northeastern region of a metropolitan area in Virginia. Accessing the target population for a study is an initial stage of selecting participants (Bauman, 2016). Researchers form the criteria of participants to improve the streamline effect of opinionated data (Koutsombogera & Vogel, 2017). A purposeful selection of participants allows researchers to ensure participants have significant information regarding the research topic (Benoot, Hannes, & Bilsen, 2016). Participants were senior marketing managers of department stores with 3 to 5 years' of experience in the Northeastern region of a metropolitan area in Virginia who successfully used strategies to improve brand marketing.

Establishing a point of contact with research participants may provide new data collection opportunities (Koutsombogera & Vogel, 2017). I had no direct business, personal relationship, or interaction with any potential participants. For this study, I visited marketing managers in retail department stores and viewed public contact information boards to establish an initial list of potential participants. I distributed information via handouts and emails referencing participant consent information, ethics, and interview protocols to build a networking relationship and gain approval from management. The consent form contained a brief background of the research, purpose, voluntary nature of their participation, and possible risks. Participants were able to express consent via email. Sending emails will escalate a researcher's chance to launch a relationship with potential participants (Byrne et al., 2016). After receiving the initial consent of the participants, I provided an introductory email to establish a relationship

with participants who have successful strategies that they were using to improve brand marketing.

## **Research Method and Design**

### **Research Method**

Researchers should select the appropriate research method to deliver significant results. The research method chosen for this study was the qualitative research method approach to explore human behaviors and the details of those behaviors through in-depth interviews. A qualitative research method is a great approach for developing and understanding marketing strategies (Pandey & Chawla, 2016). Employing qualitative research helps to construct conceptualization (Pandey & Chawla, 2016). VanScoy and Evenstad (2016) suggested using a qualitative approach to study businesspeople to engage and develop a deep understanding. Therefore, I selected the qualitative methodology as appropriate for identifying and exploring the marketing strategies department store marketing managers used to improve brand marketing.

Researchers may use a quantitative research method to examine one or more hypotheses and the relationship between variables (VanScoy & Evenstad, 2016). A quantitative research approach is optimal for researchers who seek to analyze and translate data into a statistical format (Hamilton, 2020). A quantitative approach was not appropriate for this study because a statistical data analysis will not be an effective way to retrieve rich in-depth data from participants. The mixed method is the combination of the qualitative and quantitative research methods that require an extensive process of collecting, interpreting, and analyzing numeric data (Kwiek, 2017). The mixed method approach is useful for retrieving both quantitative and qualitative data (Piccioli, 2019). In this study, the quantitative method was not used because

there was no statistical data to construe. In addition, the mixed method was not used because an in-depth analysis of both qualitative and quantitative methods may have taken much longer and required additional expenses. The purpose of this study was to explore the marketing strategies department store marketing managers use to improve brand marketing; therefore, a qualitative research method was the correct fit.

### **Research Design**

Consideration of the research problem and the data collection is essential in determining the research design (Charlick, Pincombe, McKellar, & Fielder, 2016). A case study design is often the preferred strategy researchers implement to develop theory and identify key elements for a qualitative approach (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018). Researchers use case studies to explore complex phenomena within their context using multiple data sources (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018).

For this study, the multiple case study was the appropriate design for collecting data because a case study design supports the collection and examination of data in a difficult and detailed context (Lewis, 2016). VanScoy and Evenstad (2016) agreed that a case study design is ideal to learn participant experiences through in-depth data collection using open-ended questions as opposed to collecting numeric data. Researchers have used other common qualitative research designs to facilitate their studies such as narrative, ethnography, and phenomenology (Yin, 2014).

Researchers using a narrative design intend to investigate and unfold participant real-life experiences in a linear approach (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013). My intent was not to explore the linear experiences of the participant's life experiences; therefore, I did not select a

narrative design. Ethnography design tends to unveil reality or perspectives through the generalization of individual instances (Jamali, 2018). I excluded ethnography since the design on the generalization of an individual's instances is not in line with my doctoral study. Researchers use a phenomenological design to interpret and understand an individuals' true meaning of their lived experiences (Charlick et al., 2016). Therefore, I rejected a phenomenological design because I did not collect data on the lived experiences of department store marketing managers. My focus was to use a qualitative multiple case study research design to examine real-world phenomenon within a bounded and contextual setting.

The objective of a qualitative case study is to gather enough quality data to produce a rich and comprehensive description of a phenomenon (Mackieson, Shlonsky, & Connolly (2018). To assure data quality, I used a variety of resources and techniques to gather the necessary data. I reviewed publicly available information on the organizations' website and reviewed annual reports. Triangulation and multiple data collecting are major components of case study research (Johnson et al., 2017). Methodological triangulation is a method used by researchers to integrate multiple data sources such as interviews, archives, annual reports, and observations to understand the results (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018). The targeted population for the study was five department store marketing managers from a Northeastern region of a metropolitan area in Virginia until no new data or themes occurred. However, I was open to request more participants, if needed, if data saturation was not reached with the initial five participants. Data saturation occurs when no new ideas or themes occur (Fusch et al., 2018).

## **Population and Sampling**

The population for this qualitative multiple case study will include senior department store marketing managers who successfully used marketing strategies to improve brand marketing in a Northeastern region of a metropolitan area in Virginia. The general achievement of organizations using successful marketing strategies is an indication of the marketing managers' capabilities to reach a competitive advantage (Esteban & Hernandez, 2017). To explore the specific business problem, I used purposeful sampling based on the criterion for the selection of participants in my study. Benoot et al. (2016) encouraged purposeful sampling with a small size to collect information as opposed to a larger population. In qualitative research, 5 to 50 participants can be enough to reach data saturation (Dworkin, 2012). I started with five participants and was ready to request additional participants until I reached data saturation. O'Reilly and Parker (2013) agreed that qualitative and quantitative researchers should not use straight-line procedures for selecting participant numbers because the purpose of a qualitative research method is to explore multiple phenomenal representations rather than count viewpoints or individuals.

Purposeful snowball sampling involves selected participants with significant attributes and information to satisfy the research question (Benoot et al., 2016). To reach more participants, researchers use snowball sampling to retrieve individuals who have rich and knowledgeable information about the research topic based on participant referrals (Colvin, Witt, & Lacey, 2016). Puyvelde (2018) stressed that interviews should be in a suitable location free from distractions. An interview with participants in a qualitative case study is an ideal method for collecting enough data (Yin, 2014). In semistructured or unstructured interviews, researchers

can use improvisation in question probing to gain further information (Ross & Blumenstein, 2016). The interview setting was in a natural environment to provide comfort, convenience, and confidentiality such as a conference room or office. An appropriate atmosphere for participants may help capture their interest to broadly express opinions and discuss experiences (Ross & Blumenstein, 2016).

### **Ethical Research**

The importance of ethical research includes the collective responsibility to ensure proper conduct of human research (Snoek & Horstkotter, 2017). Bromley, Mikesell, Jones, and Khodyakov (2016) discussed that participants must be willing to engage in research. Therefore, participants will know the options to either partake or withdraw from the study with no consequences. Each department store marketing manager I selected voluntarily consented to participate in the study. If a participant wished to withdraw from the study, they had the opportunity to contact me via telephone or email. Participants were able to inform me of a decision to withdraw during an interview or 1-2 days after the session. Medway and Tourangeau (2016) noted that participants having the right to withdraw from the study may improve transparency and trust. Participants receiving incentives may cause concern about the rate of responses and the quality of collected data (Medway & Tourangeau, 2016).

Some researchers may use an assortment of incentives to encourage participants to take part in the study (Medway & Tourangeau, 2016). Participants did not receive any incentives for participating in this study. I ensured the confidentiality and protection of the participants' identities by having sole access to identifiable information and personal details. Researchers achieve anonymity by altering recognizable information of the participants (Snoek &

Horstkotter, 2017). I generated codes using letters and numbers such as A1 to A5 for each participant to determine their responses for data analyzing. Valuing ethical practices not only protected researchers, but also decreased the risk of harm, preserve the integrity, and communicate trust during the study (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012).

Dixon (2016) stated that the consent form in research is essential. Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe, and Young (2018) argued that participants agree to the terms and conditions in the consent form including the freedom to participate or withdraw. Curran, Kekewich, and Foreman (2019) considered the consent form to be a basis for studies related to human research. All participants should receive a consent form to acknowledge the research process with the interview questions for the study (Curran et al., 2019). I distributed the consent form for my doctoral study that included my contact information, detailed information on the research process along with a Walden University representative's email address.

The IRB's objective is to stimulate ethics in research and avoid exploitation of participant research principals with respect to persons, beneficence, and justice (Phillips, Johnston, & Austin-Szwak, 2017). I complied with IRB ethical research procedures that involve proposed research, community research stakeholders, partner potential risks and benefits, data integrity and confidentiality, potential conflicts of interest, data collection tools, description of research participants, and informed consent. Researchers collecting data are responsible for data confidentiality at all levels to include data analysis, and storage (Yin, 2014). I stored collected data in a secure container at my residence and will destroy all contents and hard data of the research after 5 years. Confidential data is useful in protecting a participant's privacy (Snoek & Horstkotter, 2017).



### **Data Collection Instruments**

Interviews are the most common form of data collection in qualitative research. I was the primary data collection instrument in this study. In qualitative research studies, researchers are on the front-line as the primary instrument to listen, observe, and interpret data (Aarsand & Aarsand, 2018). Jaidin (2018) explained that interviews are the most common knowledge-generating technique in qualitative research. Upon receiving IRB approval, I scheduled face-to-face semistructured interviews following an interview protocol (Appendix A) for data collection.

The goal of each interview was to explore the experiences of department store marketing managers' strategies for improving brand marketing. There are variety of sources that researchers may use to collect data that include interviews, archival records, documentation, direct observation, and participant observation (Heath, Williamson, Williams, & Harcourt, 2018). Yin (2014) agreed that the more resources the richer the quality of the study. I collected data from semistructured interviews with open-ended questions, company reports, and website archival data as a primary and secondary resource for data collection.

Alsulami, Scheepers, and Rahim (2016) agreed that member checking serves as an interactive method to assure validity and reliability in qualitative research, in which the researcher and the participant seek to achieve consensus on the accuracy of data interpretation. Researchers using member checking may improve their confidence in the data collected through comparing and contrasting responses of participants to similar findings prior to member checking (Simpson & Quigley, 2016). Researchers' may request participants to review interview documents for verification of accuracy and preciseness of the transcript (Alsulami et al., 2016).

Member checking involves checking interpretations of data that participants provide (Birt et al., 2016). I conducted member checking after summarizing and interpreting the participants' responses for each interview question. I enhanced reliability and validity by implementing member checking. The process of using open-ended questions may contribute to the flexibility of probing questions and receiving fully expressed viewpoints and experiences (Weller et al., 2018).

### **Data Collection Technique**

Data collection techniques can be online/paper surveys, interviews, observations, site visits, video recordings, and a review of company documents such as quarterly reports and business operation work plans (Chan & Walker, 2016). Introducing participants to the interview procedures is essential to building rapport (Mao & Feldman, 2018). The data collection technique for this study will consist of constructing semistructured face-to-face interviews with questions listed in Appendix A and document review. I provided a telephonic and email invitation for potential participants that informed them of the purpose, intent, and benefits of the study. According to Mao and Feldman (2018), face-to-face interviews could contribute to receiving quality information in relation to behavior and non-verbal indications. The advantage of semistructured face-to-face interviews is that they could provide an abundance of dialogue and interaction amongst the participant and researcher (Mao & Feldman, 2018). The potential disadvantages could be geographical limitations, the bias of the researcher, and participant time constraints (Gagnon, Jacob, & McCabe, 2016).

Chen, Wang, and Lu (2016) agreed that a document review may help organize, extract and interpret knowledge efficiently. I conducted a document review to determine the difference

between collected data and enhanced my understanding of the organization. The interviews and document review served as sources to triangulate the data. The advantage of a document review is that it is inexpensive and may expose unstated information (Pacho, 2016). The potential disadvantage may be time-consuming, disorganized data, or outdated data (Pacho, 2016).

Triangulation is a data analysis tool used to evaluate two or more sources to validate data (Fusch et al., 2018).

Fusch et al. 2018 agreed that methodological triangulation may improve the validity of qualitative research. Johnson et al. (2017) suggested that case study researchers use methodological triangulation during the data analysis to triangulate data. Using multiple sources may help gain insight and improve the interpretation of collected data (Fusch et al., 2018). I used methodological triangulation by gathering and reviewing hard copy or electronic documents to better understand the organizations' performance. Morse (2016) agreed that data saturation is when no new information occurs. I used member checking to achieve data saturation of transcribed data with the 5 participants to ensure the adequacy and quality of collected data.

### **Data Organization Technique**

Organizing and securely storing data can be a challenge but is necessary for protecting participant research information (Surmiak, 2018). The data organization technique for this proposed study will consist of research logs, reflective journals, and coded data. I used my android mobile phone (Samsung Galaxy Note 5) for audio recording support. I used a research journal log to annotate my observations and responses throughout the research process. I transcribed the interview data into text and stored it in Microsoft Excel. I used NVivo software to load data for coding data into themes. NVivo is a common technique in analyzing and

organizing interview data, coding, and data recovery (Swygart-Hobaugh, 2019). I organized and stored all raw data by assigned codes including interview questions and responses, audio recordings, transcripts, interpretations, organization online archival reports, other supporting documents collected in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet file. Microsoft Excel functions of filtering, sorting and the ability to generate tables make it a great tool to view data from multiple perspectives (Kuhlmann & Ardichvili, 2016). Woods, Paulis, Atkins, and Macklin, (2016) agreed that privacy and confidentiality are vital components in protecting participant information. I used alphanumeric codes, A1, A2, A3, A4, and A5 to represent the five participants. Data including recordings, interview notes, and transcripts will be stored in a password-protected file in a secure location for a minimum of 5 years. After 5 years, I will delete all electronic data and shred all material associated with the research.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis involves categorizing, determining a conclusion, and examining collected data (Yin, 2014). Woods et al. (2016) proposed that researchers use data analysis to organize data into codes and themes. To satisfy the research question of what marketing strategies department store marketing managers use to improve brand marketing, I used semistructured, open-ended interview questions. I summarized my understanding of the interviews and distributed my interpretation to participants for accuracy and correctness. I collected supplementary information by reviewing organizational reports and archival documents available on the organizations' website. Triangulation encourages the researcher to focus on and examine collected data from various resources to confirm themes or recognize patterns within the phenomenon (Kothari, Hovanec, Sibbald, Donelle, & Trucker, 2016). The advantage of using a

triangulation approach is that it helps in supporting data and expanding research credibility (Fusch et al., 2018). Triangulation may decrease the risk of researcher bias (Kothari et al., 2016). Kothari et al. (2016) agreed that researchers utilize triangulation to improve collected data confidence and reliability. Therefore, to improve the validity and dependability of research findings and mitigate any bias, I combined, compared, and contrasted different data sources.

Analyzing transcripts with organizational reports and available website content was substantial in responding to the research question. I studied five dissimilar cases to get an in-depth understanding and a holistic view of the phenomenon. Maher, Hadfield, and Hutchings, and de Eyto, 2018) stated that NVivo software is a helpful data management tool specific to compiling data for analysis of qualitative cases into words or phrases and arrange similarities to assist in segmenting the data into groups. Researchers may use NVivo software to generate categories, organize transcripts, extract themes, search and sort data, and produce graphs, maps, and charts to visualize data (Maher et al., 2018). A systemic process ensured successful data coding leading to extracting meaningful themes (Claps, Svensson, & Aurum, 2016). The steps I used for data analysis were (a) organizing the data, (b) familiarizing with the data, (c) creating data nodes, (d) providing data codes, (e) interpreting data, and (f) presenting a script of the data. Data organization consists of compiled data that researchers align in a meaningful order to produce a suitable database to disassemble and fragment data into themes and labels (Woods et al., 2016). I extracted the correct themes and concepts from the data and placed them into clusters followed by reassembling the data in a category sequence to interpret and conclude. Researchers who use thematic analysis describe how the themes combine into a broader conceptualization (Mackieson et al., 2018). To focus and correlate the key themes of the

conceptual framework, researchers can use thematic analysis to identify and record appropriate themes within the data (Mackieson et al., 2018). Along with the NVivo software, I described potential themes related to the conceptual framework and directly addressed the research question.

## **Reliability and Validity**

### **Reliability**

Reliability indicates that researchers can achieve the consistency of results when following identical methods and techniques (Benoot et al., 2016). Kihn and Ihantola (2016) emphasized that the validation of a study in any methodological approach is a continuing process. In qualitative studies, researchers use trustworthiness and rigor to ensure reliability (Korstjens & Moser, 2016). Dependability helps researchers replicate research and compare findings under similar conditions (Varpio, Ajjawi, Monrouxe, O'Brien, & Rees, 2017). For this multiple case study, I used member checking and methodological triangulation to ensure reliable findings. Simpson and Quigley (2016) agreed that using member checking involves clarifying the meaning and accuracy of participants' responses. Researchers use methodological triangulation to link and incorporate themes between multiple data sources (Fischer & van de Bovenkamp, 2019). Member checking is the process of sharing data transcripts to obtain feedback from the participants (Simpson & Quigley, 2016). I remained impartial and objective during the data collection and analysis process to mitigate bias. After I interviewed the participants, I provided a summarized interpretation of the interviews for accuracy and correctness. Once the participants were satisfied with the transcripts, I coded themes from the interviews and analyzed triangulated data to connect the themes.

## Validity

Validity forms a research process that renders data trustworthy (Pandey & Chawla, 2016). Credibility, transferability, and confirmability establishes the quality of the research procedure and results through the analysis of findings to reflect the primary purpose of the research (Aravamudhan & Krishnaveni, 2016). Olsen, McAllister, Grinnell, Walters, and Appunn (2016) agreed that researchers must accept scientific sound methods in both qualitative and informational sciences to maintain authenticity or credibility. Olsen et al. (2016) agreed that member checking improves the credibility of the research between participants and the researcher. I used semistructured interviews, a review of academic literature, and organizational documents to connect emerging themes as a process to triangulate the data and increase credibility. Confirmability refers to the quality of results, which by member checking enhances the support of the participants (Benoot et al., 2016). Abdalla, Oliveira, Azevedo, and Gonzalez (2018) stated that researchers use confirmability and triangulation to decrease bias and ensure the study can be replicable. I used follow up member checking interviews and data triangulation to enhance the confirmability of the study. Korstjens and Moser (2016) concluded that in qualitative research, the transferability and dependability are strategies to help determine the rigor for the framework. The point to which a study is consistent with a participants' preceding experience will influence the level of transferability of the study (Aravamudhan & Krishnaveni, 2016). I ensured transferability by using triangulation between multiple data sources to illustrate the findings for future researchers. Data saturation is a process that ensures the dependability of research findings (Birt et al., 2016). Sim, Saunders, Waterfield, and Kingstone (2018) argued that adding more to a sample size does not mean a richer population; however, an adequate

sample number is essential for a successful study as long as researchers ensure data saturation. I explored the successful marketing strategy experiences of five department store marketing managers; however, I was prepared to continue interviewing additional participants to reach data saturation.

### **Transition and Summary**

The objective of the doctoral study was to explore how department store marketing managers improve brand marketing. I used a qualitative multiple case study to conduct the research. In Section 2, I began restating the purpose statement followed by a detailed description role of the researcher; identification of the participants, population, and sampling method; and elaboration on the data collection tools, data organization, and data analysis process. Section 2 concluded with an overview of the research reliability and validity. In Section 3, I provided an introduction leading to the presentation of findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change, and recommendations for using the findings to improve business practice and further research.



### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore department store marketing managers' strategies to improve brand marketing. Because brand marketing affects productivity, it is important for retail store managers to implement strategies to improve business practices. The results of the findings indicated that department store marketing managers could focus their efforts on customer and brand interaction, as well as broadening brand concepts to stimulate customer experiences.

#### **Presentation of Findings**

The overarching research question of my study is: What strategies do department store marketing managers use to improve brand marketing? To identify the strategies department store marketing managers use to improve brand marketing, I conducted semistructured interviews with five successful department store marketing managers located in the Northeastern region of a metropolitan area in Virginia. In qualitative studies, interviews are an effective technique for collecting data (Glegg, 2019; Rosenthal, 2016).

I used member checking for accuracy and reliability. I used methodological triangulation to combine the interview responses along with the collected documents. Researchers use methodological triangulation to provide a balanced understanding of conventional data from multiple perspectives (Abdalla et al., 2018). Morse (2016) stated that data saturation is achieved when no new data emerges from the data collection process. I reached data saturation when no new or additional information emerged from the 5 participants. I transcribed audio recordings of interviews after each session and assigned unique codes to each participant. NVivo was used to

code collected data involving reoccurring themes. Table 2 displays the frequency of keywords participants used related to the themes.

Table 2

*Keyword Frequency of Participants Related to Themes*

Themes	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	Total
Market research	12	8	9	12	6	47
Customer retention	5	11	7	9	11	43
Branding	9	9	6	8	7	39
Marketing knowledge	6	7	8	8	9	38

**Theme 1: Market Research**

Market research consists of identifying new opportunities to develop attractive products and services and a competitive advantage for the existing long-term (Morgan, Whitler, Feng, & Chari, 2019). Implementing market research to observe market trends and comprehend customers' concerns will warrant higher profits and competitive advantage (Yang et al., 2017). During the interview, P2 stated, "sharing experiences involved locally going door-to-door handing out surveys to understand customer necessities for everyday life, this was daunting but helpful. It gave me a chance to get out to see and feel how people express their concerns face to face, instead of sending, what they may see as junk mail." "I got the chance to socialize and interpret how they felt about specific market brands", stated P2. "The survey provided valuable information to improve and adjust our marketing plan", stated P1. P3 stated, "I used a focus group on market research to obtain data from customers representing the target market." Companies with deficient marketing strategies that include market research will not effectively perform as companies that are consistently improving their marketing plan to meet market and consumer needs (Bhattacharya, 2016).

Three of five participants employed certified professional personnel from market research agencies to identify opportunities and risks in the marketplace. P4 stated, “they found the marketing agencies’ professional support valuable as the professionals aided in testing their product in the open market to track sales and profits.” P3 stated, “the marketing agency professional provided detailed statistics, reports and data sources through market research services.” Business leaders should effectively manage the collection of consumer data because recognizing the target market group is critical to increasing brand awareness, maintaining customer retention, and sales (Hegner, Fetscherin, & van Delzen, 2017).

“The data collected by the marketing agency professional helped the business leaders with situational awareness of current and future expenditures and preferences”, stated P4. P5 stated that “the marketing agency professional was able to identify dissimilar groups of key consumers in the industry and able to develop a new product for a unique market group.” Market research supports business leaders in establishing strategies for prospective buyer groups with common needs and a high-value perception for products and services (Farrell, 2016; Salavou, 2016), which allows marketing teams and business owners to increase their investment and maintain business sustainability.

## **Theme 2: Customer Retention**

Customer retention indicates the propensity of customers to switch competitors and is considered central to developing business relationships (Gordini & Veglio, 2017). Moreover, concerning an increase in spending, retention can be financially rewarding for company operations (Gordini & Veglio, 2017). Seventy percent of prospective business leaders are dependent on consumer satisfaction (Alavijeh, Esmaili, Sepahvand, & Davidaviciene, 2018).

“Business leaders should focus on engaging with consumers and providing first-rate customer service”, stated P1. P3 stated, “useful marketing strategies use to be distinct among competitors to create sociable relationships with customers and create loyalty and customer credibility.” P1 stated “ensuring customers had an outstanding purchase experience was essential.” “I remember a time where a customer, I do not wish to name the place, but the employees did not assist the customer or wanted to answer any questions of the customer as if they were having a bad day, but at the end of the day, the customer is the number one commodity”, stated P1. Zhang, Li, Wang, and Wang (2016) indicated that a customer life cycle is the process consumers experience when considering buying and remaining loyal to a business. P4 stated, “a word-of-mouth marketing strategy is most successful for brand awareness and revenue growth.” P5 stated, “customers have to be comfortable and satisfied with that specific brand experience, but word-of-mouth can also hurt you as well.” P3 stated, “it is always good to treat people kind and ensure they are satisfied with what they get from your business. A happy customer is very rewarding, so we try hard, very, very, hard.”

Consumers will trust, stay loyal, and recommend a business through word of mouth when they are satisfied with their business transactions (Saleem, Yaseen, & Wasaya, 2018). P2 stated, “business leaders might need to work on developing society and consumer relationships, as customer needs change over time.” P2 used reward programs to escalate their customer base. P1 stated, “they would provide incentives to supporters for any innovative business idea they present and develop personnel connections with to obtain exceptional leads.” P5 stated, “my business endured through reward programs for the first year of operation.” Periods of economic tightening provide consumers with incentives to experiment with lower-priced brands (Berendt

et al., 2018). P3 stated, “business leaders would discover value in customizing their services and marketing responsiveness by creating relationships with customers that are long term.” The management of customer relationships is important and must be supported and understood for business success (Li, Huang, & Song, 2019). Chakraborty and Bhat (2017) stated that giving exceptional customer service is the key to the success of small businesses.

### **Theme 3: Branding**

When a brand is different from other competitors, consumers may stay consistent in terms of purchasing the common brand because the demand for other brands is not satisfied, so the common brand becomes more attractive (Yoganathan, Osburg, & Akhtar, 2019). P1 stated, “greater emphasis should be placed on enhancing consumers’ online brand experience in the face of increasing competition.” P3 stated, “It is most important to understand the sensors of brand marketing techniques to lead a more positive consumer evaluation of an ethical brand.” P2 stated, “marketing is not exclusive to in-store shopping, the brand effect must be diverse in advertising.” P3 stated, “diversifying is a critical function of brands that result in memorable brand experiences for consumers; therefore, marketing managers should educate their team members on the advantages and disadvantages of product branding.” Osterle, Kuhn, and Henseler (2018) found different effects of branding showed the importance of having a general view over the prices, market leaders, and economic concerns. In some cases, the relationship between brand, service prices, and market drivers is not straightforward and requires holistic research on socioeconomic boundaries (Osterle et al., 2018).

During different market conditions, marketers configure brands based on the pull of the market (Yoganathan et al., 2019). Proper branding and cost are key factors that affect business's

sustainability and growth (Pakseresht, 2016). Direct and indirect costs are two main elements identifying the price of a brand (Andreini, Pedeliento, Zarantonello, & Solerio, 2018). P3 stated, “businesses may suffer through unjust pricing of the competition and encourage customers to focus more on price rather than brand quality.” However, Andreini et al. 2018 argued that small business management tries to sustain revenue and not lose brand quality. P4 stated, “pricing is a key marketing strategy to improve sales and increase profitability. We expand on social media in ways to appeal and influence customers that are digitally inclined, meaning they solely shop on-the net.” “Changing prices was not the first action to be taken, but is a priority if believed cost would be cut to level a brand”, stated P5. “Prestigious clients are more likely to purchase brands that are high in price even during the fluctuation of the market. On the other hand, low profile clients would probably restrict their spending for a lower-priced brand”, stated P2. P3 stated, “dropping the prices would not ultimately mean a drop in cash flows.” According to P5, “surviving a market recession requires management to make serious decisions to ensure prices align and do not affect product quality and services.”

#### **Theme 4: Marketing Knowledge**

Mitrega (2020) stated that organizations that lack marketing knowledge have become a threat and a barrier to their success. During the interview, P4 shared an adverse experience upon starting a business. P4 stated “I did not complete college, have any experience with marketing, or developed a business plan.” All the participants stated, “learning new sources of business and marketing management is essential for starting any business.” Two of five participants attended marketing training sessions and seminars to enhance their marketing skills. All participants claimed that empowering leaders with business knowledge could help to sustain a business.

Compared to P5, P3 stated, “I experienced a lack of marketing knowledge and skills.” Small business leaders should consider the consistency of long-term effects of market planning and seek innovative improvements (Carter & Yeo, 2017). P4 stated, “business leaders with a background education in marketing should stay informed and provide the necessary training for their marketing teams.” P3 stressed that “attending marketing and related industry events are essentials for learning and integrating new skills into a marketing plan.” “I obtained more marketing knowledge by purchasing audiobooks and frequently updating the company website”, stated P1. P5 stated, “they obtained inspiration through the power of knowledge and guidance.” A comprehensive marketing plan provides business leaders with flexible competitive control in the marketplace (Rodriguez, Molina-Castillo, & Svensson, 2020). All participants agreed that innovation could improve through new forms of knowledge and basic perspectives about the market. P1 shared that “on-line social marketing channels create opportunities to access information needed for marketing managers to make relevant marketing decisions as well.”

### **Ties to Conceptual Framework**

The marketing theory developed by Alderson and Cox, was the conceptual framework for this multiple case study. The marketing theory’s potential basis for marketing strategy concepts included buying behavior, perception of supply and demand, product-price adoption, and revenue growth. Analysis of the participants’ data confirmed the marketing theory developed by Alderson and Cox was appropriate and relevant to exploring the marketing strategies to improve brand marketing used by department store marketing managers. Participant’s responses and themes aligned with the concepts outlined in Alderson’s and Cox’s marketing theory.

The study findings confirm that the perceived quality of brands should improve the beliefs about the brand and association to reinforce consumer brand satisfaction. The customer interactions in certain forums may be reflections of underlying or forming of attitudes towards the product and services at hand. The significant differences in profit among marketing groups with or without consumer brand interaction are relevant to marketing managers (Hirvonen et al., 2016). It is essential to comprehend the interactions between consumers and brands, products, and services (Popp & Woratschek, 2017). Researchers use the intellectual framing of psychological ownership to provide marketing practice with the means to comprehend consumer product and service relationships and decision making of innovative concepts on corresponding strategies (Gonzalez-Benito et al., 2016).

The availability of resources may help businesses to experiment with proactive, risky, and aggressive strategies that contribute to growth (Dwyer & Kotey, 2016). Despite various explorations of strategic orientation, the linkages between firm resources have been challenging, and firms need to create adequate valued resources to have a competitive advantage (Davicik & Sharma, 2016). Relationships among marketing strategies, advertising, and consumer appeal may bridge the gap of brand marketing for different platforms of product strategy (Yan, et al., 2016). The more affluent network of brand associations built should make customers become less product sensitive and more receptive to brand marketing and brand extensions (Gonzalez-Benito et al., 2016).

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

Applications to professional practice are applied strategies of trained, knowledgeable, and skilled professional applicable to a required field (Kasemap, 2017). Department store managers



may benefit from reviewing successful strategies to improve brand marketing. The specific business problem was some department store marketing managers lack strategies to improve brand marketing. The purpose of this study was to explore strategies department store marketing managers use to improve brand marketing. The outcome results are essential for this study and may enhance the probability of a business owner's success by aligning strategies of brand marketing with marketing targets and organizations' profitability objectives (Priilaid, Human, Pitcher, Smith, & Varkel, 2017).

Business leaders who understand the importance of developing and implementing successful brand marketing strategies should aim to provide a distinctive and desirable experience, not only to satisfy the consumer but also to exceed their expectations. Punyatoya (2018) identified customer satisfaction as the key force that will lead to brand loyalty and increased profitability. Targeting the right customers will ensure a healthy relationship and assist marketing managers to strengthen the rapport. Embracing the most appropriate marketing strategies according to the changes in the marketplace is key for marketing teams and profitability (Priilaid et al., 2017).

Another way business leaders may sustain a competitive edge is by assessing competitive ingenuities of brand imaging with marketing targets and an organization's profitability objectives (Eryigit, 2017). Business leaders that use effective brand marketing strategies are particularly important for emergent products due to the unfamiliarity of the market with the quality of new entrants (Eryigit, 2017). Positioning a solution to brand marketing requires a more in-depth analysis of the customer's objectives and customer relationships (Agarwai, R. (2018). Therefore,

business leaders should learn how to be more vigilant in reaching out via social media to improve the existing and potential customer base.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The implications for social change of this study include (a) combined approaches to business sustainability such as training and seminar programs for upcoming business leaders within the community and (b) development resources for business leaders to improve sales and profits, which may create employment opportunities. Business leaders that target, engage, and introduce new products and resources can develop a competitive advantage and transition to a more sustainable business future (Purcell & Chahine, 2019). Business leaders should develop and encourage relationships with communities and fellow organizations to identify cultural issues affecting community growth (Stelmokien & Endriulaitiene, 2016).

Offering training programs encourage social change through community engagement (Pontes, 2017). Training topics should include business management; marketing strategies; cost-efficiency; customer retention; targeting investments to improve revenue growth, and new business leaders and their contribution to society (Davidovitch & Belichenko, 2016). A group of business leaders should host community seminars to present marketing strategies for revenue growth. Considering the potential for increased sales, participants in the study used surveys to gauge their customer base. Business leaders should work closely with communities and organizations to assess the value of training programs and apply surveys and feedback on future improvements and community awareness (Franco, 2018).

### **Recommendations for Action**

In this qualitative multiple case study, I explored the successful marketing strategies used by department store marketing managers to improve brand marketing. Retailers often fail at positioning brands to optimize profitability and competitive advantage (Witeck-Hajduk & Grudecka, 2018). Department stores collapse because of incomprehensible methods to promote growth (Karjalo & Lindblom, 2016). The recommendations from this research study may aid (a) department store marketing managers, (b) community leaders and organizations, and (c) researchers and students who study marketing strategy and competitive advantage. My goal is to disseminate this research study in marketing training seminars and publish it in a peer-reviewed journal to be available to researchers and students. Based on the findings of this study, there are four recommendations for department store marketing managers to consider. I recommend that department store marketing managers conduct research to identify marketing trends and target customers' concerns and examine multiple types of customer and sales data. Brand attraction may contribute to a competitive advantage for marketing managers to understand the customer's perception of a particular product (Fischer & Himme, 2016).

Secondly, I recommend department store marketing managers to develop sociable relationships with customers and create loyalty and customer credibility. Consumers will trust, stay loyal, and recommend a business when they are satisfied with their purchase experience (Zhang & Li, 2019). The third recommendation is that the department store advantages and disadvantages of product pricing and the impact on revenue from sales. Managers should learn how to optimize pricing to maximize client retention and improve revenue (Krasheninnikova, Garcia, Maestre, & Fernandez, 2019). The fourth recommendation for department store

marketing managers is to enhance their marketing knowledge and empower their team members with the resources to sustain long-term business operations. Managers that are familiar with marketing research concepts are able to make healthier business decisions (Badi, 2019).

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study was to explore the marketing strategies used by department store marketing managers to improve brand marketing. A limitation of this study was the sample population of five department store marketing managers who implemented marketing strategies to improve brand marketing. I interviewed department store marketing managers because they are generally responsible for implementing marketing strategies. All five participants had between 5 and 8 years of experience. Future researchers could conduct multiple case studies to explore the phenomena using a greater sample of different organizations to compare and contrast how marketing strategies are used. I recommend future researchers to increase the sample size by expanding to other geographical regions for better results. A researcher may use a quantitative study to enrich the findings in this study by expanding the criteria to a greater populace. In addition, a mixed-method approach may develop an in-depth performance analysis of the relationship between marketing techniques and profitability rates that may provide additional information on effective marketing strategies. I recommend researchers to use other interviewing techniques such as video teleconference or a web-based platform. Using alternate techniques to collect data from participants may help the researcher save time organizing and validating the information.

## **Reflections**

The doctoral journey was a rigorous, illuminating, and fascinating experience. Throughout completing this doctoral study, I gained substantial respect for department store marketing managers because of their commitment, enthusiasm, and energy stressed into promoting marketing strategies within their organization. Connecting with the department store marketing managers was inspiring and I recognized the comparisons and differences among their views and approaches to the business problem. I had a preconceived idea once I received IRB approval that the interviews would be easy, but I underestimated that process. As I did the interviews, I became comfortable and once completed, it was rewarding to have learned the experiences of the participants. This study has truly been a testament that challenged me wholeheartedly. I have learned new critical thinking skills, research techniques, and writing applications. Marketing strategies are a primary concern for business leaders (Islam & Rahmann, 2016). Ongoing research efforts in a competitive market can reveal potential and relevant information to leaders who may want to improve their professional practice and lead in social change.

## **Conclusion**

Leaders need to acquire and invest innovative knowledge and skills constantly for organizations to maintain high performance and obtain competitive advantage (Witeck-Hajduk & Grudecka, 2018). An organization's marketing strategy and capability affect customers' brand loyalty and eagerness to pay for products and services (Pehrsson, 2016). Expanding marketing strategies may help businesses to seek better ways to understand current and future consumer

needs. Therefore, the nurturing of consumer relationships may produce innovative and essential marketing tools and strategies that enhance performance, competitiveness, and corporate growth.

Identifying insight, trends, and cultural concepts of consumers through marketing contributes to the assessment of cost-saving initiatives and organizational growth (Hanssens et al., 2016). A proper conception of culture is a major component in developing an effective marketing strategy and best practice of economics (Hanssens et al., 2016). Marketing managers could promote reciprocal relationships by building trust and focusing on consumer needs to maintain a competitive edge.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

**The main research question is:** What strategies do department store marketing managers use to improve brand marketing? In this qualitative multiple-case study, the interview will contain nine open-ended questions to gain insights from experienced department store marketing managers located in the Northeastern region of a metropolitan area in Virginia.

**Selecting participants:** The researcher will contact participants by telephone or e-mail.

**Setting place and time for interview:** Interviews will be in the participants' private office or library

**Explanation of the research study:** At the beginning of the interview, the researcher will go over the purpose of the study, obtain consent from the participant, and provide a consent form to each participant.

**Recording the interview:** The researcher will record each interview. The researcher will mail a thank-you card to each participant one day after the interview.

**Transcription of the interview:** The researcher will transcribe the recorded interview of each participant. The participants will receive a copy of the transcription and interpretation of their interview.

**Member checking:** The researcher will contact each participant by e-mail or telephone to confirm the accuracy of the transcription.

**Follow-up questions:** The researcher will ask any follow-up questions determinant on the quality and importance of responses.

**Initial interview questions:** The researcher will take notes.

1. How do you describe strategies department store marketing managers use

- to improve brand marketing?
2. What traditional marketing strategies do department store marketing managers use to improve brand marketing?
  3. What are some challenges do department store marketing managers face when improving brand marketing?
  4. What are some of the barriers to implementing strategies by department store marketing managers attempting to improve brand marketing?
  5. What were some of the digital marketing strategies that department store marketing managers have successfully used to improve brand marketing?
  6. What (if any) changes to customer loyalty did department store marketing managers notice while improving brand marketing?
  7. What strategies were unique to department store marketing managers who successfully improved brand marketing?
  8. What employee training, if any, was implemented by department store marketing managers to improve brand marketing?
  9. What additional information can you share regarding effective marketing strategies department store marketing managers used to successfully improve brand marketing.