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Successful Marketing Strategies for Small Business Sustainability

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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

Abstract

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by

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MS, Columbia Southern University, 2016

BS, Columbia Southern University, 2013

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Small businesses play a significant role in the health of the U.S. economy, but 50% of

small businesses close before reaching 5 years of operation. Some small business owners

do not utilize effective marketing strategies to guide them towards sustainability in

business. Grounded in hybrid typology, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study

was to explore marketing strategies small business owners use for sustainability. The

participants comprised three small business owners in the Midwest Region of the United

States, with a business in operation for at least 5 years. Data were collected from semi-

structured interviews, public company documents, company websites, and social media

and analyzed using Yin's five-phase cycle of compiling, disassembling, reassembling,

interpreting, and concluding. Four themes emerged: social media, collaborations,

incentive marketing, and word-of-mouth. A key recommendation includes small business

owners identifying effective marketing strategies that remain in line with their objectives

while also remaining open, creative, and honest with their target market. The implications

for positive social change include the potential to further the longevity of small

businesses in various communities throughout the United States and to create and

implement programs for individual businesses and group members within a community

to promote positive relationships and conditions.

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Dedication

This doctoral study is dedicated to my family, my husband and son, for all their love and support throughout the entirety of this journey. They have been and continue to be my motivation.

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I would like to thank my Chair, Dr. Irene Williams, and Dr. Peter Anthony, Dr. Cheryl Lentz, and Dr. Kim Critchlow for all their guidance throughout my doctoral journey. This journey has taught me a lot and has led me to become a better researcher and writer. I would also like to thank my program director, Dr. Susan Davis, for her role in helping students to the finish line of the programs as well. Thank you all.

Table of Contents

i

List of Tables

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Background of the Problem

Small businesses are critical to community stability through the creation of employment and economic growth (Rolleri, Nadim, & Lussier, 2016). In the United States, 50% of small businesses close within their first 5 years of business (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2016). Effective marketing strategies are a necessary part of sustainable growth for small businesses. Many small businesses have dissolved due to their failure in implementing successful marketing strategies for their businesses (Rebecca & Maharani, 2018). One reason for this dissolution is due to some small business owners not being able to afford to invest in the development and implementation of effective marketing strategies, therefore, negatively impacting their longevity in their communities (Bandyopadhyay, 2016). A qualitative case study was suitable to explore the phenomenon further.

Some small businesses are not sustainable beyond the first 5 years of operation because business owners do not possess adequate marketing strategies to successfully sustain their businesses beyond this time frame (Rebecca & Maharani, 2018). The findings of this study could be beneficial in improving business processes by providing small business owners with sufficient information to help them sustain their businesses for the long-term. Furthermore, this study's findings can expand on the previous literature on marketing strategies for small business sustainability.

Problem Statement

The failure rate of small businesses throughout the United States is a continuous concern for small business owners (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2018). In the United States, 50% of small businesses close within their first 5 years of business (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2016). The general business problem was some owners of small businesses do not have effective marketing strategies. The specific business problem was some small business owners lack marketing strategies necessary to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the marketing strategies small business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. The target population for this study included four small business owners in the Midwest region of the United States who have successfully sustained their businesses beyond 5 years. The findings from this study may be useful to small business owners by providing educational opportunities, providing their communities with employment opportunities, and reducing unemployment rates. There are other opportunities for social change, which can allow small business owners to engage with members of the community. Some of the opportunities include implementing individual and group programs focused on social issues, which may positively affect the community by enabling the development of local infrastructure by promoting a sustainable commercial environment.

Nature of the Study

The appropriate method for this study was qualitative. The purpose of the qualitative research method is to study consumer attitudes, behaviors, and motivations (Barnham, 2016). Based on the analysis by Park and Park (2016), some basic characteristics of the qualitative research method (a) involves the researcher interacting with the research, (b) the process of the research is inductive, (c) the research is accurate and reliable through forms of verification, (d) the researcher develops a theory to help design a research question, and (e) the research is usually unstructured. These characteristics of the qualitative research method are the same characteristics that are a part of my study, which is why the qualitative method was the most appropriate choice. The quantitative method was not appropriate for this study because quantitative research involves measuring variables to test hypotheses about variables' relationships or differences (Yin, 2017). I did not test a hypothesis regarding sustainability strategies used by small business owners. The mixed-methods approach was not appropriate for this study because mixed-methods research involves the use of quantitative components (Yin, 2017). I did not use quantitative components in my research, and therefore, using the mixed method was not required.

The designs that were of consideration for this qualitative research were phenomenological, ethnographic, narrative, and case study designs. A phenomenological design was not appropriate because I did not look at deep psychological meanings or the lived experiences of a phenomenon. The purpose of the ethnographic design is to study culture, communities, or social regularities (Cardoso, Gontijo, & Ono, 2017). The

purpose of the ethnographic design made it an inappropriate choice to use for my study. The narrative research is for exploring participants' diverse stories (Flick, 2014). The narrative research did not align with the purpose of my study, as I did not explore personal stories. The design of this study was the case study design. Yin (2017) explained how the case study design enables researchers to ask more open-ended questions within semistructured interviews. The purpose of asking open-ended questions within semistructured interviews is to gain data to identify patterns. By using the case study design, I asked interview questions and reviewed company documentation that helped me identify what, how, and why some small businesses may or may not succeed beyond 5 years.

Research Question

What marketing strategies do small business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years?

Interview Questions

1. What are the primary marketing strategies that have helped you grow and sustain your business beyond the first 5 years of operation?

2. What strategies were most effective toward your marketing efforts?

3. How did you address the key barriers you encounter when implementing marketing strategies?

4. How did the business skills you possess facilitate the effective implementation of the successful marketing strategies?

5.   What additional information would you like to share that will help other entrepreneurs sustain their businesses?

Conceptual Framework

Orville Walker and Robert Ruekert (1987) combined the two typologies of Porter (1980) and Miles and Snow (1978), creating a hybrid typology that comprises my study's conceptual framework. Walker and Ruekert's hybrid typology, which they proposed in 1987, defines the business unit's preferred rate of new product-market development and the unit's deliberate method of competing in its primary business for current production markets. The hybrid typology addresses three types of businesses; prospectors, differentiated defenders, and low-cost defenders (Walker & Ruekert, 1987). The authors further identified business unit performances, which within the hybrid framework, researchers can measure and improve through increasing effectiveness, efficiency, and adaptability.

Characteristics of the hybrid typology include the goals of a business and what actions are taken by the owners to reach their goals and the internal capabilities that business owners may use to achieve a specific strategy (Karuppan, Waldrum & Dunlap, 2016). I expect that the hybrid typology presented by Walker and Ruekert can apply to understand the results from my study because I focused on smaller business-level strategies used by small business owners in the Midwest region of the United States. With the combination of the characteristics into the hybrid form, the hybrid typology could align with the business leaders' development and implementation of successful marketing sustainability strategies.

Operational Definitions

Market orientation: Market orientation is part of organizational strategic thinking, found on the organizational approach of organizations to outperform competition, obtain better market share, increase profits, and achieve long-term sales (FarajAllah, El Talla, Abu-Naser, & Al Shobaki, 2015).

Marketing plan: A marketing plan is a written document that contains an outline and detailed guidelines of a business's marketing programs and allocations over a planning period (Naghshbandi, Ombati, & John, 2016).

Small business: A small business is an entity where the owner operates independently as a for-profit entity and is not dominant in its industry. The size of a small business ranges from size, from zero up to 1,500 employees, with revenue up to $23 million annually (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2015).

Small business owner: A small business owner is an individual who organizes and manages, assumes business risks to further personal goals (Marom & Lussier, 2018).

Sustainability: Sustainability is economic development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Epstein, 2018).

Sustainability marketing: Sustainability marketing is developing and maintaining sustainable relationships with customers, clients, the social environment, and the natural environment (Kumar, Goyal, & Vandana, 2017).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are the beliefs of researchers they assume to be true without verifiable evidence (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). My first assumption in this study was that all small business owners utilized marketing plans to help sustain their businesses. Next, I assumed the selected business owners for this study could provide detailed and honest answers to the interview questions regarding the impact marketing may have had on their businesses as well as their sustainability process beyond a 5-year timeframe. Finally, I assumed the information collected for this study will contribute to social change for entrepreneurs and communities which host small businesses.

Limitations

Limitations are the weaknesses of a study as they are threats that impact the validity of the information, which is out of control of the researcher (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The first limitation of this study was the sample size of three small business owners only within the Midwest geographical region of the United States. The sample size of this study does not represent all small businesses in the Midwest region of the United States. Another limitation of this study is that the participants may not have provided honest answers to the interview questions, which represented the marketing and sustainability processes of their businesses.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the boundaries, which researchers inflict to emphasize the scope of the study (Rule & John, 2015). The first delimitation of this study is the geographical

location, which was the Midwest region of the United States. The second delimitation is the business owners who had utilized marketing strategies to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. The research did not include small business owners who failed to use effective marketing strategies to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years.

Significance of the Study

This study may be of value to the practice of business because I identified the primary factors, which have led small business owners toward successfully maintaining their businesses beyond 5 years and how marketing has had an impact on their success.

Contribution to Business Practice

With this study, I sought to develop conclusions, which will help small business owners identify their primary sustainability issues with marketing strategies within their businesses. Effective business strategies may translate to increased revenues. The findings from my study may be of value to the practice of business for identifying or adapting the marketing strategies small business owners use to sustain a business beyond 5 years. Upon gaining further perspective from their identified issues, small business owners may also gain insight into more effective marketing strategies to increase their chances of sustainability.

Implications for Social Change

Positive social change is grounded in the elimination of restrictions that prevent or hinders the progress within a community (Haugh & Talwar, 2016). Implications for positive social change for small business owners include providing jobs and volunteer work for community members. Small business owners also can engage in charitable

ventures for the betterment of their local communities. Charitable ventures may include fundraising for new programs and activities for individuals and group members. These ventures are beneficial as they help encourage groups of people to work as teams and grow closer as a community.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of a literature review is to provide a comprehensive account of previous research within a specified scholarly research topic (Jahan, Naveed, Zeshan, & Tahir, 2016). The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the marketing strategies small business owners use to sustain their business beyond the first 5 years in the Midwest. Small businesses make up 99.9% of employer firms in the United States, which contributes in the boost in economic growth, but only 50% survive after the first 5 years of operation (Lussier, Bandara, Marom, 2016; U.S. Small Business Administration, 2016; Turner & Enders, 2017). Expanding research to incorporate into the current literature on sustainability theories can help researchers and small business owners gain an in-depth understanding of the marketing strategies they can use to sustain their businesses successfully. This study aimed to address the gap in marketing strategies for small business sustainability.

In this literature review, I expanded on the published research on the marketing strategies that small business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. The literature review consists of current and seminal peer-reviewed studies, which I used to help me further develop some of the subsections and key themes of the study. I used the literature to develop an extensive review of subjects related to the hybrid typology

conceptual framework, relevant alternative theories, small businesses, small business strategic management, social change, marketing, and marketing strategies.

To locate sources for this study, I searched the Walden University Library Database, Emerald Insight, Business Source Complete, SAGE Journals, Google Scholar, the U.S. SBA, and ProQuest. To choose sources related to the study, I made my selection by filtering the sources using a variety of keywords, such as *small business, small business sustainability, marketing in business, strategies in small business, small business failures, small business success,* and *marketing in small business success.* Additional keywords consisted of a wide range of terms to ensure the implementation of the most relevant sources for this research.

Hybrid Typology Conceptual Framework

The hybrid typology formed the framework of this study. Walker and Ruekert (1987) reviewed and integrated different theoretical perspectives, normative statements, and the parts of empirical evidence on organizational structures and the processes that are the most effective for the implementation of the various forms of business strategies. The perspectives, which are a part of the hybrid typology, stem from Miles and Snow's (1978) typology on the intended rate of product-market change and Porter's (1980) typology on external competitors (Olson, Slater, Hult, & Olson, 2018). Olson et al. further supported Walker and Ruekert's work, as this group of theorists agreed that the successful implementation of a marketing strategy would depend mainly on the degree to which the chosen marketing strategy reinforces the selected business strategy and objectives. With this theory, I framed my research question to gain a deeper

understanding of the marketing strategies small business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years.

The hybrid typology includes positioning strategies, all of which are usually observable within a business environment. The three positioning strategies are prospectors, low-cost defenders, and differentiated defenders (Karuppan et al., 2016). The prospector and defender categories stem from Miles and Snow's typology, and the low-cost defender category is from Porter's typology (Karuppan et al., 2016; Walker & Ruekert, 1987). The positioning strategies of the hybrid typology are used by managers to determine the appropriate relationship between strategy, structure, and behaviors. Thus, the adoption of positioning strategies is a unique way to identify a business's market strategy.

Marketers in prospector firms should target innovators and early adaptor segments. Marketers use the prospector positioning strategy for innovation and early market entry to locate and employ new product and market opportunities (Olson et al., 2018). The primary concern with business strategy is how business owners pursue a competitive advantage within a market (Walker & Rukert, 1987). Though, competition is not of much concern to prospector firms regarding the product markets they develop until the establishment of those markets (Walker & Rukert, 1987). The purpose of low-cost defenders is to reach high-quality at low costs (Karuppan et al., 2016; Walker & Ruekert, 1987). Differentiated defenders focus on premium products and services to attract customers who will pay the price increase (Karuppan et al., 2016). The combination of

the categories from the two typologies enables researchers to build a solid foundation for the framework.

The hybrid typology is an effort to extract more general typologies from business-level strategies through empirical observation. With the combination of Miles and Snow's and Porter's typologies came the hybrid typology, a marketing-focused typology of business-level strategy. Walker and Ruekert created the hybrid typology, to include the goals of the business and the actions taken by the business owners to help them reach their goals (Karuppan et al., 2016). The overall purpose of the hybrid typology is to help improve the development of small business owners and to implement successful marketing strategies.

Relevant Alternative Theories

Although there were many conceptual frameworks to choose from to utilize in my research, only one was necessary for this study. The hybrid typology is the most appropriate framework, but four other conceptual frameworks were of consideration. Schumpeter's (1934) entrepreneurship theory was the original choice for this study, but it did not highlight the marketing factor of the research, which is critical to the study. Another theory included in the discussion is the business sustainability model, which is useful for small business profitability (Rezaee, 2017). The organizational life cycle is a common framework used in business research literature because the organizational life cycle is critical to the growth of small businesses (Churchill & Lewis, 1983). Finally, there is the marketing myopia theory by Levitt (1960), which highlights marketing and strategic business planning. The alternative theories each had a focus on business or small

business in general, but all had unique factors that separated them from one another and related to the topic of my study in one way or another.

Entrepreneurship theory. Entrepreneurship is a dynamic process where entrepreneurs act in uncertainty to discover new opportunities (Gupta, Chiles, & McMullen, 2016). The entrepreneurship theory was developed by Joseph Schumpeter (1934), who believed that the actions of entrepreneurs are the primary factors in the process of innovation, economic development, and the disruption of the economic system. Many definitions exist for the term *entrepreneur*. Bernat, Lambardi, and Palacios (2016) stated the typical operational definition of entrepreneurs as self-employed individuals. The characteristics of entrepreneurship are the need for achievement, the locus of control, tendency to take risks, tolerance of ambiguity, self-confidence, and innovation to separate those who have entrepreneurial characteristics (Intrama, Sookbanjung, Santawee, & Teerasawad, 2017). Schumpeter defined entrepreneurs as innovators who execute entrepreneurial change within markets. Braunerhjelm, Ding, and Thulin's (2017) beliefs on entrepreneurship align closely with Schumpeter's on how the entrepreneur drives economic progress by seeking to start new and profit-gaining business ventures. The entrepreneur driving economic growth is what presents entrepreneurship as a substantial contribution to innovation in the United States.

Entrepreneurs possess a diverse range of expertise that contributes to their work performance. Qureshi, Saeed, and Wasti (2016) stated that entrepreneurs have specific traits that enable them to come up with innovative ideas and to initiate them. Qureshi et al. divided entrepreneurial skills into three categories: technical, business management,

and personal. Additionally, Qureshi et al. emphasized innovativeness, self-confidence, and risk-taking propensity, as some of the most prominent skills of an entrepreneur within these categories. Entrepreneurial innovation consists of five stages: introduction of a new/improved good, introduction of new production strategy or method, inception of a new market, exploitation of a new supply source, and the execution of a new organization of an industry (Rahdari, Sepasi, & Moradi, 2015; Schumpeter, 1934). The concept of innovation is highlighted extensively throughout the works Qureshi et al., Rahdari, et al. (2015), and Schumpeter (1934) because innovation is a simultaneous part of entrepreneurship. The different forms of innovation, such as marketing, product, and organizational, are crucial when developing strategies to increase the survival of businesses.

The business sustainability model. The business sustainability model is used by researchers to analyze the different factors of a business. The purpose of the business sustainability model (BSM) is to create new ideas and form new, innovative approaches to renovate a business' organization, strategies, and discovering ways business owners can accomplish their goals. The BSM can be used to assist small business owners in developing ways they ensure their customers receive quality products and services while using effective strategies to persuade them to pay for those quality products and services and turning the payments into profit (Philipson, 2016). To improve their sustainability performance, small business owners must identify, manage, and evaluate the drivers of improved sustainability performance and form systems to boost social performance (Epstein, 2018). Maximizing the profitability of a small business while establishing

shareholder value is one of the gainful aspects of the BSM (Rezaee, 2017). Small business owners also need to secure their developments and develop strategies to increase their profits their business gains to ensure they remain sustainable. Rezaee emphasized the complexity of the BSM for sustainability decision-making and contains uncertainty for business owners because sustainability involves making investments while facing an uncertain future regarding shareholder value. Small business sustainability relies on the factors of organizational culture, business models, reasonable standards, risk management, and sustainability reporting guidelines (Karadag, 2015; Taneja, Pryor, & Hayek, 2016). Business models are especially useful to start-up firms to help small business owners identify who their customers are and how they plan to deliver value to those customers (Philipson, 2016). Small business sustainability relies on the implementation of a BSM.

Business models are generally used as operational activities for system modeling and became a significant factor in the advancements of technological developments. The concept of business models stemmed from the need to define and analyze new categories of business (Wirtz, Pistoia, Ullrich, & Göttel, 2016). Wirtz et al, (2016) further explained that the use of business models in any organization could help business owners analyze the competitive structure, which can then lead them to make strategic innovation decisions. Schaltegger et al. identified the elements of business models; value proposition, business infrastructure, customer interface, and the financial model. The value proposition element provides the ecological or social and ecological value through offering products and services (Yang, Evans, Vladimirova, & Rana, 2017). The business

infrastructure must be in alignment with the principles of sustainable supply chain management (Schaltegger et al., 2016). The customer interface must permit relationships with the customers, as well as other stakeholders, to become responsible for the production and consumption systems (Schaltegger et al., 2016). Finally, the financial model allocates economic costs and benefits equitability with all involved (Schaltegger et al., 2016). The BSM is beneficial in the description, analysis, management, and communication of the business model elements making it an essential tool for small business sustainability.

Business Model Levels

Three levels of the business model consist of economic, operational, and strategic levels (Pels & Kidd, 2015). Addtionally, Pels, and Kid (2015) further explained each level under the business model, which aligns with Schaltegger et al. with Pels and Kidd's description of the business model. The economic level represents how the business model produces a profit (Pels & Kid, 2015; Schaltegger et al., 2016). Variables in the economic level consist of pricing, cost structure, and revenue structure. The operational level responds to the internal operations and the designs of infrastructure that allows the firms to establish value, considering the variables of delivery methods, administrative processes, and resource flows (Pels & Kid, 2015; Schaltegger et al., 2016). Finally, the strategic level responds to the market positioning and direction of the business. The variables at the strategic level are offering differentiation, stakeholder identification, and networks (Pels & Kid, 2015; Schaltegger et al., 2016). The absence of a BSM could

negatively impact the growth, development, and likelihood of sustainability for small businesses, further validating the importance of implementing a BSM.

Business model innovation is generally more valuable and transformative than other forms of innovation. According to Serrat (2017), business model innovation can reduce risks and can lead business owners towards taking more risks, as well as encourage organizational innovation. Business model innovation is the process of experimenting, piloting, debriefing, learning, and scaling up, as explained by Bocken, Schuit, and Kraaijenhagen (2018). The practices and of business owners and employees contribute to the changes in business logic and results in the core business model. Bocken et al. explained that for business owners to develop a sustainability mindset, all social, environmental, and financial indicators become a combination of internal performance measurement and management systems. Therefore, the main stage regarding the business modeling process is to integrate sustainability into the central performance measurement and management systems of small businesses.

Business owners must develop an alternative way of thinking, and experimentation is one of the most crucial innovation capabilities for organizations. Business experimentation is a primary factor when seeking a change for sustainability (Weissbrod & Bocken, 2017). One of the sole purposes of business experimentation is to help business owners learn and improve business model innovation activities, accompanied by potential risks and resources through continuous and collective learning with business stakeholders (Bocken et al., 2018). Bocken and colleagues expanded their research and discussed business experimentation. More specifically, business owners

must not think only about the products, but also about the systems surrounding the products and redeveloping strategies on producing revenue through creating and maintaining revenue over time.

  Organizational life cycle. Small business owners may typically experience different stages throughout the lifetime of the organization. Therefore, another conceptual framework taken into consideration was the organizational life cycle, which was developed by Adizes (1979), Churchill and Lewis (1983), and Miller and Friesen (1967). Small business growth can depend on specific factors, which consist of startup, survival, maturity, take-off, and resource maturity/decline (Abosede, Obasan, & Alese, 2016; Churchill & Lewis, 1983). The organizational life cycle involves these series of changes, which could potentially prepare small business owners in learning to sustain their operations for the long-term and how to address problems and make decisions for the benefit of their businesses.

  The first stage during the startup is the beginning of the business and where business owners primarily center their attention on gaining and expanding their customer base by developing the range of products or services they offer. Small businesses in the startup stage of the organizational lifecycle may be limited in resources, which could, therefore, be crucial for the next phase, survival (Fisher, Kotha, & Lahiri, 2016). During the startup stage, risk-taking is also a common occurrence, although the results of the taken risks may not always produce the best results (Elsayed & Wahba, 2016). The second stage, survival, requires the small business owner to manage internal resources, workflow, and organizational structure to expand operations (Fisher et al., 2016). The

third stage, maturity, is when the organization enters a hierarchy of management and the small business owner focuses more on the growth and profitability of the organization (Fisher et al., 2016). The fourth stage is take-off (Churchill & Lewis, 1983) or decline (Abosede et al., 2016). The small business owner could experience their business taking off, which consists of the small business owner exhibiting creativity and flexibility in their management structure. Abosede et al. explained the decline of a business in the fourth stage of the organizational life cycle. The results of the decline ultimately depend on the success of the maturity stage. Should the decline of the organization continue to descend, it could ultimately result in organizational death.

The fifth and final stage is the resource maturity or decline of an organization. The final stage of the organizational life cycle could result in resource maturity or decline, depending on the chances of survival or success during the fourth stage. Churchill and Lewis explained that the resource maturity stage involves a business having the advantage of size, financial resources, and the business owner's managerial talent, which could all help them becoming or maintaining a significant role in their market should they continue to use and build their entrepreneurial skills. Some small business owners may also experience the decline of their business (Amir & Auzair, 2017; Mouzelis, 2017). However, once a business begins to decline, it is not always inexorable that it will continue to decline if small business owners explore all options available that can positively influence their business's life cycle.

Businesses at any stage of the organizational life cycle are affected by external and internal environmental circumstances. Additionally, Abosede et al. (2016) also

emphasized the importance of small business owners gaining new markets and introducing new products to obtain sustainable profit. Primc and Cater (2016) stated that the stages of the organizational life cycle are critical determinants of compensation strategies and the effectiveness of achieving organizational goals. While the organizational life cycle is a theory that has implemented in previous qualitative studies, it would not have been useful for me in fulfilling the purpose of this doctoral study because I do not feel that it was focused enough on the marketing factor of the study.

The new marketing myopia theory. The marketing myopia stemmed from the speculation of how once-thriving businesses could slow down in growth or stop altogether. The marketing myopia theory was developed by Theodore Levitt (1960) to analyze the phenomenon (Diderich & Mamali, 2017). Businesses can ensure growth by defining their markets or industries to ensure they have the availability of growth opportunities. Levitt posited businesses decline as the advancements in technology increases because business owners limit themselves when defining their markets or industries. Levitt further believed that this limitation slows business growth and stems from the contentment of the business owner. Marketing myopia is when business owners do not recognize or respond to the changing environment in their industry. Small business owners or marketers who are content with relying on previous or ongoing successes may engage in marketing myopia (Balch & Sutton, 2018). Levitt further argued that there are possibilities for growth and marketing myopia is an underlying failure to capitalize on those potential opportunities. Therefore, because the idea of marketing myopia

contradicts the traditional way business owners manage their marketing, the new marketing myopia was developed.

The new marketing myopia stemmed from marketers learning the lesson to avoid marketing myopia. While the new marketing myopia also causes a misinterpretation of strategic vision and can also result in business failure, the development of the new theory corrects the old marketing myopia (Smith, Drumwright, & Gentile, 2010). The authors identified three phenomena from the development of the new marketing myopia. The first phenomenon is a single focus on the customer and disregard for other stakeholders (Kull, Mena, & Korschun, 2016). The second phenomenon is a narrow definition of the customer and their needs (Brennan, Previte, & Fry, 2016). The final phenomena are the failure to recognize the difference in the societal context of business to address all stakeholders (Smith et al., 2010). The purpose of highlighting the phenomena was to provide a new vision of marketing management as an activity, which business owners could use to engage stakeholders in value creation and suggest that marketing can bring specific expertise to bear.

Propositions for practice to help correct the myopia are to map the stakeholders, identify stakeholder salience, research stakeholder issues, and expectations and measure impact, and ensuring stakeholder orientation. The first point is to map the primary business stakeholders and secondary stakeholders (Brennan et al., 2016). Business owners must also identify the more notable stakeholders and their interconnections. Next, determining the stakeholder salience shows how prioritizing competing stakeholder claims will reflect stakeholder power, legitimacy, and urgency (Smith et al., 2010).

Stakeholder interconnections could also increase the power of priority. Once business owners have identified the prioritization of the salient stakeholders, they must then determine the stakeholder issues and expectations (Kull, Mena, & Korschun, 2016). This proposition is specific to the role of marketing in stakeholder management because marketing research methodologies impact a business's efforts to measure social and environmental performance (Smith et al., 2010). Stakeholder engagement is successful when business owners learn to identify how to listen more to customers and how to cooperate with their customers in strategic initiatives (Kull et al., 2016). Strong marketing competence is necessary to gain a better understanding of stakeholder needs. The last proposition is business owners ensuring stakeholder orientation becomes an integral part of the everyday decision-making (Smith et al., 2010). Although the authors emphasize the importance of marketing practitioners and researchers to understand an organization's position in society, the same can attribute to small business owners as well to better comprehend their business's environment and so they can then shift their focus from only customers to stakeholder orientation, leading them to further growth.

Challenges & Small Businesses Sustainability

Small business owners should always consider sustainability as a top priority for longevity. Sustainability is the transformation of key business activities (Alonso-Almeida, Bagur-Femenias, Llach, & Perramon, 2018). Small businesses contribute significantly to the United States' economy (Bandyopadhyay, 2016). However, there is a multitude of reasons why small businesses fail after a few years, and many small business owners are not always sure of how they can change their business practices to succeed

beyond those first few years. In the case of this study, poor marketing efforts and the implementation of effective marketing strategies are a significant reason why 50% of small businesses in the United States fail after the first 5 years (Bandyopadhyay, 2016). The small businesses that do not survive negatively impact economies on a local and national scale (Holloway & Schaefer, 2014). Therefore, it is critical for small business owners to comprehend how sustainability and failure connect to specific skill-sets, such as marketing, to fully grasp the needs of the business and the necessary actions to take to guide them toward sustainability.

Sustainability requires the development of new ideas and methods, which are innovative and effective for business. Karadag (2015) identified a large amount of exposure that small businesses experience regarding risks and uncertainty in comparison to larger businesses. Due to the increased number of risks that small business owners face, small business owners have become more aware of the challenges and opportunities. Challenges that some small business owners face negatively impacts the sustainability of their business, with one of those challenges being the marketing factor of small business (Taneja et al., 2016). Small business owners must continuously remain involved throughout the process of innovation and implement strategic planning into their business model (Karadag, 2015; Taneja et al., 2016). Customers are more aware of the businesses they frequent or plan on visiting due to their availability of various computer technologies and other forms of connectivity. Therefore, there are more choices and needs for the customers with all the readily available information they can access. For some small business owners, it is difficult for them to develop their technologies due to

various factors, including costs, risks, and other uncertainties (Taneja et al., 2016). For this reason, a complete focus on small business owners being customer-centered is a challenge.

Niche selection is an important factor for small business owners. Sustainability strategies are typically developed depending on the niches small business owners choose to market towards (Schaltegger, Luedeke-Freund, & Hansen, 2016; Taneja et al., 2016). Limiting a market down to a niche can be a challenge as well. Small business owners who focus on niche markets may have a limited range of influence on their market demands. According to Schaltegger et al. (2016), these limitations could further prevent small business owners the ability to grow their businesses and face the challenges of revising their products and services to meet the needs of their markets. Therefore, small business owners must build an environment that will allow them to effectively increase their chances of guiding their businesses toward longer sustainability.

Small Business Strategic Management

Business strategies are plans developed by the business owner to help them prioritize and meet their objectives, compete successfully within the market, and optimize financial performance through a selection of activities (Collins, 2016; Kachouie, Mavondo, & Sands, 2018). Small business owners should opt for effective business strategies that could guide them toward successful and long-term sustainability (Reddy, 2015). Strategic management consists of strategic thinking, which is a common trait of successful small business owners and, therefore, crucial to business development (Reddy, 2015). Small businesses can value the impact of environmental changes that occur within

their businesses using strategic management practices, leading them to make more
effective decisions.

Strategic management involves the implementation of strategic innovation. In the
United States, most of the small business owners do not apply strategic management into
their businesses (Bayani & Crisanto, 2017). Small business owners can use strategic
management practices to help them identify objectives and the plans necessary to achieve
them. If small business owners choose not to apply strategic management into their
operations, it could impact their business's ability to hold a strong position in the
competitive market and, therefore, decreasing their chances of sustainability (Bayani &
Crisanto, 2017). Small business owners who fail to implement a formal strategic plan into
their business processes affect not only their possibilities of performance improvements
but also the chances of overall growth and achieving their sustainability goals.
Atanassova and Clark (2015) indicated it is best for small business owners to invest in the
areas of innovation, technology, and marketing during times of uncertainty. To meet
customer needs, small business owners must establish a sustainable growth strategy to
increase their organization's chances of survival and improve their performance levels
(Atanassova & Clark, 2015). Furthermore, small business owners must develop strategies
to motivate their employees and learn to engage customers for useful results. In all, small
business owners should include strategic planning into their everyday operations for
sustainability.

Social Change

Social change is how organizations and their projects impact change in targets in the outside environments of their organizational boundaries. Stephan, Patterson, Kelly, and Mair (2016) clarified the nature of positive social change as a process. Furthermore, Stephan et al. created an integrative framework that specified two positive social change strategies: taking stock and developing a strategy for change mechanisms and enabling organizational practices. Project legitimacy becomes enhanced within firms that take part in corporate social responsibility activities.

Social change is a crucial factor in small business success and sustainability. Small business owners who have been successfully stronger sustainability wise will have more opportunities to continue providing for their local economies (Johnson, Faught, & Long, 2017). Additionally, small business owners who focus primarily on improving, growing, and strengthening the areas of local businesses and communities have high chances of also encouraging investments within their economies (Johnson et al., 2017). It is also a key priority for small business owners to seek ways to influence the perceptions of the individuals within their communities. Tankard and Paluck (2015) explained how social change interventions influence the sources of information that people use to understand norms to influence the perceived norms and behaviors. To achieve the influence of perceptions, small business owners must implement norm change strategies.

Small business owners must understand the importance of social norms for them the fully understand the developmental needs of their communities. Those who seek to change norms can face issues which can make norm change a difficult task (Eriksson,

2015). Resistance against the new norm is a primary issue (Bloomfield, 2016). For one, those who resist the norm change often dispute the motives of the norm changers and question if there is a genuine interest in the change motives or if the norm changers want to get away with norm violation (Bloomfield, 2016). Therefore, those who attempt norm changes must pay attention to how those efforts are, or maybe, interpreted (Eriksson, 2015). Paying attention to the norms, obtaining information to develop an interpretation of information on current social norms and using this information to inform others can trigger people to compare their behaviors against the standard.

Norm change impacts the marketing factor in business as well, which further aligns its importance to this study. Small business owners must gain knowledge on information about what others tend to do to implement the most effective marketing strategies and to develop marketing methods for positive results (Eriksson, 2015; Tankard & Paluck, 2015). Providing a summary of information on behaviors can influence the perceptions of individuals or groups. Should small business owners accurately interpret the information they gain, they can then present it through various marketing methods, such as through social media, ads, or fliers to encourage customers think about their current perceptions (Eriksson, 2015; Tankard & Paluck, 2015). Haugh and Talwar (2016) identified the significance of social change and described social change as the removal of constraints that prevent or hinder progress. Haugh and Talwar's study aligns with Eriksson's and Tankard and Paluck's works as they all mutually suggest that new behavior patterns are vital for influencing social change. For example, Haugh and Talwar primarily explained the increased involvement of women in entrepreneurship and how it

changed social norms using similar methods proposed by Tankard and Paluck, such as educational services, to encourage the change of behaviors in society. Social change for small business owners is a responsibility with many benefits stemming from it. Gaining the support of the community and positively influencing norm change takes ensuring the implementation of social change methods into their current marketing strategies.

Marketing

The history of marketing has a connection to the history of economic development. Individuals discovered they could improve their opportunities for consumption by trading their surpluses of goods which they did not need with others. The individuals traded to receive goods which they would find more useful (Baker, 200l). The individuals would meet at a mutually agreed on location to exchange goods with one another; thus, ultimately resulting in the production of those goods or services (Baker, 2001). Over time, the elements of marketing were formed, known as *the marketing mix*. The marketing mix consists of pricing, product, promotion, and place (Spence & Wan, 2015). The marketing mix is necessary for any firm to help control its marketing plan.

Marketing involves a variety of factors that are relevant to small business sustainability. The concept of marketing is significant because it pertains to multiple activities that essentially drive the overall success of small businesses (Kenny & Dyson, 2016). Further, the areas of sustainability marketing are just as critical to small business success (Abdullah, Razak, Hamdan, Anuar, & Aziz, 2018). Finally, the marketing mix is necessary to provide business owners clarity on understanding how to plan for their products and services successfully.

Concept. The focus of marketing is on the buyer's needs through the products and all factors related to creating, delivering and consumption of the products (Levitt, 1960). Marketing helps small business owners determine specific business functions. The concept of marketing stemmed from the general principle of economic organization, which consists of maximizing satisfaction by using limited resources (Levitt, 1960). Business owners who focus primarily on their innovative efforts seek to increase their market size by offering new, general products and services by promoting new applications for previous products and targeting new groups of customers who have yet use the previous products (Baker, 2001). The marketing concept involves small business owners using the same motivation used to determine their markets and products, as well as new research and other communication techniques. Small business owners must identify what their target markets consider better products and services and the best ways to sell them.

Sustainability. The purpose of sustainability marketing is to satisfy the needs and wants of consumers. Small business owners must position their businesses in the market that will place them at an advantage by communicating how they will address environmental, societal, and economic issues (Abdullah et al., 2018). Some small business owners may not focus on all factors of their sustainability needs, nor enough on consumer needs (Abdullah et al., 2018). Due to the incomplete focus on sustainability and consumer needs, customers can become confused because the information they receive is ill-defined and is irrelevant to their decision-making process (Villarino & Font, 2015). Marketing efforts should be sustainable over an extended time frame, especially

considering that sustainability expands beyond an environmental concept. Villarino and Font (2015) highlighted the importance of understanding sustainability marketing as it is necessary to comprehend the factors of effective sustainability communication better. Persuasive sustainability conversation can always use improvement. Persuasive conversation is for influencing others by swaying their beliefs and values (Villarino & Font, 2015). For small business owners, their motivations for sustainability communication have the possibility of useful results.

Sustainability is for evaluating economic development, social development, and marketing in business activities (Lim, 2016). The overall effectiveness of sustainability marketing depends on its course of empowerment. Sustainability marketing strategies must be developed and implemented by small business owners effectively. Lim (2016) explained that sustainability marketing strategies to be effectively implemented; ethics is a primary factor. Three approaches to ethical sustainability are consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics (Nelson, Bruskotter, Vucetich, & Chapron, 2016). Practical action stems from ethical approaches. The purpose of the approaches is to provide an account of the concepts and dictates what forms of actions are appropriate or not.

Consequentialism holds that the right or wrong course of action depends on the consequences, whether they are good or bad, where the environment is only of instrumental value because it only meets the human need (Lim, 2016). Additionally, consequentialism urges marketers to take part in sustainability activities as long as it increases the good consequences. Deontology is an alternative to the consequentialist approach that focuses on the underlying principles of the results of actions (Nelson,

Bruskotter, Vucetich, & Chapron, 2016). Fulfilling duties and respecting rights under the deontology approach is ethically acceptable even when there is no maximization of goods. Deontology rejects the idea that maximizing goods is the only ethical viewpoint of action and contributes that there are specific ethical tasks (Lim, 2016). Violating the imperatives is considered wrong while observance is right. Virtue ethics provides a more focused method on ethics where the focus is more on moral virtues and character traits become a part of the quality of life and a more natural approach to ethics.

Technology is a standard tool used to provide a solid foundation for sustainability marketing (Lim, 2016; Mejia-Dugand, 2016). Lim acknowledged the observations of technology, leading to potentially improved sustainability. Technologies such as the internet, smartphones, and other technological devices and advances increase connectivity, therefore, contributing to the increasing awareness between stakeholders and keeping people around the notified about sustainability issues. Technology also encourages co-creating solutions to identify problems of unsustainable production and activities, causes which will result in the effects of accomplishing greater sustainability.

The implementation of effective marketing methods and tools can influence the evolution of small businesses and is essential for small businesses to transform their products into profit (Medrano & Olarte-Pascual, 2016). Shen, Chiou, Hsiao, Wang, and Li (2016) focused their research on marketing communications using social media. Social media can encourage customer participation in an organization's platform by creating and sharing information. Small businesses that provide their customers the opportunity to further interact with them will have higher chances of identifying areas of improvement

and for understanding what their customer's demands are (Trulio-Lonrigan, 2015).
Moreover, small business owners who have established an online social media presence
will ultimately enhance the trust that customers have for a company.

Digital and traditional marketing. Digital and traditional marketing are two
forms of marketing used by small business owners to help attract customers and increase
profits. Todor (2016) compared digital marketing and traditional marketing. Digital
marketing is a term for the targeted, measurable, and interactive marketing of goods and
services by using digital technologies to reach new customers and to converts leads into
customers and maintain them (Todor, 2016). Traditional marketing is the non-digital
method of marketing, such as flyers, radio, magazines, newspapers, and billboards.
Traditional marketing primarily reaches local audiences, although there could be more
than one target audience (Todor, 2016) and plays a crucial part in building awareness and
interest (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Korschun, 2016). Digital marketing is a cost-effective way
for small business owners to market themselves while still reaching a global audience.
Small business owners can use a mixture of traditional and digital marketing as part of
their strategies.

The downside of traditional marketing is its inability to provide brands with real-
time metrics. This handicap can prevent advertisers from having the ability to rapidly test
and revise different advertising elements (Todor, 2016). Therefore, many financial
resources go to waste by extrapolating small test market results in larger populations.
Digital marketing allows for a detailed analysis of consumer activities on specific digital
platforms almost instantly (Ryan, 2016). In turn, brands can immediately engage

responses and modify advertising or marketing assets to increase customer engagement on social media or to stop nonfunctioning campaigns and allot more resources to produce high functioning campaigns (Ryan, 2016). Furthermore, social media websites such as Facebook, not only provide brands with information regarding customer interactions with their specific marketing assets, but these sites also give brands information on how their target market engages with campaigns related or unrelated to their marketing assets. In all, technology for sustainability marketing is a valuable factor necessary to contribute to economic, ethical, and technological elements in business.

The marketing mix. The marketing mix is the foundation of actions a company uses for brand identification and promotion for products and services in the market. The 4Ps of the marketing mix consists of price, product, promotion, and place (Jackson & Ahuja, 2016). The purpose of the 4Ps is for marketers to utilize demand differentiation strategies. The marketing mix is usually for larger organizations where there is more access to resources and marketing skills, but small firms generally have restrictions in those areas (Resnick, Cheng, Simpson, & Lourenco, 2016). The importance of the marketing mix is to help small business owners provide the capacity to respond to their markets by creating a connection between the organization's products and customers.

Price. The price element in the marketing mix provides people with the opportunity to access and purchase products (Efanny, Haryanto, Kashif, & Widyamto, 2016). Small business owners must determine their position and viability within the market. If the price is too low, it affects quality product perception. If the price is too

high, then it could affect the number of sales, although it depends on how willing

customers are or their ability to pay for the asking price of the product.

Product. Product branding is critical in its success in the market. The purpose of

the marketing mix is to differentiate product qualities from that of business competitors

(Resnick et al., 2016). The product sold must deliver at minimal performance.

Promotion. Promotion is informing people about the products or services offered

(Resnick et al., 2016). Businesses promote through various methods of advertising, such

as through social media and print flyers.

Place. The place element of the marketing mix is highly significant because

business owners must ensure that their products are in an appropriate place to be sold

(Resnick et al., 2016).

<center>**Small Business Marketing & Challenges**</center>

Small business marketing is a critical factor for business activity (Resnick et al.,

2016). The authors primarily focused their work on marketing in small- and medium-

sized enterprises (SMEs), in which they argued that the current established academic

definitions of marketing are not consistently beneficial for SMEs because of the various

terms of what marketing is. The basic definition of marketing is important for small

business owners to understand to increase their marketing efforts. Marketing is the

management of relationships, the process of identifying, anticipating, and the satisfaction

of customer requirements through promoting and selling products and services for profit

(Black, Shaw, & Trebeck, 2017). To increase the chances of success and to ensure

sustainability, small business owners must understand the basic definition of marketing to develop effective strategies to integrate into their operations.

Marketing Activities

Small business owners may face the difficulties of implementing effective strategic practices into their firms, which can overall impact their marketing. SMEs generally have elements that are unique to the organization but are limited in their marketing abilities and expertise (Jackson & Ahuja, 2016; Resnick et al., 2016). Marketing activity in SMEs is under the influence of the business owner's personality, and their level of engagement can affect their decision on implementing any marketing strategies at all (Jackson & Ahuja, 2016; Resnick et al., 2016). For small businesses, some marketing activities, including advertising and market research, have not contributed to the overall success of SMEs (Resnick et al., 2016), but word of mouth and continuous engagement and communications with existing and potential customers have become essential ways of marketing. Business owners who seek to market their organization must be aware of the challenges, including visibility and marketplace positioning within a competitive environment.

Small Business Branding

A significant factor in marketing is branding. Resnick et al. provided a comprehensive understanding of branding in their research. Branding is a marketing tool to attract customers and is an effective way of differentiating products of various channels (Bellin, 2016). Branding is a requirement for effective marketing and is critical for the growth of small businesses (Bellin, 2016; Resnick et al., 2016). Branding

development is essential for small business owners to create an identity for their business. Branding will also guide the elements of leadership, marketing, support, products, and organizational culture of small businesses (Bellen, 2016). Financial limitations are a primary concern for small business owners seeking to develop their brand image because they are unable to fully invest in the required skills for the branding to be successful, such as technology and marketing developments (Bellin, 2016; Resnick et al., 2016). Aside from financial, small business owners face other challenges that may limit their branding opportunities.

Small business owners who effectively build their brand put themselves at a strategic advantage. However, for some small businesses, branding can cause uncertainty among customers (Reijonen, Hivonen, Nagy, Laukkanen, & Gabrielsson, 2015). To provide a solution to Reijonen's et al. (2015) claims of uncertainty, Eggers, Eggers, and Kraus (2016) stated that small business owners should engage in building brand familiarity by circulating information about themselves as well as the products and services they have available. However, small business owners should survey their customers to identify their needs better because the information they circulate may still not be enough for customers to gain the information they want to know (Eggers, Eggers, & Kraus, 2016). Surveying customers to identify their needs and what they like provides potential customers and current customers an opportunity to become a part of a firm's branding process and is a way to gain their loyalty as long-time customers (Eggers et al., 2016; Reijonen et al., 2015). Branding helps to create an image for customers and is a form of communication between customers and small businesses. Brand image builds

emotional connections and helps to shape customer perceptions, solidifying its importance in small businesses.

Brand orientation and market orientation. Brand orientation is an inside-out and identity-focused approach where brands are seen more as a center for business. Laukkanen, Tuominen, Reijonen, and Hirvonen (2016) defined brand orientation in their research as an approach used by business owners to use their brand as a strategic platform. Brand orientation is useful for identifying strategic directions and places the brand at the center of decision making (Laukkanen et al., 2016). The brand identity must validate every internal and external decision. Market orientation is the organizational culture that builds the behaviors necessary for forming superior value for the customer (Laukkanen et al., 2016). Market orientation improves the financial performance of small businesses only if small business owners have already implemented brand orientation and converted into brand performance (Laukkanen et al., 2016). The core goal of market orientation is to satisfy the needs and wants of customers (Levitt, 1960). Therefore, marketing orientation links to the concept of marketing because it allows a business to be more flexible to market demands through its product mix (Jogaratnam, 2017; Levitt, 1960). The differences between brand orientation and market orientation are that market orientation focuses on the external markets to determine what its products or services should provide (Jogaratnam, 2017; Laukkanen et al., 2016). Brand orientation seeks to validate its existing internal products and services. Furthermore, brand orientation aims to identify consumers that fit within its brand image instead of attempting to become the brand that consumers prefer.

Profitability Marketing Small Business

Using successful marketing strategies for greater profit is one of the most critical factors in small business success. Maymand and Samaeizadeh (2017) defined a profit as the difference between gross revenues and the overall costs of an organization. Effective marketing is critical for small business owners to garner a profit, which leads to the growth of an organization (Black et al., 2017; Carroll, 2016). Business owners who see a decline in their sustainability practices must improve their marketing management practices to increase their profitability (Maymand & Samaeizadeh, 2017). A significant factor in business growth is the customers, which Ramasobana, Fatoki, and Oni (2017) have found that small business owners who focus on marketing strategies that meet customer needs have higher chances of sustaining their business beyond five years within a competitive market. Customer interaction for small businesses is necessary for a variety of reasons. Hutchinson, Donnell, Gilmore, and Reid (2015) identified high customer interaction as essential to build trust and open communication to provide the product and services those customers seek. Ensuring such marketing efforts further increases the chances of sustainability.

Small Business Performance

Performance in business is a critical factor in small business sustainability and success. Maintaining effective performance for small businesses is a challenge for small business owners over long periods (Amisano & Anthony, 2017). To achieve high and effective performance, small business owners must develop strategies to improve their performance (Brannon & Wiklund, 2016). Enhancing small business performance could

include achieving a higher financial status (Tsuruta, 2015). For small businesses, the

quantity of internal finance could negatively impact business performance (Dobbins &

Martins, 2016). Insufficient internal finance has the potential to limit the growth of many

small businesses (Dobbins & Martins, 2016). With financial capital and enhanced

performance, small businesses have a greater chance of survival. To contribute to Tsuruta

and Dobbins and Martins' work on the value of sufficient financial leverage for small

businesses, Rosli and Sideck (2015) suggest that small business owners make

investments in technology, machinery, innovation, and product development to boost

their economic capital. Motivation is another common and critical element for the reason

why some people focus on becoming small business owners. Isaga, Masurel, and

Montfort (2015) identified factors such as personal and financial independence and

higher social status. Small business owners must be willing to incorporate new ideas and

strategies into their business plans, which include introducing new services and products,

as well as forming new competitive markets.

Small Business Owner Characteristics

Small business owners have multiple characteristics that enable them to open and

maintain their business operations successfully. Useful characteristics are one of the

contributions that small business owners make toward the U.S. economy's employment

opportunities. One crucial characteristic for small business owners is innovation

(Schumpeter, 1934). Schumpeter saw innovation as the key to becoming a successful

business owner. Those who are willing to take risks is another characteristic of small

business owners. Carland, Hoy, and Boulton (2007) identified the desire for

responsibility as a useful characteristic of business owners and entrepreneurs. Seeking

responsibility is seen as a sign of commitment in business. Carland et al. also noted risk-

taking as another characteristic. Taking risks in business can lead to more opportunities,

although uncertainty among those taking risks is standard. Alongside innovation and risk-

taking, Ahmed and Muhammad Arif (2016) highlighted education in their work as a

significant factor in the growth and success of small businesses. Successful small

business owners generally have a degree, which helps to determine their growth in the

small business sector, according to Ahmed and Muhammad Arif's research.

Leadership

Long-term viability for small business also relies on leadership. The impact of

leadership on strategic direction and firm performance can lead to accomplishing

efficiency and effectiveness in small businesses. Practical leadership skills and styles of

small business owners are integral to business performance, sustainability, and being able

to remain within a competitive market successfully. Turner and Endres' (2017) work

shows that the lack of leadership skills can lead to the demise of small businesses. Taneja

et al., (2016) specifically identify relationship-oriented leadership styles as a significant

contribution to the success of small businesses. For instance, Taneja et al. note that

forming customer and supplier relationships and participating in formal and informal

relationships can increase opportunities for small business owners, including the ability to

obtain access to valuable resources such as technologies and new markets. Dunne, Aaron,

McDowell, Urban, and Geho (2016) explore other leadership styles, including the effects

of transformational, transactional participative leadership for firm innovation and

success. Communication, a core leadership skill, indicates the impact a business owner has on innovation and their business relationships. Dunne et al.'s research findings show that communication of motivational language leads to positive effects of employee innovation, as well as provide employees with a clear view of goals and responsibilities. Great leadership in small businesses is, overall, essential to small business sustainability and should be learned by those who wish to obtain viability in their business ventures.

Transition

This study consists of three sections: Section 1, Section 2, and Section 3. In Section 1, I presented an introduction to the study, the background of the problem, a problem statement, purpose statement, nature of the study, the overarching research question, and interview questions used for the study participants. Section 1 also included the conceptual framework used for this study, operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations, and the significance of the study. In Section 1, I discussed the strategies of marketing for small business sustainability beyond the first 5 years. I collected data through semistructured interviews from three small business owners in the graphological region of the Midwest in the United States. I concluded Section 1 with a review of the professional and academic literature, where I focused on various areas that impact the small business industry, including marketing, ethics, failures, success, use of strategies, and other issues.

In Section 2 of the study, I restate the purpose statement, present information on the role of the researcher, the participants, research method, research design, population and sampling, and a discussion of ethical research. Within Section 2, I also discuss the

data collection instruments, data organization techniques, a data analysis, and a section of

reliability and validity. Section 3 of this study includes an introduction to the section, a

presentation of the findings, application to professional practice, implications for social

change, recommendations for action, further recommendations for future research,

reflection of the research, and a conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the marketing strategies small business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. The target population for this study included four small business owners in the Midwest region of the United States who have successfully sustained their businesses beyond 5 years. The findings from this study might also be useful to small business owners by providing educational opportunities, providing their communities with employment opportunities, and reducing unemployment rates. There are other opportunities for social change, which can allow small business owners to engage with members of the community. Some of the opportunities include implementing individual and group programs focused on social issues, which may positively affect the community by enabling the development of local infrastructure by promoting a sustainable commercial environment.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I have gathered various amounts of data through different forms of data collection. Some of the most common ways to gather data for qualitative research are through audio recordings, video recordings, interviews, observations, questionnaires/surveys, or records (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Although I have a bachelor's degree in marketing, I possess limited experience in the small business industry. Although I do personally know a small group of small business owners, I am unaware of

the impact marketing has had over their overall success in sustainability. Also, the participants of this study and I had no prior relationship with one another.

When researchers choose participants for a study, it is vital for researchers to ensure they first work toward building a solid foundation before the research process begins. According to Silverman (2016), researchers have the responsibility of ensuring trust, protection, confidentiality, and informed consent for their participants. I acquired these responsibilities for the overall protections of my research participants, responsibilities which are in alignment with the protocol for the Belmont Report. The purpose of the Belmont Report is to protect the rights of research participants, which include the elements of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Miracle, 2016). I mitigated bias in this study by avoiding generalizations, providing reliable evidence, terminating objectivity, using sensitive language in the wording of my research, and becoming self-aware of pre-existing biases I may possess to prevent implementing them within my study and when conducting interviews.

Well-structured interview protocols help researchers increase their quality of data acquired from interviews. Additionally, developing an effective interview protocol is a way to improve the reliability of the interview process (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Therefore, I developed an interview protocol to achieve reliability and to increase the overall effectiveness of the interview process for my study.

Participants

Choosing participants is a crucial factor in the research findings and the quality of data retrieved through qualitative research (Flick, 2015). The target population for this

research was small business owners who have used successful marketing strategies to help them sustain their businesses beyond 5 years in the United States. Based on the findings of Eriksson and Kovakainen (2015), there is very little distance between the researcher and participants in qualitative research as participants may become deeply involved in the research process. For instance, the participants may take part in long and multiple open-ended discussions. Meeting with research participants often over long periods can lead to building a close relationship with them. The business owner participants may already have a significant amount of experience with a minimum of 5 years in the small business industry and have gone through the trials and errors of utilizing a variety of marketing strategies. A business owner with less than 5 years of experience would not meet the requirements to participate in this study.

To gain access to participants, I selected three small businesses in the Midwest region of the United States. Once I created a list of eligible small businesses, I contacted the business owners well to gain their interest in my study and to schedule phone call interviews with them. During my interaction with the business owners and as part of the process of establishing a working relationship with participants, I built a foundation of trust by discussing confidentiality, the informed consent process, and the interview process. According to the Miracle (2016), the Belmont Report's purpose is to ensure respect, beneficence, and justice of the research participants. Researchers can implement the elements of the Belmont Report by respecting the participants' privacy and communicating the research process and their rights. Philips and Jiao (2016) explained that a researcher must discuss the confidentiality and the informed consent process with

the participants as well as their significance to the research to ensure trust and establish a relationship with the research participants.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

There are three methods used in research: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Flick, 2015). I did not choose the quantitative method for this research because the quantitative method is when the researchers gather data, but they do not use interviews or observations to determine their findings (Yin, 2017). I used interviews and reviewed company documentation to help complete my research. Mixed methods research is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods (Yin, 2017). Because I only used the qualitative methods, the mixed method was not appropriate as I did not need to use the quantitative methods in my research.

For this study, I chose the qualitative research method. The qualitative method allows the researcher to gain further insight into a participant's lived experiences (Suddaby, Bruton, & Si, 2015). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore what strategies small business owners in the Midwest region of the United States used to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years of operation. I interviewed three small business owners based on their time starting and operating a small business.

Research Design

A research design is a plan which combines the research questions alongside the data collected and analyzed within a study (Yin, 2017). Four research designs I took into consideration for this study were the phenomenological, ethnographic, narrative, and case

study research designs. These research designs are a selection of designs that are commonly used in qualitative research (Flick, 2015). I chose to use the case study design for this research. The case study design is the process of investigating societal and evolving disciplines (Yin, 2017). I chose the case study design to probe through open-ended questions regarding the experiences of the participants and to gain a thorough understanding of issues from data sources.

The phenomenological design requires several interviews, multiple re-readings, and interactions of collected texts; it also involves the process of collecting, creating, and analyzing the tools which provide the researcher with the resources to learn about the lived experiences of the participants (DeFelice & Janesick, 2015). I did not use the phenomenological design because it is not appropriate for my study. Researchers use the ethnographic design to study culture, communities, or social regularities (Cardoso et al., 2017). The ethnographic design was not appropriate for my study because I did not study culture, communities, or social regularities in my research. The purpose of the narrative design is for researchers to explore diverse stories (Flick, 2014). I did not explore diverse stories in my research.

A researcher reaches data saturation when they gain enough information to mirror the study when they can gain new additional information (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data collection is how a researcher can reach data saturation. Rich and thick data is necessary to accomplish reaching data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). For example, I used interviews and collected data until I reached data saturation and I was unable to obtain

new information or data. Interviews and data collection are effective ways to collect rich and thick data to reach data saturation.

Population and Sampling

The sample of participants for this study consisted of three small business owners. Choosing the amount of three participants provided me with a significant amount of data to help me finalize the results of my study. One should select a sample size that allows the researcher the opportunity to reach data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Two types of sampling methods are probability and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling is the distinctive attributes that each participant in the population has a known chance of being included in the population (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Nonprobability sampling is a technique when a researcher collects samples, a method that does not give the participants in the population equal opportunities of being included (Etikan et al., 2016). For this research, I used the nonprobability sampling method. I used the nonprobability sampling method because it did not involve random selection but instead involves purposive sampling, which best helped me choose the most appropriate sample for my study from the population. Purposive sampling has its many benefits in qualitative research, including allowing researchers to select their participants based on the specified criterion and to explore and gain clarity of the principal themes of the sample (Tscheu & Buhalis, 2016). For this reason, I feel that nonprobability sampling was the most appropriate method to use for my study.

Purposive sampling is a technique a part of nonprobability sampling. The use of purposive sampling is to find appropriate participants who have specific knowledge

regarding the research topic (But & Ap, 2017). The purposeful sampling method will assist me in choosing small business owners who have had success sustaining their businesses beyond the first five years as this specific group will possess the knowledge necessary to answer the research questions.

A population in research is the defined collection of individuals or objects which have similar attributes (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Samples are typically chosen from the researcher's desired population because it is impossible and expensive to test an entire population (Robson & McCartan, 2016). For this research, the population consisted of three small business owners who are successfully sustaining their businesses beyond the first five years of opening. Because an entire population is impossible and expensive to test, I have chosen a sample from the population of small business owners.

Data saturation is the observation of more data that will not lead to more information related to the research questions (Lowe, Norris, Farris, & Babbage, 2018). When a researcher continues to come across repeated information without gaining any new information, they are reaching data saturation. Once they reach data saturation, it is time to begin to analyze the collection of data. I ensured data saturation when no new themes or patterns emerged from the interviews with my research participants.

Failure to reach data saturation negatively impacts the validity of one's research (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Ensuring data saturation involves the construction of a saturation grid and the possibility of having another party conduct the coding of transcripts (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I ensured data saturation for my research by conducting interviews with semistructured, open-ended questions with each of my research participants. I also

summarized the results of the interviews as a part of the process of ensuring that I reached data saturation.

To determine whether the participants were appropriate for the study, I established an eligibility criterion to avoid gathering data that would not be effective for the collection of data. I began by establishing the characteristics that were crucial to the validity of the study. Small business owners who have been able to successfully sustain their businesses beyond the first five years of opening in the Midwest are some of the characteristics which are necessary to participate in the study. It is also key to the study that participants had previous experiences in the marketing process for their small businesses to ensure they can answer each of the interview questions.

Ethical Research

Ethical research involves the use of the informed consent process. Informed consent is a legal, ethical, and regulatory requirement for most research (Grady, 2015). I issued consent forms to each research participant and provided further clarity on their privacy protections and their rights to discontinue the interview at any point during the interview. Informed consent forms are for documenting the intentions of the researcher to acquire the maximum level of confidentiality and trustworthiness of the identities of the research participants (Marrone, 2016). The consent form included (a) research background information, (b) interview procedures, (c) participation, (d) statement of compensation for participation, (e) statement of withdrawal procedures (f) confidentiality, (g) contact information, (h) IRB approval information, and (i) the interview questions.

My overall goal of this study was to ensure that I applied the ethical standards of respect, beneficence, and justice to the participants. Compliance with the standards of the Belmont Report (Miracle, 2016), means to emphasize the participants' rights to withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions. To withdraw their participation, participants could contact me via email or phone informing me of their choice to withdraw from the study. During the interview, participants may stop at any point and inform me verbally of their withdrawal. Research participation is voluntary, and there are no incentives for participants in return for their time.

To ensure ethical protection of the research participants, I removed identifying information of each participant for anonymity, including real names, names of businesses, and exact locations of businesses, which is a necessity of confidentiality, and replaced them with the unique identifiers SBO-1, SBO-2, SBO-3, and SBO-4. Per Petrova, Dewing, and Camilleri (2016), it is critical to remove identifying information to ensure privacy and confidentiality. Additionally, the data gathered during the research process has been safely electronically stored in a code protected computer for 5 years to ensure full confidentiality of the research participants. After 5 years of the completion of the study, I have deleted all data obtained during the research. The approval number from IRB for this study is 07-17-19-0667093.

Data Collection Instruments

The primary data collection instrument for this study is the researcher. Therefore, I was the primary data collection instrument for this research. The data collection technique for this study is a set of semistructured, open-ended interview questions. To

ensure convenience, I conducted semi-structured phone interviews at a day and time

chosen by the participants as part of the interview protocol (see Appendix). Allowing the

participants to choose the day and time will enable them to choose when and where they

are most comfortable during the phone interview. Additionally, before each interview, I

provided documents to the participants which detail the interview process and protocol.

This information within the documents will provide the participants with a deeper

understanding of the research and interview process.

As the data collection instrument for this research, I designed and followed the

interview protocol (see Appendix) to ensure I stuck to the focus of the research topic and

to enhance reliability. Interview protocols of a case study include an overview, data

collection procedures, interview questions, as well as a guide for a case study report (Yin,

2017). I enhanced the reliability and validity of my research data by member checking,

where I reviewed a summary of my interpretations of the responses with each participant.

Member checking is a significant factor for researchers to enhance the rigor and

the validity and reliability in qualitative research (Baillie, 2015). Member checking is a

participant confirming the researchers' viewpoint of the data they collected from them is

precise (Morse, 2015). Overall, member checking is validating the understanding

between the researcher and the interview participants (Årlin, Börjeson, & Östberg, 2015).

In the documentation provided to participants at the end of each interview, I detailed

additional information on the process of pre-approved follow-up interviews for

verification of my viewpoint of the first audio-recorded interviews.

The follow-up interviews took place 1 to 2 days after the initial interview. I presented participants with the opportunity to choose whether they would prefer to do the interview either over the phone or via email. During the follow-up interviews, the participants can review the data and the interpretations from their primary interview. The review of the data confirmed the overall credibility of the information and ensures the data is in alignment with the participants' descriptions of their experiences.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection is the process of gathering and recording information from a variety of sources to gain a full and accurate view of an area of interest (Clark & Vealé, 2018). The primary source from which I gathered the information for my study is from my selection of research participants through semistructured interviews, which took place over the phone with the use of an audio recorder to record the data. The interviews involved open-ended questions, which allowed for flexibility in detail for the participants. I collected the data at times and days comfortable and convenient for each research participant.

Interviews in research are a method of learning about participant experiences. Participants may sometimes exhibit feelings of nervousness or anxiousness before interviews. Therefore, it may be beneficial for researchers to discuss what to expect before the interview process and to address the concerns participants have. Thus, researchers need to plan with the research participants beforehand to ensure the participants have time to prepare before the interviews and data collection (Castillo-

Montoya, 2016). Prior preparations also allow the researcher to prepare for developing a conversational tone for their interviews to help ease participants mentally.

The advantages of semistructured interviews include the researcher gaining clarity on the research topic, which is related to the experiences and perspectives of the participants (Yin, 2017). The interview process also helped me gain rapport with the participants, which presented me with the opportunity of asking follow-up questions during the member checking process. Additionally, the participants may help other small business owners with the information they provided during the interview process. A disadvantage is that semistructured interviews may lead to research bias (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Furthermore, retrieving and transcribing the data is extensive and time-consuming (Yin, 2017). The process in all required thorough analysis and a deep understanding of my end.

Researchers who conduct pilot studies before their primary data collection do so to establish schedule flexibility, transparency, and to ensure the participants can answer the research questions (Morrison, Clement, Nestel, & Brown, 2016). I did not conduct a pilot interview for this study as I felt it was not necessary because the interview questions were clear, understandable, and participants were able to answer without issue. After I conducted the primary interviews, I used member checking to ensure that my summary of interpretations from the primary interviews is accurate.

Member checking is a process that involves the researcher presenting data transcripts or interpretations to their research participants for comment to enhance the overall credibility of the data analysis and researcher's interpretations (Varpio, Ajjawai,

Monrouxe, O'Brien, & Rees, 2017). Moreover, member checking is a widely used method of rigor in qualitative research (Smith & McGannon, 2017). To ensure that my interpretation of the data I collected from participants was correct, I needed to use member checking to provide participants with the opportunity to offer their feedback on the previous data to avoid misinterpretations of their perceptions. I reviewed the audio recordings to record notes and followed-up with each research participant to help me determine if the notes I gathered from the audio recordings best aligned with their experiences.

Data Organization Technique

The purpose of data organization techniques is to gather, disassemble, and to organize the data that a researcher collects within a study (Pierre & Jackson, 2014). Compiling data throughout the process of research can be made simpler with the use of effective data organization techniques. One way to organize data is through research logs. Research logs are useful for keeping documentation of observations and activities (Ham, Erp, & Broerse, 2016). Research logs can be used both electronically and as a hard copy. For my study, I chose to utilize the electronic form of a research log using a hand-held audio recorder. Audio recordings are a secure way to ensure data quality and allow researchers to code and analyze qualitative data (Neal, Neal, VanDyke, & Kornbluh, 2014). Upon the completion of recording the interviews, I transcribed the recordings to analyze the interviews further.

For each research participant, I assigned unique identifiers, such as (SBO-1, SBO-2, and SBO-3). The unique identifiers were necessary to ensure that the identities of the

research participants remain confidential and to protect their privacy. I used the unique

identifiers to label the electronic files once I uploaded the recordings for ease of reference

and organization. I have stored the collection of data I used in the study in a private code

protected computer. After 5 years of the publication of the study, I will destroy the

collection of data by deletion.

Data Analysis

Triangulation is one of the methods researchers use to ensure the validity of the

study's findings (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Methodological triangulation is the combination

of multiple external methods to collect and analyze data, such as interviews,

observations, questionnaires, and documents (Fusch & Ness, 2015). To analyze

qualitative research, a five-phase cycle presented by Yin (2017) consists of compiling,

disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding.

Compiling

The compiling phase of the life cycle is somewhat like developing a database

(Yin, 2017). Organizing the data of my study before my analysis allowed me to develop a

stronger analysis as well as rigorous qualitative research. Compiling the data further

allowed me to familiarize myself with my research notes and observations. I recorded my

interviews and transcribed them upon completion, which presented me with the

opportunity to review the data thoroughly at my own pace.

Disassembling

Once the compilation of the data is complete, the next phase of the cycle is

disassembling the data. The second phase consisted of disassembling transcripts and

interview notes after reviewing them (Yin, 2017). I disassembled my research data and analyzed them to determine if I recognized the development of significant patterns. With each piece, I assigned a code that helped me when reassembling the data in the next phase.

Reassembling

Once completing the disassembling phase and the issuing of codes, I moved on to the next phase. The purpose of the codes is to identify the themes and patterns better from the data I collected during the interview process. The third phase, reassembling, is identifying themes and patterns and creating matrices to reassemble the data (Yin, 2017). I performed a comparison of the codes I gathered from my multiple reviews of the interview transcripts. Reviewing the interview transcripts should be done until there are no new codes to identify (Yin, 2017). Identifying comparisons of the interview transcripts are necessary to decrease bias when determining the emerging patterns (Yin, 2017).

Interpreting

Yin (2017) stressed the importance of having to identify arrays during the reassembling phase of the life cycle to detail the implications from the data. Interpreting is explaining the meaning of the findings of the data and data arrays in one's own words (Yin, 2017). I interpreted the data I reassembled in the reassembling phase to help me conclude my study. The attributes of comprehensive interpretation consist of completeness, fairness, empirical accuracy, value-added, and credibility (Shurden & Shurden, 2015).

Concluding

Once I completed the first four phases of the five-phase life cycle, I had enough information to present a conclusion of my work formally. The fifth phase, concluding, is concluding and detailing the significance and implications of the study (Yin, 2017). I concluded my study and explained its overall significance. Furthermore, I identified the primary competitive forces, core practices, cost factors, and differentiation factors. These elements will stem from the responses of interviewees (Shurden & Shurden, 2015).

Data analysis is searching for and identifying the patterns of data, interpreting the patterns, and determining the meaning of the patterns (Bernard & Ryan, 2016). Data analysis allows the researchers to thoroughly understand a phenomenon as they come to identify the themes of participant experiences (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Eight techniques that researchers can use to analyze qualitative data; code categorization, developing a coding manual with operational definitions, data triangulation, development of themes and concepts from preexisting literature, emerging data saturation, the use of NVivo (a qualitative data software), pattern matching for validity, and the validation of concepts with secondary documents.

I chose to use triangulation for my study. I used triangulation to help ensure the overall credibility of the research. Triangulation is the use of multiple data sources to validate research (Mayer, 2015). As part of the triangulation process for my study, I used the methodological triangulation of data, including phone interviews, a review of business websites to gain a better understanding of history and operations, and document reviews. Using triangulation for a qualitative multiple case study design will help provide

valuable information and will increase the transferability of the research findings (Stavros & Westberg, 2009). I reviewed the data I gathered throughout the interview process with my research participants. After I transcribed my audio-recorded interviews and used the triangulation technique to analyze my data thoroughly, I gained a greater understanding of the data which led me to develop conclusions for my research.

After the completion of the phone interviews, which is the primary data collection technique for this research, I transcribed the data. Following the completion of the transcription, I followed up with each participant using member checking interviews, where I reviewed f a summary of my interpretations of their responses from the first interview. Member checking is another method of data collection for this research. To facilitate coding and analysis, I used the NVivo software. The purpose of NVivo is to ensure adequate management data and data interpretation. Additionally, NVivo will help me collect, organize, code, and analyze the data I gathered throughout the research process.

It is crucial for researchers to ensure that all themes are in alignment with the purpose of the study to avoid deviation (Bogers et al., 2017). After the completion of the member checking process, I then uploaded the interpretations to the NVivo software for coding and analysis. Finally, I used the themes I found and codes I identified to draw conclusions from the data I collected.

The thematic analysis approach is what I used to focus on the key themes of the study. The thematic analysis approach is used in qualitative research to identify, examine, and record the themes in data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Nowell, Norris, White,

& Moules, 2017). Using the thematic analysis will ensure the critical themes of the study correlate with the conceptual framework and literature.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research is a way to assess the quality of the measurements which were used to gather the data in the research, which is error-free and is dependable in the findings (Noble & Smith, 2015; Wamba, Akter, Edwards, Chopin, & Gnanzou, 2015). Sarma (2015) explained that credibility mostly ensures the dependability of qualitative research. Integrating measures, such as interviews and field visits, is ideal to ensure the credibility, further leading to the dependability of the research. Research dependability impacts the overall trustworthiness of a study. To ensure dependability, I reported the processes in full detail, which will allow readers to analyze the extent of the proper research practices that I followed. Furthermore, the development of a research protocol for the research design and data analysis methods can also lead to the research dependability (Sarma, 2015). In all, reliability in qualitative research may be assessed and accomplished in a variety of ways to ensure the credibility and dependability, which are crucial elements in research.

Member checking is a form of validation to ensure the accuracy of gathered data based on the views of members of a study (Richards, 2013; Simpson & Quigley, 2016). The member checking technique helps the researcher enhance quality research by increasing its reliability and credibility of the information within the research (Simpson & Quigley, 2016). As member checking is a form of validation for research data accuracy, I

used member checking in my research because it also minimized bias. Member checking

helps to minimize bias by helping researchers gain a more accurate view of the data

collected from interviews (Årlin et al., 2015). Overall, member checking is a significant

factor in helping the researcher ensure that the reliability and validity elements of their

study are both of high quality.

Validity

Credibility in qualitative research is the trustworthiness which a researcher must

establish and is a part of the criteria that ensures the rigor of the research findings

(Anney, 2014). Elements of credibility in qualitative research are rigorous techniques and

methods for ensuring quality data, the credibility of the researcher, and a philosophical

belief in the value of qualitative inquiry (Patton, 1999). Ensuring credibility means to

develop a chain of logic between decisions and how a researcher will conduct s study.

One way to ensure credibility is to conduct a negative case analysis, where the researcher

of the study asks questions to make up for unanticipated answers (Bengtsson, 2015). To

ensure credibility, I identified patterns and linkages through an inductive analysis. I

sought to identify possible competing themes by finding additional ways to organize my

data and by considering other possibilities that may have led to different findings.

Transferability is the degree of the results which may apply to other groups or

settings as well as the number of research participants (Bengtsson, 2015). The

generalizability of the results depends on how representative the sample is (Bengtsson,

2015). Transferability depends on the future researchers of the subject who may wish to

fill in the gaps and expand on the research. By following the interview protocol (see

Appendix), conducting member checking, and reaching data saturation, future researchers who conduct similar studies may determine the transferability of my study.

Confirmability in qualitative research is the degree findings that are consistent, and which other researchers could replicate (Connelly, 2016). The primary factor of confirmability is the concern with establishing the data and interpretations of the findings, which are derived from the data and not figments of the researcher's imagination (Anney, 2014). To address confirmability, I kept detailed notes of the decisions I made and conducted member checking with my research participants.

Data saturation is ensuring the collection of significant and quality data to support the study. Not reaching data saturation impacts the overall quality and validity of the research (Fusch & Ness, 2015). To reach data saturation, I conducted open-ended, semistructured interviews with research participants. I also developed a saturation grid for my study. The saturation grid will list the topic and questions of the study vertically and the interviews in a horizontal direction. I achieved data saturation when I was certain there were no additional insights into the research, and when there was no further evidence of emerging themes from the interviews.

Transition and Summary

In Section 1, I provided a background of the problem, the problem statement, and defined the purpose of this study, which was to explore the marketing strategies small business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. Furthermore, I detailed the nature of the study, the research question, interview questions, the conceptual framework, a list of operational definitions and assumptions, limitations, and

delimitations. Finally, I concluded Section 1 with the significance of the study and a review of the professional and academic literature.

Section 2 consisted of a restatement of the purpose statement, a detailed description of the role of the researcher, and a description of the participants. Further expanding Section 2 was the research method, research design, population and sampling, ethical research, a description of the data collection instruments, data collection techniques, and data organization techniques. To finalize Section 2, I provided a data analysis and a detailed description of reliability and validity.

Section 3 consists of a presentation of findings, the application to professional practice, and implications for social change. Section 3 also contains sections on recommendations for actions and recommendations for further research. To conclude Section 3, there is a reflection and a conclusion of the research.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study is to explore the marketing strategies small business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. According to Turner and Enders (2017), small business owners make up 99.9% of all employer firms in the United States, but 50% of new small businesses fail during their first 5 years. Rebecca and Maharani (2018) identified that inadequate marketing is a contributing factor to the failure of those small businesses. By implementing effective marketing strategies into their business plan, small business owners can increase their chances of longer business sustainability.

The conceptual framework used as the foundation for this study was the hybrid typology. To distinguish effective marketing strategies that contribute to long-term sustainability, I conducted individual semistructured interviews with three small business owners located in the Midwest of the United States who had sustained their business operations beyond 5 years. With each interview, the participants answered a set of five interview questions to answer the study's overarching research question, which was: What marketing strategies do small business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years? The answers to the research helped me to gain a greater understanding of this phenomenon and enabled me to gather the findings needed to come to a valuable conclusion for this study.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question of this study was: What marketing strategies do small business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years? With this research question as the foundation of this study, I interviewed three small business owners who have used marketing strategies to sustain their business beyond 5 years. While my original intention was to interview four small business owners, I found that only interviewing three small business owners was enough to provide adequate data. Out of the three participants I interviewed, only two responded to the member checking process. The participant who did not respond, I relied on the public documentation available for their business. Participants are in different states throughout the Midwest region. In a semistructured interview with five open-ended research questions, the participants provided accounts of their experiences in using sustainable marking strategies. I also collected public documentation, such as business websites and social media, as secondary data for my study.

I took notes of the personal identification of the participants for researcher purposes and replaced them with unique identifiers in the study; SBO-1, SBO-2, and SBO-3. The unique identifiers were to ensure participant confidentiality and to distinguish the participants to ensure their confidentiality. Participants' personal information, including names, places of business, and locations, were recorded electronically and will remain secured in a locked folder in a password protected computer for 5 years, after which, I will destroy. The personal identifiers were implemented into the process to label the codes and themes identified in Nvivo during

data analysis. Four themes emerged from the data analysis: (1) social media, (2) incentive

marketing, (3) partnerships, and (4) word-of-mouth. Table 1 details the themes that

emerged when analyzing the data of this study.

Table 1

Data Themes

Emergent themes	Percentage used by SBOs
Social media	1/00%
Incentive marketing	66%
Partnerships	66%
Word of mouth	66%

Emergent Theme 1: Social Media

The first theme that emerged from participant responses was the use of social

media. Social media, including Facebook and Instagram, were one of the primary

strategies used by participants that play a key role in enhancing their marketing strategies

for their businesses. A majority of businesses use social media as part of their branding

and marketing strategy (Shabbir, Ghazi, & Mehmood, 2017). Participants SBO-1 and

SBO-3 detailed their experiences and strategies using social media. The social media

accounts of SBO-2 include Facebook and Instagram as well. When answering the first

interview question, SBO-1 stated that one strategy they use is to allow people to bring

their pets into their shop. SBO-1 emphasized, "I take photos of every animal that comes

into my store, and I highlight that animal on my Facebook page." SBO-3 utilizes both

Facebook and Instagram and stated, "I find that I get the greatest type of traction with

Instagram," given that SBO-3 holds promotions and giveaways on the social network,

which they further explained when answering the second interview question. The strategies used by SBO-1 and SBO-3 are in alignment with He, Wang, Chen, and Zha's (2017) research findings, which show that customer participation in a business's social media site leads to an increase in the frequency in customer visits. Not only does social media encourage customer visits, but it also helps users to create and share information about the business.

The hybrid typology was the chosen framework for this study by Walker and Ruekert (1987). According to Sarac (2019), prospectors are highly flexible, employ innovation to address it, and become industry designers. Prospector companies are also continuously searching for new opportunities in the market (Yanes-Estévez, García-Pérez, & Oreja-Rodríguez, 2018). The emergent social media theme of this study aligns with the prospector positioning strategy of this study. The small business owners I interviewed use social media strategies in various ways to attract customers, which one can consider as innovative and can also adjust to fit the needs of their customers and followers on their social media platforms.

Table 2

Social Media Theme Frequency & Subtheme

Emergent theme: Social media	Participants	# of Responses
Mentions of social media platforms	SBO-1, SBO-3	2
Active social media	SBO-1, SBO-2, SBO-3	2
Facebook subtheme	SBO-1, SBO-2, SBO-3	1
Instagram subtheme	SBO-1, SBO-2, SBO-3	1

Correlation to the conceptual framework. Marketing communications should be essential in the implementation of the prospector and differentiated defender strategies in small businesses. Prospectors always focus on new needs, new markets, and customers, along with entering the market with new products and services (Khaki, Poursadegh, & Vazifehdoust, 2016). I believe that the first theme of this study, social media, aligns with the prospector positioning strategy from my conceptual framework. The participants of this study detailed ways of how they can meet the needs of their customers and reach different markets by attracting them through unique strategies. The actions of a prospector of a firm are similar to a process called growth hacking. Growth hacking is a marketing strategy adopted by startups that primarily focus on low-cost practices and seek out ways to uniquely use their platforms (Kemell et al., 2019).

Further, growth hacking is a form of marketing that fortifies analytical thinking, experimentation, web metrics, social networks, and creativity (Coll & Micó, 2019; Riobóo, 2016). In comparison, the prospector positioning strategy is for innovation and early market entry to locate and employ new product and market opportunities (Olson et al., 2018). The participants emphasized their use of social media and the different ways they manage their platforms to gain an increase in followers and customers for their businesses, which include promoting their products, experimentation, creativity, and taking advantage of new market opportunities.

Emergent Theme 2: Incentive Marketing

Incentive marketing, such as the use of promotions, certifications, and giveaways, is another theme that emerged used by participants. Two out of the three participants

identified that their use of incentive marketing has helped increase their customer base in some fashion. About their cause marketing strategy, SBO-1 stated, "So every new adopter at the local humane society receives a $10 gift certificate to my store, and I'd donate that gift certificate. That was also one of the main strategies that I used". Tamaddoni, Stakhoovych, and Ewing's (2017) work show that offering specific cash vouchers to customers can improve the performance of retention campaigns in business. SBO-3 used promotions and giveaways in their strategy through social media:

> For example, if you want to win a dozen cupcakes, you need to tag 3 of your friends, and then they need to tag 3 of their friends. So, I focused on the competition with the promotions, asking everyone to tag three or more friends is increasing the popularity or the traction that I actually have on Instagram. I find promotions, giveaways, and asking to tag three or more friends is very, very effective.

Incentive marketing is a highly common practice in business marketing strategies. Hamilton, Velitchka, and Rohm's (2017) work showed that incentives and promotions are one of the primary motivations that customers interact with a business on social media and by email, which in turn confirms that the participant's use of incentive marketing as a vital tool in marketing. Below is Table 3, which shows how many participants identified a form of incentive marketing as one of their marketing strategies.

Table 3

Incentive Marketing Theme Frequency

Emergent theme: Incentive marketing	Participants	# of Responses
Incentives	SBO-1, SBO-3	2

Correlation to the conceptual framework. Incentive marketing is also in alignment with the prospector positioning strategy of the hybrid typology. From the standpoint of a prospector, participants showed innovation through their descriptions of the ways they sought out customers either through their offerings of certificates and promotions. Mirza and Ahsan (2019) state that prospectors' experiment with economic changes. The participants of the study have and have emphasized the need to change when it comes to customer's needs and wants. From the standpoint of a defender, the participants ensure to provide offers to their customers to help secure their position in their current product and market.

Emergent Theme 3: Collaboration

Partnerships among the participants of this study were ideal for enhancing their marketing strategies. SBO-1 explained their partnership with their local humane society has been beneficial for their cause marketing strategy. SBO-1 emphasized: "Subsequently whatever they used the gift certificate [to their store], I donated 10% of their purchase when they use a certificate back to our local humane society". Additionally, SBO-3 identified partnerships as an effective way that helped them address the key barriers they encountered when implementing marketing strategies (interview question # 3), stating: "I

also do partnerships with other small business owners, so they allow me to leave, business cards and vice versa." Developing partnerships with other business owners is a strategy that went unintentionally unmentioned in the literature review portion of this study. According to Hernández-Carrión, Camarero-Izquierdo, and Gutiérrez-Cillán (2017), entrepreneurs experience a growth in their internal and external networks with other business acquaintances, such as partnerships. The findings of this study show that small business owners who develop partnerships with other small business owners in their community are an effective marketing strategy and in spreading brand awareness. Table 4 shows which and how many participants detailed their collaborations with other business owners to help promote their businesses.

Table 4

Collaboration Theme Frequency

Emergent theme: Collaboration	Participants	# of Responses
Collaborating with other businesses	SBO-1, SBO-3	2

Correlation to the Conceptual Framework. For the partnership theme of this study, the prospector positioning strategy seemed the most appropriate. Marketing opportunities may be exploited in various ways by small business owners. The participants of this study sought to exploit new market opportunities by working with other businesses to help market their products to more potential customers. Chereau and Meschi's (2019) research of Olson et al.'s work upholds that as constant innovators, prospectors should be attentive to their customers. The participants have exhibited that

they continuously search for new product and market opportunities through their collaborations with others.

Emergent Theme 4: Word of Mouth

Word-of-mouth is another theme that came from the findings. While SBO-2 did not contribute to the emerging word-of-mouth theme, SBO-1 and SBO-3 have identified word-of-mouth as one of their marketing strategies as a result of different methods. SBO-1 explained that their membership in their local Chamber of Commerce and participation in the leads group generated referrals to their business. SBO-3 specified their use of social media to help influence word-of-mouth for their business: … "The last six months of my contract, I found that word of mouth was being leveraged better than the digital boards. So, I removed the digital boards and turned my emphasis on social media to leverage word-of-mouth". SBO-3 also explained how their use of their business truck, which includes logos of their business, printed on their truck. Word-of-mouth in small businesses is a form of relationship marketing that can sometimes be the only marketing strategy available to some small businesses (Sabapathy & Selvakumar, 2018). Even so, word-of-mouth can have a significant impact on the purchasing behaviors of consumers and has believed to become one of the most efficient and effective forms of advertising in marketing (Razi, Lajevardi, Orouei, Saedi, & Khatami, 2017). Therefore, word-of-mouth has proven to be a contributing factor to the most effective marking activities. Table 5 shows which participants of this study specifically identified the importance of word-of-mouth as a form of marketing that has helped their small businesses.

Table 5

Word-of-Mouth Theme Frequency

Emergent theme: Word-of-Mouth	Participants	# of Responses
Specified word-of-mouth marketing	SBO-1, SBO-2	2

Correlation to the conceptual framework. The prospector strategy from the hybrid typology aligns with the word-of-mouth theme. Word-of-mouth is a form of free marketing that is typically communicated and spread from customers and potential customers of a business, and overall, plays a significant role in customer decision making (Sicilia, Delgado-Ballester, & Palazon, 2016). To generate positive word-of-mouth would require small business owners to remain creative in their marketing strategies and the products and services they have to offer. The participants of this study have identified ways to produce an increase in word-of-mouth for their businesses.

Noteworthy Findings

Although this section does not contain direct marketing strategies, other factors that participants identified heavily contributed to the formation of the current marketing strategies they discussed in their interviews. Image 1 shows the emergent themes and the additional noteworthy findings participants mentioned in their interviews. A common theme that all participants emphasized is passion and knowing what you want to do. Each participant felt very strongly about their businesses;

SBO-1: "Animals are a strong passion for me, obviously with my involvement in our local humane society. So, I guess the number one thing that can help you is just to make sure you find something you're really passionate about".

SBO-2: "As long as the business that you're in is one that you can target honestly and it's one that you believe in., it's a lot easier to market because you're marketing to people like yourself. You always try to personalize who your marketing towards and look at it as if to you're marketing towards yourself".

SBO-3: "Being a small business owner, you definitely have to have the hustle, the grit, the grind, because it's definitely not for the faint heart."

The passion described by the participants led to them discussing their want to continuously learn about running a small business and about their industries. They emphasized the importance of learning as a part of helping their strategies in business. Additionally, the participants stressed the importance of flexibility when discussing marketing strategies. More specifically, being flexible and open to adjustments for successful marketing strategies is a factor that is important to the small business owners I interviewed.

Ties to Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is the hybrid typology, which was developed by Walker and Ruekert (1987). The hybrid typology addresses three types of positioning strategies; prospectors, differentiated defenders, and low-cost defenders (Walker & Ruekert, 1987). The data analysis of the study confirmed that the hybrid

typology was applicable and suitable for exploring the marketing strategies small business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years.

The themes and additional findings collected from the data are tied to the prospector element of the hybrid typology because participants expressed either the desire for new products in terms of customer needs and wants, or market development. Anwar, Shah, and Hasnu (2016) stated that prospectors flourish by stimulating new product and market opportunities, which the participants appeared to present during interviews, highlighted in the Noteworthy Findings subsection of this paper. Differentiated defenders are those who seek to secure a segment of the market by providing a robust set of products or services of superior quality (Anwar et al., 2016). I cannot apply the differentiated defender strategy to all three participants of this study, as only one (SBO-1) explained their activities, which would fall under a differentiated defender, in their interview. The low-cost defenders focus on cost control in stable markets; they seek to produce goods or services as efficiently as possible (Olson, Duray, Cooper, & Olson, 2016). Two out of the three participants made mention of the cost of their products or running their business in general in a more efficient manner.

<div align="center">**Applications to Professional Practice**</div>

The results of this study provided marketing strategies that small business owners can use to help sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. Small business owners contribute significantly to their local communities. Still, many face the challenge of maintaining sustainability beyond 5 years of operation, where research shows that the lack of effective marketing strategies plays a role in small business failure (Bandyopadhyay, 2016). The

themes identified in this study are social media, incentive marketing, partnerships, and word of mouth. Each of these themes are marketing strategies that different business owners throughout the Midwest region of the United States have identified as useful for sustainability for their businesses. The results of this study can contribute to business practice by providing small business owners with marketing strategies that help them sustain their businesses for beyond 5 years.

Small business owners can seek to improve their business strategies through multiple ways. The themes are significant and therefore support the professional practice. The use of social media has been a strategy used by small business managers when implementing customer relationship management activities (Charoensukmongkol & Sasatanun, 2017). Additionally, Turner and Endres (2017) use social media for marketing, advertising, and recruitment. Social media in a small business can help owners improve their strategies in all areas.

Implications for Social Change

Positive social change is grounded in the elimination of restrictions that prevent or hinders the progress within a community (Haugh & Talwar, 2016). Implications for positive social change for small business owners include providing jobs and volunteer work for community members. Small business owners also can engage in charitable ventures for the betterment of their local communities. Charitable ventures may include fundraising for new programs and activities for individuals and group members. These ventures are beneficial as they help encourage groups of people to work as teams and grow closer as a community.

Recommendations for Action

For small business owners to increase their chances of sustainability, business owners must be willing to learn and adapt to new approaches that fit their business model. Marketing strategies in small business is critical long-term sustainability. Therefore, small business owners could benefit from applying the findings in this study to their businesses. I recommend that small business owners develop a presence on different social media platforms where their target market is most active and develop strategies to promote their business across the market. I also recommend that small business owners seek to form partnerships with other small business owners, as research has shown to be an effective marketing strategy. Small business owners should also create ways that will help generate word of mouth throughout their communities.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this study was to help contribute to the gap of the lack of or ineffective marketing strategies for small businesses. I recommend further research on this subject. The limitations of the study were the sample size of three small business owners within the Midwest region of the United States not being a representation of all small business businesses in the Midwest region of the United States. Although I was able to reach data saturation, extensive research with a broader group of participants would be beneficial to the subject matter of this paper. The other limitation of this study was that participants might not have provided honest answers to the interview questions representing the marketing and sustainability processes of their businesses. Small

business owners who are willing to participate in research of such might be willing to provide honest experiences from which other small business owners can benefit.

Reflections

Completing this research has been a challenging experience; however, it is one that I do not regret. The doctoral study experience has helped me to learn and grow on a professional level, as I have gained the knowledge and skills that I need to help me succeed on a career path that is fulfilling. This program is one that requires determined focus, organization, and time management, and I feel that I improved in each of these areas. Furthermore, reading about and experiencing having to let go of personal biases throughout the interview process is not only applicable to research but during everyday experiences as well. I'm also glad to have learned and understand all the hard work that small business owners put into doing something they love.

Conclusion

Although marketing strategies are one of the essential elements for small businesses, small business owners still experience challenges when implementing or developing effective marketing strategies that will help them sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. I used open-ended, semistructured questions to ask three small business owners during interviews throughout the Midwest region of the United States. Data saturation occurred once information became repetitive. From these interviews, four themes emerged from the data I collected: social media, incentive marketing, partnerships, and word of mouth. The themes which emerged from this study are effective marketing strategies based on the additional research I conducted from previous

literature. Small business owners may apply the findings from this study to their business

practices for positive change in their marketing activities.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

The research question of this study is: What marketing strategies do small business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years?

In this qualitative, multiple case study, I developed a set of 5 semistructured, open-ended research questions to ask research participants to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived-experiences of small business owners in the Midwest. The below interview protocol is what I will adhere to for the interview process.

1. I will call the participants at the scheduled day and time, after which we will formally introduce ourselves, and I will explain the interview protocol in its entirety before beginning the interview.

2. I will explain the purpose of informed consent and provide a consent form for the participant to sign before beginning the interview.

3. I will provide a copy of the consent form to the participant for their records.

4. After allowing them some time to look over the documents, I will ask the participant if they have any questions or concerns regarding the consent form.

5. I will provide the participant with their unique participant code, which I will inform the participant that the code will also be used as their pseudonym in the interview for anonymity purposes.

6. I will further inform the participant that I will record the interviews for transcription purposes afterward.

7. I will inform the participant that the length of the interview may vary between 30 mins to 45 minutes.

8. The interview will begin with the predeveloped set of five interview questions:

    a. What are the primary marketing strategies that have helped you grow and sustain your business beyond the first 5 years of operation?

    b. What strategies were most effective toward your marketing efforts?

    c. How did you address the key barriers you encounter when implementing marketing strategies?

    d. How did the business skills you possess facilitate the effective implementation of the successful marketing strategies?

    e. What additional information would you like to share that will help other entrepreneurs sustain their businesses?

9. I will ask the participant if they have any additional questions regarding the interview.

10. I will inform and explain to the participant about the follow-up review for the member checking process to ensure that my translation and understanding of the interview recordings are accurate.

11. I will then end the interview and thank the participant for their time.