

2020

Social Media Strategies for Small Businesses

Joanne Sachiko Chinen-Moore
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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Joanne S. Chinen-Moore

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Social Media Strategies for Small Businesses

by

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MBA, University of Phoenix, 2008

BABA, University of Hawaii-West Oahu, 2006

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

June 2020

Abstract

Small business owners who fail to implement an effective social media marketing strategy lose the opportunity to increase sales and revenue. Small business leaders are concerned with the lack of proper resources to adopt and implement social media as part of a marketing strategy. Grounded in the diffusion of innovation theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore social media marketing strategies small business owners use to increase their sales and revenue. The participants comprised 6 owners of small businesses in Honolulu, Hawaii, who successfully increased sales and revenue by implementing social media marketing strategies. Data collection consisted of semistructured interviews, company documents, and social media platforms used by each company. Data analysis consisted of thematic analysis. Four themes emerged: factors leading to positive decision-making regarding social media marketing, assessment strategies for efficacy, social media marketing strategies, and perceived barriers. A key recommendation is that leaders of small businesses recognize the importance of using the appropriate social media strategies, overcome personal perceptions about the difficulties of social media learning, carefully evaluate social media marketing program options, and empirically assess the revenue-generative efficacy of each social media program. The implications for positive social change include the potential for small business owners to create jobs and support the economic growth of their local communities by adopting effective social media marketing strategies used by other successful small businesses.

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Dedication

First and foremost, I thank God for guiding me throughout this grueling journey. Through many prayers and conversations with God, I knew that He was there with me every step of the way and answering every prayer of mine. I dedicate this doctoral study to my entire family for their continued support, patience, and sacrifices made to make this project a reality. To my now deceased parents, I just want to tell you that I thought about you each and every day that I was going through this process and I thought about how proud you would have been of me if you knew that I made it to the end of this grueling journey. I know that you were looking down at me and guiding me every step of the way. Thank you for instilling the value of education in me and allowing me to believe that I could achieve anything that I put my mind to. To my dear husband Garry, words cannot express my sincere gratitude for all you have had to endure and all that I have put you through during the last two and one-half years. From cooking and cleaning to putting up with my fits when I wanted to call it quits, this accomplishment is for us, as we are and always will be a team, for life. To my children, Greg, Liana, Garrett, and Geoffrey, Alex, and Lexie, and my grandchildren, Ava, Leah, and Bella, thank you for your support and encouragement, and I hope that I have set an example for all of you to consider as you transition through your lives. My hope and commitment to you all is that you all be the best version of yourselves in your lives and that I have brought inspiration for you all to know that anything is possible at any age. I love you all very much.

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To my team of committee members, words cannot express my gratitude for making this dream of mine a reality. To Dr. Dina Samora, I could not be where I am today if it was not for your commitment and support. Your encouraging words brought comfort and warmth in a sometimes dark and cold time of sometimes wanting to quit this journey. Thank you for believing in me and encouraging me to the end. You are a one in a million person and I am so glad that God put us together throughout this journey. To Dr. Warren Lesser and Dr. Thomas Schaefer, thank you for your continued patience, guidance, and assistance. I have gained a wealth of knowledge from you that will carry me throughout my career in academia. I am truly honored and privileged to have had the support and encouragement from all the faculty and staff that supported and guided me throughout my doctoral journey. Mahalo!

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Small business owners employ over half of the private sector of the U.S. workforce; thus, the failure of small businesses can lead to economic losses and growing unemployment rates for the country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Only 50% of small businesses survive beyond 5 years, and one of the major reasons is the lack of effective marketing and communication efforts (Bandyopadhyay, 2016). For small businesses, social networking sites (SNSs) are among the best means to gain marketing collateral at affordable costs by allowing owners to engage with customers and build relationships using little money (Alshamaila, 2018). Traditional advertising methods, such as direct mail, cold calls, radio, billboards, television, and newspapers, have become less important due to the growing ubiquity of new technologies. Small business owners can use social media to transcend former marketing strategies and to interact with their customers more effectively (Bennett, 2017). The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies that successful small business owners developed and implemented to increase their sales and revenue effectively.

Background of the Problem

SNSs provide a platform for business owners to construct human relationships through online communication. Moreover, business owners use SNSs to analyze these interactions to assess their performances and identify areas of improvement (Alshamaila, 2018). The emergence of new technologies like SNSs has changed market dynamics by threatening the competitive position of businesses and by increasing the power of the consumers (Alves, Fernandes, & Raposo, 2016). However, studies have shown that small

organizations have limited scopes for investment in new information and communications technologies that can facilitate business success (Rahbi, 2017).

Social media represents an agile way of doing business. Leaders of all types of organizations, regardless of nature or size, have realized the importance of social media adoption in various areas such as promotion, branding, advertisement, market research, and product development (Rahbi, 2017). Social media applications have become the most efficient tool for small business entrepreneurs to advertise their products; given the proper approach, small business owners can better reach and build long-term relationships with their target customers (Shabbir, Ghazi, & Mehmood, 2016).

As the state of Hawaii's comprehensive economic development strategy includes the importance of innovation and the sustainability of small businesses (Economic Development Alliance of Hawaii, 2016), I explored social media marketing in the context of small businesses in Honolulu, Hawaii. There have been different studies exploring the impact of social media marketing on small businesses, with particular focus on different sectors and regions (Abrons, 2018; Rahbi, 2017); however, further work was necessary to gain valuable insight into the social media marketing strategies of small business owners, with particular focus on the small businesses in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Problem Statement

Social media is important for small businesses that lack the resources to market their services or products through expensive alternative means (Balan & Rege, 2017). However, findings have shown that only 26% of small business owners use social media strategies effectively enough to reach their potential customers (Bennett, 2017). Failure to

incorporate social media strategies as part of formal marketing plans may result in the decline of brand awareness and market share of small businesses (Tafesse & Wien, 2017). Owners of brands who engage customers through social media channels enjoy higher loyalty from their customers and an increased likelihood of influencing customer conversion rates to their favor (Iblasi, Bader, & Al-Qreini, 2016). The general business problem was that the lack of effective social media strategies could negatively affect small business owners. The specific business problem was that some small business owners could not develop and implement effective social media marketing strategies.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies that successful small business owners developed and implemented to increase their sales and revenue effectively. The targeted sample population included small businesses in the city of Honolulu, Hawaii who had successfully increased sales and revenue by implementing social media marketing strategies. The results of this study contribute to positive social change by improving the potential of small business owners to learn the proper strategies to use social media as a means to gain and retain customers, build brand awareness, and increase employment, which may all lead to job creation and the economic growth of their local communities.

Nature of the Study

The three approaches to conducting research studies include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methodology. The qualitative method is suitable for researchers who aim to understand the participants' perspectives and experiences as a means of

understanding the phenomenon (Yin, 2014). I aimed to explore how small business owners used social media to increase their sales and revenue effectively. Therefore, I focused on the perspectives of the participants. The qualitative method is used to discover the *how*, *why*, and *what* of the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2015). The quantitative approach was not used because I did not use precise measurements to examine a phenomenon or test a given hypothesis, which was the common objective of quantitative research (see Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Mixed-methodology, which uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single study, is best suited for research where one method is insufficient to understand the problem or phenomenon (Morse, 2015). Quantitative and mixed-methods approaches were considered inappropriate for this study because I did not collect and analyze numerical data. Based on the goals of the study, I used a qualitative approach to conduct the research.

Three common research designs for qualitative studies include case study, ethnography, and phenomenology (Yin, 2014). Researchers use case study designs to explore the *what*, *how*, and *why* of events over which the researcher has little or no control (Jakes, 2018). Furthermore, researchers can use the multiple case study design to analyze the phenomenon within each situation and across different situations, which can contribute to the knowledge regarding a phenomenon with important influences from the cases' differences and similarities (Gustafsson, 2017). Researchers use the ethnographic design to study groups' cultures, while the phenomenological design is applicable for exploring the meanings that participants associate with their lived experiences (Jakes, 2018). As I did not explore groups' cultures or the meanings of participants' lived

experiences, I chose the multiple case study approach to describe the phenomenon using multiple data sources.

Research Question

The main research question for the study was the following: What social media marketing strategies do successful small business owners use to effectively increase their sales and revenue?

Interview Questions

I developed the following open-ended interview questions in alignment with the main research question: What social media strategies have you employed to increase revenue and build brand awareness?

1. How do you perceive the importance of using social media marketing strategies for business success?
2. How do you measure the performance of your social media marketing strategies?
3. What social media strategies have you found that are most effective for financially benefitting your business?
4. What, if any, strategies did you use to include your employees in your social media initiative and what were the results?
5. What key challenges or barriers leveraging social media strategies to increase sales did you face?
6. What were your counterstrategies to address the key barriers and challenges you faced as you implemented your social media marketing strategies?

7. What else would you like to share regarding your organization's social media marketing strategies?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the diffusion of innovation (DOI) theory by Rogers (2003). According to Rogers (2003), most organizations pass through various stages of adoption before they decide to integrate a given technology fully into their business. The four main elements in the DOI theory include (a) innovation, which is described as an idea, project, or practice that is perceived as new by the decision-maker; (b) communication channels, through which participants create and share information; (c) time, which is always part of understanding rate of adoption, the innovation-decision process, and adopter categorization; and (d) a social system, which focuses on interrelated communities that engage in joint problem-solving (Sahin, 2006).

The model's innovation-decision process provides a way to explain various stages of adoption. Knowledge is the first stage and pertains to when a decision-maker becomes aware of innovation. Second, persuasion focuses on the attitude developed by a decision-maker toward innovation based on how they perceive its features as either favorable or unfavorable. Third, the point of making a decision pertains to when a decision-maker adopts or rejects the technology. The fourth stage is implementation, which is when the decision-maker puts an innovation in place. Last, the confirmation stage is when a decision-maker reflects on continuing or discontinuing the use of the innovation (Burgess, Sellitto, Cox, Buultjens, & Bingley, 2017). Researchers can apply the DOI to understand where organizations fall along the adoption spectrum, the factors that

influence their decisions, and the challenges that may prevent them from adopting the technology (Burgess et al., 2017). This study was framed using the elements of innovation, diffusion, and stages of adoption to understand how small business owners practice marketing through social media strategies (see Bennett, 2017).

Operational Definitions

Brand awareness: Brand awareness is the first step in building and sustaining customer relationships; furthermore, brand awareness is one of the leading benefits of social media marketing (Prevatt, 2016).

Brand loyalty: Brand loyalty is the degree of closeness between a specific brand and a client, which can manifest in replicated purchases despite the marketing stress created by rival brands (Malik, Ghafoor, & Iqbal, 2013).

Diffusion of innovation: Diffusion of innovation is a group process through which members of a social system communicates an innovation through time using different social channels, which can result in the adoption or rejection of an innovation (Dibra, 2015).

Marketing return on investment (MROI): MROI occurs due to the expenditures made for marketing purposes, such as advertising or direct mail marketing (Bennett, 2017).

Small businesses: For this study, small businesses are businesses that do not have a high level of resources to develop and implement effective communication and marketing strategies (Bandyopadhyay, 2016).

Social media: Social media include websites that connect people based on similar interests, and there are as many types of social media as there are interests (Bandyopadhyay, 2016).

Social media marketing: Social media marketing is a form of internet marketing that uses social networking websites as a marketing tool (Iblasi et al., 2016).

Social networking sites: Social networking sites are a form of social media through which businesses can build successful customer-brand relationships (Huang, Liao, Wang, & Lin, 2018).

Traditional marketing: Traditional marketing pertains to marketing through radio, billboards, newspapers, and signage, which generate activity through professionally published or broadcasted content (Bennett, 2017).

Web 2.0: Web 2.0 refers to the technical infrastructure that allows people to produce and deliver user-generated content (Bennett, 2017).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions pertain to truths out of the researcher's control and remain part of the foundations of the study. Assumptions are crucial in examining the research problem (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). I made certain assumptions in the implementation of this study. First, I assumed that the research methods and approaches I had chosen were most appropriate to address the purpose of the study. I also assumed that the interview approach was the best approach to collect in-depth data from the participants. As such, I assumed that the participants clearly understood all the interview questions and

responded openly, accurately, and truthfully. I could not specify the respondents' levels of honesty; however, I reminded the participants of the importance of providing answers that were as honest and complete as possible to provide better insights into the phenomenon. I assumed that the participants were honest and upfront about their qualifications to provide information and insight into the effective social media strategies for small businesses.

Limitations

Limitations in research are the potential weaknesses of the study due to reasons beyond the scope of the researcher's control (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015). Limitations have the potential of affecting the study's outcomes (Taylor et al., 2015). One of the inherent limitations of this qualitative study was the generalizability and applicability of the findings to a larger population. I focused on gaining insight into the perspectives of small business owners in the city of Honolulu, Hawaii; thus, the data gathered comprised mainly personal accounts from a small sample size, thereby limiting the generalizability of the data. Another limitation of most qualitative studies was the lack of scientific methods and procedures of investigation, which might lead to inconsistencies. The possibility of participants withholding certain information due to business confidentiality reasons was another limitation for this study.

Delimitations

Delimitations pertain to the characteristics or attributes of the research study that define the scope and boundaries of the research process and its subsequent findings (Taylor et al., 2015). The choice to focus on small business owners who had successfully

implemented social media marketing strategies, as observed through increased sales and revenue, delimited this study. I took a purposeful sampling approach to gather information from business owners who met these criteria. I focused on small businesses in Honolulu, Hawaii; I did not aim to provide generalizable results. I provided insights into the successful social media marketing strategies among small business owners in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

Small business owners employ 52% of Americans; however, small business owners fail at a relatively high rate, which can lead to economic losses and increased unemployment rates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Effective marketing, including social media marketing, is a crucial business skill that small business owners must acquire and develop to ensure their business success (Abrons, 2018). Small business owners can use social media to target more engaged customers, develop relationships through online communication, ascertain the performance of their businesses, and improve clients' areas of concern in more efficient ways (Al-Shamaileh, 2018).

I provided insights into how small business owners successfully developed and implemented social media marketing strategies to increase their sales and revenue. Organizational leaders who seek to increase brand awareness, lower marketing costs, and increase their customer base may find value from this study by using its findings to develop their strategies for social media marketing programs and avoid business failure in the future. Additionally, the results of this study may benefit small business owners in

Honolulu, Hawaii; business owners may acquire knowledge on the effective social media strategies to communicate with customers, build brand awareness, and increase profits within the context of their local communities.

Implications for Social Change

In this research study, I provided a better understanding of effective social media marketing strategies for small businesses. The community in Honolulu, Hawaii may benefit economically from the results of this study by improving the performance of small businesses in the area. The success of small businesses in the community in terms of increased revenue and sales may lead to increased employment rates and more disposable income spent in the community (Bennett, 2017). Employers may adjust their hiring practices to hire more people with social media background and knowledge, in alignment with the specific strategies that the participants outlined. Moreover, the study can have an impact on the social media adoption of the local business community, which can help facilitate improved communication between the businesses and their consumers (see Abrons, 2018). This research can bridge some economic gaps in the community and help businesses reach consumers who can efficiently provide necessary feedback to small business owners (see Al-Shamaileh, 2018), which can lead to improved products and services, thereby benefiting the consumers and their local communities.

Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

Many small business owners fail to incorporate social media applications into marketing strategies resulting in negative impacts on multiple aspects of small businesses including factors such as brand awareness and overall business growth (Tafesse & Wien,

2017). Some small business owners lack knowledge regarding how to integrate social media tools effectively into their marketing strategies (Rahbi, 2017). According to Bennett (2017), only 26% of small business owners effectively use social media to reach existing and potential customers. Although previous researchers explored the impact of social media marketing on small businesses with a focus on specific sectors and regions (Abrons, 2018; Rahbi, 2017), further work was needed to gain insight regarding the integration of social media applications into marketing strategies with a focus of the study on successful small business owners in Honolulu, Hawaii. Incorporating social media tools into marketing strategies contributes to positive business outcomes, including increased sales and revenues (Alves et al., 2016; Shabbir et al., 2016). The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies that successful small business owners developed and implemented to increase their sales and revenue effectively.

The organization of this literature review includes a description of the search strategy used to obtain the relevant literature presented next followed by a discussion on the chosen theoretical framework for the study. The review of the literature begins with an introduction, followed by six primary sections organized thematically to provide order and clarity. The six sections include (a) social media impact on the company brand, (b) integrating social media as a marketing strategy, (c) blending traditional marketing strategies with social media, (d) social media benefits for the small business, (e) small business barriers to social media marketing, and (f) measuring performance outcomes. The discussions within each section encompass relevant literature to small businesses and

the use of social media marketing strategies. Following the section discussions comes the synthesis of findings within the literature reviewed, followed by a critique of research methods and procedures used.

Methods of Searching

Online databases and search engines employed for literature selection included Google Scholar, DeepDyve, Proquest, Research Gate, Science Direct, Google Books, Google, EBSCOhost, Business Source Complete, ABI/INFORM, and government-supported websites. These websites included the National Institute of Health, U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Small Business Administration, and European databases that provided statistics, such as Eurostat. Search limitations included available options per search site such as peer-reviewed journals, dates of publications focusing on works since 2015, author name searches when needed, access to related and previously cited articles, and the use of full-text or pdf availability for published documents. Search terms included the use of entries in single terms or Boolean search manners and included *social media*, *social media marketing*, *small business*, *small business marketing*, *word-of-mouth*, *marketing strategies*, *SMEs*, *small and medium-sized enterprises*, *micro business*, *social network*, *social network platform*, *social network sites*, *Web 2.0*, *Roger's*, *diffusion of innovation*, *traditional marketing*, *brand*, *company brand*, *metrics*, *social media metrics*, *performance measures*, and *digital marketing*. Much of the research literature used was published between 2015 and to 2020 with a representation of the literature in that timeframe to be 91 of the total 104 works cited (87.5%) with 13 works (12.5%) published

before 2015. References cited included 71 (68.3%) peer-reviewed journals and 33 (31.7%) sources consisting of books, dissertations, websites, and conference proceedings.

Theoretical Orientation for the Study

Diffusion of Innovation Theory

Rogers's (2003) DOI was the chosen theoretical framework for the current study. Rogers studied agriculture in 1952 from Iowa State University (Rogers, 2003; van Vliet, 2012). Following his service in the Korean War, Rogers (2003) returned to Iowa State University and accomplished both his M.S. and Ph.D. in rural sociology. His career included serving as an assistant professor at Ohio University while he continued his research and development of his DOI theory. Published in 1962, the theory had its origin in Rogers's (2003) dissertation, which focused on the resistance of farmers to adopt agricultural innovations (van Vliet, 2012). The theory has been widely applied across a range of disciplines and in use for decades as a primary framework for research support.

Rogers's (2003) DOI theory involves the adoption of any innovation, which may be a product, practice, or idea. Rogers (2003) broadly described communication as the basic process of sharing information, while diffusion is specific to the spreading of information or messages that consist of a new idea, product, or practice considered an innovation and involves an element of perceived risk and uncertainty (Rogers, 2003). The diffusion of an innovation encompasses the four characteristics as identified within the theory of (a) the involvement of the actual innovation, (b) the communication or diffusion of the idea through specified channels, (c) the involvement of time for the diffusion to

occur, and (d) containment within a social group or system (Hoffman, 2011; Rogers, 1962, 2003).

Rogers (2003) expanded on the description of innovation to include broader examples of its application and the inclusion of advancing forms of technology, such as social media platforms, noting that technologies often consist of hardware and software, with either or both qualifying as an innovation. According to Rogers (1962, 2003), an innovation comprises five essential attributes that establish interest in the innovation as perceived from within the social system. The attributes include (a) the innovation provides a relative advantage, (b) is compatible with the needs and goals of the prospective users, (c) involves a degree of complexity, (d) allows for a trial period, and (e) the difference is observable. The DOI theory introduced detailed descriptions on the usefulness of the theory across populations and applications. For example, Rogers (2003) described the range of potential innovations, incorporated both the homophily and heterophily traits naturally contained within social systems that influence communication, developed the concept of time involved in the process of the diffusion and described the intricacies within any given social system (Hoffman, 2011).

Once an innovation entered the channels within a social system, Rogers (2003) framed the adoption of the innovation across defined groups, identifying five sectors within the adoption process focused on the use of new technologies. Group descriptions included innovators, 2.5% of the total, early adopters at 13.5%, the early majority at 34%, the late majority also at 34%, and the laggards or the final adopters at 16% (Cardon & Marshall, 2015; Hoffman, 2011; Rogers, 1962, 2003). Saturation of information

regarding the innovation happens at a point of critical mass, a point that often occurs in the early majority state as the innovative technology becomes visible and the innovation is influenced into adoption by those considered to be innovators and early adopters (Rogers, 1962, 2003). The connections established between users, as they relay information specific to the innovation and consider adoption, constitute a social network, as the diffusion process occurs within that social network (Liu, Sidhu, Beacom, & Valente, 2017).

Researchers have provided numerous examples of adopted innovations and the usefulness of the DOI theory in supporting the research that examined many of those processes. Researchers have applied Rogers's (2003) theory to support studies involving public health policy, the use of new drugs in the treatment of disease, social issues such as examining terrorist social platforms and informing social outreach such as AIDS prevention research (Scott & McGuire, 2017). Still, not every innovation leads to adoption. Cardon and Marshall (2015) applied the DOI theory to a study that examined the views of business professionals regarding the use of social media resources for team communications. The study results indicated that business professionals preferred other channels, determined to be richer methods of communication, to those available through social networking for internal team use. The researchers concluded that the skepticism evident in their study may not hold in both a broader population of professionals and at a later time, suggesting the same study a few years from now may create different outcomes as social networking continues to evolve (Cardon & Marshall, 2015). The concept presented by Shelomi (2015) regarding entomophagy or the eating of insects

indicated a failed innovation. Shelomi described evidence of established encouragement for the practice of entomophagy including published cookbooks, appeals by the United Nations, newsletters, television appearances by entomophagy advocates, and even TED Talks on the subject. The adoption of entomophagy, at least in the western world, is an example of a failed innovation as adoption never reached a degree of acceptance to promote the societal adoption of this practice (Shelomi, 2015).

Dynamic Capabilities Theory

An alternate theory in support of the current study is the dynamic capabilities theory introduced in the 1990s by Teece and Pisano (as cited in Pisano, 2017). The theory indicates that a business can apply the capacity to seek knowledge and innovative ideas by introducing a process that explores innovations internally through practical steps in determining the usefulness of an innovation or idea (Atanassova & Clark, 2015; Inan & Bititci, 2015). Laaksonen and Peltoniemi (2018) conducted a systematic literature review targeting studies that included empirical data and operationalization of the theory of dynamic capabilities. The researchers applied a working definition of the theory that included four components of (a) recognizing dynamic versus ordinary capabilities within an organization, (b) indirect outcomes of performance with the application of dynamic capabilities, (c) the presence versus quantity of specific types of capabilities, and (d) a focus of change over time. Laaksonen and Peltoniemi found 232 distinct dynamic capabilities operationalization strategies in their review and established four categories that included manager assessments and evaluations, financial performance data, organizational experiences, and multi-level employee experiences, actions, and

performances. The researchers indicated that ordinary capabilities contributed to effective operational strategies within any given organization, while dynamic capabilities provided the foundation for advantaging innovative strategies that supported creative change measured over time. Even so, the understanding of the theory is limited in providing clarity to guide management in the types of dynamic capabilities needed to promote the desired changes within an organization (Laaksonen & Peltoniemi, 2018).

Using the dynamic capabilities theory, business leaders examine the complexities and characteristics of relationships including those between the business and the customer base and explore the dynamics of social media platforms as aligned with the needs and goals of the business (Inan & Bititci, 2015). The underlying premise of the theory indicated that short-term business strengths aid in establishing longer-term plans to build on existing relationships as the conceptual basis for the development of marketing strategies (Inan & Bititci, 2015). Although the theory is applicable and useful in the context of adapting to change in the pursuit of success by businesses using the available technologies, consideration to the operational limitations of small businesses and developing strategies for social network use is effectively addressed using Rogers's (1962, 2003) DOI theory. The DOI theory framed the current study in understanding challenges from the perspective of a small business owner or entrepreneur who might be weighing the caution of social media use against the benefit.

Literature Review on Social Media Use in Small Business

Introduction

The parameters used to define small businesses are inconsistent across industry, regional, and international borders (Soundararajan, Jamali, & Spence, 2017); however, the impact of the small business sector is portrayed with greater clarity (Hassan, Nadzim, & Shiratuddin, 2015; Rahbi, 2017; Ren, Eisingerich, & Tsai, 2015; Spence, 2016; Srinivasan, Bajaj, & Bhanot, 2016; Wamba & Carter, 2016). Small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the European Union account for 99% of the business presence and more than 70% of the employed workforce (Rhodes, 2015; Wamba & Carter, 2016). In the United States, SMEs are responsible for about two-thirds of all new jobs created across the country and contribute to 39% of the gross national product (GNP; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016; Wamba & Carter, 2016). A report issued in 2018 from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) indicated that small businesses represented 99.9% of all U.S. businesses, 97.6% of all exporting companies, created 8.4 million new jobs which were almost twice that of large firms, were responsible for 32.9% of known export value, and employed 47.8% of individuals working in the private sector.

Across Europe, many countries declare small businesses to be those with 500 or fewer employees while other countries, such as Germany, France, and Denmark, define small firms as consisting of 50 or fewer employed persons (Eurostat, 2019; Pierre-André, 2018). U.S. agencies define small businesses according to both annual receipts and the number of employees, noting that private businesses generally employ 500 or fewer individuals to meet the qualifier of a small firm (Balan & Rege, 2017; Pierre-André,

2018; U.S. SBA, 2019). Although business size criteria matter, from the perspective of the small business owner or entrepreneur, business success and sometimes even survival may be the more critical classifier as those individuals work to keep their firms open versus closed and succeeding versus failing.

The contributions of small businesses in both the domestic and international sectors are significant with a consistent history and predicted future of stability (Caruso, 2015; U.S. SBA, 2018). Even so, estimates have shown the failure rate as high, noting that 50% of SMEs fail within 5 years of set up (Atanassova & Clark, 2015; Bandyopadhyay, 2016). Findings from published studies have shown that successes occur in SMEs that use network marketing strategies available through advancing technologies and businesses that fail lack objective and strategic marketing approaches that employ communication networks (Bandyopadhyay, 2016; Spence, 2016). Social media are an available and cost-effective option that promote the success of small businesses by providing an effective interactive platform for developing and implementing marketing strategies. Such strategies can enhance the company brand and improve business performance (Bandyopadhyay, 2016; Bennett, 2017; Hassan et al., 2015).

Social media are from a simplistic perspective or a digitalized electronic word-of-mouth platform (Dwivedi, Kapoor, & Chen, 2015). Broadly defined, social media are the inclusion of all Web 2.0 Internet applications that allow for user-generated creation and exchange of information while facilitating interactivity between users, with communications often driven by similar interests or shared concerns (Alves et al., 2016). Examples of applications include social sites, such as Facebook; blogs; microblogs, such

as Twitter; collaborative sites, such as Wikipedia; and video content-sharing sites, such as YouTube and Flickr (Alves et al., 2016; Bandyopadhyay, 2016). According to Bandyopadhyay (2016), more than 475 such sites existed in 2016 with continued growth predicted.

Customer engagement through an interactive platform such as social media is a necessity to the success, and sometimes survival, of small businesses through profitable marketing strategies created on a budget (Bandyopadhyay, 2016). Examples of benefits available through the use of social media networking include advancing the company brand, the capacity for real-time data collection on market trends, tracking consumer activity, using tools that observe purchasing trends, and the direct and indirect integration of customer feedback into the development and promotion of products and services (Srinivasan et al., 2016). By advancing the benefits of integrating social network platforms into market strategies, small business owners and entrepreneurs position their companies for growth and profit.

The advantages of digital and interactive means of communication through social media networks present promising marketing opportunities for small businesses. Still, many such enterprise owners are hesitant to adopt social media as a marketing strategy (Atanassova & Clark, 2015; Cardon & Marshall, 2015; Hudson, Huang, Roth, & Madden, 2016). Although the benefits are within reach, implementing marketing strategies using social media warrants caution; the interactivity established through such sites can do as much harm as good. A company's brand and image may suffer by introducing poorly designed strategies and implementing those strategies without

attention to the company's needs and goals (Hudson et al., 2016). Social media realists point to slow transition in useful integration, concerns over cyber and digital security, fragmented information, potential information overload, worries of system control and accountability, and the potential for adopted technology to quickly become outdated (Cardon & Marshall, 2015).

The economic significance and substantial presence of small businesses, both domestically and internationally, underscore the value in the development of marketing strategies that contribute to the success of this sector of business enterprises. However, additional research can advance the literature on both usage patterns and successful strategies as evidenced by the research suggestions communicated by previous researchers (Atanassova & Clark, 2015; Balan & Rege, 2017; Tafesse & Wien, 2017). Balan and Rege (2017) identified a need to expand research regarding the usage patterns and strategies employed by small businesses that have successfully used social media to advance their business goals; Tafesse and Wien (2017) looked more deeply at messaging content and potential multilayered messaging, encouraging research that explores the impact of messaging strategies. Ainin, Parveen, Moghavvemi, and Jaafar (2015) recognized the confusion that exists regarding social media use in many small businesses and encouraged further research through different contexts within small business settings. Similarly, Alves et al. (2016) suggested a consumer-oriented research approach to examine the related behaviors of consumers and their reactions to social media strategies by small businesses. Atanassova and Clark (2015) pointed to the paucity of research that explores the impact of social media further noting that only a small portion of small

businesses have implemented social media marketing strategies to their full potential.

Thus, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies that successful small business owners developed and implemented to increase their sales and revenue effectively.

The focus of this literature review was on the marketing strategies that involved social media platforms in contributing to business success. The business population for the current research encompassed small business enterprises operating within the U.S. borders. The published research material on small business was extensive, and the available research on social media was substantial and rapidly advancing. However, the overlap in published works regarding small business success using social media was less extensive and was the focus of the current literature review accompanied by extant literature that provided a basis of understanding regarding the topics discussed. To explore the successful use of social media in the small business environment, sections included in this review focus on the company brand, traditional marketing strategies, social media benefits and barriers for small businesses, and measuring performance outcomes.

Social Media Influence on the Company Brand

Social media marketing is rapidly expanding with predictions suggesting companies will continue to increase social media budgets to participate in the fastest-growing digital opportunity for marketing, a network that also influences the company brand (Coursaris, van Osch, & Balogh, 2015). A company brand is more than the company name (Iglesias, Ind, & Alfaro, 2017). The brand contributes to the perceptions

of customers and the public based on both functional aspects of the business and emotional values. Traditional strategies of brand development involved efforts and influences internal to the business structure that allowed for the development of the brand according to the needs and goals of the company (Iglesias et al., 2017). Those traditional perspectives of the company brand and ways to manage and promote that brand are now evolving into a more fluid rather than a static viewpoint (Iglesias et al., 2017). An ever-shifting landscape that provides less control by company owners or managers, and more control by an array of stakeholders that includes the customers, the integration of social media results in influencing and cocreating the company brand. Iglesias et al. (2017) suggested that managers and business owners adapt leadership approaches to become humbled, open, and participatory in the shifting control of the company brand.

Creating the company brand. Using a qualitative and exploratory study design, Iglesias et al. (2017) conducted 20 in-depth interviews regarding the marketing practices of different company types. Iglesias et al. held to the evolving perspective that building and developing brands occurred through ongoing negotiations and interpretations from multiple stakeholders. The interview guide consisted of understanding the key actors involved with brand development, the co-creation concept, the role of employees, the role of customers, and the development of the brand in different environmental conditions. Through the study results, Iglesias et al. demonstrated that a brand consisted of more than the perspective of the business owner, management, or the customer and involved the functional and emotional perspectives of multiple stakeholders. Supporting the evolving loss of control by business owners or management, brands were determined, built, or

changed according to the shifting perceptions put forth in social media platforms. Social media, applied as a tool, influenced the company brand by establishing communication with communities, consumers, and invested parties, and integrating both positive and negative perspectives of multiple stakeholders. Iglesias et al. concluded with a description of the brand as a sum of experiences compiled from the perspectives of all parties that changed day by day through the use of social networking platforms.

Similarly, Greyser and Urde (2019) supported the findings by Iglesias et al. (2017) and extended descriptions of the company brand as representative of different perceptions. For example, the company brand, when viewed from the public's perception, can be an influential factor when considering the competition. Greyser and Urde (2019) posited that establishing a strong company brand, created internally, included elements of integrity and social responsibility that carried over to the product brands of the umbrella company put forth within any given business or company structure. According to the researchers, a coherent company brand that expressed value with roots both in community and environmental responsibilities informed the credibility of the product names produced by the company (Greyser & Urde, 2019) while adapting to external influences that reflected the perceptions of multiple stakeholder as suggested by Iglesias et al. (2017).

Brand loyalty. Huang et al. (2018) examined the influence of social media interactivity and customer relationship management on brand loyalty and the impact of media richness on brand loyalty. The researchers provided 2015 statistics indicating that 73% or 180 million Internet users actively participated in social networking as of 2015,

noting the growth over 5 years from 48% reported in 2010 with further growth predicted to reach 200 million users by 2019. Similarly, 73% of business owners had established branded pages in 2013 using social media, with that number also expected to grow (Huang et al., 2018). Huang et al. (2018) collected data from 229 users of a specified Facebook page community, specifically that of users that actively followed the Facebook page on Super Basketball League teams. Huang et al. pointed out that users may not always be purchasers of a product or service, and social media interactivity may reflect brand loyalty based on other variables. The 10 hypotheses for the study included the expectations that brand loyalty related to gains in knowledge, social influence, media richness, and a sense of membership. Data collection methods included surveys sent to individuals actively participating and interacting on the identified Facebook pages. Results showed all variables measured to be positively interrelated. Of the 10 hypotheses, five evidenced support, and five did not show support. Huang et al. indicated that the unsupported hypotheses showed that knowledge gains did not lead to brand loyalty, social influence did not lead to brand loyalty, media richness was not related to knowledge gains, social influence was not related to a sense of membership, and media richness was not related to a sense of membership. The hypotheses supported included a sense of membership related to brand loyalty, media richness related to brand loyalty, social influence, and responsiveness related to knowledge gains, and responsiveness related to a sense of membership. Huang et al.'s conclusions reflected the perspectives of Iglesias et al. (2017) by identifying the importance for businesses to create memorable experiences and to promote those experiences through the use of social media marketing

strategies thereby creating an opportunity to promote brand awareness and loyalty (Huang et al., 2018). Iglesias et al. (2017) encouraged business leaders to adapt to the evolution of the company brand as influenced by stakeholders, including social influences and perspectives of consumers.

Similar to the objectives in the study by Huang et al. (2018), Pilgrimiene, Dovaliene, and Virvilaite (2015) described the value of co-creation in establishing the company brand; a further overlap with the suggestions of Iglesias et al. (2017). Similar to Huang et al. (2018), Pilgrimiene et al. (2015) stated that consumers in the social media environment need not be purchasers of a product or service to contribute to the company brand or image. Three focus points discussed in the study by Pilgrimiene et al. included economic factors, social perspectives, and functional value. The researchers aimed to examine methods used by businesses to engage consumers as contributors to the co-creation of the brand and the resulting value to the company (Pilgrimiene et al., 2015).

Using a qualitative research design, Pilgrimiene et al. (2015) viewed the focus of the study as a new phenomenon and employed exploratory research methods using focus groups as the means for data collection. Representatives from six companies based in Lithuania that target the development and use of virtual environments in the gaming industry participated in the study. The focus groups included questions based on the three target areas of economic factors, social perspectives, and functional value, as these areas interrelated to gamification and virtual reality (Pilgrimiene et al., 2015). Study findings indicated that economic value for businesses developed through an increase in brand awareness, brand loyalty, the extension of brand communication, and newly attracted

customers (Pilgrimiene et al., 2015). Social perspectives resulted in determined value via consumer interaction. Functionality positively aligned with consumer feedback providing businesses with value regarding advancement or redesign needs regarding product development. Study results indicated support for social media interactions in advancing the three target areas. Moreover, the research results indicated value to the company regarding the role of the consumer in the co-creation process of the company brand as supported by research including work by Iglesias et al. (2017) and Huang et al. (2018). However, the findings were limited regarding generalizability specific to geography, the target sample, and the virtual gamification industry (Pilgrimiene et al., 2015).

Social responsibilities and the company brand. Noting the link between company social responsibility and the company brand, Soundararajan et al. (2017) examined the social responsibilities of small businesses. The researchers defined social responsibilities as the activities of small businesses that contribute to positive outcomes in social change. The concept of social responsibility, established for large corporations beginning in the mid to late 20th century, drew attention to the activities of corporations and their leaders regarding social, ethical, and environmental obligations and behaviors. In a systematic review of the literature, Soundararajan et al. asked questions specific to defining social responsibilities of small businesses, the theories that supported research in this area, as well as national and international methodology in this area; and identifying elements of activity. Elements of activity included predictors of outcomes, moderating activities, and outcomes at different levels of analysis. Soundararajan et al. concluded that traditional research and organizational directions established over decades

contributed to the actions of large corporations regarding social and ethical responsibilities. However, the views of small businesses included roots in their communities. The community presence of small businesses positions them to provide direct and positive impacts on communities, public service groups, local populations, and area governments, by making a difference in addressing needs and creating both short- and long-term benefits (Soundararajan et al., 2017). Although small business owners significantly contribute to the business presence across the globe, the sensitivities aligned with small business owners and employees contribute to their perceived capacity to make a real difference in their contributions toward social and environmental concerns rooted in the same communities that support the small businesses (Soundararajan et al., 2017).

Consistent with the awareness of the social responsibilities established for large corporations as identified by Soundararajan et al. (2017) and the corresponding shift toward community-oriented social obligations of smaller businesses, Spence (2016) considered theories that addressed corporate social obligations extended to the responsibilities of small businesses. Spence divided social responsibilities associated with small businesses into five primary areas that included (a) meeting the needs of others, (b) placing value on emotions, (c) accepting partiality, (d) moral implications of business operations, and (e) viewing people through relationships and interdependence. Examples provided clarity regarding the areas identified and included (a) caring for family as the businesses are often family firms and employ family as key staff; (b) combining business and personal approaches for communication; (c) consideration of diverse perspectives by business leadership; (d) using flattened hierarchy approaches that involve information

relationships and family as employees; and (e) applying business concepts based on relationships supported through personal integrity that extends trust and reputation to business partners (Spence, 2016).

Spence (2016) concluded that small businesses, often grounded in relationships and local awareness as indicated by Soundararajan et al. (2017), shared customer service goals with both management and employees. Extending the basis of social relationships to the awareness of social responsibility is an actionable area suited to the foundation of small businesses (Spence, 2016). Similarly, the flexibility and adaptability needed for business leaders, as indicated by Iglesias et al. (2017), aligns with the shared customer service goals of small business management and employees in attending to community-oriented social responsibilities (Soundararajan et al., 2017; Spence, 2016).

Consistent with the research by Iglesias et al. (2017) and specific to the stakeholder groups that influence the company brand, Coursaris et al. (2015) explored four messaging components used by well-recognized brands and social media marketing efforts that target the consumer group of stakeholders. Using a systematic review of the literature to support the research design, the researchers employed a multiple-case study approach that examined Facebook pages for three major industries. The industries targeted in the study were Delta Airlines, Wal-Mart, and McDonald's, and I focused on exploring aspects of brand messaging that included purchase involvement, message appeal, message content, and message richness. I chose these three companies because they are leading companies in their respective industries. Study hypotheses addressed the four areas of messaging focus. The hypothesis of brand messaging included levels of

purchase involvement, the transformational appeal of message content, the use of richer media, abstract content, and product awareness messaging. Transformational messaging involved advertising on emotional appeal related to consumer's experiences (Coursaris et al., 2015). The data collected for use in this multiple case study consisted of information from Facebook pages of well-known brands.

Two predetermined periods Coursaris et al (2015) used for data collection included 6 weeks of data per period. Data collection consisted of an analytical review of all posts collected over each identified time frame. The researchers used SPSS ANOVA and regression methods to evaluate the data. The full data set consisted of 369 posts with support found for all study hypotheses. The outcomes indicated that richness and appeal of messaging versus content predicted customer engagement. Brand purchase involvement to any degree predicted message appeal by consumers. A greater appeal occurred with the use of brand awareness messaging richer in content such as those that included videos or photos than those involving only text content. Although the study findings showed support for all study hypotheses, limitations of the study included the narrowed scope of social media platforms reviewed and the inconsistent usage of social media across platforms. For example, one company included in the study used different social media platforms to accomplish different company goals; an activity that differed between the companies included (Coursaris et al., 2015).

Although the selected companies provided a diverse foundation for study data, the study design limited study findings to only the companies included (Coursaris et al., 2015). Coursaris et al. (2015) identified a further limitation that involved the relationship

between message content and consumer engagement; however, the researchers failed to analyze the proposed relationship. Study findings still supported the co-creation approach to company messaging and the company brand noting the significant role of the consumer for informing the evolving company brand as posited by previous researchers, such as Iglesias et al. (2017) and Huang et al. (2018). These findings overlapped specific industry data that encompassed cocreation aspects by Pilgrimiene et al. (2015).

Brand equity. Consistent with the perspectives of Iglesias et al. (2017) and Coursaris et al. (2015), Godey et al. (2016) found that social media marketing efforts significantly influenced brand awareness and brand image, key contributing variables for brand equity. Godey et al. discussed the opportunities provided through social media marketing yet further noted the difficulty in measuring the impact of that marketing on measures of brand success. The researchers explored the relationships of social media marketing activities, consumer perceptions, and consumer responses to brand equity. The primary study objectives included measuring the influence of social media marketing on customer behaviors, the impacts of social media marketing on brand loyalty and preference, examining the components related to social media marketing, and the differences in data collected over four participating countries (Godey et al., 2016).

Employing a quantitative study design, Godey et al. (2016) established and administered a survey to a sample population of 845 individuals distributed across the four countries of China, France, India, and Italy. The brands involved included Burberry, I.V., Dior, Gucci, and Hermés. The sample group was consistent in age, gender, and income, noting the design of the target population included individuals that purchased

high-end products. Study results indicated that social media marketing efforts focused on five areas, including entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth, which positively contributed to brand awareness and brand image. The researchers demonstrated that social media marketing had significant positive impacts on brand loyalty and brand preference with consideration to the price point and concluded that companies view social media as an increasingly valuable tool to maintain current customers, reach new customers, and address brand image in an ongoing manner (Godey et al., 2016).

Similarly, Seo and Park (2018) identified the same five areas of entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth as activities influenced by social media marketing strategies and further identified both brand awareness and brand image as critical variables in establishing brand equity as established by Godey et al. (2016). In a study of airline brand equity, Seo and Park accepted the premise that social media marketing positively impacted both brand awareness and brand image, thereby accepting the positive influence of social media marketing on brand equity. Both research groups described brand equity as a goal of many businesses as brand equity involved consumers that develop a greater sense of brand loyalty and pay higher prices for the branded products (Godey et al., 2016; Seo & Park, 2018). Seo and Park (2018) collected data using survey instruments in South Korean airline passengers and reported study conclusions indicating that social media marketing strategies positively influenced brand awareness and brand image, thereby impacting brand equity. While the study findings by Seo and Park showed similarities to the study by Godey et al. (2016), limitations across

both studies included geographically-based sample populations and limited brands used within the research. Even so, the significance of the study findings in both research settings contributed evidence of the usefulness of social media marketing strategies in establishing brand equity (Godey et al., 2016; Seo & Park, 2018).

Considerations regarding the company brand and company social responsibilities are not unique to any business size, country, industry type, or product offering. Similar overlap observed in marketing approaches, including both traditional and social marketing strategies, existed across business sectors. The expected use of traditional marketing methods, when available or possible, persist as small business owners and entrepreneurs acquire knowledge and evidence of successful experiences by those adopting social media marketing strategies.

Integrating Social Media as a Marketing Strategy

Businesses of all sizes are advancing marketing and advertising efforts using social media to connect with consumers and promote their company brand (Hudson et al., 2016). As of 2014, more than 2.7 billion people worldwide, approximately 40% of the global population, were actively online (Hudson et al., 2016). In the U.S., more than half of adults use at least two social media networking platforms in addition to commonly used search engines to navigate and investigate the ever-changing contents of the world wide web. Social media access to news has surpassed that of print news media, and actual news media sites are the second most popular platform (Shearer, 2018). Mobile platforms achieved almost 100% access to the Internet, and consumers are accustomed to searching, looking, chatting, tweeting, and more from any place at any time while potentially using

more than one channel or device simultaneously (Hudson et al., 2016). According to statistics from Facebook, the average individual has about 130 friends and responds favorably at a 15% higher rate when products, services or businesses are referred from a friend (Hudson et al., 2016).

Even so, a medical study conducted by Lin et al. (2016) identified a significant increase in depression in 1,787 young adult study participants in the U.S. that routinely accessed social media platforms, suggesting further study into causative mechanisms and treatment interventions. The researchers explored the relationship between social media use and the overall increased incidence of depression in U.S. young adults to advance knowledge regarding depressive symptoms in this population at risk of depression. Study findings showed a significant and robust association between social media use and symptoms of mood dysregulation, including depression (Lin et al., 2016). Individual users' behaviors regarding social media use and the divergence of opinions of small business owners regarding business applications of social media for marketing purposes are unrelated to medical concerns including mood symptoms identified by Lin et al. (2016); however, the common thread that connects the medical aspects with small business owner hesitancy is founded in the lack of knowledge and understanding. The concerns identified by medical researchers and their call for more information regarding the relationship of increased social media use and symptoms of depression is consistent with similar claims made by small business owners, hesitant to invest in marketing strategies that advantage social media platforms, as these business owners also cite a lack

of knowledge and understanding regarding the unknown impacts of social media (Bennett, 2017; Broekemier, Chau, & Seshadri, 2015).

Business models. Iankova, Davies, Archer-Brown, Marder, and Yau (2018) explored social media usage across business types that included business-to-business (B2B), business-to-consumer (B2C), and mixed business types. The overarching research questions involved understanding differences in social media usage in B2B, B2C, and mixed business models, and the perceived effectiveness of social media across business models. Using a survey instrument designed for the study, the researchers collected data using two groups to achieve the final sample consisting of 449 participants who included both U.S. and U.K. participants representing multiple business types and sizes. The data collected relevant to social media usage included information regarding other marketing channels used. Examples of other channels included direct mail, print, Web PR, television broadcasts, and trade shows. Findings revealed that B2B organizations used social media marketing significantly less frequently than B2C organizations. Consistent with the usage of social media, B2B organizations did not value social media as much as B2C or mixed model organizations. The study results indicated inconsistencies in the perspectives of social media usefulness for companies with different business models. For example, B2B organizations employed social media strategies for purposes other than direct customer communication goals used by B2C organizations. The study findings aligned with other those of researchers (e.g., Coursaris et al., 2015) that showed inconsistencies in social media strategies employed within the same company to accomplish different company goals based on the target audiences and the target goals.

The diversity of social media usage suggested evolving strategies by organizations in accomplishing internal goals including tailoring social media to address communication goals in tandem with marketing aims (Coursaris et al., 2015; Iankova et al., 2018).

Iblasi et al. (2016) addressed the diversity described in the study by Iankova et al. (2018) by breaking down social media into its simplest form. The media aspect referenced an instrument of information and communication while social indicated the sharing of information among those involved, including interactive capacities that allowed for exchanges initiated by all parties with multiple purposes possible for such interactions (Iblasi et al., 2016). Similarly, Godey et al. (2016) and Seo and Park (2018) suggested five areas of functionality for social media that included entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth. The functional areas identified overlap with the breakdown of social media, according to Iblasi et al. (2016).

Iblasi et al. (2016) collected data using a questionnaire sent to 93 individuals regarding services and products provided by the company SAMSUNG. The researchers provided 10 focus areas recommended for attention for businesses considering the use of social media marketing strategies. The 10 items included (a) increased brand recognition, (b) increased brand loyalty, (c) increased opportunities to convert consumers to customers, (d) higher rates of conversion from consumer interest to consumer purchase, (e) improved brand authority, a perception created by customers as they converse with others through social media, (f) increased inbound traffic, (g) reduced marketing costs, (h) improved search engine rankings, (i) richer customer experiences, and (j) improved customer insights. Using semistructured interview questions, the researchers collected

data using a 35 question survey instrument distributed in SAMSUNG showrooms. Study results showed that participants invested significant time into social media usage, a result consistent with the findings by Lin et al. (2016) indicating that young adults invested more than one hour per day on social media sites with an average of 30 social media sites visited each week. Iblasi et al. (2016) concluded that integrating the rich and fertile capacities of social media sites into marketing strategies enhanced consumer reach and positively influenced purchasing decisions. Three key recommendations for businesses regarding the use of SNSs provided by the researchers included (a) increasing knowledge and support for developing strategies that use SNSs, (b) focusing on key sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, and (c) taking care and caution in designing the marketing strategy to attend to age and income groups (Iblasi et al., 2016). The recommendations aligned with the perspectives provided by Iankova et al. (2018) in recognizing the diverse capacity of social media functions from a business perspective and the value in selective targeting of social media strategies to reach different target audiences and accomplish different company goals.

Career applications. Buettner (2016) studied the data created through the utilization of social media for career searches and explored variants in construct models used to predict outcomes. The first of two research questions posed involved examining the role regarding the number of contacts, or friends, listed by job seekers as that number related to actual job offers via career-oriented social media sites. The second research question explored the drivers for intent regarding the use of career social media sites for job searchers. The researcher put forth a series of 12 hypotheses in the study design and

applied a theoretical framework supported by positive associations with behavioral intention and expectancy. The first nine hypothesis statements reflected positive associations with behavioral intention specific to expectancy in the areas of performance, effort, social influence, facilitating conditions, hedonic motivation, price value, habit, usage intensity, and job offer success (Buettner, 2016). Additional hypotheses included expectations regarding, (a) the impact on usage intensity by job offer success and the number of contacts, and (b) the number of contacts expected to create a positive association with job offer success. Data analysis using the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT2) model resulted in significant study results. The researcher collected data using online surveys resulting in 523 usable questionnaires. Participants were equally divided between genders and ranged from 16 to 52 years of age. When integrated using the own construct in the UTAUT2 model, results revealed that the predictive quality of the number of contacts increased from 19% to 80.5% with a surprising degree of counterproductive items involved with the category that used the number of contacts as a variable. This finding is aligned with the professional opinion of headhunters noting that merely increasing the number of contacts in a social media environment does not contribute to positive outcomes (Buettner, 2016).

Results indicated no support for hypothesis expecting that a higher number of contacts would be associated with greater job offer success. Similarly, the association between usage intensity and job offer success was not supported. The five hypotheses that were supported included the association between behavioral intentions and usage intensity, behavioral intention and job offer success, usage intensity and job offer

success, and both habit and facilitation conditions associated with behavioral intentions. According to Buettner (2016), the academic and practitioner perspectives differed on the value of the actual quantity of contacts for career searching using social media. The study results supported the position of practitioners, indicating that other aspects of a career search contributed more significantly to positive outcomes than did the number of contacts or friends of the job seeker. The researcher established that sufficient prior resources including knowledge of economics, human resources, and information systems and technologies were factors that contributed to the intention of use for such career-oriented social media and networking sites (Buettner, 2016). The outcomes of the research provided evidence for the utility of social media sites for services versus products and purchases, notably an argument established by the influence of social media on the company brand as such research suggested that social media users influenced companies and company brands that extended beyond the purchase of tangible items (Huang et al., 2018; Pilgrimiene et al., 2015).

In a career-based study similar to the research by Buettner (2016), Djerf-Pierre, Ghersetti, and Hedman (2016) examined the career environment of journalists and their use of social media in a work-related capacity. The researchers emphasized the importance of viewing social media in a simplistic form as a fluid element of technology, a perspective supported by both Iglesias et al. (2017) in research involving the company brand and the simplistic description of social media put forth by Iblasi et al. (2016).

Djerf-Pierre et al. (2016) used a web-based survey tool to examine the perceptions of 1,689 respondents from a Swedish panel of journalists. Findings showed that many

journalists had decreased or even discontinued using social media at the time of the survey while other journalists persisted. About 20% of journalists claimed to never use social media for either personal or professional use with an equal number claiming frequent if not constant use of social media. Analysis of the collected data over the two years from 2012 to 2014 revealed that 35% increased their overall use of social media, 47% remained constant, and 18% decreased their social media use. Of the platforms used, increases occurred in only Twitter and LinkedIn with Facebook consistently indicated as the most popular platform used.

Other platforms such as blog sites were used for the study. Observations of blog sites resulted in a notable decline. The decrease in the perceived usefulness for professional reasons was determined to be significant. Reasons for source- and interviewee-finding through social media decreased from 59% to 33%, the perceived value of audience feedback dropped from 56% to 36%, and crowdsourcing dropped from 38% to 19% during the same time frame. Only one of 15 areas tracked regarding the usefulness of social media increased, and that was in the category titled *Because the Managers and Editors Want It*.

Overall journalists' perceptions of the value of social media for professional reasons dropped in four out of 10 journalists from 2012 to 2014. While many journalists fell in the category of early adopters for social media use, the personal exposure and subsequent experiences of insults, bullying, and online harassment resulted in a disenchantment factor over time thereby leading to the decreased use of social media for professional reasons among some journalists (Djerf-Pierre et al., 2016).

Anthropomorphic traits of products and services. Hudson et al. (2016)

examined social media use and customer perceptions across the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. Hudson et al. examined the association of social media interactions with consumer perception of quality determined by brand anthropomorphisms and examining the role uncertainty avoidance related to brand anthropomorphisms, noting that measures of uncertainty avoidance fluctuate depending on the cultural setting. Hypotheses included expectations that cultural differences across countries reflected a relationship with social media interactions related to brand anthropomorphisms and the degree of uncertainty avoidance. Higher scores of uncertainty avoidance indicated greater resistance to change with lower scores indicative of areas more open to adopting innovations (Hudson et al., 2016).

Hudson et al. (2016) described a win-win scenario, aligned with the goals of the current study and suggestive of overlap across sections discussed in this review, indicating that consumers win as they develop positive attachments to brands through social media interactions and businesses win as that attachment contributes to brand equity, a concept that supports increased cost of goods (Coursaris et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2018; Iglesias et al., 2017). Recognizing that small businesses are often reluctant to invest in social media marketing strategies, the win-win described by Hudson et al. underscored the importance of advancing knowledge regarding the potential benefit to small businesses that develop strategies specific to both their business goals and the goals of their customers.

Hudson et al. (2016) described brand anthropomorphisms associated with positive brand-consumer perspectives. For example, consumers may view a product that performs as expected as possessing the human quality of being trustworthy. Advancing the concept of anthropomorphisms, objects or products assigned human traits, such as shape, movement, or voice, are subject to social norms applied by consumers that extend to the company brand and facilitate ongoing relationships between the customer and the brand. The outcomes of assigning human qualities to a product indicated a partnering perspective, between the consumer and the business, associated with the motivation for consumers to enhance social media interactions with companies that contribute to the anthropomorphic perception (Hudson et al., 2016). Although assigning anthropomorphism may not apply to all business products or services, the strategy may benefit small businesses that develop products and services conducive to anthropomorphic characteristics in establishing the win-win scenario posited by Hudson et al. (2016).

Hudson et al. (2016) included a panel of 533 participants ranging from 18 to 35 years with familiarity and use of athletic shoes, the product focus of the study, and included both social media users and non-users. Each of the three countries used similar panels, with the countries selected determined by similarities in cultural dimensions yet differences in degrees of uncertainty avoidance noting that cultural differences contributed to varying degrees of risk reduction related to uncertainty avoidance behaviors. The uncertainty avoidance data results were 86, 46, and 35 for France, the United Kingdom, and the United States, respectively. Results were analyzed using

multiple regression methods and revealed no difference in the interplay of social media users and non-social media users and brand anthropomorphism, although results were higher in France than in the other two countries. Increased social media interaction involving consumers with anthropomorphized products indicated stronger brand relationship quality. Limitations of the study suggested that greater insight may be obtained by a similar study that determined the frequency of social media use across borders (Hudson et al., 2016). Small business owners that promote products or services in cultures with high uncertainty avoidance can apply such data to create effective strategies according to their target marketing area.

The researchers conducted a second follow-up study that explored the frequency of use of laptop computers in a sample of 207 U.S. business school students with questions based on computer brands. Participants were asked to assign human qualities to their laptop preferences and evaluated the personality traits of their laptop, such as enthusiastic, dependable, ugly, quarrelsome, anxious, and calm. The study groups were then asked to assign product characteristics such as noise level, weight, storage capacity, speed, and appearance. Based on collected data, the participants were assigned to social media groups based on usage frequency and were subsequently asked to estimate the frequency of interaction with the brand of their product on social media using a Likert scale ranging from at least once a week to less than once a week. Study findings indicated that social media interaction increased with higher usage of anthropomorphisms associated with the product by the consumer. This information is useful to businesses interested in developing strategies aligned with brand quality relationships influenced by

social media interactions (Hudson et al., 2016). Research regarding business-initiated development of customer interactions through social media specific to anthropomorphisms in cultures with low uncertainty avoidance contributes knowledge to small businesses interested in developing innovative marketing strategies. According to Hudson et al. (2016), consumers in low uncertainty avoidance regions that develop anthropomorphism product characteristics were significantly more likely to interact through social media channels.

Blending Traditional Marketing Strategies With Social Media

Marketing encompasses the actions that a business takes to put their products or services in front of the consumers. In this digital age, creativity and innovative marketing possibilities arise, including advancing opportunities through the channels of social media. Still, uncertainties accompany many of the innovative opportunities. Although the knowns of traditional marketing tactics remain available options for any business, the impact of traditional options is also shifting as the world becomes more comfortable with Web 2.0 and the digital age with interested individuals investing time in the seemingly endless digital arena. Business owners strive to establish and maintain positive relationships with their customer base through any marketing scenario (Todor, 2016). As consumers invest their time and interest in interactive exchanges available through social media including interacting with businesses, small business owners, including those hesitant to use social media for marketing, exist in the same marketplace as companies that choose to attend to the advancing interactive exchanges between customers and businesses.

Traditional marketing strategies are used in advertising tactics as the public expects newspaper and magazine ads, television spots, billboards, brochures, mailings, flyers, and radio commercials (Todor, 2016). Marketing tools that are not delivered digitally are known as traditional marketing. Advantages to traditional marketing include faster results in some cases, durability, and the public's trust (Todor, 2016). Disadvantages of traditional strategies include difficulties in measuring outcomes, high costs, the lack of interactivity, timing as many ads may be quickly outdated, customizing ads to reach a target population, and limited pricing options (Todor, 2016). According to Todor (2016), many marketing experts encourage businesses to attract new customers and retain existing patrons through individual attention versus target groups, a strategy addressed with digital media methods, while blending cost-effective and useful traditional strategies to improve brand awareness and customer retention across consumer groups.

Kumar, Choi, and Greene (2016) studied the time-varying effects of social media, traditional media, and the synergism created with the combined use of both approaches. The researchers developed ten hypotheses based on the synergistic effects of both marketing approaches on sales. Study conclusions indicated that the effectiveness and synergy established through the use of both social media and traditional marketing strategies might vary over time. The researchers developed an intricate model for business use in the field that resulted in higher predictive accuracy rates for sales than many benchmark theories providing business owners with the capacity to reallocate marketing resources to respond to the dynamic business environment. Significant cost

savings realized by businesses that applied the predictive model as a marketing strategy tool exceeded the proposed cost of the model (Kumar et al., 2016). Complementing traditional advertising strategies with social media methods established a synergistic and cost-effective relationship.

Consistent with the conclusions of Kumar et al. (2016), de Vries, Gensler, and LeeFlang (2017) investigated the use of social media to establish brand awareness and advance customer acquisitions, an approach considered useful for promoting the company brand as discussed by Coursaris et al. (2015), Godey et al. (2016), Hudson et al. (2016), Iankova et al. (2018), Iglesias et al. (2017), and Pilgrimiene et al. (2015). The research findings of de Vries et al. (2017) showed that social media strategies served to enhance the strengths of traditional advertising specific to brand building and acquiring new customers.

In a qualitative, exploratory study, Resnick, Cheng, and Simpson (2016) investigated the application of traditional marketing theory in small business enterprises and examined the perceptions of owner-managers regarding their role in marketing. The researchers used semistructured, in-depth interviews with the owners of 20 SMEs in the U.K. The study participants, selected using purposive sampling, included a diverse final group that represented different small business types. Interviews lasted for 45 to 90 mins with questions asked in a manner that provided the opportunity for additional commentary. Study findings indicated that the companies had been in operation ranging from 2 to 48 years with an average of 12.5 years. The operations were of regional, national or small international basis with six of the businesses described as product-based

and 14 categorized as service-based. Four overarching themes identified specific to marketing included personal branding, perseverance, practice, and production. The researchers excluded traditional marketing strategies due to the expense and the perception that those methods were not needed. Eighteen of the participants had websites. The key finding showed that self-branding of the SME business by the owner, described as reflecting the perspective and personality of the business owner, personified the marketing functions of the business (Resnick et al., 2016).

According to previous research cited by Resnick et al. (2016), mainstream marketing strategies, typically designed for large corporations, focused on planning, marketing research, strategies for advertising, marketing mix, and often exceeded the financial and human resources of SMEs (Resnick et al., 2016). Other barriers to implementing traditional marketing approaches in SMEs included characteristics central to the business owner as some entrepreneurs did not see the need for, or have an interest in, marketing strategies. Moreover, the construct of many SMEs prohibited the use of many traditional marketing strategies as larger corporations often delegate the duties of marketing to management trained to accomplish such goals. However, employment responsibilities within small businesses often included shared and flexible duties, involved creative work tactics, and operated with limited finances, making such marketing ventures ill-suited to the small business environment. According to Resnick et al. (2016), the goals and activities of the business owners paralleled the capacity of social media marketing. For example, small business owners developed goods and services tailored to specific customer needs that involved interactive communication with the

individual customer. Moreover, the business owners established and maintained relationships with existing customers over lengthy periods, often for many years, while maintaining personal communication to build business-customer relationships (Resnick et al., 2016).

Social Media Benefits for the Small Business

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies that successful small business owners developed and implemented to increase their sales and revenue effectively. Although some small business owners lack interest in developing marketing tactics and strategies, many actively participate in promoting their business, products, and services, although such promotions fall outside of their defined realm of marketing. With consideration to the fundamental social and media aspects within the sections discussed, the success of small businesses that employ a social network, even in the absence of technology, reflect the importance of social communication and the sharing and exchange of information through those developed networks as a part of successful business strategies and further highlight the evolution of social media and social networking.

Social networking. The current study is used to understand strategies used by successful small businesses parallel the research conducted by Kuéplé, Tenikue, and Walther (2015). Kuéplé et al. (2015) examined the social network of successful small businesses without access to technology in five markets of West Africa and determined that the most successful business owners included those considered to be well-connected to their customers and communities. Kuéplé et al. collected data on social networks from

358 traders across five border markets in an area of West Africa. Using the DOI theory, Kuéplé et al. examined the social networks of the entrepreneurs recognizing greater success for those considered as integrated within a social network, yet all participants lacked the use of technologies. The geography and underdeveloped nature of the area framed the concept of social media in its most basic form, as did Iblasi et al. (2016). As described by Iblasi et al. (2016), the sharing and exchange of information through instruments that involved interactive methods, meaning technologies, is evidenced in the research by Kuéplé et al. (2015) even in the absence of technology yet accomplished through the connected social networks occurring in the border markets. Within the border market environment, the successful entrepreneurs included those with established social networking connections, a finding reflective of marketing strategies in the developed world as a function of the digital age (Kuéplé et al., 2015).

Social media as a tool. Business owners in the border markets of West Africa applied open and interactive networking strategies, albeit without technology, to establish methods of communication networks that contributed to successful business ventures. According to Hitchen, Nylund, Ferrás, and Mussons (2017), open and interactive communication required the capacity to collaborate through social networking channels as evidenced by the research by Kuéplé et al. (2015). Hitchen et al. (2017) explored open innovation in SMEs and the use of social media platforms as a resource in accomplishing innovation and networking strategies with the advantage of available technologies. The definition applied to open innovation included managing the inflow and outflow of communications and knowledge to promote and expand an innovation within the target

markets. The flexibility of SMEs, versus the rigid structure of large corporations, positions SMEs to introduce new ideas and innovations effectively. For example, ideas lacking in synthesis and organization can be adopted by SMEs and brought to the forefront through practical methods, recognizing the limitations of SMEs regarding the lack researcher and development departments and the inability to spread financial costs and risk factors for innovative products; variables that may negatively impact the entire company versus a single department. Even so, innovative ideas, rooted in the complexities of social nature, often form the very basis of SMEs developed offerings of goods and services. Small business owners apply networking strategies to effectively hatch new ideas and innovations into existence through a systemic framework that uses interconnected agents as did the successful business owners in the border markets (Hitchen et al., 2017; Kuéplé et al., 2015).

According to Hitchen et al. (2017), when a change occurs in one agent, the members of the interconnected network experience the resulting wave or outflow of that knowledge or idea, accelerating and expanding the innovation using efficient methods, including social media platforms. Strategies develop from a focus on the systemic nature of networking while identified agents within the system encourage the effective diffusion of the innovation. SMEs, start-ups, and entrepreneurs often have limited resources, yet have the flexibility needed to launch new ideas. Opportunities for innovation require knowledge that may involve crossing collaborative lines, such as seeking information from established organizations or larger corporations with a different focus, to gain the needed knowledge to pursue the innovation. Social media is a tool that can be

instrumental in managing the inflow and outflow of knowledge and can be useful to the small business sector in accomplishing goals that reach beyond marketing strategies (Hitchen et al., 2017).

Yan and Musika (2018) asked an overarching research question based on identifying factors used by SMEs when implementing social media as a tool. Using a qualitative approach, the researchers employed semi-structured interviews with six Swedish businesses, three small and three medium companies, that successfully used social media tools. Study findings revealed 13 aspects described by participants as key in implementing social media tools. The 13 areas identified included the following: decision making regarding platform selection, responsibility for oversight, value metrics, accessibility, security and risk management, growing the online community, content and content updates, incentives, site monitoring, comment usage for future development, processing guidelines, timelines for customer feedback, and creating and sharing reports related to social media tools. The researchers provided previous study discussions and opinions that indicated social media to be more cost-effective and convenient than traditional marketing methods for both businesses and consumers. Moreover, social media assisted businesses in efficiently reaching target customers, provided opportunities for increasing customer bases, and increased market shares, with the benefits of particular value to SMEs due to the financial barrier that accompanies the use of traditional marketing avenues (Yan & Musika, 2018).

Hassan et al. (2015) proposed a marketing tool strategy for social media based on the attention, interest, desire, and action (AIDA) model. Frequently used in the online

marketing arena, this strategy lacks research evidence in social media applications. The researchers used a qualitative design that employed focus groups to collect data from small business entrepreneurs. Data indicated that SMEs in Malaysia in 2013 provided 4,800,000 jobs in the country during 2012 and contributed almost 33% to the gross domestic product of the country. Still, no more than 20% of the SMEs in Malaysia utilized marketing opportunities associated with social media. The AIDA model focused on the transactions and purchases of individuals applying company-specific trend data to formulate marketing strategies for those businesses (Hassan et al., 2015).

Hassan et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study to determine an appropriate strategy that employed social media as a small business marketing tool. Focus groups used for data collection explored ways participants applied social media marketing strategies to benefit small businesses. Focus groups occurred in two phases and consisted of 22 owners and entrepreneurs of small businesses that successfully used social media. Study findings resulted in a developed strategic model that incorporated AIDA and combined both traditional and social media tools to improve business performance. Perceptions of the study participants included recognizing social media as a cost-effective marketing tool that aligned with the budgets of many small businesses. The group further noted that each business was best-served by taking initial steps to define the goals of marketing specific to their product or service and integrate social media along with traditional means to enhance their brand and increase business performance (Hassan et al., 2015). The current study goals advances the knowledge for individual small business owners who are hesitant to invest in social media marketing tools.

Successful Use of Social Media

Balan and Rege (2017) used data mining techniques to determine small business usage patterns for social media and to determine the utility of data mining for social media and small business. Using the massive data accumulated through Twitter, the researchers analyzed all Twitter remarks, commonly known as tweets, that contained the entry of hashtag small business, or #smallbusiness. Data observation and analysis instruments and procedures included IBM Watson Analytics. Results showed that females used the phrase of interest more often than males, and positive remarks occurred more frequently with few negative entries indicated. The researchers observed that public and customer sectors preferred companies that offered interactive means versus companies that only posted information about their business. Balan and Rege concluded that small business interest in social media is advancing as the growth of social media use increases. Moreover, social media networking, platforms, and marketing tool investments by businesses of any size predicted a substantial growth advantage over competitors that did not use social media opportunities. The impact of social media on businesses is changing rapidly. Data indicated the evolving realizations by small business owners regarding the potential contributions of social media to business profit and growth opportunities (Balan & Rege, 2017). Although study data showed that social media tools contributed to successful marketing strategies of small businesses, many small business owners would require knowledge to successfully integrate social media applications to advantage business growth and effectively compete in their specific marketplace.

Intending to advance such knowledge for business owners of SMEs, Odoom,

Anning-Dorson, and Acheampong (2017) examined owners of 210 companies that successfully used social media marketing in Ghana regarding performance benefits and motivation associated with the use of social media marketing strategies. Of the 210 businesses that participated in the study, 67% provided products, and 33% offered services. The majority of businesses, 91% of the total, had operated successfully for at least five years, and 54% of those participating reported more than 20 employed staff. Facebook was the only social media site used by 54% and 34% used only Twitter. Combined usage of both Facebook and Twitter occurred in 12% of businesses. Study results showed that businesses that used both selected social media sites took such steps to invest in the interactive nature that allowed for direct consumer feedback and two-way communication, a finding consistent with prior research. Study results also indicated support for both cost-effectiveness and compatibility as SMEs utilized social media more cost-effectively than traditional media avenues with a recognized fit of compatibility between SMEs and social media as a marketing tool (Odoom et al., 2017).

Differences based on business types contributed to variance in relationships of business to social media usage. For example, Odoom et al. (2017) indicated that interactivity produced higher scores of motivation among SMEs that provided services with cost-effectiveness more strongly associated with motivation for businesses that offered products. The researchers extrapolated causation for the differences suggesting that service-oriented SMEs relied more heavily on interactive relationships with customers while the product-based businesses faced existing challenges of the costs involved with manufacturing thereby motivated by opportunities to reduce costs. A

further finding from the study indicated that SMEs that used both social media options experienced improved business performance benefits versus the use of either social media sites alone. Aligned with the goals of the current study and supported by similar research findings, Odoom et al. underscored the importance of evaluating SMEs as individual entities based on business type and informing owners of strategies available with social media applications specific to the needs of their business type, brand, format, and goals.

Owners of SMEs face time constraints that differ from those of larger corporations. Time constraints, a critical factor in determining strategies for business success alongside the business type, company brand, business format, and company goals (Odoom et al., 2017), further contribute to the individuality of SMEs and the owners of those businesses. Srinivasan et al. (2016) examined the role of social media marketing in small business settings and the relationship between sales in a successful social media marketing strategy and the amount of time devoted to social media strategies for marketing. Using an exploratory research design, data collection methods involved judgment sampling methods resulting in 50 micro, small-, and medium-sized business enterprises (MSMEs) in India. Study findings revealed that social media marketing strongly influenced brand awareness and brand trust, creating a positive association between the amount of time devoted to social media and sales. Statistics regarding MSMEs in India revealed this business group to be the leading factor in 40% of the total exports of the country, 45% of India's manufacturing output producing more than 6,000 products, employed 73 million people, and were considered the backbone of the GDP in

India noting that contribution to be 8% of the total GDP (Srinivasan et al., 2016).

Although the positive significance of social media marketing strategies on company sales influenced growth and productivity, the positive influence on brand awareness and brand trust is noteworthy. As indicated by research involving the company brand, advances toward improving the consumer's perspective of the company brand, including brand awareness, trust, and equity, is an aspect of social media applications that significantly benefits and overlaps with the gains associated with specific marketing strategies working in tandem to benefit company growth, sales, and overall profitability.

Although many studies that involved successful social media integration of SMEs and MSMEs originated in countries other than the United States, Ren et al. (2015) explored marketing strategies for small companies interested in establishing a successful global reach for their customer base. The researchers provided insight from a 1990s quote stating that the purpose of any business is to create customers with two primary functions available to accomplish that purpose, marketing, and innovation. Ren et al. explored performance measures in SMEs actively establishing international opportunities suggesting an association between evolving business opportunities and advancing technologies, including digital methods of communication. As shipping and communication capacities advance, opportunities for internationally-based customers, and a foothold in countries of interest contribute to the competitive nature between companies that offer similar goods and services. Ren et al. focused on the roles of innovation and marketing specific to the competitive positioning of SMEs in the domestic and international marketplace. The study aimed to examine the role of marketing versus

research and development (R&D) capability in the SMEs' innovative performance specific to establishing an international presence. The definition applied to market capability included the integrative steps taken by a business to utilize tangible and intangible resources to advance internal knowledge of market needs, establish a basis of product differentiation, promote consumer cooperation, and perform financially. The researchers recognized the need to evaluate SMEs regarding the influence of marketing capability in innovative performance and the ability to establish an international presence (Ren et al., 2015).

Study findings showed that companies with strength in either research and development capabilities or marketing capabilities significantly increased the brand and product awareness of the innovation of the SMEs in the global marketplace thereby improving their competitive stance and ultimately business growth and profitability (Ren et al., 2015). Companies with either low capacity for research and development or poorly developed marketing strategies experienced adverse performance outcomes in the global market. The findings showed further significance as many SMEs function on limited resources and, therefore, do not have research and development sections or departments. Aligned with the findings of the study by Ren et al. (2015), the remaining variable available to positively influence the international marketplace is that of advancing the marketing strategies of the SMEs. Moreover, the challenging task of developing successful marketing strategies at a global level warrants attention to digital platforms, including social media networking.

Small Business Barriers to Social Media Marketing

In the same study that provided support for social media marketing in India, the researchers discovered that many small businesses had not yet adopted social media marketing strategies (Srinivasan et al., 2016). The benefits of social media presented challenges to small businesses that opted for other marketing methods. Moreover, while some micro and small businesses attempted to integrate social media into their marketing strategies, many of these businesses struggled to develop effective strategies for social media use, sometimes due to a lack of knowledge regarding both the advantages and approaches for social media use. The development of Web 2.0 and the ease of use regarding interactivity and instantaneous exchange of information available through the advancing technologies further contributed to the rapidly advancing integration of digital media. Individuals and groups from all corners of the globe, all walks of life in the public and private sectors, and countless businesses benefit from the capacity of information exchange and the use of social media for communications and marketing strategies. While data showed that a large number of companies use social media for marketing purposes, 23% of those have only just started (Srinivasan et al., 2016). Advancing knowledge and awareness of the capacity available to SMEs by integrating social media for multiple purposes, including marketing methods as aligned with the goals of the current research.

Broekemier et al. (2015) used online surveys to investigate perspectives on the use of social media for marketing strategies among U.S.-based small businesses. A total of 81 businesses completed the survey with 46.9% business owners or co-owners, 30.9%

in management positions, and 16% in marketing positions. No information regarding job title or position included 6.2% of those participating. The highest number of responses came from the West region of the United States, followed by the Midwest, the South, and the smallest response from the Northeast area.

Study results showed that 54.3% of the companies used social media for business reasons with LinkedIn the most commonly used site at 86.4%. Many companies used more than one site with the most popular combination being LinkedIn and Facebook at 70%, followed by LinkedIn and Twitter at 67.5%.

Popular reasons for use of social media included promoting the company reputation, increasing customer interest and awareness, and establishing new customers. Fewer respondents indicated increasing sales as a reason for use. The majority of respondents perceived their use of social media as effective or somewhat effective; however, 22.7% of users did not know the effectiveness. The researchers identified that 45.7% of responders did not use social media, with 54.1% of that group sharing the opinion that social media was not beneficial to their business. Two additional reasons provided for the lack of use was not enough time reported in 32.4% of responders and not enough knowledge in 27%. The majority of non-users, 80.6%, reported no intention to use social media integration into marketing strategies within the next 12 months following the data collection.

A shared opinion among all respondents who used social media, indicated that more valuable forms of business promotion other than social media were available. A divergence of opinion occurred between non-users and users on the topics related to the

cost-effective use of social media for marketing, the popularity of the business, and the implication that social media methods are for attracting younger customers. The researchers concluded by suggesting educational outreach efforts toward B2B small business owners and management staff (Broekemier et al., 2015).

Consistent with the conclusions by Broekemier et al. (2015), Bennett (2017) indicated that a primary barrier to social media adoption was a lack of knowledge and understanding by management. Additional barriers described included the need for training, the time commitment required, and the importance of learning the details of the adopted technology (Bennett, 2017). The lack of knowledge indicated by Bennett and the statistics provided by Broekemier et al. point to a substantial number of U.S.-based small business owners that do not use (45.7%), nor intend to use soon (80.6% of those that do not), social media technology for their businesses. Study findings raised questions regarding the knowledge of social media among small business owners, their divergence of opinions regarding critical capacities, and even within the population that integrated social media strategies, almost 23% of that population lacked knowledge on performance measures to establish the effectiveness of social media methods adapted. The study findings align with the goals of the current study in exploring small business owners and their experiences to advance knowledge that may be useful to small business owners within the United States.

Using a qualitative approach, Alshamaila (2018) used a questionnaire to ask questions of 24 social media experts located in Jordan since 90% of adult Internet users participate in social network platforms, a higher rate than in many developing countries.

Alshamaila identified motivating factors and numerous barriers to social media use in small businesses. Barriers to the adoption of social networking sites for marketing usage included security factors and privacy concerns, both listed as primary reasons for small business owner hesitancy in adopting social media strategies. Additional barriers involved the readiness of the business for the adoption of technological advancement, the willingness to commit the needed resources to maintain the strategies for the benefit of all parties involved, a lack of knowledge regarding available technology, and negative word of mouth communications, meaning concern over the impact to the business should potential negative comments and reviews occur. Regulatory issues listed as barriers indicated the concern primarily in developing countries specific to the emerging regulations developed by governments (Alshamaila, 2018).

The final barrier discussed was central to the beliefs of the business owner or top management (Alshamaila, 2018). Such beliefs carried weight throughout the structure of the organization as employees respect the opinions of owners and management regarding the development of organizational strategies, programs, and overall business decisions. The number of barriers faced by small business owners, including the lack of knowledge to accomplish the advancement within their business, may support the view of small business owners as laggards. The results of the study indicated that the most significant influential barrier was that of top management beliefs, followed by knowledge and awareness and firm readiness (Alshamaila, 2018). The findings by Alshamaila (2018) showed support for the problem identified in the current study and further aligned with the substantial number of business owners in the United States that indicated similar

barriers to the use of social media technologies identified by Broekemier et al. (2015) and Bennett (2017). Consistent with the concerns reported by Alshamaila (2018), research put forth by the Pew Research Center supported concerns from the public sector regarding privacy and security on the Internet. Almost 50% of Facebook users described feeling uncomfortable with the labels and categories assigned by tracking tools of the site (Hitlin & Rainie, 2019). Other research supported concerns of the public regarding the capacity of social media platforms to protect their privacy and personal data (Rainie, 2018).

Alford and Page (2015) conducted a qualitative study of 24 small business owners in the U.K. that revealed a desire to implement social media marketing strategies, yet the study participants lacked the knowledge needed to pursue such opportunities or the ability to establish performance measures to determine their return on investment effectively. Study findings by Alford and Page reflected the findings of Broekemier et al. (2015), Bennett (2017), Alshamaila (2018), and reports provided by the Pew Research Center as described by Rainie (2018) and Hitlin and Rainie (2019). Alford and Page (2015) established a series of themes formed from their review of the literature representing barriers that challenged small business owners regarding the adoption of marketing technologies. The first theme involved published literature that discussed the influential role of the business owner or entrepreneur in establishing values and visions of the business. The second area suggested that the adoption of technology for marketing purposes was more likely to occur when the business owner viewed the technology as holding long term benefits for the company. The third theme centered on the link between marketing orientation and business performance outcomes noting the lack of

clarity in many small business settings. The fourth area involved resource availability, both financial resources and time, as both carried limitations within the small business environment. The next barrier for small businesses described the tendency for many small business owners to adopt a short-term approach rather than consider such an endeavor through longer-term planning and implementation efforts. The last barrier related to the development of a customer's reach beyond the company's website and extending into the Web 2.0 applications available through social media applications (Alford & Page, 2015).

Measuring Social Media Performance Outcomes

Social media use is measured to analyze the available information on product usage, customer opinion, information about the company brand, market trends, competitors and general social media indicators of usage (Aichner & Jacob, 2015). Analyzing social media activity is best accomplished by applying metric analysis methods to assess the performance of social media as a tool, such as the use of social media for marketing purposes (Aichner & Jacob, 2015; Scuotto, Gludice, & Carayannis, 2017). Small business owners and entrepreneurs that adopt social media as a marketing strategy determine the objectives and performance measures to evaluate the success of such strategies. Examples of metrics used for analysis included the number of site visits, page views, tags, site specifics such as likes, the number of members, the list of members, friends or fans, consumer impressions, incoming links, time spent on site by visitors, and impressions-to-interactions ratios. Objectives may range from the number of posts, establishing online communities, sharing user-created content, tracking the time to

respond, and maintaining a determined goal for interactions (Aichner & Jacob, 2015; Hair, Celsi, Money, Samouel, & Page, 2015; Scuotto et al., 2017). Performance metrics and analysis of the efficacy of social media applications is an area identified as a barrier to social media use in small businesses as owners lack knowledge in the use of performance metrics and analysis methods. Informed use of social media to advance small business communications, growth, customer reach, and overall profitability requires attention to the knowledge deficit identified in small businesses.

Scuotto et al. (2017) analyzed 215 SMEs to gain insights regarding social media usage and determine relationships between social networking sites, absorptive capacity, described as the ability to absorb knowledge from the external or virtual environment, and innovative performance. Absorptive capacity, a force that drives many entrepreneurs to create innovations without the use of internal research, input, and brainstorming of ideas, applies the knowledge acquired through the dynamic environment encouraged through social networking. According to Scuotto et al. (2017), 86% of entrepreneurs viewed SNSs as important with at least 69% interested in advancing their knowledge about social media platforms. According to Scuotto et al., leaders of small businesses found that social networking support in the establishment and promotion of innovative ideas, often generated by increased exposure through social media, led to new products with faster times to market and lower costs of development. The researchers put forth three study hypotheses that included expectations that SNSs would influence SMEs' innovative performance outcomes, absorptive capacity would positively impact innovative performance, and increased absorptive capacity through SNSs would

influence the innovative performance of the SMEs. The 215 participating SMEs were surveyed to determine insights into the three areas of innovative performance, absorptive capacity, and social networking site use. The researchers used IBM-SPSS Statistics 23.0 and Cronbach's alpha to aid in analyzing data. All three hypotheses were supported. The researchers concluded that the absorptive capacity of SMEs impacted innovation through the association and assimilation of external knowledge resulting in the enhanced inflow and outflow of knowledge. Social media platforms significantly contributed to the integration of information and contributed to the positive study outcomes (Scuotto et al., 2017). The findings by Scuotto et al. (2017) showed support for the benefit of advancing knowledge of small business owners regarding the potential applications of social media and networking technologies to promote business growth and profitability in a manner that extended beyond marketing strategies.

The study findings of Scuotto et al. (2017) overlapped with those of Dutot and Bergeron (2016) who examined the use of social media and the association with business outcomes measures. Using a quantitative approach, Dutot and Bergeron analyzed 257 SMEs to determine the impact of social media on business performance. Both entrepreneurial and customer orientation to social media applications positively impacted sales, showing a positive correlation with social media activity and business development. Strategies used by SMEs further advanced the growth and attention to the business through company visibility and social media performance. The researchers suggested that small business owners attend to the development of company visibility, a concept aligned with the company brand, brand awareness and image, and brand equity,

to further enhance business development and positive outcomes in sales (Dutot & Bergeron, 2016).

Ainin et al. (2015) investigated factors that influenced the use of social media, specifically Facebook, and financial and non-financial performance outcomes in SMEs in a community in Malaysia. Data collection methods included the use of interviews with marketing or social media directors of six companies successfully using Facebook and also included 259 responses from SMEs using online survey questionnaires in a selected online community group. Survey data was analyzed using Partial Least Square method to test the hypotheses of this integrated design study. The researchers established six study hypotheses. Those hypotheses included expecting that business design compatibility would positively influence the use of the selected social media, the cost-effectiveness of social media would positively influence social media use, and trustworthiness and interactivity of the site would positively influence decisions to use social media. The final two hypotheses included the expectations that social media usage would have positive impacts on both non-financial performance measures and financial performance measures. Two primary categories used for outcomes included financial and non-financial measures. Financial performance measures included sales transactions, sales volume, product inquiries, and the number of customers (Ainin et al., 2015).

Nonfinancial measures were found to result in positive outcomes, included marketing costs, costs for customer service, positive influence on customer relations, customer access to information, compatibility, cost effectiveness, and interactivity (Ainin et al., 2015). Results supported all hypotheses except that trust was not significantly

related to the social media site. Study results indicated that 85% of respondents were small businesses that employed less than five staff, 11.6% employed five to 10 persons, and 1.5% of survey respondents employed more than 20 persons. The study results showed that 4.2% had used the social media site for up to 4 years, 12.7% for up to 3 years, 29% for up to 2 years, with 50.2% reported using the site for 1 year or less. The researchers concluded a rising dedication among SMEs regarding the use of the social media site to enhance business performance (Ainin et al., 2015). The findings from Ainin et al. (2015) parallel the results by Srinivasan et al. (2016) indicating that 23% of small business owners that participated in the study had only just started integrating social media applications into business strategies.

Consistent with both the attention to the use of anthropomorphisms as discussed by Hudson et al. (2016) and the need to consider the business type in developing message content, Tafesse and Wien (2017) introduced a discussion on categorizing social media posts. The point of their work encompassed attention to the rich communications possible using social media and the risks involved with developing accurate versus inaccurate methods of categorizing the data for use within a marketing strategy plan (Tafesse & Wien, 2017). Similarly, Beigi, Tang, and Liu (2016) addressed the importance of determining trust and distrust events within the analysis of social network usage. Such link analysis, also described as strong and weak or positive and negative ties, is a technical measure of categorizing messages that often involved the use of identified words or phrases within messages that aided in the positive diffusion of information through social networking channels (Beigi et al., 2016). Shabbir et al. (2016) described

SNSs as gateways for businesses to establish both profit and growth through the integration and development of weak ties. By advantaging weak ties, the researchers suggested that SMEs use the weak ties available through social media networking to improve productivity (Shabbir et al., 2016). Beigi et al. (2016) and Shabbir et al. (2016) paralleled the findings of Kuéplé et al. (2015) in identifying the value of social networking connections that promoted the effectiveness of small businesses across business types including those that profited through well-connected social networking methods even in the absence of technologies.

Synthesis of Findings

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies that successful small business owners developed and implemented to increase their sales and revenue effectively. The two predominant sectors identifiable in the goals of the current study included social media and small business. The substantial scholarship available in both areas provided useful information in establishing published works relevant to the goals of the current study. A significant number of the studies were qualitative in design, providing rich information regarding the perceptions and experiences representative of both areas included in the current research. For example, Al-Shamaileh (2018) used qualitative methods to examine social media platforms with relevant data collected from social media experts, providing insights into both motivators and barriers for consideration by small business owners and entrepreneurs. Atanassova and Clark (2015) provided relevant information through the qualitative and explorative approach to provide realistic and accurate insights into the

overlap of social media and the interests of small businesses. Both Al-Shamaileh (2018) and Atanassova and Clark (2015) used the qualitative design to evidence the need for innovations and describe the pivotal role of the business owner in setting precedence within the company regarding the use of technology. Moreover, Al-Shamaileh (2018) and Atanassova and Clark (2015) similarly described the role of the business owner, supporting internal steps to explore innovations and initiating practical steps to bring those ideas into existence.

A further point of interest, found in the content studied by two separate research groups and over multiple studies, involved using anthropomorphisms by companies; these research groups assigned human traits or behaviors to products or brands. The actions by business owners to apply anthropomorphism resulted in significant and measurable influences on consumers. Bandyopadhyay (2016) described the strategy by businesses to create the voice of a brand or product heard around the globe, and Hudson et al. (2016) conducted three studies that explored using anthropomorphisms with measurable outcomes produced that contributed to the possibilities of innovative influences diffused through social media platforms. Bandyopadhyay (2016) and Hudson et al. (2016) consistently provided the data needed for responsible analysis and reporting of data, allowing for reliable cross-study review of findings. For example, the researchers routinely provided the number of participants, methods of data collection, and tools used for data analysis, thereby contributing to clarity of the research goals and substance to the findings. Throughout the discussions of both small business information and challenges and the rapidly advancing technology of social media networking, a common and

relevant thread connected the research presented in this review. The common thread consisted of the support provided by the DOI theory, the chosen theoretical framework to support the current study.

The DOI theory was evident throughout the studies described in the review. Many researchers applied the theory to support the studies conducted with the processes of the innovation and the specific channels of diffusion grounding the research and providing a foundation for the results. The perspectives by Scott and McGuire (2017) provided a cohesive view of Rogers's (2003) theory through evidence of the foundational framework used to establish research outcomes that reach solidly across disciplines and circumstances.

Critique of Research Methods

The research literature presented in this review provided clarity and support for the current research; however, some study data resulted in questionable findings and limitations. Pilgrimiene et al. (2015) explored consumer engagement in cocreation from the perspective of the business or business owner. The researchers explored considerations regarding the value of consumers in interactive communication leading to co-creation processes deemed of value to the company. Pilgrimiene et al. explored strategies used by companies to engage consumers. However, the study population included companies operating in Lithuania that used gamification or virtual platforms predominantly to engage consumers. Pilgrimiene et al. established a qualitative study design using focus groups to collect data. However, the sample size of six individuals within a specified industry that included only businesses operating in Lithuania presented

limitations in applying the study findings to other groups, populations, or cultures.

Pilgrimiene et al. further lacked clarity regarding data collected through focus groups and showed limitations specific to geography, culture, sample size, and the industry platform.

Similarly, other studies included in the review showed limitations based on cultural issues and the development of the country. For example, two studies collected data in Malaysia, two collected data from India, one from Australia, and several from the U.K. The literature demonstrated that small businesses could reach global markets and social media applications may enhance marketing strategies to do so. Although the world is within reach for small businesses, the cultural differences and degree of development in any given country provided concerns worthy of attention to protect the needs and goals of the small business. For example, merely understanding differences in shipping laws and Internet security at a global level warrants attention as small business owners expand their reach using social media marketing strategies.

Summary

This review discussed the evidence that supported both the progressing use of social media in the small business sector and caution in taking such steps to ensure the desired outcomes. The small business sector frequently referred to as either the engine that drives economies or the backbone of a country's GDP, is strongly represented in countries across the globe. Limited financial and employment resources, accompanied by the high failure rate of new small businesses, evidences the importance of caution for small business owners and entrepreneurs that integrate social media as part of a marketing strategy. The opportunity to profit and grow from an active social media

marketing strategy is as exciting as the fear of failure potentially caused by improper integration of the same social media opportunity. Small business owners face the challenge of acquiring knowledge of the technology that provides for the effective use of social media for marketing in a way that focuses on the needs and goals of the company without losing sight of the same for their customers. Small business owners who effectively integrate social media with their marketing plans act with caution in exploring the diffused knowledge about this innovative approach while assigning realistic expectations and a commitment that extends beyond the initial decision to integrate social media as a marketing tool.

Section 2 includes a discussion of the qualitative methodology and the multiple case study design chosen for the study. The study methodology supports the aims of the study in advancing knowledge and understanding of social media marketing strategies used by successful small business owners. Section 3 includes a discussion of the study findings, including results of the data collected and analyzed, implications for practice and social change, and the researcher's recommendations for future practice and study.

Transition

I explored the relevant and available research on successful social media marketing strategies for small businesses in the first section. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies that successful small business owners developed and implemented to increase their sales and revenue effectively. Social media is important for small businesses that do not have the sources to market their products and their services through more expensive alternatives

(Balan & Rege, 2017). The review of the literature provides a background overview of social media marketing in general and social media marketing in the context of small businesses. The review also highlighted the strategies to create business value, brand awareness, improve customer relationships, and improve overall business practices through the effective use of social media. The first section also provides an overview of the conceptual framework for this study.

Section 2 will include a discussion of the qualitative method used for the study to determine which social media marketing strategies small business owners effectively used to improve business performance. In Section 3, I provide the results of the data collection, analysis of the data, application of practice, implications for social change, and my personal recommendations.

Section 2: The Project

The second section begins with a restatement of the purpose, followed by the role of the researcher, the research method and design chosen, the population for the study, and the sampling methods. The section also details the data collection techniques, data organization techniques, and data analysis approaches of the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies that successful small business owners developed and implemented to increase their sales and revenue effectively. The targeted sample population included small business owners in the city of Honolulu, Hawaii who had successfully increased sales and revenue by implementing social media marketing strategies. The results of this study contributed to positive social change by improving the potential of small business owners to learn the proper strategies to use social media to gain and retain customers, build brand awareness, and increase employment, which might all lead to job creation and the economic growth of their local communities.

Role of the Researcher

My role in this qualitative multiple case study was to gather data through semistructured interviews, transcribe the interviews, and analyze the data without any prior bias (see Fusch & Ness, 2015). As the main instrument for data collection for this study, I was responsible for initiating contact with potential participants, obtaining site permissions, and recruiting the final pool of small business owners who participated in the study. I also selected the appropriate research design for the study. Researchers

performing case studies should behave courteously and ethically throughout the research process (Abrons, 2018). Thus, I obtained permission from the small business owners to observe the small businesses' social networking sites to supplement the analysis of the interview data.

I developed an interview guide to provide structure to the interview process and prevent myself from asking questions that would lead to biased responses. I mitigated potential bias by allowing the respondents to member-check their interview transcripts and my interpretations, which allowed them to assess whether their responses had been transcribed, interpreted, and understood correctly (see Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). In alignment with the *Belmont Report*, I adhered to all ethical considerations for the participants involved in the study by seeking their informed consent and selecting participants following those ethical principles (see Tene & Polonetsky, 2016).

Participants

Researchers use eligibility criteria to ensure that the participants selected can provide useful and relevant information regarding the phenomenon (Latiffi, Brahim, & Fathi, 2016; Sowman, Sunde, Raemaekers, & Schultz, 2014). Qualitative researchers use selection criteria, which can uncover the most eligible potential participants with attributes that make them the best sources of information, considering the depth and quality of the information necessary to achieve the goals of the study (Asiamah, Mensah, & Oteng-Abayie, 2017). Inclusion criteria comprise key features of the target population that researchers use to answer the research question; whereas, exclusion criteria refer to

features of potential study participants who meet the inclusion criteria while meeting certain characteristics that could interfere with the success of study (Patino & Ferreira, 2018). In qualitative research, participants are always sampled deliberately and are sampled primarily by representativeness rather than by a set of conceptual requirements (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Researchers have a set of inclusion criteria to sample the most qualified, accessible, and convenient group for the study (Asiamah et al., 2017).

In alignment with this goal, the requirements of this study were that participants had to have at least 1-year experience in developing and implementing social media marketing strategies for small businesses in Honolulu, Hawaii. To achieve the goals of this study, I employed a purposive sampling approach. A researcher can use a purposive sampling approach to choose the sample based on attributes that can help the researcher gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon (Helal, 2017). I identified potential cases for the study by contacting the U.S. SBA's Hawaiian district office for information regarding small businesses in the city of Honolulu that were open to participating in the study. This strategy ensured that participants met the eligibility criteria.

After identifying participants who met the criteria, I sent a letter by email to the small business owners to ask for their interest in participating in the study. Purposive sample recruitment for this study was dependent on the potential participants' availability and accessibility (see Asiamah et al., 2017; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). I was clear about the intended purpose of the study. Once I received expressed interest from the business owners, I provided each participant with a detailed, written letter explaining the details of the study, the process, and their rights at any given stage of the study. I attempted to

recruit at least eight small business owners. However, I retained only five cases with strong evidence of social media presence, which produced the list of potential cases that met the study criteria. This strategy was aligned with the literature's recommendations for multiple case studies (see Rule & John, 2015; Stake, 2013; Yin, 2014).

Research Method and Design

Research Method

Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods are three common types of research methods (Makrakis & Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2016). In this research study, I used a qualitative approach to explore how small business owners in Honolulu, Hawaii used social media marketing strategies to enhance business performance. The qualitative research method is best suited for studies that aim to understand the experiences and perspectives of participants to understand phenomena (Yin, 2014). The qualitative methodology suits a research topic if the study is exploratory, if the business problem is too complex to simplify into measurable variables, or if the themes from the study can assist in the interpretation of the collected data (Parker, 2014).

Researchers use the qualitative methodology if the research sources data from participants through an in-depth exploration of their experiences and analyzes the resulting data to make objective evaluations (Fletcher, De Massis, & Nordqvist, 2016). Qualitative researchers aim to comprehend a phenomenon by providing deep details regarding the specific research question (Yin, 2015). Mustaffa (2017) stated that the developers of this research method assumed that information was richest when deriving from those who had directly experienced the phenomenon. Collecting rich data was

important to this research because I aimed to understand the participants' experiences of using social media marketing strategies effectively. Additionally, quantitative and mixed-method approaches require measurable variables to test a phenomenon or a given hypothesis (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). I did not examine or test the phenomenon given measurable variables; therefore, I considered quantitative and mixed-methods approaches to be inappropriate for this study. Researchers have used the qualitative approach extensively to explore how small business owners employ different business practices and strategies, including social media marketing, to ensure the success of their businesses (Alshamaila, 2018; Jakes, 2018).

Research Design

The three common approaches for qualitative research include case study, phenomenology, and ethnography (Yin, 2014). A case study is an intensive study about a person, a group of people, or a unit within its environmental context through detailed and in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information to provide case themes and descriptions (Gustafsson, 2017; Ridder, 2017). Researchers use case study approaches to study the *what's*, *how's*, and *why's* of the contemporary phenomenon, over which the researcher has little or no control (Jakes, 2018). The capacity to gather in-depth information from multiple cases can increase the credibility of a study's findings (Bennett, 2017); thus, I included an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon that involved one or more individuals. In case studies, unlike in experiments, the contextual conditions of the phenomenon are not controlled or delineated; rather, these are part of the

researcher's investigation. In addition, the researcher chooses the cases because these are of interest, which is contrary to the logic of quantitative research (Ridder, 2017).

The ethnographic design applies to studies that explore the cultures of groups of people, whereas the phenomenological approach applies to studies that aim to understand the meanings participants associated with their lived experiences of a phenomenon and to understand how individuals perceive the situation (Yin, 2014). As I focused on social media marketing strategies that small business owners used to improve business performance, I used a case study approach for this study. Furthermore, the multiple case study approach was chosen as I could study the topic within and across different cases. The differences and similarities of cases could contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon (see Gustafsson, 2017; Ridder, 2017).

Population and Sampling

For this qualitative multiple case study, the population comprised small businesses that had effectively implemented social media marketing strategies to improve their businesses. Researchers can use purposeful sampling to select the participants who can provide pertinent information and who are relevant to the research purpose (Helal, 2017; Taylor et al., 2015). The advantage of purposive sampling is that this method allows the researcher to focus on cases that closely relate to the phenomenon of interest (Abrons, 2018). In such an approach, a researcher does not consider representativeness or generalization to be of great importance and the goal is to enhance the richness of the data to improve the opportunity to theorize (Ridder, 2017). The researcher can then select participants based on their knowledge and expertise (Jakes, 2018).

When selecting the sample size, the goal must be to estimate the number of participants that are necessary to reach data saturation (Bennett, 2017). In qualitative research, researchers do not typically have a commonly accepted size for the sample; rather, the sample size depends on the purpose of the study, the richness of the data, and the research question (Jakes, 2018). The researcher has reached data saturation when there is no longer any new information emerging from the new data collected (Bennett, 2017).

Qualitative researchers employing multiple case study approaches can expect to obtain rich data from multiple sources, with a sample of three to five participants (Yin, 2014). Based on these guidelines, I selected owners of six small businesses who had successfully developed and implemented social media marketing strategies as part of the study's sample based on these guidelines. I first ascertained the qualifications of the participants to ensure that they met the established criteria. I then interviewed the participants following a semistructured interview protocol with open-ended questions that explored the phenomenon of interest. Paine (2015) stated the importance of ensuring that the interview was conducted in a comfortable setting to encourage the participants to provide open and honest answers.

Ethical Research

Ethical considerations are crucial in all types of research (Helal, 2017). I followed ethical considerations throughout the study. The maintenance of ethical standards was important to ensure the quality of the research (see Rahbi, 2017). I followed various procedures to obtain ethical approval and ensure that the research study was aligned with

the ethical codes of conduct of the university. I conducted the study only after receiving approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). My IRB approval number is 11-08-19-0731723.

I adhered to the various ethical guidelines of research involving human subjects (see Tene & Polonetsky, 2016). I offered assurances of the participants' confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process; furthermore, I ensured that all participants provided their expressed consent that the information they provided could be used for the study before any of the data collection processes were started. I concealed all of the participants' personal information from any of the documents or other artifacts that may be produced for the study. All participants should be informed of their rights to withdraw from the study at any point in the research (Yin, 2014).

Recommendations in the literature state that research data must be destroyed 5 years after the research has concluded (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013; Yin, 2014). All of the notes, audio-recordings, and transcriptions will be stored on my hard drive, which will be safely placed in a locked cabinet in my home. I will store all data securely, and data will be subsequently destroyed and deleted 5 years after the completion of the study to protect the participants' confidentiality.

Data Collection Instruments

Typically, the qualitative researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection (Bryman & Bell, 2015); thus, I served as the primary data collection instrument for this multiple case study. Data collection techniques for interpretive research include, observation, archival records, documentation, questionnaire, and

interviews (Helal, 2017). For this study, the primary type of data collection instrument used included in-depth interviews of small business owners who agreed to participate in the study. Interviews are the most common way to collect data for qualitative research (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Rule & John, 2015; Yin, 2014).

Most interviews for qualitative research are semistructured, face-to-face interviews. Researchers can ask follow-up questions that further enhance the quality of information (Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Rule & John, 2015; Yin, 2014). I scheduled the interviews at the convenience of the participants. The interview protocol is shown in Appendix A. I asked the participants for their written consent for me to use an audio-recording device during the interview process. I asked the participants the same questions following a list of prepared interview questions (Appendix B) comprising open-ended questions about the social media marketing strategies of the small businesses regarding how the owners increased revenue and built brand awareness, their motivations, and their ways of measuring the performance of their strategies. In addition, I asked questions regarding the benefits and challenges that the participants associated with their social media marketing strategies.

A supplementary type of data collection instrument can include observations of artifacts (Rule & John, 2015). For example, I observed the participants' social media marketing strategies through their official social media sites. Additionally, I asked the participants to member-check their responses. Member-checking is a technique used to ensure that the researcher appropriately interpreted the participants' answers (Yin, 2014). I sent each participant summaries and transcriptions of their interview, and I contacted

each participant to give them the opportunity to provide feedback before the data analysis begins. Yin (2014) stated that the member-checking process enhances the reliability and validity of the data collection process.

Data Collection Technique

Among various data collection techniques, interviews are among the more common data collection techniques for qualitative research, especially for in-depth case studies (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Jamshed, 2014). Before conducting the interviews, I contacted each of the participants to ask for his or her preferred schedule and location for his or her respective interviews. I conducted the interviews in a secure, public, and quiet location at the convenience of the participants. At the beginning of the interviews, I reminded each of the participants the purpose of the interview, asked for written consent for me to record the interviews, and encouraged to provide open and honest answers for all of the interview questions (see Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Rule & John, 2015; Yin, 2014). Researchers can use interviews to collect rich data; however, a potential disadvantage is that there is a potential for bias (Abrons, 2018).

I used a hand-held audio-recording device to record the interviews in real-time, as well as a pen and paper to write down pertinent details during the interview. I used a printed copy of the interview guide to ensure that all of the interviews followed the prepared protocol. I recorded and transcribed each interview verbatim. I ensured that the data are valid and accurate through member-checking, which was aligned to the current recommendations for qualitative research (see Punch, 2013; Ritchie et al., 2013; Yin, 2014). As part of member-checking, I asked the participants to read my transcripts of the

interviews to determine whether I accurately translated their intended messages. The participants were allowed to make changes to their comments, add any additional information, and remove anything that they did not want to be included in this study. I observed the applied social media marketing strategies of the participants. This process included a review of the official social media websites of all participants, including their company websites, Twitter feeds, or Facebook pages, among others. I gathered a clearer idea of the social media marketing strategies of the participants, which supplemented the analysis of the data from the participants' interviews (see Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Rule & John, 2015; Yin, 2014).

Data Organization Technique

I assigned a number to each participant, which I kept in a personal log for record-keeping. I then transcribed the interviews of the participants using Microsoft Word. The recordings and transcriptions of the interviews were safely stored in my hard drive, and these were stored securely in a locked cabinet in my home. I named each transcript document according to the assigned number of the participants; all of the participants' details, including their businesses' names and their details, were concealed in all of the documents developed for this study. I similarly stored any additional documents, such as the participants' signed consent forms and miscellaneous documents created during the study in my home cabinet. I will then destroy and delete all data 5 years after the completion of the study.

Data Analysis

The most important part of data analysis in case study research involves gaining a clear understanding of the data collected (Yin, 2014). Data analysis in qualitative research revolves around reviewing the data to highlight meaningful themes that can help answer the research question (Guo & Guo, 2016). The analysis for this study involved following Yin's (2014) guidelines for analyzing data: (a) reviewing the collected data, (b) organizing the data, (c) coding the data, and (d) developing themes to draw inferences and conclusions.

I read and reread the transcripts of the interviews to gain an initial impression of the respondents' answers. I then imported all the transcripts into the NVivo software analysis program. The program is used to identify themes from unstructured data (Jakes, 2018). I used the tool to code the transcripts. Coding is the process of sorting and defining information applicable to the study (Bennett, 2017). Researchers can identify patterns, trends, and themes (Jakes, 2018). After coding the data into themes, I performed a thematic analysis using the NVivo software. Thematic analysis pertains to the identification of repeated patterns or themes from the data, which can describe the entire dataset in rich details as well as provide detailed accounts of the themes within the data (Bennett, 2017; Chinta & Raghavan, 2015; Jakes, 2018). I triangulated the data by using multiple data sources. I followed the guidelines by Yin (2014), Ritchie et al. (2013), and Stake (2013), which stated that complete, individual case reports for each unit of study must be made before making any cross-case comparisons or developing any cross-case conclusions. Additionally, I ensured that after authoring individual reports of each case,

the final report of this study included a discussion of the key themes that correlated with existing literature.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research pertains to the extent to which a study can yield the same results when repeated using the same procedures (Jakes, 2018). The dependability of the study indicates the reliability of the study; dependability refers to the extent to which the findings of a study reflect reality (Yin, 2015). The proper documentation of each step in the research process is crucial to ensure reliability. A researcher must use a systematic approach to data collection, data organization, and data analysis to ensure the study's dependability and minimize potential errors and biases (Bennett, 2017). Researchers must accurately detail the procedures and the outcomes of the study (Jakes, 2018). The interview questions in this study allowed the participants to respond openly and honestly to the questions (see Bennett, 2017). In addition, asking the participants to validate the researcher's understanding of their responses can help ensure the credibility of the data (Abrons, 2018; Bennett, 2017; Yin, 2015). I ensured dependability by performing triangulation and member-checking (see Abrons, 2018; Yin, 2014, 2015).

Validity

The study's transferability, credibility, confirmability, and data saturation indicate the validity of the study (Yin, 2015). I achieved transferability by providing detailed descriptions of the processes applied during the study. The context of the study was

rigorously discussed to allow future researchers to make objective determinations of the study's transferability (see Jakes, 2018). However, the transferability of a study is ultimately decided by its reader (Bennett, 2017). I ensured credibility by including rich descriptions of the different cases of the study without compromising the participants' confidential information. A researcher can ensure the accuracy of the data and eliminate any potential errors by providing rich descriptions of the cases and allowing the participants to member-check their respective data (Bennett, 2017). I applied the methodological triangulation of the interview data and the data from the observations of the participants' social media sites to enhance the validity of the study. Methodological triangulation involves the triangulation of data from multiple data collection methods to enhance the validity and reliability of the data analysis (Abrons, 2018; Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018; Joslin & Müller, 2016).

Confirmability in qualitative research pertains to the extent to which others can confirm the credibility, readability, and objectivity of the study's findings (Jakes, 2018). Confirmability refers to the exactness of the data; thus, confirmability was ensured by enhancing the accuracy of the data through member checking. A researcher must also be mindful and aware of any potentially biased interpretation throughout the research process (Abrons, 2018). I achieved data saturation by systematically conducting the interview. A researcher has reached data saturation when no new data are uncovered from additional interviews, which is an important measure of validity (Abrons, 2018; Bennett, 2017; Jakes, 2018). Thus, I followed an interview guide, which consisted of the same

open-ended interview questions about the topic of interest. I interviewed the participants until no new themes emerge from the resulting data.

Transition and Summary

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies that successful small business owners developed and implemented to increase their sales and revenue effectively. The data collection and analysis procedures of the study allowed me to explore the effective social media marketing strategies of small business owners. In this section, I detailed the data collection, organization, and analysis techniques applied to achieve the goals of the study. I also highlighted the population and sample for the study. Small business owners can use the results of this study to develop the appropriate strategies to benefit from social media marketing. This section was focused on the plan and implementation details of the study, its limitations, and the counterstrategies to ensure the reliability and validity of the study's findings. The following section details the findings of the research, the application to practice, implications for social change, and recommendations for future studies in the area.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies that successful small business owners developed and implemented to increase their sales and revenue effectively. Social media is important for small businesses owners who lack the resources to market their services or products through expensive alternative means (Balan & Rege, 2017). However, findings show that only 26% of small businesses use social media strategies effectively enough to reach their potential customers (Bennett, 2017).

Failure to incorporate social media strategies as part of formal marketing plans may result in the decline of brand awareness and market share of small businesses (Tafesse & Wien, 2017). Conversely, when customers use brands to connect companies through social media channels, they enjoy higher loyalty from their customers and increase the likelihood of influencing customer conversion rates to their favor (Iblasi et al., 2016). Following this train of thought, the general business problem was that the lack of effective social media strategies can negatively affect small business owners. For that reason, I interviewed six successful small business owners to understand which social media marketing strategies have been proven to be successful. The specific research question was: “What social media marketing strategies do successful small business owners use to effectively increase their sales and revenue?”

To provide an answer to this question, I analyzed semistructured interviews with six successful small business owners according to Yin’s (2014) multiple case study

guidelines. These guidelines include the recommended inclusion of three to five cases (Yin, 2014). The multiple case study approach was chosen as it allows the researcher the study the topic within and across different cases. The differences and similarities of cases can contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon (Gustafsson, 2017; Ridder, 2017).

I used field notes and a thorough analysis of the website content of each participant's business as a means for triangulation and further theme development. The analysis led to the development of four main themes (a) factors leading to positive decision-making regarding social media marketing, (b) social media marketing strategies, (c) assessment strategies for efficacy, and (d) perceived barriers. The first theme referred to factors that participants believed would lead to positive decision-making regarding social media marketing and included (a) having knowledge of or the intent to learn more about social media marketing, and (b) the importance of recognizing that social media marketing is necessary. The first was related to the importance of having knowledge about social media and to a certain extent knowledge about how to implement social media as a marketing strategy. Participants believed that the extent of knowledge a leader has about social media would impact decision making regarding whether or not to implement and invest in social media marketing strategies. The latter was related to ideas about the importance of believing in and valuing social media as an effective and useful marketing tool. In this regard, participants valued social media as a marketing tool because social media was considered a cost-effective tool that allowed for easy access to a wide population and would significantly contribute to a company's ability to create a competitive advantage and remain a relevant market player.

In a second theme, participants highlighted the different social media marketing strategies they applied. These strategies included (a) outsourcing responsibilities, (b) creating engaging content, (c) engaging and involving employees, (d) knowing your target population, and (e) engaging in partnerships. A third theme covered the different ways through which success and efficacy is measured by small businesses. Concerning this theme, participants mentioned five different assessment strategies: (a) likes, views, and followers, (b) regular evaluations, (c) comparisons with similar companies, (d) client feedback, and (e) other. Last, I derived the fourth theme from statements related to perceived barriers and struggles, which I then divided into four subthemes: (a) learning about social media is time-consuming, (b) adaptation never stops, (c) financial loss and investment, and (d) slow and invisible progress.

In the presentation of the findings, the results connect the findings to the framework and the existing body of literature. Next, I will discuss the application of results to professional practice, the implications of the study results for social change, and the recommendations that can be made for action and future research. The section closes with a section about the researcher's reflections and a conclusion which briefly recounts the study purpose, problem statement, study results, and implications and recommendations.

Presentation of Findings

In this study, I explored the social media marketing strategies that successful small business owners developed and implemented to increase their sales and revenue effectively. To understand better the strategies such businesses apply, I interviewed six

leaders of successful small business owners in Honolulu, Hawaii by means of a face-to-face, semistructured, in-depth interview protocol. I used seven open-ended questions to explore and analyze the participants' use of social media marketing. I conducted all interviews between November 11, 2019 and November 15, 2019.

Table 1 provides information on the participants' key demographics. The six participants in this study were all small business owners in Honolulu, Hawaii. I collected information about the participants' demographic data and background information of each small business from the company websites and social media pages. The participants consisted of both male and female genders between the ages of 30 to 56. All six participants were small business owners in Honolulu, Hawaii, with less than 50 employees. Each participant had at least 1 year of experience in developing and implementing social media marketing strategies for their respective companies. All participants posted at least twice per week on social media pages and engaged with their customers by applying strategies, such as holding contests or posting fun content.

Table 1

Demographics

Code name	Gender	Age	Years of existence	Role
P1	F	38	8	Owner
P2	M	48	25	Owner
P3	F	56	26	Owner
P4	M	42	4	Owner
P5	F	56	35	Owner
P6	F	46	20	Co-Owner

I used a mobile recording device to record the interviews. Then, each interview was transcribed verbatim. After each interview, I conducted member checking by

drafting a one- to two-page summary of each interview, along with the transcribed interviews, and emailed those to the participant. I followed up with a phone call to ensure that I captured all of the interview answers accurately. All six participants replied to my email stating that I had interpreted the information from the interviews accurately. There was no new information received by the participants in the member-checking process.

Once participants had confirmed the accuracy of the data, the interviews were uploaded in Nvivo12, a qualitative analysis software. I subsequently analyzed the data using Yin's (2014) guidelines. These guidelines included (a) reviewing the collected data, (b) organizing the data, (c) coding the data, and (d) developing themes to draw inferences and conclusions. I used field notes and website contents as additional data sources to make triangulation possible. I uploaded the field notes in Nvivo12 and applied the same coding process as I did for the interviews. This process ensured that field notes were included in the theme and subtheme development.

The analysis of all data sources advanced four main themes: (a) factors leading to positive decision-making regarding social media marketing, (b) social media marketing strategies, (c) assessment strategies for efficacy, and (d) perceived barriers. I developed these themes in alignment with the different stages of adoption as presented by the DOI theory by Rogers (2003). Knowledge is the first stage and pertains to when a decision-maker becomes aware of innovation. Second, persuasion focuses on the attitude developed by a decision-maker towards innovation based on how he/she perceives its features as either favorable or unfavorable. Third, decision pertains to when a decision-maker adopts or rejects the technology. The fourth stage is implementation, which is

when the decision-maker puts innovation in place. Last, the confirmation stage is when a decision-maker reflects on continuing or discontinuing the use of the innovation (Burgess et al., 2017).

In the following sections, the four themes are explained in detail and linked to previous literature as well as the DOI theory—the theoretical framework of this study. Direct participant quotes are used to support claims, and frequency tables are used to represent the importance of key findings.

Factors Leading to Positive Decision-Making Regarding Social Media Marketing

The first theme related to factors that participants believed would lead to positive decision-making regarding social media marketing. Before discussing the various social media strategies and barriers that small business leaders apply and perceive, I must create an in-depth understanding of the factors that may lead to a positive decision in terms of whether a leader of business will adopt social media marketing strategies. In this regard, participants highlighted (a) having knowledge of or the intent to learn more about social media marketing and (b) the importance of recognizing that social media marketing is necessary. Similarly, previous studies have shown the importance of business owners' knowledge and opinions about social media (e.g., Alford & Page, 2015; Alshamaila, 2018). Statements made about factors that contributed to positive decision-making regarding social media marketing resulted in the development of two subthemes: (a) knowledge about social media, and (b) beliefs and perceived value of social media. These subthemes are further explored in the following subsections, and these subthemes are supported with direct participant quotes. Additionally, a thorough explanation is provided

regarding how these subthemes are linked to existing literature and the theoretical framework of this study. Table 2 indicates the respective relevance.

Table 2

Factors Leading to Positive Decision-Making Regarding Social Media Marketing

Subtheme/key finding	Participant code	Percentage (%; <i>n</i> = 6)	Frequency
Knowledge about social media	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5	83.3%	11
Beliefs and perceived value of social media	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6	100%	25
Easy way to reach people	P2, P5, P6	50%	3
Cost-effectiveness	P2, P3, P5	50%	5
Staying relevant	P1, P3, P4	50%	8

Knowledge about social media. A first subtheme related to the importance of knowing social media and—to a certain extent—knowledge about how to implement social media as a marketing strategy. In this regard, five participants (83.3%) believed that the extent of knowledge a leader had about social media would impact decision making regarding whether to implement and invest in social media marketing strategies. For example, P3 stated, “Whatever the strategy is that I learned, I’ve tried to implement it.” However, this participant also recognized, “There’s so much more for me to learn.” This statement indicated that knowing certain strategies is the first important step toward its adoption and implementation.

In alignment with the previous, Alshamaila (2018) found that proper knowledge about the usefulness of social media as a marketing tool and specific strategies that can be implemented will likely result in positive decision making in terms of its implementation as a marketing strategy. Thus, having proper knowledge is key. P1 highlighted this finding: “For somebody who knows what they are doing, they could

move further and further.” This statement indicated that knowledge is power. In alignment with this statement, Alford and Page (2015) added that even when small business owners’ desires to implement social media marketing strategies, a lack of knowledge about social media can withhold them from pursuing such opportunities. Moreover, regarding knowledge, the findings indicated there is a learning curve; thus, individuals could improve their knowledge if they would want to do so.

Concerning where such knowledge was obtained, two participants (33.3%) stated that they would speak to individuals whom they believed would have the ability to provide relevant knowledge. For instance, P5 stated, “I mean honestly our generation is not using but the new generation is on social media, so I try to talk to them a lot and see what intrigues them and you know cause that’s your audience.” All the aforementioned statements also align with the first step in the DOI theory by Rogers (2003), which posits that knowledge pertains to when a decision-maker becomes aware of innovation—in this context, social media marketing strategies.

Beliefs and perceived value of social media. A second subtheme related to ideas about the importance of believing in and valuing social media as an effective and useful marketing tool. All six participants (100%) agreed on the significance of social media marketing. For example, P4 highlighted, “Social media is key to the successful promotion for both our brokerage and on a micro-scale for our agents’ individual businesses.” In addition, P6 added, “It’s been really wonderful for our company and has helped us to grow.” Similarly, P2 strongly believed that social media marketing had gotten him to the point where no other forms of traditional marketing were needed. These statements

indicated the perceived value and power of social media marketing, as highlighted by previous scholars. For example, Alshamaila (2018) emphasized that leaders must value social media because their beliefs carry weight throughout the structure of the organization as employees respect the opinions of owners and management regarding the development of organizational strategies, programs, and overall business decisions. Consequently, disbelief about the usefulness of social media may result in negative decisions regarding whether to invest in social media marketing.

Participants highlighted various reasons for valuing social media marketing. Three participants (50%) emphasized social media as an effective tool to reach a large number of people in a relatively easy way. For instance, P6 gave the opinion, “Social media is really important to any business [because] it’s a new form of advertising and marketing.” Similarly, P5 stated, “Social media is the new wave of marketing,” and “There’s a lot of generations that use social media so it’s important to use social media now.” These statements indicated the perceived power of social media as a means to advertise and promote a product, as aligned with findings from Rahbi (2017) and Shabbir et al. (2016). According to Rahbi (2017), all types of organizations, regardless of nature or size, have realized the importance of social media adoption in various areas such as promotion, branding, advertisement, market research, and product development. Shabbir et al. (2016) added that social media applications have become the most efficient tool for small business entrepreneurs to advertise their products and given the proper approach, small businesses can better reach and build long-term relationships with their target customers. Moreover, the statements indicated that social media is a part of the younger

generations' lives and that social media marketing has the potential to reach a lot of people easily and conveniently. P5 and P6 highlighted this idea, who respectively stated, "It will hit so many people," and "It's a great way to get your business out there." P2 made an important addition: "You have such a big swath of people that you know you can be exposed to and especially if they start sharing what your putting out it's like a trickle effect." This statement indicated the high value of social media as a way to expose many individuals to your content. In consistency with this finding, Iblasi et al. (2016) and Lin et al. (2016) found that consumers would invest significant time into social media usage. Lin et al. (2016) found that young adults invest more than one hour per day on social media sites with an average of 30 social media sites visited each week, indicating their high activity on social media. Thus, using social media marketing strategies may reach indeed easily reach a large crowd, as shown in the interviews.

Three participants (50%) mentioned a second advantage of the use of social media: cost-effectiveness. P3 explained the following:

When we first started this, I would always say, it's free. You can't beat that price.

(...). Why would I spend money on print advertising, or even tv advertising which is astronomically expensive when I can do a better job online for free.

The previous statement aligned with existing literature, as others have similarly suggested that social media, such as Facebook, were an available and cost-effective option that would promote the success of small businesses (see Bandyopadhyay, 2016; Bennett, 2017; Hassan et al., 2015; Yan & Musika, 2018). More concrete, social media

can be regarded as—from a simplistic perspective—a digitalized, electronic, word-of-mouth platform (Dwivedi et al., 2015). Contrariwise, traditional strategies often include high costs, and are therefore less desirable (Todor, 2016), as highlighted by P3 in the previous statement.

Besides cost-effectiveness and the ability to reach many people in a fast manner, the third advantage of social media marketing is its potential to help a business in remaining a relevant market player. Three participants (50%) mentioned this idea. For example, P4 explained, “We use social media (and our agents) in an effort to stay top of mind, differentiate from other brokerages and other agents in the local communities and to depict specialization and niche expertise.” The participant believed, “Simply staying on top of mind opens the doors for relationship building that leads to more business.”

P4 believed that social media posts daily helped her stay relevant and to stay on the top of minds of clients and potential clients. In alignment with the previous comment, Balan and Rege (2017) concluded that small business owners who implement social media marketing strategies have a substantial growth advantage over competitors that do not use social media opportunities. The reason for this advantage is that the growth of social media use is continuously increasing, and through social media marketing, leaders of companies may reach more people in a relatively easy way. Moreover, as shipping and communication capacities advance, opportunities for internationally-based customers and a foothold in countries of interest contribute to the competitive nature among companies that offer similar goods and services (Ren et al., 2015). Hence, owners of small

businesses must adopt social media marketing strategies to remain competitive and relevant. P3 added the following:

We have to be in social media marketing for sure. I mean, I think that consumers start their search online. They look at, how do I compare with other insurance companies, how do I compare to other insurance agents, to make their purchasing decision in terms of who they are going to ask for quotes. So, it's super important.

P3 continued and further added the following:

Especially the new generation of people, (...) the younger generation for sure are going online and that is where they are shopping, so to stay relevant, and I would say, be part of the noise, you know the advertising and the marketing noise, I have to be part of that social media marketing.

P1 made a similar comment and added the following:

I think that it is important to stay with the young kids and stay current with what's happening so I've got to move over to Instagram and I've got to move over to all the other social media things that they are using that I probably have no idea about.

In summary, social media were regarded as tools that provided significant advantages to more traditional strategies such as newspapers and television. This finding aligned with the DOI theory as the theory highlighted that one essential attribute of innovation—is that innovation must provide a relevant advantage or in this context a marketing strategy (Rogers, 2003).

Social Media Marketing Strategies

A second theme related to the different social media marketing strategies that participants suggested to use. In this regard, participants raised five subthemes or strategies: (a) outsourcing responsibilities, (b) creating engaging content, (c) engaging and involving employees, (d) knowing your target population, and (e) engaging in partnerships. These strategies are explained in the following sections. Direct participant quotes are used to support claims, and scientific literature, as well as the DOI theory, are used to draw similarities and differences between the findings of this study and findings from previous studies. Table 3 demonstrates the importance of each strategy. Note that some participants mentioned multiple strategies.

Table 3

Social Media Marketing Strategies

Subtheme/key finding	Participant code	Percentage (%; <i>n</i> = 6)	Frequency
Outsourcing responsibilities	P1, P3, P4, P5, P6	83.3%	28
Creating engaging content	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6	100%	27
Engaging and involving employees	P2, P5	33.3%	2
Knowing your target population	P2	16.7%	2
Engaging in partnerships	P5	16.7%	4

Outsourcing responsibilities. A first subtheme related to outsourcing the responsibility of social media marketing to others. Five participants (86.7%) mentioned the subtheme who hired one or more individuals to handle the social media marketing side of the business. For example, P1 hired an Instagram knowledgeable person to aid in social media marketing: “I have a guy that kind of put my ad out there.” This participant added that he did not have the time to deal with social media marketing himself.

P5 made another statement: “I have a social media manager to take control of that.” This participant lacked knowledge about social media and would rather rely on someone who specialized in this field: “She’s pretty knowledgeable. (...) She’s there posting and she comes around and she has ideas too, so it helps.” In addition, P6 similarly relied on her younger employees as they were more knowledgeable in social media and made beautiful posts:

We have several of our employees taking videos and pictures. They do a fantastic job and they make the food look so delicious. And so, they’re really awesome! You know, the videos and pictures that they’ve done, they are incredibly talented. I think that they’ve increased our reach and just the way that the company presents ourselves because their pictures and videos are so good, they make the company look like, their food pictures look even better than what the food tastes like. (laughter). They are very talented. They are so talented.

P3 made a similar comment, and she relied mostly on her millennial employees for updating her on anything new happening on social media, as well as updating her on her Facebook and Instagram pages. She explained that her younger employees were more comfortable with social media than she was, hence why she outsourced this responsibility to them: “I trust that they’re understanding it better than I am so and it keeps them engaged and involved (...) And they’re much more relevant in that space than I am.”

This participant continued and added that she mainly relied on her employees “because the barriers are me.” She explained, “The knowledge that I don’t have, I’m going to acquire it either by hiring young people, or by hiring a company that I can

consult with at least and pay them for their strategies.” However, the participant used this strategy only as a temporary solution until she could handle her social media marketing herself:

It’s going to take time for me to understand, how do I optimize search engine, how do I... what are the strategies for search engine optimization? I can know that, but for me to work on that continuously (...) if I can consult with someone who could tell me and then help me with that for like a year or so, to just kind of get going on it.

P3 stated that it was not because she had employees to deal with the social media side of the business that she would not be involved at all. Conversely, she said that she would often touch bases with them and include them in conference calls “because they have compliance things that they have to do.” The participant further explained, “I want to just turn it over to them which I pretty much have, but I have to be a part of it to understand it [*sic*] cause, of course, I pay for whatever it is that they do.” This statement indicated that she did trust her employees but still liked to feel in control and be updated about what is going on. In alignment with the previous comment, allowing others to post certain things and manage the company’s social media pages could be risky, and two participants had specific rules in place to avoid poor online posts. P1 explained the following:

They take pictures on their own and they post it on their own social media. However, I’m pretty strict about them not tagging us because I want my pictures to look like the best, you know. I critique everything, so I just want a certain

image to be out there, so I don't want them taking a picture and having something bad in the background and then posting it and tagging us. That would not be good.

P3 emphasized the importance of employees adjusting the wordings of the posts so that the post would better reflect her voice:

They would post certain things, and it wasn't my voice. So, it was their voice and you could tell (...) because it's on my Facebook page, it's just not my voice. So, it has to, it's just important to me that if I'm going to post something, it's in my voice.

However, P3 appreciated his employees' efforts but wanted them to change their wordings in the future:

I know the first couple of postings I kind of cringed but I appreciated that they were enthusiastic about it and as long as they were compliant and all of that stuff then but then that's when I had to say but that's not my voice and I had to say think about it, when you read it, that's not my voice.

This statement indicated the importance of posting high-quality content. In alignment with this finding, Hudson et al. (2016) warned that a company's brand and image may suffer by introducing poorly designed strategies, and those poor strategies should be avoided. Similarly, social media realists point to slow transitions in useful integration, concerns over cyber and digital security, fragmented information, potential information overload, worries of system control and accountability, and the potential for adopted technology to become outdated quickly (Cardon & Marshall, 2015).

Creating engaging content. A second strategy implied the creation of engaging, fun, and informative content. In this regard, five participants (83.3%) named various types of content. Three participants (50%) mentioned interactive content, two others (33.3%) mentioned fun posts, and another two participants (33.3%) used informative content. Of all six participants, three (50%) used traditional strategies, such as posters and newspaper ads. Table 4 provides an overview of which participant mentioned which type of content.

Table 4

Creating Engaging Content

Subtheme/key finding	Participant code	Percentage (%; $n = 6$)	Frequency
Interactive content	P1, P5, P6	50%	9
Fun posts	P3, P5	33.3%	5
Informative content	P2, P6	33.3%	3
Traditional strategies	P1, P4, P5	50%	4

Three participants (50%) mentioned frequently using interactive posts, referring to posts that would require consumers to make a certain action to win something. For example, P1 would frequently run contests and giveaways, while posting contests on Instagram and Facebook boosted their sales and bookings by 50%:

If we do giveaways and it could be something really small, like a tiara, people like things for free so, those tend to work a little bit better than just regular ads. And of course, if we do like free things, like if we're out and about in the public, people will like those things and share them so, those go over really well. I like to have at least one contest running per month.

Similarly, P5 recalled that after posting contests on his Instagram page, his place of business was jammed with customers for a few weeks: “Last year we did the gift baskets during Christmas and we had a lot of exposure from that.” Lastly, P6 shared a positive experience by offering a discount to consumers:

We did for a period of time, a Tuesday special. And you know, Tuesday was generally the slowest day of the week for us. So, we wanted to increase sales on Tuesdays. So, we started doing the XXX Tuesday special. And it was buy one get one free. Or, you know, spend \$10, get a free Pepsi drink. (...) Just putting it out there on social media was really, really awesome. So, I think social media is really important.

All the aforementioned statements indicated that running contests and giving gift baskets could significantly increase sales and gain more customers. In alignment with this finding, Bandyopadhyay (2016) similarly highlighted that customer engagement through an interactive platform such as social media is a necessity to the success, and sometimes survival, of small businesses.

The second type of content referred to fun posts, mainly referring to posting content showing what employees were up to. Two participants (33.3%) mentioned the usefulness of fun posts. P5 exemplified the following:

We just had like national noodle day, and we posted like a small funny sketch eating noodles over here and stuff like that. So, I think what we’re trying to do is more fun videos, trying to get, so next year, we’re going to start getting our

employees to do more and doing more interactive videos. As long as they participate.

P3 made a similar comment and added the following:

I took the team out for lunch, for example, and you know me, I'm digging in and he's like taking pictures of food, and posting and people bring you know stuff in, like banana bread (laughs) I'll forget to take a picture and thank the customer, but he will remember. So, I think going forward, you know, having somebody that is on top of that, on top of mind, like how can we use this interaction and post to show what's going on.

These statements indicated that including employees in posts might have a positive effect as they might evoke positive emotions. The third type of content referred to informative posts. Two participants (33.3%) mentioned this type of content stated that the main goal of such posts was to provide consumers information about what the company does and offers. For example, P2 would post videos on YouTube and Facebook so that clients could see what he did and contact him through his Facebook account. P6 gave another example:

I think Instagram pictures has brought in a lot of customers. Um because they follow us, and they see the pictures, and they want to eat it, then they will come in and um, I think that's the most effective.

Although participants mostly relied on social media, three (50%) used traditional strategies, such as flyers and emails. For example, P1 sometimes used print media to hand out at trade shows, but P1 still mostly relied on Instagram and Facebook for

marketing. Similarly, P4 regularly used traditional content, such as emails, but P4 predominantly relied on social media marketing to advertise the company. P5 aimed “to use different marketing strategies” and “to think outside the box,” referring to being creative and using a blend of different marketing strategies, both virtual and traditional. Concerning traditional methods, he elucidated the following:

We do direct mail but with ValPak. So that’s why, we tested that out for a while, and I think that the people still come in with it so that means that it’s working. So, it took like maybe 5 coupons to make it work so we’ve been getting a lot of people coming in using that so just to try the place. So, um that works. We did newspaper in the past... I think it’s a good start to showcase your business but after a while I don’t know it’s going to help us too much. (...) We haven’t done commercials yet; I think that will be the next thing that we will probably do. (...) We haven’t done radio yet because it’s too expensive.

Lastly, P1 reported interest in using multiple strategies, although he was not using any other platform than Facebook for now:

I’m open to exploring different social media platforms to advertise that way, pretty much, I only use Facebook, not even Instagram, I’ve never posted anything on Instagram so it’s the only thing I’m using that for is for the people that see us already. Um so I’d like to get out there and explore what people that age, those people those ages are using and get it going.

His statement showed the usefulness of using multiple platforms, especially as there is a continuous development of new social media platforms.

Engaging and involving employees. A third subtheme or strategy was the direct involvement of employees in their social media content. Two participants (33.3%) mentioned this strategy and reported different ways to apply this strategy. For instance, P2 raised the value of employees sharing the content posted by the business, as sharing such content would increase the likelihood of reaching more people. P2 explained the following:

The best thing they can do as an employee is just to share stuff on their line like a spider web. So, like if they are really excited about the business, which I hope they would be, then they should be excited enough to you know, spread the word.

P5 raised another strategy and stated that directly involving employees in posts was useful:

We did a Christmas video with all the employees singing *12 Days of Christmas*. That was good and there was good reaction on it. I noticed that the more videos there are where employees with on us, we get more views versus just showing pictures of our food and stuff.

This statement thus suggested that posting content in which employees are visible would have a stronger and more positive effect than posting more emotionless content.

Knowing your target population. A fourth strategy included knowing the target population. Only P2 (16.7%) mentioned this strategy: “I think the most effective one is to pinpoint what your product is and then you want to gear toward the demographic.” In addition, P2 explained to use other platforms, such as Marketplace, as a reference to see what type of people are interested in certain products:

If you go to for instance Marketplace, if you go to Marketplace and you look at like what people are selling, like they're like if you go to Marketplace and you see people selling like a lot of kids stuff, or a lot of say car stuff, depending on what your business is, you can go and look up those people, and look at what other people have commented on look at what people have commented under those people and you can send stuff to those people and that's free.

In alignment with the previous statement, Srinivasan et al. (2016) highlighted that some benefits available through social media networking include the capacity for real-time data collection on market trends and using tools that observe purchasing trends. Moreover, Shabbir et al. (2016) added that social media applications have become the most efficient tool for small business entrepreneurs to, given the proper approach, better reach and build long-term relationships with their target customers. Hence, knowing the target population is important for social media marketing, as well as for company growth and success.

Engaging in partnerships. A fifth and last strategy involved engaging in partnerships. Only P5 (16.7%) mentioned this strategy. His participant explained that through engaging in partnerships, owners can increase their brand recognition, thus gaining new customers. He explained: "We also did a video with um I guess you could say a popular comedy sketch person on social media that has a lot of followers. So, because they have a lot of followers, they saw us." This statement indicated that partnerships with artists and brands that already have a lot of name recognition can significantly contribute to a small business's growth. Besides the aforementioned, Huang

et al. (2018) highlighted that partnerships with artists or other well-known companies may have another advantage; such partnerships may create memorable experiences for the customer. By promoting those experiences through social media, marketing strategies would create an opportunity to promote brand awareness and loyalty (Huang et al., 2018).

Assessment Strategies for Efficacy

Statements relating to different tools and strategies to assess efficacy and company growth led to the third theme. In this respect, all six participants (100%) mentioned different assessment strategies, including (a) likes, views, and followers; (b) comparisons to previous months/years; (c) comparisons with similar companies; (d) client feedback; and (e) other. These strategies are explored in the following subsection as supported with direct participant quotes. Table 5 provides an overview of the particular relevance.

Table 5

Assessment Strategies for Efficacy

Subtheme/key finding	Participant code	Percentage (%; $n = 6$)	Frequency
Likes, views, and followers	P1, P3, P4, P5	66.7%	7
Comparisons to previous months/years	P1, P2, P6	50%	4
Comparisons with similar companies	P1, P3	33.3%	6
Client feedback	P3, P6	33.3%	2
Other	P4, P5	33.3%	3

Likes, views, and followers. A first assessment strategy referred to basing success on the number of likes, views, and followers a business had. Four participants (66.7%) mentioned this subtheme. For instance, P5 said the following:

Performance would be based on views and likes (...). If you have people or have more views and friends and followers, then you know something is working. So, our social media manager will let us know, “Oh, this is how many more people are following us around.”

P5 also added, “If you don’t have enough followers, um, I think that that is probably the biggest challenge because the less followers you have, that means less marketing.” His statement indicated the importance of likes, views, and followers, as had been highlighted by other scholars; for example, Aichner and Jacob (2015) and Scuotto et al. (2017) explained that small business leaders would use many metrics to determine their success, including the number of site visits, page views, tags, site specifics such as likes, the number of members, the list of members, friends or fans, consumer impressions, incoming links, time spent on site by visitors, and impressions-to-interactions ratios.

Comparison to previous months/years. A second assessment strategy included executing regular evaluations and comparing results to previous months or years. Three participants (50%) mentioned this method. For example, P2 explained the following:

I guess the only way that you can pretty much gauge your return on investment is by if you check gauge like when you started, like really pushing social media and seeing if you’re you know if your income has gone up you’re, you’re bottom line has gone up. For like say if you’re gonna try out, so, let’s just throw like an extra \$700 dollars whatever it is that social media, and let’s just go from October say

like to February and then let's put that, gauge that what we made then compared to the previous years, and then you can kinda see if it made a difference.

Similarly, P6 explained the following:

We would monitor the sales, so we would crosscheck the sales from last year to this year, on that specific Tuesday. We also did um you know we monitored the sales on that prior Tuesday, and noticed the increase in sales on Tuesday.

Comparisons with other companies. A third strategy referred to the comparison of one's success to that of other companies who offer similar services or sell similar goods. Two participants (33.3%) mentioned this strategy. P1 explained, "Some of our ads perform better than other companies just because of, you know, what we do." Similarly, P3 explained the following:

I think we're getting better at it. I think we've been sort of I think we are just basically skimming the surface. Maybe I'm doing better than some of my other counterparts are? We had this long (...) conversation about hashtags, and so some of the people that I was with, we had a women's study group, we had gone on a trip, and some of them were like I don't, at least I understood what the hashtag was. And I swear it took like twenty mins for one of my other counterparts to understand.

Although this participant evaluated his business performance better than that of his competitors, he stated, "We got to do a better job." He explained the following:

I haven't been consistent about measuring certain social media strategies, but we do know that people will say that oh we saw your positive reviews online, things

like that. So, we know that they're shopping, and we know that they're looking at that. Um hopefully going forward we have tools, you know we have better tools, to measure those things. So, when the leads come in and we asking that question, and maybe putting it someplace that measures that so we can print out reports right. You know, where are most of our leads coming from? Where are they finding us? What sites are they looking at? Got to do a better job of that.

Client feedback. A fourth assessment strategy referred to client feedback. Two participants (33.3%) mentioned this assessment strategy. In this regard, both participants mentioned that taking into account client feedback—both positive and negative feedback—would help them to assess their effectiveness, and would help them to improve their marketing and business strategies. For instance, P6 said, “Whatever responses we get, we try to improve our company by that feedback.” In direct alignment with this finding, Srinivasan et al. (2016) emphasized that the direct and indirect integration of customer feedback into the development and promotion of products and services is important. Similarly, Pilgrimene et al. (2015) noted that consumer feedback provides businesses with value regarding advancement or redesign needs regarding product development and can significantly contribute to the growth and success eventually. By asking clients for feedback, owners will have an idea of the clients' experience with the business, and this information is important because happy clients will often be more likely to repeat purchase items (Pilgrimene et al., 2015).

Other. The last group of assessment strategies included strategies that did not belong to the previous groups. For example, P4 emphasized using Google analytics as a tool, and explained the following:

At the moment, we are putting together a more formalized plan to measure social KPIs against the different metrics we can extract from social media (follows, likes, and other types of engagement). We use Facebook and Instagram insights as well as Google Analytics (to follow traffic from social media to our website) to track metrics, but it is always hard to draw a direct line from social media into financial ROI. Because of this, we are trying to draw our KPIs that encourage website traffic and lead capturing from our website.

P5 raised a different strategy: “Some of these contests include giving the server a code before receiving the discount on their bill, thus they are able to measure the value of posting on Instagram.

Perceived Barriers

A fourth and last theme related to the barriers and struggles that participants experienced regarding social media marketing strategies. In this regard, participants mentioned four barriers: (a) learning about social media is time-consuming, (b) adaptation never stops, (c) financial loss and investment, and (d) slow and invisible progress. These barriers are explored in the following sections and are supported with direct participant quotes. Table 6 shows the relevance of each barrier.

Table 6

Perceived Barriers

Subtheme/key finding	Participant code	Percentage (%; <i>n</i> = 6)	Frequency
Learning about social media is time-consuming	P1, P3, P4, P6	66.7%	5
Adaptation never stops	P2, P3, P4	50%	3
Financial loss and investment	P1, P2, P5	50%	6
Slow and invisible progress	P3	16.7%	1

Learning about social media is time-consuming. A first barrier referred to the idea that having to learn about social media marketing strategies is a time-consuming process. Four participants (66.7%) mentioned this barrier. For instance, P1 explained, “I’ve tried to learn things on my own, but there’s only so much I can do so in a day.” This statement indicated that staying on top of the ever-changing innovations was a time-consuming process and something. Similarly, P4 opined that it took too much time and effort for her to stay on top of her social media marketing. These participants mentioned that they would leverage this barrier by hiring people who would specifically deal with the social media marketing side of the business.

Adaptation never stops. A second barrier referred to adaptation as being endless. Three participants (50%) found the need for continuous adaptation to be a barrier. These participants stated that society and business strategies were constantly evolving, thereby making continuous adaptation to the latest innovations imperative. However, participants perceived this necessity of continuously having to remain updated on the latest innovations as stressful and often a difficult task. P2 explained, “The key barriers is probably pretty much just trying to keep up with the way it’s changing. (...) and trying to

learn everything new. (...) it's always constantly changing." Similarly, P3 explained, "As soon as you think you got it, things will change." Both these participants added that for this reason, they would rather hire someone who would be specifically assigned to taking care of social media marketing. P2 explained, "If you could have someone who could stay on top of that and could master that, you know just that, it would probably be more beneficial actually." Similarly, P3 found, "I think you do have to outsource it, because I'm a small business and I can't know it all."

Financial loss and investment. A third barrier referred to the financial cost of investing in social media marketing. Although participants mentioned that social media marketing was a cost-effective way of marketing, three participants (50%) did mention that social media marketing also comes with a certain financial cost. For example, P1 shared his experience with having spent a lot of money on boosting advertisements with an undesirable result:

I've thrown a lot of money down the tubes for sure. (...) They say your audience is smaller because you've got too much too many words in the video or there's a fake play button on something and it limits the people that can see things on your ad. So, I've wasted a lot of money on that because I don't quite understand that, why that is cause I feel like I see it every day on other company's advertisements and they have plenty of words on their videos but for some reason I get bonked on that. So, I put a hundred dollars to get this ad out there and then the time runs through and I've spent the hundred dollars but only like 20 people have seen the ads.

This statement indicated that money spent on boosting social media marketing was not always well-spent money; thus, social media marketing would always reflect a gamble. P1 elucidated, “A lot of them succeed on their own, with me just like ‘click,’ let’s put some money on this and let’s see if people share it, (...) let’s see if that works.” In addition to the previous, this participant also shared his frustration with Yelp, a company that boosts social media content:

I feel like Yelp is kind of screwy, like, they call me literally every day and it’s so expensive and right now we’re doing like four hundred bucks a month or something just on this one ad, and they kind of threaten you, like oh well your other company your other competition is up here and they are going to get seen way more than you so it’s kind of scheisty.

This statement indicated that not being able to manage a social media marketing strategy independently could be frustrating. Not managing social media marketing meant financial investment issues might occur.

P2 mentioned a different cost-related barrier, namely the requirement of investing in tools to detect company growth and progress. The participant explained that if a person wants to “measure your performance, I think you would need to spend extra to get the analytics on that right to see what demographics you’re hitting and if you’re going to really micromanage that whole situation.”

Slow and invisible progress. P3 (16.7%) mentioned a last barrier that related to the slow and often invisible progress and effect of social media strategies: “I think it’s a challenge to be like, I’m doing all of this but I’m not really seeing results. From a time

standpoint, from an expense standpoint, right?” In alignment with this statement, Rogers (2003) highlighted that an essential attribute of innovation—in this context, a marketing strategy—is that the difference innovation makes must be observable. P3 found the direct visibility of social marketing strategies to be often missing and as a result felt frustrated. However, P3 added, “As long as we know that it is a long-term commitment, and a long-term process of exposure, and just getting your name out there, and if we understand that then I think we’re going to be okay.”

Increased Revenue

As the research question of this study stated, the basis of this study is to ascertain knowledge from small business owners who had successfully increased sales and revenue by implementing social media marketing strategies. Many of the participants that I interviewed, expressed the increase of sales and revenue by the various means of measurement they had incorporated to address this increase. P2 stated that he invested some money to get the right tools to analyze the growth of sales and revenue after using social media marketing. He said that he measured the growth through a six-month period, after investing in his social media marketing, to calculate the increase of sales. Then he also used the analytical tool to gauge the growth from the previous year, which he described as a substantial growth in sales and revenue attributed to the use and implementation of social media marketing. P3 also attributed the growth in sales and revenue to the use of a tracking tool bought after her company started using social media marketing tools. This correlates the idea that the use of social media marketing tools initiated in small businesses may lead to success in the increase of sales and revenue.

Application to Professional Practice

Small business owners employ 52% of Americans, however, leaders of small businesses fail at a relatively high rate, which can lead to economic losses and increased unemployment rates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Effective marketing, including social media marketing, is a crucial business skill that small business owners must acquire and develop to ensure their business success (Abrons, 2018). Generally, small business owners use social media strategies to target more engaged customers, develop relationships through online communication, ascertain the performance of their businesses, and improve clients' areas of concern in more efficient ways (Al-Shamaileh, 2018). To gain more insights into these strategies, I interviewed six successful small business owners about their social media marketing strategies and perceived barriers to doing social media marketing. I provided insights into how small business owners successfully developed and implemented social media marketing strategies to increase their sales and revenue.

Organizational leaders who seek to increase brand awareness, lower marketing costs, and increase their customer base may find value from this study. They can use the findings to develop strategies for social media marketing programs and avoid business failure in the future. Additionally, the results of this study may benefit small business owners in Honolulu, Hawaii. Business owners may acquire knowledge on the effective social media strategies to communicate with customers, build brand awareness, and increase profits within the context of their local communities. Small business leaders may

want to implement the following strategies: (a) outsourcing responsibilities, (b) creating engaging content, (c) engaging and involving employees, (d) knowing one's target population, and (e) engaging in partnerships.

A first strategy involves outsourcing responsibilities and referred to the action of hiring specific individuals who will occupy themselves with social media marketing. Participants said that this strategy could be especially beneficial when the business owner has insufficient time to do their social media marketing him or herself and/or does not have the proper knowledge and skills for effectively implementing social media marketing strategies. Considering the significance of social media marketing for small businesses and the importance of posting only high-quality content, small business owners—especially of start-ups—may want to consider hiring a person who has professional experience in social media marketing.

A second strategy is the creation of engaging, fun, and informative content. Concerning such content, participants recommended using a combination of different types of content, including a) engaging content, such as giveaways, contests, and specials; b) fun content, such as funny videos and positive content; and c) informative content, such as photos and videos, of the exact services that a business provides or products that a business sells. Participants highlighted that a combination of both traditional strategies, such as email and flyers, and social media strategies are worth trying, although the emphasis should be on social media marketing.

A third strategy involves including and engaging employees to a higher degree in content. Participants said that this strategy would instigate positive emotions for both

consumers as well as employees. Practical examples included motivating employees to share content through their accounts, motivating employees to participate more in the content, and allowing for photos and videos of them to be posted online.

A fourth strategy is knowing one's target population, which requires one doing proper research about the target population, including gaining knowledge about what they are interested in and how they can be reached most effectively. By having such information, business owners can adjust their marketing techniques to different target populations to maximize customer attraction.

A fifth and last strategy involves engaging in partnerships. In this regard, leaders may want to engage in partnerships with other companies or artists—especially those with many followers and name recognition. The main reason is that by collaborating with other companies, customers who are loyal to the collaborating organization are now introduced to the company and may become potential customers to the business.

Implications for Social Change

I provided a better understanding of effective social media marketing strategies for small businesses. The community in Honolulu, Hawaii may benefit economically from the results of this study by improving the performance of small businesses in the area. The success of small businesses in the community regarding increased revenue and sales may lead to increased employment rates and more disposable income spent in the area. Employers may adjust their hiring practices to hire more people with social media background and knowledge, in alignment with the specific strategies that this study outlines. Moreover, this study has the potential to influence the social media adoption of

the local business community, which can facilitate improved communication between the businesses and their consumers (see Abrons, 2018). In conclusion, small business owners may be able to use the findings of this study to help other business owners reach consumers who can efficiently provide necessary feedback to small business owners (see Al-Shamaileh, 2018). The changes can lead to improved products and services, thus benefiting the consumers and their local communities.

Recommendations for Action

I provided useful insights into how the successful implementation of social media marketing strategies could contribute to the sales and revenue of a company. In this section, I provide specific recommendations for action. Primarily, the results indicated that a first step toward the successful social media marketing is for leaders of small businesses to recognize the importance of social media as a marketing strategy and their belief in its usefulness for company growth. As suggested by Alshamaila (2018), the beliefs of leaders carry weight throughout the structure of the organization as employees respect the opinions of owners and management regarding the development of organizational strategies, programs, and overall business decisions. Thus, a first recommended action to take applies to lecturers, trainers, and other individuals involved in training and educating of future and present leaders. Such individuals can put more emphasis on the usefulness and significance of social media as a marketing strategy throughout training sessions and study courses to increase leaders' awareness of the significance of social media marketing.

In alignment with the previous, I recommend for leaders of small businesses to implement the social media strategies discussed in the study in their current marketing strategy. To bring such knowledge over to future and present leaders, trainers and educators can invite successful small business owners to share their experiences with social media marketing. Considering that some participants found speaking with individuals who have more experience with social media marketing to be valuable, inviting relevant individuals to talk about social media marketing during a training session or class may have an increased effect on future and current leaders' opinions and ideas about the adoption of social media as a marketing strategy.

Irrespective of the previous, many participants reported that regardless of their positive perceptions about social media marketing, they lacked personal knowledge of how to implement such strategies. Many said that they heavily relied on their employees and consultants for social media marketing. To bridge this barrier, trainers and educators may not only present theory and organize interactive sessions with experienced leaders but also put this acquired theory into practice, such as by assigning students and training attendees with practical exercises. Leaders can grow confidence in their abilities in terms of social media marketing, and to subsequently become more personally involved in the field of social media marketing.

Concerning the perceived barriers that participants mentioned educators and trainers can provide future and present leaders with the knowledge and tools to overcome or minimize such barriers. With specific reference to the financial barrier, educators and trainers may want to give leaders ideas and knowledge so that they can avoid financial

loss and bad investments. With specific reference to the barriers of adaptation being never-ending and remaining updated about innovations, educators and trainers may want to emphasize the importance of social media and adaptation of innovations during their courses; leaders may feel stimulated to invest the necessary time and efforts in doing their social media marketing.

Recommendations for Future Research

Concerning this study, many recommendations for future research can be made. A first recommendation involves addressing sampling issues. I only focused on successful small businesses located in Honolulu, Hawaii. Thus, the study results only represented perceptions of small business owners based in this region, and perceptions of those working in other regions, states, or countries were not explored. To gain more knowledge on the subject and the particular social media marketing strategies implemented by and barriers perceived by this population, I recommend that future researchers should carry out similar studies in other geographical contexts. Conducting similar studies in other regions may be interesting for the sake of identifying international differences in social media marketing strategies and perceived barriers. Additionally, future researchers can increase the sample size, as I only recruited six individuals for the current study. Further, future researchers can include other populations, such as users of social media. Their perceptions may further contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon under study.

A second recommendation is to incorporate other triangulation methods such as the combination of individual interviews, focus groups, and/or quantitative surveys to

increase the strength and trustworthiness of results. Although I did implement triangulation methods using field notes and website content, other methods (e.g., the aforementioned) may have led to more in-depth knowledge about small business owners' perceptions and use of social media marketing strategies. In alignment with this recommendation, a third recommendation is to make this study quantifiable—referring to the use of quantitative methods, such as surveys. Quantifying the study may make it possible for results to be extended to wider populations and may make it possible for results to be tested for statistical significance, which is a limitation to qualitative studies. Qualitative studies are subject to interpretation; thus, the results of this study may vary pending method, researcher, and data analysis. By quantifying this study, more objective results may be obtained.

Lastly, a fourth recommendation is to adjust the interview protocol and focus more on subjects that were only lightly touched in this study (e.g., the relevance of traditional strategies in modern U.S. society). Further, the results also implied that age plays an important role in social media. Because age and traditional strategies were not the focus on the study, I did not go too much in-depth into these topics; thus, future researchers might want to pay more attention to such ideas. Therefore, future researchers should replicate the study and focus on the aforementioned aspects to get a more in-depth understanding of the social media strategies implemented by and barriers perceived by small business owners.

Reflections

My journey with Walden University pursuing my doctoral degree has been challenging at times, yet fulfilling. When I started this program, I had all intentions of completing my degree in the given time, not knowing how difficult it would be to write in a scholarly tone that seemed foreign to me. I was not ready and completely disillusioned about the time the research would take to complete my study. I have learned so much about writing and myself throughout this journey. I learned about perseverance and humbleness as I received multiple rounds of feedback from my committee. Looking back, as I was struggling to understand how to move forward in my study, I grew as a writer and a person. I will never look back at this journey with regret. Instead, I know that I became a better scholar and a humbled person.

My choice to write about social media marketing strategies was based on my work with my family business, which was dissolved in the early 2000s. I wanted to help small businesses like our small family business to conduct business in a way that involved 21st-century nontraditional marketing. I believe that social media marketing will help small businesses achieve success and enhance financial goals and achieve a competitive advantage.

The small business owners I interviewed provided me with a knowledge base for understanding the social media marketing strategies used by small businesses. The owners were surprisingly open and frank about the strategies that they used. Although I may not be the biggest user of platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, I

gained much-needed knowledge about the business usage of those platforms and the challenges some businesses face within those sites.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies that successful small business owners developed and implemented to increase their sales and revenue effectively. For this study, small businesses are businesses that do not have a high level of resources to develop and implement effective communication and marketing strategies (Bandyopadhyay, 2016). The general business problem was that the lack of effective social media strategies could negatively affect small business owners. For that reason, I uncovered the social media marketing strategies that had been successfully implemented by successful small business owners. To understand better the strategies that such business owners applied, I interviewed six leaders of successful small business owners in Honolulu, Hawaii using a semistructured qualitative in-depth interview protocol. I used field notes and website contents as additional data sources to make triangulation possible. The analysis procedure suggested by Yin (2014) led to the development of four themes: (a) factors leading to positive decision-making regarding social media marketing, (b) social media marketing strategies, (c) assessment strategies for efficacy, and (d) perceived barriers.

The first theme related to factors that participants believed would lead to positive decision-making regarding social media marketing and included (a) having knowledge of or the intent to learn more about social media marketing, and (b) the importance of recognizing that social media marketing is necessary. The first was related to the

importance of knowing social media and—to a certain extent—knowledge about how to implement social media as a marketing strategy. Participants believed that the extent of knowledge a leader had about social media would impact decision making regarding whether or not to implement and invest in social media marketing strategies. The latter was related to ideas about the importance of believing in and valuing social media as an effective and useful marketing tool. In this regard, participants valued social media as a marketing tool because they considered social media as a cost-effective tool that allowed for easy access to a wide population, and they believed that social media would significantly contribute to a company's ability to create a competitive advantage and remain a relevant market player.

In a second theme, participants highlighted the different social media marketing strategies they deployed. These strategies included (a) outsourcing responsibilities, (b) creating engaging content, (c) engaging and involving employees, (d) knowing one's target population, and (e) engaging in partnerships. A third theme covered the different ways through which small businesses measure their success and efficacy. Concerning this theme, participants mentioned five different assessment strategies: (a) likes, views, and followers; (b) regular evaluations; (c) comparisons with similar companies; (d) client feedback; and (e) other. Lastly, participants mentioned four perceived barriers and struggles that led to the development of a fourth theme. These barriers and struggles included (a) learning about social media is time-consuming, (b) adaptation never stops, (c) financial loss and investment, and (d) slow and invisible progress. I thoroughly explored those themes and subthemes, and I discussed recommendations and

implications. In conclusion, I revealed that social media are powerful tools; when implemented and maintained properly, social media may provide business owners with a competitive advantage and many growth opportunities.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

The main research question is: What strategies do successful small business owners use to effectively increase their sales and revenue? In this qualitative multiple-case study, the interview will contain 7 open-ended questions to gain insights from experienced small business owners in Honolulu, Hawaii.

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

Setting place and time for interview: Interviews will take place at an agreed upon location between the researcher and participant.

Explanation of research study: 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 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 accuracy of the transcription.

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

Appendix B: Interview Questions

The following open-ended interview questions were developed in alignment with the main research question:

1. How do you perceive the importance of using social media marketing strategies for business success?
2. How do you measure the performance of your social media marketing strategies?
3. What social media strategies have you found that are most effective for financially benefitting your business?
4. What, if any, strategies did you use to include your employees in your social media initiative and what were the results?
5. What key challenges or barriers of leveraging social media strategies to increase sales did you face?
6. What were your counterstrategies to address the key barriers and challenges you faced as you implemented your social media marketing strategies?
7. What else would you like to share regarding your organization's social media marketing strategies?