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Small Business Social Media Marketing Strategies in the Retail Industry

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

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MS, Central Michigan University, 2000

BS, University of South Carolina, 1983

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

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Abstract

Many small business owners lack social media marketing (SMM) strategies to generate

sales growth. Small business owners are concerned with increasing sales growth to

ensure sustainability. Grounded in Rogers' diffusion of innovation theory, the purpose of

this qualitative multiple case study was to explore SMM strategies some small business

owners in the women's retail apparel industry use to generate growth in sales. The

participants comprised 3 small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry in

South Carolina with successful experience using SMM strategies to generate sales

growth. Data were collected from semistructured interviews, archival organizational

documentation, and physical artifacts. Yin's 5-step analysis process guided the data

analysis. The following 3 themes emerged: social media platforms, the SMM impact, and

customer relationship management. A key recommendation is for small business owners

to use Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram social media platforms to reach customers and

receive immediate feedback. The implications for positive social change include the

potential for business owners to increase their ability to implement SMM campaigns to

generate sales growth. Higher sales may lead to more profit, which could be used to make

donations to community-based social programs.

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Dedication

To God, be the glory. I dedicate this doctoral study to my late beloved mother, who went to be with the Lord before I could complete this study. You sacrificed so much so that I could follow my dreams of becoming a doctor. I owe everything to you because I know you have been my guardian angel through this last hurdle of my journey. I am forever grateful to you, and I will always love you for a lifetime.

Table of Contents

i

ii

List of Tables

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Small businesses play a key role in the U.S. economy. A small business is an independent business with fewer than 500 employees. An estimated 30.2 million small businesses operate in the United States (U.S. Small Business Administration [SBA], 2018). However, approximately 50% of small businesses fail within first 5 years of operations (SBA, 2018). Small businesses represent 99.9% of all employers' businesses and employ 47.5% of the private labor force (SBA, 2018). The number of small businesses has increased, as business owners engage and attract new customers.

Social media is an online platform for small businesses to market and brand their products or services and to manage customer relationships (He, Wang, Chen, & Zha, 2017). Business leaders, owners, and managers use social media to communicate with their customers and build social relationships and other businesses to increase social capital. He et al. (2017) posited that social media provides small businesses owners an opportunity to increase sales, improve customers' relationships, and enhance brand awareness. Shabbir, Ghazi, and Mehmood (2017) commented that social media can create a long-term relationship between businesses and customers. Small business owners face challenges when implementing social media because they can lack resources and an understanding on effective social media adoption (He et al., 2017). Some small business owners lack the ability to accurately measure the effectiveness of social media because they are accustomed to communicating with customers through word-of-mouth (WOM). Small business owners could use social media as a gateway to make profit and grow their businesses (Shabbir et al., 2017). The focus of this qualitative, multiple case study was to

explore the (SMM) strategies that some small business owners use to generate growth in sales.

Background of the Problem

Some small business owners use SMM to engage with their customers and build social relationships with customers. Small business leaders can use SMM to promote their business and to gain visibility, viability, and sustainability to survive and remain competitive (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). Most competition for small business comes from the Internet; therefore, to achieve a competitive advantage, small business leaders must understand and use social media effectively (Go & You, 2016). Although small businesses are beginning to use social media to gain competitive advantage and social relationships, leaders still face challenges such as formulating social media strategies, and how social media affects an organization's strategy and practices. However, social media will impact over traditional methods of marketing in terms of networking, online branding opportunities, and business exposure.

Problem Statement

Social media is an effective tool to generate growth in sales, but small businesses are not embracing the opportunity to apply SMM strategies (Epstein, 2018; Kwayu, Lai, & Abubakre, 2018). Moreover, 77% of small businesses owners use social media to generate growth in sales (Elena, 2016; SBA, 2018). The general business problem is that some small businesses are not effectively leveraging social media in their marketing strategies. The specific business problem addressed in this study is that some small

business owners in the women's retail apparel industry lack SMM strategies to generate growth in sales.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the SMM strategies that some small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry use to generate growth in sales. The target population included three small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry in South Carolina who had successfully used SMM strategies to generate growth in sales for 5 years. Small businesses could use the results of this study to increase the return on investment for business owners, which could increase local community's tax base to improve social programs. Positive social change can also result from increased employment to stimulate the local economies from growth in sales.

Nature of the Study

I used the qualitative method for this study. Yin (2018a) stated that qualitative researchers search for trends in the context of their studies. Qualitative researchers also explore phenomena or experiences in a specific context (Vohra, 2014). I used the qualitative methodology research to determine the *why* and *how* of the research process. I also used qualitative research methodology to collect data through interviews, archival documents, and physical artifacts to answer the overarching research question. The qualitative method was appropriate for this study to explore SMM strategies that some small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry use to generate growth in sales.

The quantitative method consists of developing hypotheses for testing

relationships and differences among variables (Ma, 2015). I did not use the quantitative

method because I did not wish to examine data using statistical analysis. Researchers use

the mixed-methods approach to gather qualitative and quantitative data to interpret

findings based on the strengths of both methods to explore and examine phenomena in

depth (Archibald, 2016; Snelson, 2016). In this study, I did not use experiments or

investigating processes. Therefore, the mixed-methods approach was not appropriate for

this study.

Principle qualitative designs include ethnography, phenomenology, narrative, and

case studies. Ethnographers study a group that shares a common culture (Leedy &

Ormrod, 2014), which was not the focus of this study. Phenomenological researchers

study the meanings of lived experiences of participants (Moustakas, 1994). I explored the

SMM strategies used by the participants, not the personal meanings of their lived

experiences; therefore, phenomenology was not an appropriate design for this study.

Narrative researchers study the meanings of people's stories (Berry, 2016; Haydon,

Browne, & van der Riet, 2017). Because I did not collect the life stories of individuals,

the narrative design was not appropriate. Yin (2018a) proposed that *what* questions are

appropriate for exploratory research. I investigated what SMM strategies some small

business owners in the women's retail apparel use to generate growth in sales. Using a

qualitative case study involved the establishment of a case and research questions (Hyett,

Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I used three cases, or units,

to identify and explore the SMM strategies that small business owners in the women's

retail apparel industry use to generate growth in sales.

Research Question

The overarching research question for this qualitative, multiple case study was as

follows: What SMM strategies do some small business owners in the women's retail

apparel industry use to generate growth in sales?

Interview Questions

I used the interview questions below in semistructured, face-to-face interviews

with small business owners to collect data.

1. What led you to start using social media?

2. How did you customize your SMM strategies to generate growth in sales?

3. How does SMM fit into your marketing mix?

4. What other SMM strategic processes and tools do you use to generate growth
   in sales?

5. How did you use social media to contribute to improving your SMM
   strategies?

6. What trends do you see in the role of SMM in your business shopping
   experience?

7. How do customers make purchases from your business, for instance, do they
   approach your products from an online platform, or do they drop into the
   store?

8. How have alternative shopping behaviors impacted your storefront success?

9. What sets your business apart from other women's apparel businesses both locally and online?

10. How do you strategize and gain customers' loyalty?

11. What additional information would you like to share regarding your successful SMM strategies that I did not ask?

Conceptual Framework

I used diffusion of innovation theory (DOI) theory as the conceptual lens through which to view and lay the foundation for this study. Rogers developed the DOI theory in 1962. The four constructs for DOI theory are innovation, communication channels, time, and implementation (Rogers, 1962; Salman & Hasim, 2011). Rogers (2003) explained that DOI theory is the interpersonal communication relationship of the way that business owners use innovation and technology. Based on the DOI theory, Salman and Hasim (2011) proposed that small business owners be cautious when adopting innovation and technology, even when doing so may have advantages to improve the innovation process. Small business owners used the DOI to explain the SMM strategies that were beneficial to them when adopting social media to generate growth in sales. The DOI theory was used as a lens in answering the overarching research question and understanding the findings from the study.

Operational Definitions

Certain terms used in my study may not have the same meanings for all readers; therefore, I defined how these terms were used in this study as follows:

Disruptive technology: Disruptive technology is a technology that changes the bases of competition by changing the performance metrics thus changing the way firms compete (Danneels, 2004).

Small business: Small businesses in the United States are privately or publicly owned, independent businesses, having fewer than 500 employees and net profits totaling less than $7.5 million in annual receipts (SBA, 2018).

Social media: Social media is an Internet-based marketing tool that buyers and sellers use to communicate information through sharing (Agnihotri, Dingus, Hu, & Krush, 2016).

User-generated content (UGC): UGC is the innovative way that people watch video and TV, with millions of video producers and consumers (Liu, Burns, & Hou, 2017). UGC is also a source of data shared through social media platforms (Liu et al., 2017).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

This section includes the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations that has impacted the outcome of this qualitative, multiple case study. As the researcher, I accepted certain assumptions. Bendle and Cotte (2016) and Yin (2018a) stated that assumptions are facts the researcher assume are true but cannot verify. Limitations refer to the potential weaknesses of the study that the researcher has no control over (Simon & Goes, 2013). Delimitations are the boundaries imposed by the researcher when defining the scope of the study (Yin, 2018a). I set delimitations before beginning this qualitative, multiple case study to limit the study's scope. As the researcher, I defined the

assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of this study so that I can identify the issues that could affect the validity of the research process.

Assumptions

I made four assumptions in this study. I assumed that participants would answer the interview questions truthfully throughout the interview process. I also assumed that the research participants represented only small business owners with at least 5 years of experience in the retail apparel industry. Another assumption was that the interview questions selected would address the business problem of the study. The fourth assumption was that the selected cases, primarily small businesses located in South Carolina, was appropriate to address the purpose of the study.

Limitations

I identified four limitations in this study. The first limitation was that the participants might not want to share their experiences openly. The second limitation was that the study had a sample size of three small business owners, which may limit the generalizability of the study results. The third limitation was that the participants may not have been fully engaged when answering the interview questions during the interview process. Yin (2018a) stated that case study researchers are susceptible to bias if the researcher has knowledge or experience related to the problem of the study. To mitigate bias, I followed a prescribed interview protocol and confirmed their meaning and interpretation after each participant interview. Also, I asked to follow-up questions during and after the interview process to ensure clarity of information and preclude bias.

Delimitations

I identified five delimitations in this study. The first was that participants are successful small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry who use SMM to market their business. The second delimitation was that the geographical location included only small business owners in South Carolina. The third delimitation was that I only studied small businesses owners who used successful SMM strategies to generate growth in sales. The fourth delimitation was small businesses owners who were operational for at least 5 years. The final delimitation for this study was the sample size of three small business owners. According to Yin (2018a), researchers might use a small sample size in a qualitative research because more time is needed to collect qualitative data.

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Significance of the Study

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Contribution to Business Practice

Small business owners could use the findings from this study to improve their businesses. Almost 50% of small businesses close within the first 5 years of operations (SBA, 2018). However, 77% of small business owners use social media to enhance growth in sales in the United States (SBA, 2018). Since the mid-2000s, social media has evolved, and scholars and practitioners are interested in how small business owners use social media to understand markets (Atanassova & Clark, 2015; Roy, Dionne, Maxwell, Carson, & Sosa, 2018). Small businesses may use the findings from this study to improve their practices by identifying the SMM strategies that some small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry use to generate growth in sales. Business owners can use

social media to connect with customers and bring value to companies and local communities. By using social media, business owners could see a new way of doing business, based on innovative concepts such as sharing and collaboration (Jiang, Tadikamalla, Shang, & Zhao, 2016). Small business leaders could also use SMM tools to improve the speed and frequency of communication with their customers. However, the use of social media does not mean that small business owners profitably use them to develop a successful business strategy. If small businesses owners adopt social media, it could be the implementation of a virtual community where businesses, suppliers, and customers can communicate, collaborate, coproduce, and improve products and services.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for social change include the potential for business owners to increase their ability to implement SMM campaigns. Contributions from the study may also help business owners generate sales growth globally, and some business owners may support their local community social programs. Business owners could use the results of this study to contribute to positive social change by increasing economic revenues for communities and opportunities for brick and mortar businesses to remain competitive to allow for job opportunities of college students.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The literature review contains a collection of researchers' scholarly studies (Nortvig & Christiansen, 2017). In the literature review, I provided some current SMM research findings and trends in SMM strategies. The literature review was relevant to the central research question, and I focused on the conceptual framework, business problem,

research question, and purpose statement. The literature review consisted of peer-reviewed articles, books, government sources, and other scholarly sources.

I organized this literature review into four categories: (a) published relevant conceptual and empirical works, (b) critical analysis and synthesis of the conceptual framework, (c) critical analysis and synthesis of other theorists who used DOI theory, and (d) critical analysis and synthesis of supporting and contrasting theories. In this literature review, I discuss literature about SMM strategies and elaborated on background information of different methods, tools, and strategies used for SMM to generate growth in sales. I also discuss how some small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry use SMM strategies to generate growth in sales.

I gathered sources for this literature review using the following research tools: ABI/INFORM Complete, Business Source Complete, Emerald Insight, EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, Google Scholar alerts, ProQuest, Zotero, Emerald Management, and Sage Journals. I used the following research terms for the searches: *case study*, *conceptual framework*, *small business owners*, *social media*, *SMM strategies*, *small business owners*, *marketing*, *retail apparel industry*, *social media networking (SMN)*, *sales growth*, *sales forecast,* and *small business.*

I limited my search to scholarly peer-reviewed journals, cited seminal works, books, government websites, and dissertations, as well as other materials published within the 2015-2019 period. The study contains 258 references, of which 238 (92%) are peer-reviewed, and 154(65%) have publication dates within the period of 2015 to 2019, which is the expected date of receiving approval from Walden University's chief

academic officer. The literature review subsection contains 130 peer-reviewed full-text

articles, of which 117 (90%) are peer-reviewed and 90 (67%) were published within the

2015-2019 period. Table1 contains the summary of source-types and related statistics for

this study literature review.

Table 1

Source-Types and Statistics for References

Type of resources		< 5 years 2019	> 5 years 2019	% total < 5 years
Peer-reviewed articles	237	138	100	58%
Other sources: Dissertations or books or government websites	21	16	4	76%
Total resources	258	154	104	60%

Application to the Applied Business Problem

I researched studies relevant to the importance of small businesses, and I analyzed

challenges of small businesses, marketing, social media, sales forecasting, and

innovations. In the DOI theory, Rogers (1962) explained the process by which business

leaders adopt innovation, technology, products, or services. By using the DOI theory,

researchers can identify how innovators and early adopters used social media to

communicate the saturation of technology or innovation (Rogers, 2003). For this study, I

explored the SMM strategies that some small business owners in the women's retail

apparel industry use to generate growth in sales in South Carolina. However, it is difficult

to evaluate small business owners' attitudes and the way they use social media. Most small businesses do not embrace social media; however, small businesses' growth and development help to develop new products, acquire new market shares, and gain new competitive advantages (Cesaroni & Consoli, 2015).

The DOI theory provided an appropriate framework to explore the SMM strategies that small business owners use to generate growth in sales (see Rogers, 2003). Business leaders use social media to promote relationships on websites and to generate growth in sales through the diffusion of innovation (Rogers, 2003). Business owners also use social media to disseminate marketing messages to reach more customers (Rogers, 2003; Scott & McGuire, 2017).

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the SMM strategies that some small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry use to generate growth in sales. The target population included three small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry in South Carolina who have successfully used SMM strategies to generate growth in sales for at least 5 years. Small businesses could use the results of this study to increase the local community's tax base to improve social programs and the standard of living for all citizens. In addition, positive social change can result from increased employment to stimulate local economies from growth in sales and initiative of economic development and community relations.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory

The DOI theory was the conceptual framework for this study. Rogers developed the DOI theory in 1995 to describe the process by which business leaders adopt a new

idea, product, or philosophy. Scholars use the DOI to understand the process of creating

an innovative idea, product, practice, or belief that migrates from creation to use through

communication channels over time among members of a social system (Rogers, 2003;

Scott & McGuire, 2017). Scholars have studied diffusion as the spread of ideas and

products since the early 19th century (Rogers, 2003; Scott & McGuire, 2017). As

outlined in the DOI theory, diffusion occurs in stages, and the process develops over

time.

The DOI theory is an older social science theory. Scholars continue to use this

theory in innovation adoption studies. Researchers have used the DOI theory in over half

a million studies (Rogers, 2003; Thambiah, Eze, Santhapparaj, & Arumugam, 2011).

Scholars have used the DOI theory in numerous fields, such as technology, banking,

education, social media, behavior and perceptions, and business to understand how

people translate new ideas into real-world applications. Scholars use the DOI theory to

explain how, why, and at what rate of adoption an innovation or technology spreads

through cultures (Oliveira & Martins, 2011; Scott & McGuire, 2017). Hornik (2004)

stated that there are four questions that are addressed when using the DOI theory:

1. What is the process of invention and adoption of technology or ideas subject
    to diffusion?

2. Why do some people (for collectivities) adopt before others?

3. What is the process that people go through as they adopt?

    -What is the stage they go through?

    -What influences them at each stage (sources)?

4. What are the consequences with regards to social welfare (growth and equity) given policies about, or the pattern of diffusion? (p.143)

In the DOI theory, Rogers (2003) explained the process and factors that influence the adoption of innovations. The most important aspect of the diffusion process is ensuring that the innovation gets adopted (Rogers, 2003). Business leaders can maximize an innovation's rate of adoption by understanding the factors that influence its adoption. However, an innovation does not have to be new, but only perceived as new to the adopter (Rogers, 2003).

Diffusion includes the communication process for spreading messages perceived as new ideas, services, or products. DOI may be transpired through the planned or occasional transmission. Rogers (2003) stated that the process of DOI is constant because new technologies continue to come into society. Rogers discussed four constructs of the DOI: innovators, communication channels, time, and social system.

The first construct of DOI is the innovators. Innovation may be something invented years ago, but if a customer sees it as new, then it can be an invention for that person. During the diffusion process, no one innovation is adopted by all individuals in a social system at the same time (Rogers, 2003).

The second construct of DOI is the communication channels. Communication channels refer to the traditional communication channels, such as telephone, television, and newspapers (Storey et al., 2017). Some businesses use social media as a tool to communicate with their customers and marketers. People in organizations communicate through channels. However, over time, communication channels have changed to meet

the needs of customers, such as e-mail, Internet, and Facebook. Mass media and interpersonal channels are two-way communications. Rogers (2003) revealed that diffusion encompasses interpersonal communication relationships through social development. Rogers also posited that interpersonal communications could be difficult to change or create when an individual holds a strong belief. Communication must occur among and within organizations for innovation to spread (Rogers, 2003).

The third construct of DOI is time. The rate of adoption is the time it takes members of the social system to adopt an innovation. There are three dimensions of the change process: innovation adoption process, innovation adopter categories, and rate of adoption (Rogers, 2003). The innovation adoption process is the first-hand knowledge of the innovation through the final acceptance or rejection of its value and application (Rogers, 2003). The five innovation adopter categories are innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. These categories are relevant, according to Rogers (2003), as to how innovators influence one another to adopt the idea, product, or service. The rate of adoption is from start to finish and how many people adopt the innovation within the adopter categories (Rogers, 2003).

The fourth construct of DOI is the social system. The social system is the foundation for behavior science change (Rogers, 2003). The social system may be individuals, informal groups, organizations, and subsystems. A social system is a group of members who share common goals (Rogers, 2003). Within the social system, members create limits within which an innovation diffuses. In most instances, DOI takes place within the social structure of the social system. Liu, Sidhu, Beacom, and Valente (2017)

commented that diffusion of innovations transpires among individuals or organizations in a social system.

Adoption. Adoption is a significant step in the DOI theory. Adoption includes how consumers determine whether not to try or adopt innovative products or services. Marshall, Cardan, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) and Jwaifell and Gasaymeh (2013) agreed with the DOI theory and stated that adopters are grouped into five categories. DOI is used to determine how innovation, which might be about an idea, behavior, or object, is adopted among the population.

The DOI theory is the foundation of change. In this theory, Rogers (2003) emphasized how the growing numbers of adopters use the communication of innovation over time to reach a given population of potential users. Scott and McGuire (2017) studied the spread and rate of adoption of agricultural techniques in local Midwest farming communities and identified general patterns and similarities in the change process. Although my study was focused on SMM strategies in the women's retail industry, I researched other industries that have used the diffusion of innovation theory. Each industry adopted the DOI theory to communicate new ideas, products, or services. The studies discussed in the following subsections show relevancy to how the diffusion of innovation of social media occurs in the numerous studies. Each study was relevant to using social media to communicate ideas or changes within the social system. SMM as a science field was difficult to restrict to only a few disciplines; therefore, I researched numerous disciples to show correlations as how social media through innovation of diffusion could help small businesses' growth by embracing social media.

Banking and the diffusion of innovation theory. Yahaya, Hamid, Idris, and Haji-Othman (2016) adopted the DOI theory to explore whether the perceived attributes of innovation influenced the customers' adoption of the products of the bank. Yahaya et al. discussed consumers' perceived attributes of innovations through the five characteristics of DOI theory. The credit card in Islamic countries normally symbolized the wealth status of an individual (Yahaya et al., 2016). Yahaya et al. postulated that intentions to use and attitude toward use of the credit card were mostly determined by the adoption of the DOI theory. Compatibility had a significant impact on how the consumers accepted the product or services provided by the Islamic banking based on their belief and values. Perceived risks also had an negative impact on the customers' acceptance of the product and service provided by the Islamic banking in Nigeria. The customers are more likely to use a new product or service that is align with one's values and beliefs.

Academics and the diffusion of innovation theory. Scholars have used the DOI theory to explore the decision to adopt new electronic technologies for classroom instructions. Jacobsen (1998) used Rogers's (1995) DOI theory to examine the adoption patterns and characteristics of faculty who integrated computer technology into teaching and learning in higher education. Jacobsen found that the diffusion factors and Rogers' attributes of innovations can be useful to adopters. Diffusion includes the spread knowledge of an innovation to a large audience through social media. Jwaifell and Gasaymeh (2013) used the DOI theory to examine and report teachers' use of interactive white boards at the selected school in Jordan. Jwaifell and Gasaymeh discovered that the

extent of teachers' use of interactive white boards was related to their perceptions of the five primary attributes communicated in Rogers's (2003) DOI theory.

      Perceptions and the diffusion of innovation theory. Yap and Nan (2017) used the DOI theory framework to examine young Chinese wine consumers' (CWC) perceptions. The DOI theory, according to Rogers (2003), is the rate of acceptance and adoption of a product or service using the five characteristics of (innovation, relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, observability, and trialability). Yap and Nan used additional characteristics of religion and ethics to modify Rogers' s DOI theory in this study. Yap and Nan examined how information about wine was spread through different channels of communication, such as word of mouth and advertisements in China. Also, Yap and Nan explored how the diffusion of wine information can influence the purchasing and consuming of wine. Because grape wine in China is a different beverage, diffusion of wine information was through the newspaper, magazine, wine tasting, and tradeshows. Yap and Nan found that the early adopters of the wine were information seekers, and late adopters consumed wine for personal needs. As CWC become more acquainted with wine, their perceptions changed. Some young CWC purchased wine and consumed wine because of family and friends, word of mouth, and selected publications they had read. Yap and Nan determined that in the large population of China, the wine information had not been diffused throughout China's remote areas. Substantively, the young CWCs' perceptions, complexity, compatibility, relative advantage, observability, religion and ethnicity, and trialability of wine information diffused through various communication channels (Yap & Nan, 2017).

Technology and the diffusion of innovation theory. Mustonen-Ollila and Lyytinen (2003) used the DOI theory to review over 200 information system (IS) process within three environments over 4 decades. Mustonen-Ollila and Lyytinen used the DOI theory to identify and analyze factors that affected the IS process innovation adoption. Mustonen-Ollila and Lyytinen focused on the initiation and implementation of the innovative process. Mustonen-Ollila and Lyytinen discussed five sets of characteristics, called factors, that affect innovation process: the innovation factor, individual factors, tasks factors, environmental factors, and organization factors. Most of the data were from 1995 to 1997. Mustonen-Ollila and Lyytinen showed that 90% of the adoptive innovations was in the IS process.

Hassan, Tretiakov, and Whiddett (2017) discussed factors that affect the breadth and depth of e-procurement use in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) through the lens of the DOI theory. Organizations differed in how they used and how much they relied on e-procurement (Hassan et al., 2017). According to Hassan et al., the breadth and the depth of e-procurement is a new study in its single context. Hassan et al. featured 151 SMEs in the manufacturing sector in New Zealand. Using the DOI theory, Hassan et al. determined that organizations adopt and use change as new technology when there are potential benefits of using the innovation. Also, business owners will adopt and use an innovation that is well-matched with the organization's values. Innovation that is easily understood is likely to be adopted and used (Hassan et al., 2017). Also, organizations choose to adopt and use technology to be competitive. Based on the study findings, the breadth of use was exaggerated by relative advantage, and the depth of use was

exaggerated by compatibility, which are two of five attributes of innovation of the DOI

theory (Hassan et al., 2017). These organizations were not in positions to use e-

procurement practices that fit their needs, but instead, were driven by the environment.

Business owners have to evaluate new e-procurement technologies and their

compatibility with the organization, such as the norms and practices. Innovation is a

technology that is new or unfamiliar to an individual within a particular area or social

system. The DOI theory is one of the most popular theories for studying the adoption of

information technologies and the spread of information within and between

communication channels (Zhang.Yu, Yan, & Spil, 2015). Diffusion is the process by

which the information concerning the innovation flows from one person to another within

a social system over time. To have a successful IT innovation, an individual must have

communication channels, the attributes of the innovation, adopters, and the social system.

Lastly, the innovation must have the characteristics such as relative advantage,

compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability.

   Social media, health, social marketing, and the diffusion of innovation theory.

Through the lens of the DOI theory, Ma, Sian Lee, and Hoe-Lian Goh (2014) suggested

that leadership can also share news stories in social media. Social media use has been

found to be influenced by the social networks (Ma et al., 2014). Ma et al. suggested that

news can impact sharing behavior because it is the informational path that directly

interacts with users. According to Rogers (2003), news can be viewed as a type of

innovation without physical form. Ma et al. posited that diffusion networks could

influence news sharing intention. The DOI theory is academically valid forexplaining

news sharing in social media (Ma et al., 2014). There are multiple levels of factors underlying news sharing intention, which include tie strength, opinion leadership, and news preference.

Through the lens of the DOI theory, Sundstrom (2016) explored social media network influences on women's innovativeness. According to Rogers (2003), innovativeness is a new idea, new knowledge, or a new product or invention diffused through the communication channel in a social system. The participants perceived their social system through three lenses: opinion leaders, social networks, and system norms (Sundstrom, 2016). Primarily, the opinion leader must have the opportunity and skill to seek information online. Sundstrom found that social systems were made by participants identifying the practices of their social networks through the community, work, friends, and family. Innovative participants were more likely to understand and identify with messages that offered multiple perspectives on an issue (Sundstrom, 2016).

The DOI theory was the appropriate framework to focus on the SMM strategies that small business owners use to generate growth in sales. Business owners could use social media to promote relationships on their websites and to generate growth in sales through the diffusion of innovation. Also, businesses could use social media to disseminate marketing messages to reach more customers. Rogers (2003) concluded that the most efficient manner to diffuse an innovative product or service is through opinion leaders. Opinion leaders may indirectly influence others to adopt the technology. Opinion leaders' adoption of innovation is a sign that customers can adopt a product or an idea.

Conversely, opinion leaders normally diffuse information from mass media into their social networks.

Critical Analysis of Supporting and Contrasting Theories and Models

Some supporting theories that I considered for the conceptual framework of this study were the adoption of innovation theory, diffusion model, the theory of planned behavior (TPB), and technology acceptance model (TAM). The adoption of innovation theory, diffusion model, TPB, and TAM are all at the individual level. However, DOI is at both the individual and the organization level. The innovation process at the organization level is more complicated than at the individual level. I also analyzed one opposing model, which was uses and gratification theory (UGT), in contrast to the diffusion of innovation theory. The UGT is concerned with the individual's use of friendly network sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Krause, North, and Heritage (2014) posited that the UGT is an approach to understanding how and why individuals seek out social media.

Adoption of innovation theory. The adoption of innovation theory aligns with the DOI. Tornatzky, Fleischer, and Chakrabarti created the adoption of innovation theory framework in 1990. In the adoption of the innovation theory, potential consumers may not always adopt innovative technologies. New technology may saturate the market, which may allow for innovative applications that were not available. As the new technology is on the market, the old technology may continue to diffuse through a population of potential buyers, even as the substitution process is under way (Norton & Bass, 1987). Gil and Lampe (2014) stated that through the adoption of innovation theory,

an invention might be superior to the old technology. Innovative technology is one way

that customers may adopt the newer products. The customer who did not adopt the earlier

technology now can adopt the new one. The customer who had accepted the old

technology may switch and adopt the new technology (Gil & Lampe, 2014).

There are three steps to the adoption of the innovation: awareness, tryouts, and

continued adoption (Lambrecht, Vanlauwe, Merckx, & Maertens, 2014). Awareness is

knowing about the existence of the technology, and it is critical in the analysis of

technology adoption. Tryouts are when an individual can find out information about the

product and when to use it. Continued adoption is where the person relies on his or her

information and experience to decide not to use or continue its use of the technology

based on its probability. The continued adoption stage is different from awareness

(Lambrecht et al., 2014). The continued adoption stage depends on the returns to the

technology as experienced by the individual during tryouts. According to the DOI theory,

people tend to explore the new technology and experience how it might work in their

business before accepting or rejecting those techniques. Innovation can be adopted or

rejected by an individual or the social system. Customers and business owners will adopt

an innovation if they believe it will improve their efficacy.

Diffusion model. In 1969, Bass invented the diffusion model or the Bass model

as an extension of the DOI theory. Some authors used the diffusion model of 1970 for the

first-time demand of a new product or service (Norton & Bass, 1987; Rogers, 2003). The

primary construct for the diffusion model was the timing of adoption innovation. Bass

(1969) believed that people innovate an idea, product, or service out of a need to satisfy

customers. Norton and Bass (1987) concluded that DOI is a complex process dealing with a larger population's decision. Rogers (2003) linked the DOI theory to that of mixed innovation.

The diffusion model is compatible with the DOI theory as mathematical ideas might contribute to the concept (Bass, 1969). Bass (1969) commented that the diffusion model projects how a social system might adopt a new product or idea as awareness flows through communication. Researchers can use the diffusion model to corroborate the increase in adopters and forecast future development of the diffusion process (Mahajan, Muller, & Bass, 1991). Through the diffusion model, the number of adopters may determine the sales and growth of the product. Mahajan et al. (1991) validated Norton and Bass's (1987) theory that when adopters continue to buy and repeat buying, rate can become constant.

Theory of planned behavior. Ajzen invented the TPB in 1985, as an extension of the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen, 1991). Scholars use the TPB to link beliefs to behavior (Alzahrani, Mahmud, Alfarraj, & Alalwan, 2017). TPB consists of five parts: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, intention, and behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Ajzen (1991) believed that attitude, and social influence of an individual, stimulate action. Attitude reflects how people think and believe. Grounded by TPB, individual behavior is influenced by attitude, perception of situations, management, and social norms (Idris, Abdullah, Ahmad, & Mansor, 2016). Pelling and White (2009) believed TPB to be a valid theory to predict behavioral intention. Pelling and White claimed that behavior is determined by a person's intentions to perform the

behavior. Muk, Chung, and Kim (2014) used the TPB to investigate the relationships between consumers' attitudes, perceived behavioral control, social influence, intentions to join, and plans to buy. Adopters empowered through their belief are more likely to execute actions to achieve personal goals (Lien & Jiang, 2016). People with higher confidence show greater motivation for change (Lien & Jiang, 2016).

Technology acceptance model. I also considered the TAM developed by Davis and Bagozzi in 1989. Davis introduced TAM based on the concept of technology acceptance. Alharbi and Drew (2014) believed that TAM is the acceptance of social technology that predicts behavioral intention and attitude toward use. Many leaders use TAM in their organizations (Sherer, Meyerhoefer, & Peng, 2016). TAM is one of the most comprehensive adoption theories. Davis, Bagozzi, and Warshaw (1989) that claimed TAM is a practical value in addition to the theoretical value of better measures to predict and explain systems in some organizations.

Sherer et al. (2016) believed that decisions made through the adoption process might influence some organization's environments. Moreover, at the organization level, TAM may include organizational factors and environmental features that draw upon the DOI or the technology, organizational, and environment frameworks (TOE; Sherer et al., 2016). TOE has a direct relationship with adoption; however, TOE factors drive adoption than by individual factors (Awa, Ukoha, & Igwe, 2017). The TOE framework is an organizational-level theory, through which its content influences adoption decisions. Adopting social media technology is a primary marketing tool, and it influences companies through increasing force sales.

Uses and gratification theory. In 1974, Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch developed the UGT to understand how individuals use mass media. Users tend to receive gratification through the media that satisfies their social, informational, and leisure needs. The UGT is concerned with the individual's use of friendly network sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Researchers commonly use UGT as an adoption theory to explore Internet usage (Luo & Remus, 2014). Researchers use UGT to focus on what people do with media, rather than what media does to people. Researchers use UGT to focus on the users and their needs (Luo & Remus, 2014; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008).

Some mass communication scholars argued that UGT is not a vigorous social science theory. Rogers (2003), rejected UGT. However, mass media scholars recommended that UGT traditional models will provide a useful framework to study the Internet and new mass communication. Researchers of UGT continue to provide an innovative theoretical approach in the initial stages of each new mass communications medium, such as newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet. Scholars continue to study why people become involved in one communication or another and what gratifications they receive from it (Malik, Dhir, & Nieminen, 2016). Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) indicated that users meet many uses and gratifications by keeping in touch with friends and meeting new friends. The use of social media on friend-networking sites has an impact on communication and the social needs of people.

The UGT's premise is to satisfy the needs and wants of the users. Business owners can apply UGT as an Internet solution to increase business awareness and to

recruit new customers. To raise awareness, the owner may use these friendly social media sites to understand the social needs and wants of customers. Social media users will select exact SM based on their perception that the media will be able to fulfill their needs and wants. Organizations might stimulate positive behavior through social media, as well as discourage negative behavior. UGT theory is one of the first approaches to activate customers to choose media that satisfies their needs through gratification. Over time, UGT has gained support from numerous researchers regarding social media use (Fu, Wu, & Cho, 2017; Khan, 2017; Quinn, 2016). More people are using the Internet because of the amount of information available, and its online communication capabilities continue to be studied by scholars. As social media continue to emerge, both practitioners and scholars recognize the need to engage in its content (Dolan, Fahy, & Goodman, 2016).

Importance of Small Businesses

In the United States, some small businesses were the family farm. In 1953, President Eisenhower signed a Small Business Act, initiated by the U.S. Government, to support small businesses (SBA, 2018). The SBA (2018) sets the criteria for a small business. Millions of new businesses launched each year are small businesses. People visit small businesses daily, such as apparel stores, grocery stores, bookstores, service businesses, and restaurants.

Small businesses are rarely the focus of corporate research. For small businesses to gain competitiveness, the organization must be able to develop services and products and have the flexibility to adopt new technology. Ninety-eight percent of the 26 million firms in the United States are small businesses (Fitzgerald & Muske, 2016). Across the

United States, there are at least 5 million small businesses with 500 or fewer employees (Kuofie, Gholston, & Hakim, 2015). Small businesses drive the economy in the United States. President Obama's administration encouraged small businesses to strive to be more competitive and innovative (SBA, 2018). However, some small businesses do not survive beyond 5 years (SBA, 2018).

Retail apparel industry. The Industrial Revolution gave to rise to the movement of textile and apparel products from the homes to the factories. Since the Industrial Revolution, the United States is the single largest importing country in the world (Ha-Brookshire, 2017). Retail is the most significant private employer in the United States (Chung, Seo, & Song, 2017; Ha-Brookshire, 2017). The retail industry is critical to economic growth and wellbeing in the United States. The retail industry consists of numerous small businesses. The retail industry is a multibillion-dollar industry (Chung et al., 2017). Retail apparel industry includes clothing, accessories, and footwear.

The U.S. retail industry leaders changed the methods for conducting business from the traditional manner to online. Between 1998 and 2013, average retail firm size grew by 18%, from 19.3 to 22.8 employees per firm (Hortaçsu & Syverson, 2015). In 2013, e-commerce retail sales increased to 5.8% of total retail (Hortaçsu & Syverson, 2015). More customers are moving from the traditional brick and mortar stores to the Internet. Over time, the retail industry processes, and systems have changed to meet the growing demands of the customers and their lifestyle. Retailers tend to target a group of customers and cater to their wants. Retailers are also using social media to gather data on customers to figure out what the customer wants and needs.

As the retail industry continues to grow, brick and mortar retailers will need
Internet. With the evolution in the e-commerce industry, online retail in India is estimated
to reach 76 billion U.S. dollars by 2021 (Kalia, Kaur, & Singh, 2016). Technology has
altered the apparel industry through global expansion (Kalia et al., 2016). Technology is
changing the way retailers do business. Social media has had an impact on the retail
industry, by increasing awareness of products and driving demands (Bubonia, 2017;
Kalia et al., 2016). With the growing success and use of social media, businesses must
embrace the future. Small businesses may use social media to help build their platforms
to share ideas, manage the inflow of information, and increase profitability (Taneja &
Toombs, 2014).

Challenges for small businesses. Small businesses must actively be involved
with marketing efforts. Small business owners must also be educated on the importance
of marketing (Calli & Clark, 2015). Calli and Clark (2015) stated that small businesses do
not show sales growth, they lack marketing knowledge, and they do not understand their
marketing strategy. Small businesses may turn to a strategic alliance with a more
substantial company to seek advice on marketing strategies. However, Calli and Clark
believed that small businesses must create a marketing plan with strategies to increase
market shares. Small business owners face challenges that prevent the survival and
growth of their business (Calli & Clark, 2015). Small business owners must focus on
distributing the highest value to customers through better communication by using the
Internet and social media. By using social media, small businesses may communicate
with customers and promote brand awareness (Calli and Clark, 2015). Calli and Clark

expressed that small businesses do have the potential to engage with social media in their business practices of activities, especially their marketing plans.

Small businesses can use the increase of social networking to create opportunities for marketing practice. However, small businesses may have challenges in adopting social media. These challenges can be addressed through efficiency initiatives. Most small businesses may not have a SMM budget. Also, small business leaders may lack understanding of return on investment (ROI), financial resources, IT staff and expertise, and IT infrastructure and open IT governance (He, Wang, & Zha, 2014).

Calli and Clark (2015) stated that environmental factors might comprise of issues like the absence of peers, suppliers, or industry-specific groups using social media. Other ecological barriers, such as legal or regulatory restrictions on the use of social media by businesses and customers, can also hinder brand awareness in small businesses. Small businesses can overcome similar barriers of management, finance, technology, staff, and the environment by identifying challenges. Small business owners can overcome these challenges by providing guidance, developing training programs, using mobile equipment, encouraging employees to understand social media, learning biases, and managing social media platforms. Small business owners must have a strategy on how the business plans will inform and educate their customers in the community. The business owner needs to have the right content message. Branding is critical and is more personal. Some business owners use social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, which are the top two social media platforms**.**

Small business success. There has not been enough research on how to measure the growth of small business (Bello & Ivanov, 2014). Some leaders use measures like growth in sales, employee assets, profit, and equity**.** Bello and Ivanov (2014) commented that for any business to grow, it must focus on innovation. Small businesses owners must be prepared to grow their business. Business owners must have a business plan, long-term goals, and strategic plan for growth. Small business growth can be staggered by fear of outgrowing of traditional practices (Bello & Ivanov, 2014). Small business growth depends on the industry growth rate and market maturity. Small business growth depends on the environment and social, political, technological, and economic changes (Bello & Ivanov, 2014).

Small business failure. Hyder and Lussier (2016) stated that small businesses are good for the stability of the economy and economic development of the country. In the United States, small businesses make up 99.7% of U.S. employees (Hyder & Lussier, 2016). Approximately 50% of small businesses survive beyond 5 years, and about one-third survive 10 years or more (SBA, 2018).

There is a higher failure rate for small businesses than big companies (Hyder & Lussier, 2016). Researchers are perplexed as to why small businesses fail (Hyder & Lussier, 2016). Whether a small business fails or succeeds, leaders may depend on the marketing skills applied to the company (Hyder & Lussier, 2016). There are two main reasons that small businesses fail: (a) lack of marketing skills and (b) financial problems (Cant, 2012). Researchers commented that most failure is due to the lack of marketing skills (Hyder & Lussier, 2016). Marketing skills include (a) gaining an understanding of

the market and potential for growth, (b) market needs analysis, (c) access to finance to fund marketing actions, (d) education and training, and (e) lack of competitiveness (Cant, 2012). Some other reasons for small business failure include low sales, profit loss, high levels of debt, and reduction in liquidity (Abas-Masturo, Imam, & Osman, 2013). Determining which business may fail or succeed is difficult. Understanding why businesses fail may allow business owners to increase the success-to-failure ratio (Hyder & Lussier, 2016). Marketing is significant to the success or failure of a business (Kuofie et al., 2015). Cant (2012) and Abas-Mastura et al. (2013) believed that small business owners do not possess the requisite skills when it comes to marketing concerns. Cant posited that whether a business fails or succeeds depends on the marketing skills of the business owners.

Marketing in small businesses. Small business owners can use brand awareness to create more exposure on the brand. Awareness is the primary stage of adoption of any product or service (Rogers, 2003). Awareness is the groundwork for usage in most organization's products and services. Having no awareness may cause no initiative from the customer to use the products and the services provided by the organization.

Human needs are the basic concept of understanding marketing. Businesses use marketing as a tool for success and survivability. Marketers should ensure that the customers are considered in every step of the process. Marketers may use social media to manage small businesses by understanding customers' relationships and creating value to profitability. Small business owners may use social media provision to build long-lasting customer relationships and profitability. Many global companies are adopting SMM to

empower their advertising campaigns. North Face, Pepsi, and Dell are organizations that

have embraced SMN services to work in partnership with their customers (Go & You,

2016; Kohli, Suri, & Kapoor, 2015). Businesses owners should involve customers to give

them a sense of proprietorship and make them social media followers that support the

brand (Kohli et al., 2015).

 Marketers must create an excellent relationship with the right customers. Thus,

marketing must have some dialogue. The goal of the marketer should be to build

relationships with the customers. Most customers do not use social media for making

purchases. Nevertheless, they are looking for solutions, and this provides marketers with

an opportunity (Kohli et al., 2015). The key to success lies within the company and how

they can change their attitude and adopt new strategies in response to the customer needs,

wants, and demands (Kohli et al., 2015). Many organizations know that social media

works, but they remain uncertain as to how or when to replace or supplement other forms

of communication with these techniques (Kohli et al., 2015; Lamberton & Stephen,

2016).

 Marketers believe that the use of social media platforms supports their need to

communicate with their target customers. Marketers may use social media channels to

develop an organization's web presence. Creating web presence is an effective marketing

technique to help establish and promote the brand, or mission and cause of the business

(Appleby, 2016). Marketing is the responsibility of the business owner. When marketing

through digital social media, managers can offer new ways to reach and provide service

to customers (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). Business owners and marketers should

determine whether using social media as part of their marketing strategy will be beneficial to the firm.

In small businesses, marketing has become a challenge to the organization as they adopt new social media techniques rather than using traditional channels, such as television, print, and advertising. Marketing is a two-way process that engages the brand and customers; it is no longer one-directional from organization to the customer. To learn what customers' needs are, business leaders can hire marketing firms to address these concerns. The use of lateral engagement, which is WOM marketing through social media, can reach hundreds and thousands of people in an instant. Social media can influence and scale customers in ways that traditional marketing could not. With the innovation of social media, small businesses can compete with the larger companies. Before social media, it was challenging for small businesses to compete with the advertising and marketing budgets of large companies. Consequently, with viral social media, business owners can get traffic with growing natural links, and keep traffic coming for a long time. With SMM, small business owners can advertise for much less**.**

Brand. The brand is a significant element of marketing. A brand must be active, interesting, humble, professional, and have the right content to target an audience. Brands should offer some entertainment to their potential customers. Also, owners must know their brand content, which may keep customers engaged on their Facebook page. Business owners can use branding to create an identifiable image for their product or service. Branding is essential for a small business success.

Word-of-mouth (WOM) communication. Baker and Donthu (2018) commented that WOM is the act of exchanging marketing information among consumers. Pauwels, Aksehirli, and Lackman (2016) postulated that WOM advertising was more effective than paid marketing. Consumers talk face-to-face; talk over the phone; text back and forth; and communicate through social media with others on Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and other online channels. Customers need to trust before purchasing a product, service, or technology. Baker and Donthu stated that WOM affects choice, diffusion, and sales. When consumers find something more appealing, they often share it with friends who generate WOM. Pauwels et al. (2016) noted that online content is more likely to be shared across more people.

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication. According to Chu, Lien, and Cao (2018), customers' usage of eWOM influences readers' attitudes, intentions, and behavior. A small business owner can use eWOM in the decision-making processes of consumers. Small business owners can use eWOM to influences customers' feedback, comments, and product reviews that contribute to sales growth. Also, small business owners can use eWOM to promote new products and brand development. Through social media, the small business owner can use eWOM to accelerate its reach of customer engagement.

Marketing return on investment. Measuring marketing ROI is multifaceted. ROI has become vital to social media efforts. Marketers need to understand that there are measurable outcomes when dealing with social media ROI. As social media spending continues to increase, organizations will have to measure its impact. Approximately 66%

of marketers do not measure their SMM strategies even when data are available (Wilcox & Kim, 2016). The marketers should decide how the organization is going to measure their marketing efforts.

Small businesses need to make sure that they are getting a return on marketing investment. Although social media spending is on the rise, measuring its impact remains a challenge for some organizations (Wilcox & Moore, 2016). Governments and politicians use social media to secure a significant ROI. As governments use social media, they are achieving a high return on innovation and investment. Kim, Kho, Cha, and Lee (2015) commented that measuring social MROIs are essential to an organization's financial performance because (a) markets must justify the cost associated with social media irrespective of the size of the cost, and (b) markets must maximize financial performance.

Appleby (2016) and Kim et al. (2015) commented that there are three categories of ROI: financial group, behavior category, and attitudinal category. The financial group includes conversion when a reviewer becomes a supporter or donor. Behavior category consists of the how often an activity takes place. The attitudinal category comprises the transformation of attitude, perceptions, and loyalty within the community. As business owners continue to look at new products, they must understand MROI to grow their businesses.

Social media in small businesses. The social media landscape is large and ever-changing (Fan & Gordon, 2014). As social media continues to grow, it takes on different forms such as Internet forums, e-mail, social networking sites, blogs, microblogs, and

voice over IP. Social media can be described in two terms: people and human relations and communication. Social media ranges from personal to business. Social media is different from any other form of traditional or online media.

Social media is a technology that is changing the lives of people and how they connect to each other. Businesses can use social media through numerous tools, such as recruitment, marketing, customer relationship management (CRM), and employee communications. Business owners and leaders may use social media platforms to enhance communication, collaboration, and sharing knowledge (Appleby, 2016). Business owners and leaders may use social media to engage consumers directly (Sajid, 2016). However, numerous businesses may implement SMM strategies that may directly or indirectly influence their adoption of new technologies (Appleby, 2016). When a business uses a social media platform, the organization may increase the productivity of owners and professionals by 25% (Appleby, 2016). Through social media, some organizations may reach a global audience with less effort, time, and money.

Social media has caused a shift in the way that businesses of all sizes engage with their customers (Nadeem, 2012). Moreover, social media can impact small businesses. Webb and Roberts (2016) posited that 77% of small businesses are using social media; however, only 39% update these sites on a regular basis. Sajid (2016) postulated that 75% of small companies have existence on a social media website. Social media has an impact on business image, reputation, and relationship with customers (Men & Muralidharan, 2016). The rise of marketing and social media is due to the adopting of innovation and

technology. Almost 20% of small businesses employ some type of social media as an essential element of the online marketing technique (Sajid, 2016).

Social media is a networking tool that can help small businesses increase traffic from social networking sites, such as Facebook, Bloggers, Ning, Myspace, Twitter; blogs; and platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Facebook is the most popular social network site (Facebook, 2016). Social media dominates not only business, but politics, entertainment, media/social, and charitable organizations. The use of social media is increasing among small businesses owners. Some small business owners use social media like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Myspace to promote their business. Small businesses can gain significant value from social media (Cui, Gallino, Moreno, & Zhang, 2018). However, some marketers are uncertain of what social medium is best for their business. Small businesses adoption of social media depends on how well they use social media (Cui et al., 2018). Small businesses can use SMM with networking, relationships, community and customer, and online branding opportunities. Business owners can use social media to promote their target audience (Webb & Roberts, 2016). However, small businesses need to trust that engaging in social media activities may be rewarding and the cost of updating, and investing time is worth the sacrifice. There are some risks associated with using social media.

Within the last 20 years, the digital revolution has made an impact on small businesses. Small businesses can reach a global market and regional market at a moderate rate. Having a wealth of free media allows small business to benefit from social media. Ainin, Parveen, Moghavvem, Jaafar, and Mohd Shuib (2015) stated that Facebook use

had a strong positive impact on the financial performance of SMEs in Malaysia. Social

media consists of three stages: (a) capture, (b) understand, and (c) present. The capture

stage includes obtaining pertinent social media data. All data captured will not be useful

to the business owner. Business owners use the capture stage to gather data for many

users and sources, such as Facebook, Twitter, Google, blogs, news sites, and picture

sharing. The understand stage includes selecting relevant data and gaining insight from

them. Businesses owners use the understand stage to conduct trend analysis to remove

noisy data. Lee and Carlson (2015) suggested that the understand stage provides

information on users as to how they feel about the company and its product. The present

stage includes analyzing current data from the understand stage. In the present stage,

leaders can determine the findings from the understand stage (Lee & Carlson, 2015). At

any time, these three stages can merge.

Social media can become a communication toolbox for external stakeholders, not

only customers but the public. Social media provides more interaction than traditional

media, such as television, newspaper, and advertising. Scholars highlight both external

and internal communication. External communication occurs with numerous audiences,

such as customers, investors, and the public. Internal communication provides

communication within the organization. External stakeholders using social media can

connect with other stakeholders. In doing so, stakeholders can exchange information with

one another.

Innovation of small businesses. SBA's primary goal as a policy maker is to

encourage high growth and job creation among small businesses. Bloch and Bhattacharya

(2016) commented that a firm's performance is limited to its innovation capability. Innovation tends to create new jobs and businesses, products, services, and industries that expand the economy (Bloch & Bhattacharya, 2016). Bloch and Bhattacharya posited that a critical factor in improving the economy is the innovation of small businesses. Small businesses are essential to innovation and job creation (Bloch & Bhattacharya (2016).

Innovation comes in many forms from politics, funding, and thinking creatively. Some small businesses are dependent on joiners from businesses that previously have been engaged in innovation (Braunerhjelm, Ding, & Thulin, 2018). Braunerhjelm et al. (2018) posited small businesses tend to have a higher number of innovations than large organizations. Vajjhala and Ramollari (2016) observed that a critical enabler of innovation in small business is their ability to adopt new technologies and use them as a source of innovation.

Some constraints to innovation for small businesses are resistance to change, weak networks, lack of access to financing, and the need for leadership (Bloch & Bhattacharya, 2016). Talukder, Quazi, and Djatikusumol (2018) suggested small businesses are increasingly moving toward innovative technology processes that enhance economic development. Small businesses that take advantage of opportunities can offset some of their disadvantages, such as resources constraints. As small business owners continue to grow, there is an opportunity to seek information on marketing development, marketing strategies, and creating a marketing plan to perform successfully. Thus, business owners participating in training and obtaining measures may assist with reducing the failure rates of small businesses (Talukder, Quazi, & Djatikusumol, 2018).

Education, training, and development for small business. In some

organizations, managers and owners view training as an expense, rather than an asset

(Medina, Jimènez, Mora, & Ábrego, 2014). It is invaluable for employees to enjoy and

learn from training programs provided in their workplaces. Medina et al. (2014) stated

that organizations should train their employees so that they become expert and

diversified. Organizations should use training to apply practical solutions to problems

encountered in the workplace. Small business owners may receive continuing training

from the Chamber of Commerce to gain knowledge. Volunteers run training sessions that

may or may not have the training skills expertise offered to the small business owners. In

most small businesses, the owners need strategies for at least 6 months as a part the

overall strategic plan. Small business owners need to be active and have an understanding

on how to train new and existing employees without triggering issues with efficiency

(Bandura & Lyons, 2015). Small businesses should create opportunities for the

individuals responsible for social media to participate in training workshops, either in-

person or online, to get the skills needed to maintain a robust social media presence

(Webb & Roberts, 2016).

Forecasting

Forecasting enables business owners to predict sales and growth. Lakhani and

Kleiner (2014) commented that sales forecasting is a process of helping companies

predict future sales. Any business owner can forecast, but they may not always achieve

100% accuracy (Diebold, 2015). Small businesses use forecasting to help reduce the

uncertainty in decision making (Lakhani & Kleiner, 2014). Forecasting can mean the

difference between failure and success of a small business. Sales forecasting plays a role in the business management in any organization. Additionally, forecasting is a continuous process of learning and adapting of business owners. Sales forecasting can be found in marketing, strategic planning, finance, and operations.

Customer Relationship Management

Elena (2016) stated that CRM became popular in the mid-90s and has transition from traditional CRM to social CRM. CRM is a business strategy between a client and an organization (Elena, 2016). However, social CRM is more about customer service, putting the customers first, and using social media accounts to connect one to one. Managers use social CRM as a tool to better understand customer needs and enhancement of their experience, which is key to customer retention, organization growth, and profitability (Abubakar & Mukhtar, 2015; Elena, 2016).

The CRM strategy is contingent on the right balance between three organizational resources: people, technology, and processes (Rahimi & Kozak, 2017). A small business may use a CRM system to achieve profits. The concept of profit is different from one business to the next (Fouad & Al-Goblan, 2017). CRM implementation can provide both tangible and intangible benefits to small business owners (Rahimi & Kozak, 2017). Benefits such as improving customer satisfaction, retaining existing customers, providing strategic information, and improving customer lifetime value could gain a competitive edge for business owners. There are numerous benefits to social CRM; however, an organization can plan, implement, and evaluate marketing campaigns. Organization's information is available all around the world, no matter what time it is, by each

employee. An organization that adopts social CRM as their present and future strategy will build better relationships with customers, growing and gaining trust and confidence (Elena, 2016). Elena (2016) stated that social media is growing at a fast pace and continuously. Social CRM tools update data endlessly and will de-duplicate data. Social CRM strategies can allow for feedback and follow-up and generate reminders to help company schedule activity.

Transition

Section 1 contained the foundation of the study; the background of the problem; problem statement; the purpose statement; nature of the study; research question; interview questions; conceptual framework; operational terms; assumptions, limitations, and delimitations; the significance of the study; and implications for social change. Section 1 also contained the literature review. Section 2 has the aspects of the research study, such as purpose statement, role of the research participants, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments and technique, data organization techniques, data analysis, and processes for assuring the study's reliability and validity. Section 3 includes the introduction, presentation of findings, the application to professional practices, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, reflections, conclusion and appendices.

Section 2: The Project

Section 2 includes a discussion of the restated purpose statement, the study's research participants, the role of the researcher, the study's research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments and techniques, data organization techniques, data analysis, and processes for assuring the study's reliability, and validity. The information provided in Section 2 is the foundation for the study findings, as I gathered data from the semistructured interview data, archival documents, and other data provided by the three business owners.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the SMM strategies that some small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry use to generate growth in sales. The target population included three small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry in South Carolina who have successfully used SMM strategies to generate growth in sales for 5 years. Small businesses may use the results of this study to learn how to increase return on investment for the business owners, which could increase the local community's tax base to improve social programs. Positive social change can also result from increased employment to stimulate local economies from growth in sales.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I was the primary data collection instrument to explore the SMM strategies that small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry use to generate growth in sales. The role of the researcher is a vital part of studies (Fusch &

Ness, 2015). The qualitative researcher's role is to ensure the integrity of the research, collect data, organize data, analyze the results, and develop conclusions (Collins & Cooper, 2014; Draper, 2016). The qualitative researcher must plan and prepare for the study by selecting participants, conducting interviews, transcribing, interpreting and analyzing participants' responses, generating themes, and reporting findings and conclusions (Parker, 2014). Qualitative researchers are responsible for collecting, organizing, and analyzing data (Tong, Winkelmayer, & Craig, 2014). As the researcher, I collected data using open-ended interview questions and a review of participants' documents. According to Stevenson (2016), the researcher must remain neutral. The qualitative researcher must gain knowledge through the inductive reasoning of the professional experiences of participants in a naturalistic setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Although I have retail apparel experience, I had no prior relationship with the participants of the study. My experience working in the retail apparel industry for many years could be beneficial to the study because I understand the challenges and constraints of small businesses. The primary data from this research came directly from the participants' interviews and my review of archival documents. *The Belmont Report* serves as the foundation for ethical standards and guidelines to protect the rights of human subjects (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). I adhered to the protocol of *The Belmont Report* and the principles described therein, which include respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. I respected the rights of each participant in this study. According to *The Belmont Report*, the researcher should provide applicable

information about the study so that the participants can make an informed decision to participate (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). Before the research process, I sent an invitation to qualified study participant as shown in the interview protocol (see Appendix A). Once the individual expressed interest in the study, I sent them an informed consent form to which they could respond via e-mail to state "I Consent."

The principle of respect for persons includes the power of a participant to make autonomous decisions by ensuring his or her wishes and rights (Novak, 2014). As the researcher, I made every effort to secure the rights and the wellbeing of the participants. The participants knew their rights to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Each participant signed a consent form that outlined the details of the study including assessing risks and benefits and selecting subjects according to *The Belmont Report*.

The principle of beneficence is an act of kindness that capitalizes on possible benefits while minimizing potential harms to the participant (Novak, 2014). Lynch, Bierer, Cohen, and Rivera (2017) agreed that the principle of beneficence is the opportunity to act in the best interest of the participant. As the researcher, I respected the rights and wishes of the participants throughout the study. I did not require any participant to continue in the study if the participant decided to withdraw from the study.

The principle of justice is used to ensure that the researcher's practices are fair and equal without coercion to participants in the study (Lynch et al., 2017). As the researcher, I ensured that I was fair and treated each participant equally with respect. I

mitigated any bias associated with the collection of data and data analysis. I asked the

same questions to each participant, and I recorded each interview and conducted member

checking to ensure that I had captured the participants' information accurately. Because I

was the primary data collection instrument for the study, the participants needed to know

about any potential biases or assumptions, expectations, and experiences that I had in

conducting this research. Parker (2014) stated that the researcher should collect data

without bias. Yin (2018a) and Fusch and Ness (2015) argued that researchers are

vulnerable to bias when there is known knowledge or experience related to the problem

of a study. Ibrahim and Edgley (2015) remarked that a researcher must be aware of

personal biases, such as prejudicial beliefs, and the presuppositions that could contribute

to bias before and during the data collection process. My goal was to be transparent to the

participant to mitigate bias. I also conducted member checking to allow the participants

to review my interpretation of their interview answers to validate accuracy.

As a researcher, I was open and honest about this study. To improve the quality of

data, an interview protocol was necessary to gain further information relative to the study

(Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Scholars use an interview protocol to ensure alignment

with the research question, thus enhancing the quality and trustworthiness of data during

the data collecting process (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Dikko (2016) stated that

researchers could use the interview protocol to limit bias in the study.

I used the interview protocol (see Appendix A) to ensure the consistency of the

interview process and allow the participants to answer questions freely. I used the same

interview protocol with each participant to ensure data accuracy, as suggested by Fusch

and Ness (2015). I also asked each participant the same questions in the same sequence. The primary data came from face-to-face interviews. I also reviewed organization documents and primary artifacts to achieve data saturation.

Participants

The selection of participants is one of the essential facets of this study. Some researchers provide criteria for participant selection in qualitative research (Charlick, Pincombe, McKellar, & Fielder, 2016). I followed Charlick et al.'s (2018) suggestion for the institutional review board (IRB) criteria for this study. Yin (2018a) argued that a researcher should establish eligibility criteria before collecting data from participants. The participants for this study included 3 small business owners in the women's retail, the apparel industry in South Carolina who had successfully used SMM strategies to generate growth in sales. The participants met the following criteria: (a) operated a successful women's retail apparel small business storefront location for at least 5 years; (b) enhanced or sustained profitability through social media strategies; (c) implemented a broad range of social media strategies, including online purchasing platform; and (d) had a willingness to share what works to remain competitive in the local and Internet apparel industry.

Strategies for gaining access to the participants are essential in conducting research (Peticca-Harris, de Gama, & Elias, 2016). Some researchers use their personal experiences of facilitating and maintaining access to gatekeepers, informants, and researchers (Peticca-Harris et al., 2016). Gaining access is often described in an autonomous manner rather than in a dynamic process (Peticca-Harris et al., 2016). I

researched organizations from local retail business directories in South Carolina. I

gathered information from social media websites and requested a list of small business

owners in the retail apparel industry from the local Chamber of Commerce. I obtained

names, addresses, and telephone numbers from the Internet about the participants who

meet the criteria of the study. I contacted individuals via e-mail and phone to explain the

intent of my study and the requirements for participation. To establish a working

relationship, I contacted three small business owners via phone calls and e-mail. I sent a

letter of introduction and information that outlined the research, answered any questions

from the owners, and collected e-mail addresses. I followed up with another e-mail and

personal visit to the business owner's facility to meet in person, reiterate the details of the

study, and conduct the interview. A private visit to each business allowed me to establish

a good working relationship with business owners. Building trust and rapport with the

participant is essential because the participant needs to be comfortable to answer

questions candidly (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Rubin and Rubin (2012) also agreed that

building a good rapport includes having an honest relationship with the participants.

Brewis (2014) indicated that people create relationships that shape them and their

behavior. Rubin and Rubin stated that participants should feel comfortable during their

interview process, which helps researchers establish a good working relationship with the

participants.

The chosen participants for this study aligned with the overarching research

question to explore the SMM strategies that some small business owners in the women's

retail apparel industry successfully used to generate growth in sales. Elo et al. (2014)

commented that participants must understand and possess knowledge of the research topic to help the researcher answer the overarching research question for the study. The participant's knowledge must align with the researcher's theoretical, vital constructs, and the participant must contribute to the understanding of the phenomena (Krause, Luzzini, & Lawson, 2018).

Research Method and Design

Research Method

Qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods represent three types of research methods (Makrakis & Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2016; Yin, 2018). Researchers use the qualitative method to explore phenomena or experiences in a context (Nicholls, 2017). DeMassis and Kotlar (2014) stated that qualitative researchers collect data through interviews, examine documents, and observe behaviors. I used the qualitative methodology for gathering research data and exploring SMM strategies that small business owners use to generate growth in sales. I conducted semistructured interviews with at least three small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry in South Carolina who successfully used SMM strategies to generate growth in sales for 5 years.

The quantitative method consists of developing hypotheses for testing relationships and differences among variables (Ma, 2015). Parker (2014) stated that quantitative researchers use numerical data to measure relationships between factors and variables. Hemingway, Clifton, Stephenson, and Edward (2014) proposed that quantitative scholars can analyze pretest and posttest data from questionnaires to help evaluate the researchers' instrument. I did not use the quantitative method to examine

data using statistical analysis because it was not compatible with the purpose of this study.

Researchers use mixed-methods research to gather qualitative and quantitative data to develop in-depth findings based on the strengths of both methods (Snelson, 2016). Scholars use the mixed-methods methodology to explore perceptions of participants relevant to qualitative research (McMillian & Schumacher, 2014). Although researchers use the mixed-methods methodology to deepen their understanding of phenomena and theories, mixed-methods research can be challenging and time-consuming (Turner & Cardinal, 2017). There was no need for both methodologies for addressing the research question for my study because there was no need to examine variables' relationships, groups' differences for investigating processes. Therefore, the mixed-methods research methodology was not appropriate for this study.

Research Design

The case study design was optimal for the study because I focused on the phenomenon in a detailed way to build relevant knowledge. Case study researchers explore problems in their physical setting (Cronin, 2014; Yin, 2018a; Zainal, 2017). The case study researcher has little control over the events, and the focus is primarily on the problem of a real-life situation (Singh, 2014). Using a multiple case study design allows for insights into facts and to explore differences in the phenomenon under study (Yin, 2018a). Case study researchers collect multiple types of data from numerous sources, such as interviews, documents, and observations (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

I chose the case study design over phenomenological research, ethnographic research, and narrative research. In the phenomenological approach, researchers explore the meanings of lived experiences and personal views of individuals (Charlick et al., 2016; Sohn, Thomas, Greenberg, & Pollio, 2017). Consequently, phenomenological scholars define the importance of lived experiences through in-depth information and perceptions through face-to-face interviews (Anderson, Leahy, DelValle, Sherman, & Tansey, 2014; Przegalinska, 2014). The phenomenological approach was not appropriate for this study because I did explore SMM strategies used by participants and not the lived experiences of participant. Scholars use ethnographic inquiries to observe a group daily life and interactions of this group to study the complexity of patterns that differ from others (Mol, Santos Silva, Augusto Rocha, & Ishitani, 2017). The nature of ethnography enables the researcher to explore social reality with the overall aim of uncovering the phenomena of a social group (Hayre, Blackman, Carlton, & Eyden, 2018). Yin (2018a) stated that researchers used ethnographic studies to explore the activities, behaviors, and culture of a community for prolonged periods. Similarly, Caulkins (2014) stated that ethnography is appropriate for seeking to observe behaviors, beliefs, and languages shared by various groups. Because the purpose of this study was not to explore groups' cultures, ethnography was not appropriate. Narrative researchers investigate the lifelong stories of individuals through the participants' personal stories (Berry, 2016; Haydon et al., 2017), which was not suitable for this study. I chose the case study design because it aligned well with the purpose for my study.

Data saturation occurs when no new or relevant information emerges from the participants' responses to interview questions (Anyan, 2013; Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation occurs when information is repetitive (Robinson, 2014). Researchers have concluded that achieving data saturation is dependent on sample size, coding, ending point, and evaluating (Hennink, Kaiser, & Marconi, 2017). To reach data saturation, I conducted face-to-face, semistructured interviews with participants and collected data from each participant. I continued with interviewing participants until I reached data saturation. I conducted member checking by interpreting participants' responses to interview questions and giving these interpretations to the participants for validation purposes.

Population and Sampling

The population included three small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry in South Carolina who have efficiently used SMM strategies to generate growth in sales. The sampling method is a critical process for developing a quality study (Emmel, 2015; Patton, 2015; Robinson, 2014). Purposefully sampling is one way of obtaining in-depth information concerning experiences of business owners (Robinson, 2014). Some researchers choose purposeful sampling to determine the selection of participants based on the purpose of the study, thus making the participants suitable to provide data that could help answer the research question (Dworkin, 2012; Lamprinakis, 2015; Robinson, 2014). I used the purposeful sampling method to select participants who met the participant eligibility criteria for this study. By using the purposive sampling process, the participants had a detailed and comprehensive knowledge of the

phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The population sample must meet the eligibility criteria set by the researcher (Brewis, 2014). Robinson (2014) stated that a small number of participants could be invaluable to the population. Researchers use the qualitative method to attain valid data, regardless of sample size (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Yin, 2018a).

Data saturation in this study occurred when I could not obtain any new information from the research participants. To obtain data saturation, researchers collect data from the participants until there is no new information or data become repetitive (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014). Dworkin (2012) stated that researchers use purposeful data collection to increase their chances of achieving data saturation. A researcher should seek to obtain rich cases when collecting extensive data from participants while focusing on data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Data saturation occurred as the participants confirmed the accuracy of my interpretation of their responses, and they provided no new information. Researchers conduct member checking to ensure research validity by providing study participants with the researchers' interpretations of study participants' responses and asking participants to verify their answers (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2016). To reach data saturation, I continued to interview participants until no new information emerged. I used member checking to confirm the validity of my interpretation of each participant's responses to the interview questions. Data saturation occurred once the participants confirmed the accuracy of my interpretation of their responses and gave no new information.

One of the sources of case study evidence is the interview (Cairney & St Demy, 2015; Yin, 2018a). I conducted face-to-face, semistructured interviews by using open-ended questions (see Appendix B). I did not contact any participant until a consent form was signed, and the potential participant agreed to participate in the study. As the researcher, I conducted semistructured interviews with participants in their chosen business setting, unless the participant wanted to meet at another location. The face-to-face interview setting is in a comfortable and safe place to ensure confidentiality. Deakin and Wakefield (2014) suggested that when participants are in a safe environment, they are more likely to share sensitive information. Dikko (2016) believed that a participant should be allowed to select the setting for the interview to ensure a comfortable and quiet environment. Mellor, Ingram, Abrahams, and Beedell (2014) commented that interviews should be conducted in a relaxed, cozy, homey space to allow for a nonthreatening environment to accommodate the participants. In addition, Yin (2018a) suggested that researchers limit their interviews to 1 hour. Similarly, Sohn et al. (2017) suggested that interviews last 45-60 minutes, but the timeline should be determined by the participant. Dikko also posited that interviews should be a limit of 1 hour to respect the participant's time. I ensured that I limited the interviews to no more than 1 hour to respect the participant's time and mine.

Ethical Research

I conducted the study after receiving approval by Walden University's IRB. The approval number for this study was 02-21-19-0460512. Researchers must complete the National Institutes of Health Course Protecting Human Research before conducting any

study. Researchers will ensure that participants receive fair and ethical treatment and used ethical procedures while working with human participants in a study (Chappy & Gaberson, 2012). I completed the NIH certificate to conduct this study. Lunnay, Borlagdan, McNaughton, and Ward (2015) stated that a researcher is responsible for conducting studies ethically, regardless of using social media that may challenge integrity outside of the researcher's control. The researcher must take into consideration that data drawn from studies can have serious, even private implications (Conway & O'Connor, 2016). I explained the intent of the study and advised the participants of their rights. All participants had the opportunity to asked questions both prior to and after completing the consent form.

As the researcher, I used the consent form to explain guidelines to the participants that the study was voluntary and that there were no incentives or compensation given for participating in this study. All participants in the study agreed to sign the consent form. Participants received a copy of their consent form. Abadie, Brown, and Fisher (2018) agreed that incentives or compensation to participants could influence participants. Azriel, Chambers, and Healy (2018) also commented that incentives or compensation could encourage participation in a study. Azriel et.al argued that offering incentives can change participants' motives to that of earning money, which may skew the results of the study. The participants did not receive any incentive for participating in the study. Yin (2018a) stated that all participants should be able to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. I explained to participants their rights to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Participants could contact me via e-mail to withdraw

from the study. I informed the participants that their information would remain

confidential. Yin (2018a) commented that participant personal information should be

protected and remain confidential. I followed the interview protocol guidelines.

I followed all the guidelines in the Belmont Report to protect the rights involving

human subjects during the entire study. I followed the guiding principles of respect,

justice, and beneficence of all willing participants. I protected the rights of the

participants and their organizations. The risk to participants was minimal. Business and

participant names did not appear in published or written documents that could identify

them in this study.

Robards (2013) recommended assigning a number to each participant to prevent

identifying the participants by name or organization. Using the alphanumeric coding can

help to protect the identity of the participants (Taylor & Land, 2014). I chose to label the

participants in the study as P1, P2, and P3. The data I collected will remain in a locked,

secured safe to protect the privacy of the participants, as suggested by Khan (2014) and

Saunders, Kitzinger, and Kitzinger (2014). The consent forms, files, transcripts, and

recordings from the research, will be stored on a private encrypted external hard drive for

a minimum of 5 years to protect the confidentiality of participants. I will permanently

delete the file after 5 years.

Data Collection Instrument

I was the primary data collection instrument in this study. Researchers use

triangulation as more than one approach to researching a single phenomenon (Heale &

Forbes, 2013). Researchers can use numerous techniques to collect data (Merriam &

Tisdell, 2015) but I chose to interview the participants and review of documents. To enable the methodological triangulation of data in this study, I used two distinct types of data collection: semistructured interviews and document review. The document review also included archival records and physical artifacts. The most efficient use of data collection in a qualitative study is conducting an interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Noble & Smith, 2015). I conducted face-to-face, semistructured interviews with three small business owners who had successfully used SMM strategies to generate growth in sales. Participants' interviews were semistructured and in-depth to gain knowledge to answer the overarching research question. Using the semistructured interview technique allows the researcher to refocus questions to prompt for information (Yin, 2018a). I recorded the interviews with the permission of the participants, reviewed data collection and analysis process, used verbatim recordings, and interpreted responses immediately after each interview session to ensure I captured data accurately. I provided my interpretations to the participants for validation purposes. I tape recorded each participant's interview using the Echo Smartpen by Livescribe. The data collection tool consisted of an interview protocol (see Appendix A) and embedded is reference to interview questions (see Appendix B). Participation was strictly voluntary; therefore, all participants could withdraw from the study at any time by contacting me via e-mail (Yin, 2018a). No participant withdrew from the study.

To assure reliability and validity, I conducted member checking by having the participants review my interpretation of the interview responses. Member checking is a technique researcher use to ask participants to review the researchers' interpretation of

participants' responses to interview questions to verify the accuracy of data collected (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, Morse, 2015). By conducting member checking, I ensured that my interpretation of each participant's responses was accurate.

As the sole data collector, I ensured the credibility and reliability of the data gathered from the participants. Reliability is essential by gaining accuracy using reliable instruments and measurements (Appelman & Sundar, 2016 & Cope 2014). To obtain credibility of the interview, the participants will review the researchers' interpretation of the interviews as written based on their reflections and experiences (Palmatier & Rovner, 2015). Scholars conduct member checking to confirm that the responses of each participant in the study are understood correctly and represented objectively (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Assuring the reliability and validity of data collection instruments requires consistent and logical procedural processes (Houghton et al., 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Researchers can use an interview protocol to set processes and procedures for participation when conducting interviews (Treloar, Stone, McMillan, & Flakus, 2015). I used member checking to assure the validity of the research data. I used the NVivo software to validate the data that I analyzed and coded after I collected data to identified themes.

Data Collection Technique

The purpose of data collection was to explore and understand the research phenomenon. Data collection is the process the researcher uses to obtain data to help the researcher answer a study's overarching research question (Sigh, 2014). I collected data through in-depth, semistructured interviews with three small business owners in the

women's retail apparel industry in South Carolina. I collected data for this study through interviews and document reviews of the companies' archival documents and physical artifacts. However, the interview was the key component of my study as I engaged business owners in open dialogue to obtain rich data. In additional to semistructured interviews, I increased data collected from the interview with each company's electronic social media documents and marketing plans that linked the data trends. I collected data from old newspapers clippings, journals, and social media data reports. My intent was to focus the discussion on the open-ended interview questions and ask follow-up questions when necessary.

The data collection procedure began upon receipt of approval to proceed with the study from Walden University's IRB. Anyan (2013) claimed that a researcher must be engaging, listening to the participants' experiences, and maintaining good eye contact during the interview. Adderley and Mellor (2014) stated when collecting data from participants, researchers must show respect and genuine concerns for the participants. As the researcher, I must recognize that the location of the interview is an important consideration and may affect data collection. I followed Anyan, Adderley, and Mellor's suggestions. Duggleby and Williams (2016) suggested the researcher paraphrase questions, so the participants can answer questions effectively. I paraphrased questions, when the participant was not sure of what was being asked, if necessary.

After approval, the following process took place to conduct the study. I requested and received permission to conduct this research study from Walden University IRB and to gather contact information of participants. Participants received the informed consent

form during the initial contact, which was used as a dual form. Contacting participants to

clarify any questions about the study informed consent form was part of the follow-up

process. Participant agreed to participate in the study by sending me a "I Consent" e-mail,

and then I scheduled the interview at a convenient location for each participant. Data

collection took place face-to-face. At the beginning of each interview, the participants

acknowledged their rights on the informed consent form. I took field notes using the

Echo Smartpen by Livescribe and then transcribed the interview in Microsoft Word

document and Excel document. By using an interview protocol (see Appendix A), the

data collected from all participants were consistent and confidential. Participants' privacy

and confidentiality are critical, and the researcher must protect the wellbeing of each

participant (Anyan, 2013). Also, the researcher must maximize the benefits of

participants and minimize harm to the participants. Anyan (2013) stated that reviewing

and analyzing company documents can help to validate data.

　　　　According to Yin (2018b), there are six sources of evidence of data collection that

include (a) documentation, (b) archival records, (c) interviews, (d) direct observations, (e)

participant observations, and (f) physical artifacts. I used two sources of data collection:

semistructured interviews and archival organization documents and physical artifacts.

Face-to-face interviews offer advantages and disadvantages within the qualitative inquiry.

Onwuebuzie and Byers (2015) summarized that conducting interviews is the most

common data collection method, as the researcher asks the participant a list of

predetermined questions. Smith (2018) postulated that interviews are the initial data with

other sources used to validate information obtained from the participants. However, there

are some disadvantages to face-to-face interviews. Face-to-face interviews could be more expensive and time-consuming for the researcher than other data collection types (Cardamone et al., 2014). Face-to-face interviews have the potential for researcher bias and geographical limitation (Alby & Fatigante, 2014). Rossetto (2014) commented that semistructured interviews could be stressful or painful depending on the research topic.

There are some advantages and disadvantages of using document review as a means for collecting secondary data during data collection. Researchers use document review when examining and interpreting data to gain understanding from existing documents (Yin, 2018a). I used document review to triangulate interview data to ensure consistency of meaning the content found during interview data. Another advantage of using document review is that the researcher can use data related to the case study (Irwin, 2013). The researcher also uses secondary data to synthesize and make sense of data collected (Godden, Kutsyuruba, & Tregunna, 2014). The disadvantage of using document review in data collection is that the researcher can interpret the data differently or collect inaccurate information from the secondary data (Houghton et al., 2016). Document review as a secondary source can create ethical risks because data come from personal interaction with participants, often involving trust towards participants' data on the part of the researcher (Irwin, 2013). Another secondary data is physical artifacts, the company's websites, blogs, Internet marketing strategies, photographs, and public records information (Haucke & Robinson, 2018; & Myers, 2015). Using information gathered from physical artifacts and archival documents, I triangulated data to explain the data analysis process and answer the research question. The disadvantage of physical

artifacts is information obtained from sources may be out-of-date, or the researcher can misinterpret the data. I used business documentation, social media information, and website information to gather additional information related to participants. Wahyuni (2012) posited that qualitative researchers could use other data sources to strengthen and crosscheck acquired data. Exploring documentation and interview data reinforces data triangulation (Heale & Forbes, 2013). An advantage of researchers using documents to collect data was that they could expand findings. A disadvantage of using documents review as a method to collect data is that researchers could experience problems acquiring complete documents (Yin, 2018a).

According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), researchers use member checking as a tool to assure validity, credibility, and reliability of data. Researchers use member checking to prevent and reduce errors (Houghton et al., 2016). Member checking is a technique researcher use to ask participants to review the researchers' interpretation of participants' responses to interview questions to verify the accuracy of data collected (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Morse (2015) recommended using member checking to allow participants an opportunity to clarify and confirm the accuracy of interview data that the researcher collects and interprets. I used member checking rather than transcript review to enhance the reliability and validity of the study's data collection instruments. To conduct member checking, I ensured that my interpretation of each participant's responses was accurate by sharing my interpretation with the participants for validation purposes. I also used NVivo software to validate the data collected and analyzed and coded themes.

Data Organization Technique

I collected data by interviewing three small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry. As the researcher, I organized and categorized all data collected after each interview. Coding, transcribing, and organizing the data can assist the researcher in identifying themes (Elo et al., 2014). I used a filing system to maintain each participant's signed consent form, company's documents, interview questions, and interview interpretations. There were no participants' names associated with their interview; the participants were only be referred to by P1, P2, and P3. I used individual folders alphanumerical coding to assist with keeping participants' information confidential. Taylor and Land (2014) and Yin (2018a) argued that using pseudonyms should protect the confidentiality of research participants. I also used de-identification that entailed a letter and a number combination code to protect the participant's identity and information, as suggested by Lee, Jung, Park, Chung, and Cha (2018).

I used Livescribe Smartpen to record and transcribe handwritten notes. I used the Livescribe Smartpen to record the interviews of each participant. Harle and Towns (2013) claimed that the Livescribe Smartpen is a tool for collecting data and designing research. I used NVivo 12 software to code and categorize themes from the interviews of participants. Researchers use NVivo 12 software tool for examining nonnumerical and unstructured data (Sotiriadou, Brouwers, & Le, 2014). Researchers use NVivo 12 to prepare, organize, code, and collate data (Zhao, Peiwei, Ross, & Dennis, 2016). Woods, Paulus, Atkins, and Macklin (2016) commented that NVivo 12 software is an excellent tool for structuring interview data. Researchers use NVivo 12 software to reduce the risk

of errors, facilitate the data analysis process, and the ability to interpret the data. Researchers are ethically accountable to keep confidentiality of raw data and to protect the rights of the participants (Taylor & Land, 2014). According to Dewsbury and Dewsbury (2018), researchers should store all raw data because the loss of data can affect the study's validity. Buys and Shaw (2015) suggested that researchers store data in a safe place for at least 5 years. I securely stored all raw data, audio recordings, and interview transcriptions on a personal hard drive in a locked cabinet in my home which I will hold for 5 years. I will shred all printed documents and erase all digital information after 5 years.

Data Analysis

There are four types of triangulation: data, investigator, theory, and methodological (Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2018a). For this study, I used the methodological triangulation method to enhance rigor and reliability of this study. Researchers use methodological triangulation to determine richness and depth of data collected from various sources (Tonkin-Crine et al., 2016). I used the methodological triangulation to analyze data collected in this study. Using methodological triangulation during data analysis can strengthen the credibility of the study findings. I used methodological triangulation by using the responses from the semistructured interviews and document review to ensure an accurate representation of the phenomenon for data analysis. I conducted member checking with the participants to confirm accuracy of my data interpretation. By using methodological triangulation, researchers could validate and member check findings (Heale & Forbes, 2013). Yin (2018a) noted that increasing

creatability and trustworthiness in a multiple case study is a proper use of methodological triangulation.

Lawrence and Tar (2013) claimed that when analyzing data, researchers explore the meaning of the content. Lawrence and Tar contended that in data analysis, the researcher's goals include collecting, organizing, analyzing, and interpreting data to identify emerging themes. The selected approach is to group the data into emerging themes while assigning an alphanumeric code to protect participant and organization identities (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The data analysis technique involves identifying themes by reviewing the occurrence of word repetition, reviewing the concepts that emerge most frequently, and assigning meaning to the overall theme (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin 2018a). Data analysis is for identifying emerging and repetitive themes and patterns, so researchers can better understand these themes (Zheng, Guo, Dong, & Owens, 2015).

I adopted a sequential process for data analysis, as suggested by Yin (2018a). Yin (2018b) identified five steps of data analysis: (a) collecting the data, (b) separating the data into groups, (c) regrouping the data into themes, (d) assessing the information, and (e) developing conclusions. First, I collected the data by using semistructured interviews with open-ended questions, archival documents, and physical artifacts to answer the overarching research question.

Next, I analyzed the interview data that I collected from the interview process into groups. Researchers use coding for data as a means for organization and interpretation (DeMassis & Kotlar, 2014). I organized answers by labeling them with participant

numbers and themes. I assigned numerical values to participants: P1, P2, and P3. I also

input data into the NVivo 12 for Windows software by using an Excel spreadsheet to

regroup data and identify common patterns and themes to establish conclusions. NVivo

12 software is a tool for organizing nonnumerical and unstructured data (Sotiriadou,

Brouwers, & Le, 2014; Zamawe, 2015). Researchers use NVivo 12 software to reduce

the risk of errors in interpreting the data. Researchers also use NVivo 12 to organize,

code, and move through the data (Zhao et al., 2016). Yin (2018a) suggested assigning

labels to key parts of the interview transcripts. I kept a reflective journal to keep track of

responses and records during the interviews, which helped me to identify key themes by

grouping similar labels together, words, and participants' experiences. I also assigned

labels to the interview transcript. The data analysis process also included researching the

literature for recently published information on my themes. I correlated themes that

emerge from the study with previous studies with my conceptual framework.

The data analysis process and interpretation began when I reviewed and

interpreted interviews. I recorded and reviewed the documents related to the research

question. Finally, after the data analysis processes, I drew conclusions from the study

findings. Borrego, Foster, and Froyd (2014) commented that the conceptual framework

links the literature with the methodology and results of the study. Yazan (2015) similarly

postulated that the conceptual framework must align with the previous literature and the

methodology.

Reliability and Validity

Researchers seek to ensure data collection and analysis are free from biases and errors to ensure the research results are reliable (Hess, McNab, & Basoglu, 2014). Reliability occurs when data collection and analysis is consistent and without inaccuracies in the study (Hess et al., 2014; Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). I ensured reliability and validity for this study.

Member checking is a tool to assure dependability, reliability, and validity (Reilly, 2013). I conducted three interviews and follow the interview protocol to assure the reliability of the study. Member checking is a technique a researcher uses to ask participants to review the researcher's interpretation of participants' responses to interview questions to verify the accuracy of data collected and its interpretation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). To conduct member checking, I ensured my interpretation of each participant's responses was accurate.

Reliability

Qualitative researchers explore in-depth knowledge of a single phenomenon of a research study (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). How the researcher generates findings is critical to the validity of the study (Elo et al., 2014). Dependability is a criterion for evaluating the reliability of a qualitative multiple case study (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Dependability refers to the duplicated nature of the study findings through peer examination, triangulation, and repetition (Elo et al., 2014; Reilly, 2013). Cope (2014) stated that dependability refers to the consistency of an outcome under comparable

conditions. Dependability allows for the reliability of the resources in a study (Funder et al., 2014). Through dependability, the researcher can gain validity of the study.

Erb (2015) and Marshall and Rossman (2016) suggested that the researcher should examine the participants' interview responses for consistency during transcription, member checking and data analysis processes. Researchers use member checking to confirm data dependability by comparing the data captured during and after the interview process. The interviews will continue until the researcher reaches data saturation from the participants' information, or where there is repetitiveness in the data. Credibility, reliability, and validity are important to ensure the accuracy, consistency, and integrity of any study (Hess et al., 2014)

Reliability, or dependability for qualitative studies, is the consistency, soundness, neutrality, and applicability of procedures, ensuring no biases from the researcher influenced the study (Hess et al., 2014). Transparency can assist in ensuring and demonstrating reliability and credibility of the study. I followed the interview protocol (Appendix A) to ensure that consistency in the same interview procedure. To conduct member checking, I ensured the accuracy of my interpretation of each participant's responses was accurate. Member checking is a technique researcher use to ask participants to review the researchers' interpretation of participants' responses to interview questions to verify the accuracy of data collected (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Each participant reviewed my interpretations of the participant's responses via e-mail to determine the accuracy of my interpretations and respond to me within 48 hours via e-mail. I used multiple data sources in this study, such as interviews and archival

organizational documentations to assure reliable and valid findings through methodological triangulation.

Validity

Methodological triangulation, an audio tape recorder, and member checking are tools to support validity (Terwee et al., 2016). There are two types of validity: internal and external. Internal validity is bias or cause-and-effect of the sample and is not relevant for qualitative studies (Terwee et al., 2016). External validity is the ability of the generalization or transferability of findings from one group to another (Terwee et al., 2016). Credibility refers to the acceptability and confidence of the findings of the study (Donges, 2015; Yazan, 2015). It is essential that qualitative researchers generate strategies to enhance the integrity of studies' findings (Kelly & Small, 2016).

Credibility is relevant to the researcher. As the researcher, I ensured the credibility of the study by using scholarly journals, member checking, an interview protocol, and methodological triangulation. By using methodological triangulation, scholars can produce full findings in the study (Heale & Forbes, 2013). I used methodological triangulation, via comparing the findings from interviews to the archival documents to enhance the credibility of the study.

Researchers believe that transferability is how well the researcher conveys the context of the study to the readers (Anney, 2014; Donges, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2015). To enhance transferability, I used detailed descriptions of the processes within the study. Principle researchers are responsible for enabling other researchers to determine

studies' transferability to determine the qualitative research results' applicability to other settings (Houghton et al., 2016).

Confirmability is when the researcher confirms or corroborates the results of the study by others (Donges, 2015; Erb, 2015). Confirmability is the exactness of the results by the participants through which member checking assures the validity of the study (Houghton et al., 2016). Also, confirmability includes using a technique that other researchers can replicate to confirm and ensure that the findings are repeatable for other research domains. Using member checking should assist with demonstrating the credibility of this qualitative study. Through using member checking, I ensured my interpretation of each participant's responses was accurate. Cope (2014) and Marshall and Rossman (2016) stated that member checking, methodological triangulation through comparing the findings from interviews and document review should strengthen the validity of qualitative research. Researchers use core guiding principles to achieve data saturation through sample size, coding, ending point, and through evaluating (Hennink, Kaiser, & Marconi, 2017).

Data saturation occurs when no new or relevant information emerges from the participants' responses to interview questions (Anyan, 2013; Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation occurs when participants' responses to interview questions are repetitive (Robinson, 2014). To reach data saturation, I conducted face-to-face, semistructured interviews with participants and collect data from each participant until no new information emerged. If I did not reach data saturation within three participants, I would have continued to ask interview questions, and member check until the participants'

responses did not reveal anything new. For this case study, I used the methodological triangulation to help me reach data saturation.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I provided information on the research method, design, data collection techniques and organization, population and sampling methods, data analysis, ethical research, and processes for assuaging the study's reliability and validity. I explored SMM strategies that some small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry use to generate growth in sales. The population for the study was three small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry in South Carolina. I collected data from various sources including semistructured interview, archival documents, and physical artifacts. Using the Microsoft Word and Excel documents helped me organize the collected data. Coding of interview summaries and looking at common patterns, I categorized the participants' responses into themes related to the research questions. In Section 3, I present the findings of this research, describe their application to professional practice, discuss implications for social change, recommend actions for future research, and reflect on the study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the SMM

strategies that some small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry use to

generate growth in sales. I interviewed three small business owners in South Carolina; the

leaders possessed successful experience implementing and maintaining SMM strategies

to generate growth in sales for 5 years. The findings include the SMM strategies that

some small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry used to generate

growth in sales. I collected data from semistructured interviews and reviewed archival

documents and physical artifacts of the participants' SMM strategic plans along with

websites to perform methodological triangulation. Using Yin's (2018b) five-step process,

I conducted data analysis that led to the discovery of three themes: (a) social media

platforms, (b) the impact of SMM, and (c) CRM. All participants agreed that social

media platforms could be beneficial to their business success. The uses of social media

tools could increase customer retention. The DOI theory was the conceptual framework

of this study that aligned with the themes and findings from the previous literature.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question was, What SMM strategies do some small

business owners in the women's retail apparel industry use to generate growth in sales?

The data collection process in this study comprised semistructured interviews and a

review of archival documents and primary artifacts. I conducted semistructured

interviews with three small business owners from South Carolina. Before the planned

interviews, study participants consented to participate in the study via email. At the beginning of each interview, the participant signed an informed consent form. Participants' interviews were conducted in person at the participant-designated location. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. To ensure the confidentiality of each study participant, I addressed them as P1, P2, and P3. After conducting semistructured interviews with each participant, I performed member checking to ensure the validity of the data collected during the interviews. Along with semistructured interviews, the data collection process involved reviewing company archival documentation and physical artifacts, such as newspaper articles, websites, and social media pages across various social media platforms.

I then used Yin's (2018b) five steps of data analysis: (a) collecting the data, (b) separating the data into groups, (c) regrouping the data into themes, (d) assessing the information, and (e) developing conclusions. First, I collected the data by using semistructured interviews with open-ended questions. I analyzed data collected from participants' responses to interview questions and company archival documentation and physical artifacts. I interpreted the data based on the participants' responses to the interview questions and shared my interpretations with the participants to validate responses and to mitigate bias. I used the NVivo 12 software to code data via word frequency searches and identified recurring themes, allowing me to concentrate on items related to the overarching research question and the DOI theory. I achieved data saturation with the original number of participants because there was no new information that was inconsistent with previous answers and document review by the end of the third

interview. I recorded, transcribed, coded, and verified transcripts via member checking for all participants. Using NVivo 12 helped me identify three significant themes that morphed from the data analysis, which were (a) social media platforms, (b) the impact of SMM, and (c) CRM. All three themes correspond with the social media strategies the participants used to generate growth in sales.

Using the results of this study, I was able to confirm that small business retail owners could use SMM strategies to generate growth in sales. DOI theory was the conceptual framework for this research study, and it heightened my understanding of the social media strategies small business owners in South Carolina successfully used to generate growth in sales. There is a positive relationship between SMM and consumer buying behavior. Social media could be a useful marketing tool. All three participants commented that social media helped them to connect with customers and build their businesses with little financial impact. The participants provided significant responses to the 11 open-ended interview questions, which varied in depth and scope and allowed me to gain insights into how small business owners use SMM strategies to generate growth in sales. All three participants attested to posting content across different social media platforms several times per week as part of their business strategy to engage new customers. I used member checking to ensure the validity of the research data. In the following sections, I will discuss the three emergent themes and their relationship to the literature and the conceptual framework used in this study.

Emergent Theme 1: Social Media Platforms

In 2018, the number of active social media users reached 3.2 billion worldwide (Chaffey, 2018). According to He et al. (2017), social media is an online platform for small businesses to market and brand their products or services and to manage customer relationships. Most organizational leaders know that social media works, but leaders remain uncertain regarding the appropriate time to replace or supplement other forms of communication with evolving techniques (Lamberton & Stephenson, 2016).

In this study's findings, there was detailed information to better understand the participants' social media usage and to allow comparisons of the participants' usage patterns. Participants used social media to engage consumers in a timely and direct manner at moderately low cost and higher levels of efficiency than with former traditional communication tools. All the participants used Facebook and Instagram as a source to reach customers. However, 67% of the participants found Twitter useful for their SMM strategy. As Gordon and Fan (2016) claimed, businesses use social media platforms as marketing tools to reach potential customers.

The first theme identified pertained to participants' responses to the type of social media platforms small business owners used to generate growth in sales. The study participants used social media platforms to communicate product information from the business owner to the customer. The following three components of social media are the basis of this theme: (a) Facebook, (b) Instagram, and (c) Twitter. These three components morphed from the data analysis based on collected data from participants' webpages, their responses to the interview questions, and review of their organizational documentation.

The content of the businesses' websites visually represented some of the strategic initiatives P1, P2, and P3 used. For example, my observation of the participants' presence on social media revealed that P1 strictly used Facebook as a tool to post pictures and videos of new merchandise, gain customer's feedback, and increase sales. P1 postulated, "I can reach a more extensive customer base using Facebook." P1 used Facebook live to promote different products. On P1's Facebook page, I found a video post reviewed by 505 customers during the live video session. P1 used the live video technique as a way for customers to watch a live video, and expeditiously capture their feedback. Correspondingly, P1 could see the customer comments while the video was live. Similarly, P2 had 207 customers view a video featuring sweaters.

P2's and P3's strategic initiatives included conducting special events such as the Georgia Master's Golf Tournament and the Carolina Cup to build relationships and to meet and greet the community. P2 discussed business pride as a way of giving back to the community and providing enormous customer service through these events. P3 posted events on customers' engagement, such as Shop, Sip and Save Lives, Spring Tailgate Party, and Parents Weekend.

P2 allowed me to review the store's 45-page business plan. One component of the business plan was the marketing plan. Included in the marketing plan was the use of several SMM platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. I also reviewed a newspaper article relevant to P2's business celebration of 45 years of operation on Facebook.

An analysis of the businesses' social media pages revealed that the participants used social media to post pictures and videos, promote community events, advertise daily, and promote special occasions. P2 explained in the marketing plan that social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, were placed on their company business websites in order to invite customers to share, like, and follow the business. P2 and P3 employed all three social media platforms. P2 had the largest number of followers on Facebook, which was approximately 10,000, followed by P3 with around 7,000. P2's webpage had numerous testimonials from the customers. One customer commented, "I've been shopping at the store since I was in college . . . I feel like I know everybody well." P3 interacted with customers with a post on the company's webpages, "Who is coming to the event? . . . We can't wait to see you.

Using social media as a marketing strategy confirms Rogers's (2003) findings on DOI. Rogers found there would be a growing number of adopters using innovative communication methods. Specific findings related to Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as a result of the semistructured interviews, website reviews, analysis of past and recent literature and document review are evidence of their correlation to the DOI theory.

Facebook. The participants specified that they use Facebook to generate growth in sales. P1, P2, and P3 contacted customers for immediate feedback using Facebook. Ham, Lee Haynes, and Bae (2019) claimed that more than half of U.S. social media users are multiplatform users; for instance, they use Facebook and Instagram to reach target customers. All participants in the study specifically mentioned that they used Facebook as a platform to reach potential and existing customers, to communicate with customers,

share products, and increase sales. P1's family business had been in existence for 47 years and continued to evolve from traditional advertising to social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram. P1used Facebook more than any other social media platform. Facebook was the one method for getting instant feedback. P1 uses Facebook to post new products and allow customers to market their business for them by tagging their business in the post.

P2's company was founded more than 12 years ago and markets its products to four generations of customers. P2 uses Facebook because it is free communication, effortless when sending messages, and reduces time and cost. P3's 70 years of operational business practices continued to evolve, as social media played a role in the way the organization connects to its customers. P3 used Facebook as a social media platform to communicate with customers and as a method for identifying product "Likes" via the "Like" icon. P2 and P3 indicated they employ Facebook to post pictures of their clothing items and special events. They also leverage Facebook to promote other social media events. P3 commented, "posting pictures of signature clothing always increase sales. Customers will come in the store because they saw a picture of the product on Facebook or Instagram." Using varying words, all three participants confirmed Facebook as an innovative concept and a significant tool used for their improved sales growth. Also, described in various ways, all three participants reported they could quickly evaluate the effectiveness of their strategies by reviewing customers' responses via social media.

The participants' use of Facebook aligns with Balan and Rege's (2017) study in that small business owners increase business opportunities and communication with their

customers through social media platforms. Also, Fan and Gordon (2014) found small

business owners use Facebook as a marketing tool to communicate with potential

and existing customers. All three participants use Facebook as a marketing tool to

expeditiously communicate with current and potential customers. P1, P2, and P3 used

Facebook to connect and develop relationships with their consumers rather than merely

providing information.

Instagram. All three participants used Instagram regularly to post pictures and

videos of their clothing items to increase sales. P2 and P3 specifically post photos and

videos of different signature lines of clothing for special events, specific local community

events, such as the Georgia Master's Golf Tournament and the Carolina Cup respectively.

P1 primarily used Instagram to post pictures but not significant events. P2 and P3 started

using Instagram after first implementing Facebook as a marketing platform. P2 indicated

that posting photos and videos of signature line clothing ensures customers return to

make online or in person purchases. P2 and P3 reported that they use hashtag captions on

their posts and videos as a means for tracking customers' comments and preferences. P2

used Instagram to introduce the company. P2 commented some customers knew the store,

brand, and products before visiting the store.

All participants recognized some form of customer purchases online or physical

visits to purchase merchandise as a result of using Instagram as a marketing tool. I asked

participants the following question: "What sets your business apart from other women's

apparel businesses, both locally and strictly online shopping experience?" P1 shared that

giving small gifts to Instagram customers returning to the website to make a purchase is

an effective way of showing appreciation. P2 claimed that the reliance on Instagram sets the business apart from others and allows for time to launch new posts regularly, which was critical to sales growth. P3 uses Instagram to post clothing pictures but not as a method for conducting promotional contests. Lee and Carlson (2015) reported that Instagram is a visual platform that business owners use to reach current and potential customers as a way of communicating, collaborating, and creating value through picture content.

Twitter. Society uses Twitter for emailing, tweeting, messaging instantly, and texting. All three participants stated that they have Twitter accounts. P1 created a Twitter account but did not use it. P2 used Twitter as a social media tool to reach customers. P2 created a Twitter account because it is fashionable to have at the startup of the business. P3 started using Twitter because a business colleague encouraged it and initially used Twitter to gain customers and company visibility. P2 and P3 stated that while they do have a presence on Twitter, they had not been consistent with the use of Twitter for marketing purposes. While P2 and P3 used Twitter, P1 did not have a presence on Twitter.

Through the face-to-face interview process, participants had the opportunity to share their views and experiences using social media platforms. None of the participants confirmed any challenges using social media platforms. However, P1 stated that Twitter was not a good fit for the business to connect with customers. P3 said, "friends had told me about the Facebook page because we did everything the old way, but Facebook is a user-friendly site." All three participants' responses were positive about using social

media platforms for reaching existing and potential customers. During the document review, I reviewed social media platform websites to see how business owners connected with customers. The findings obtained from reviewing organizational documentation and physical artifacts align with the findings generated from conducting semistructured interviews with participants in that all participants used social media to communicate with customers. All participants attested that the use of social media platforms was good for their businesses, as it helped them to stay connected with customers and generate sales.

Correlation to the literature. Social media platforms align with the findings from other research studies, as business owners use some form of social media to reach customers and increase sales (Cui et al, 2018; Fan & Gordon, 2014; Karimi & Naghibi, 2015). Agung and Darma (2019) found through their research that online marketers should be more active in learning about social media, boosting motivation, and improving communication with customers. Business owners could use social media platforms to communicate, collaborate, and share knowledge with customers (Appleby, 2016). In this study, business owners also used social media platforms to collect data from customers, increase sales, and promote awareness of products. According to Karimi and Naghibi (2015), social media platforms foster communication around brand and outcomes, providing positive or negative feedback from customers. Participants that were active on social media facilitated positive conversations, identified customer concerns, obtained information about their products, and gained strategy insight from customers' recommendations. These practices align with those suggested by Sajid (2016). Sajid

found that during live videos, participants were able to facilitate communication with customers and convert negative feedback into positive feedback. Karimi and Naghibi found many customers were using social media platforms and, therefore, small business owners were gradually becoming more involved in social media as an effort to reach existing and new customers. Similarly, the participants of this study discussed their gradual use of social media and the benefits associated with its use.

The study's findings also support the work of Lee and Carlson (2015) in that, social media platforms could accomplish the goals of the business owners through building awareness, increasing sales, and building customers' loyalty. Cui et al. (2018) claimed that small businesses' successful adoption of social media depends on how well business owners use social media. All participants confirmed that using social media platforms was a successful way to communicate with the customer, build awareness, and reach a large population. All participants used social media as a place to market their products digitally as well as to create excellent communication with customers.

According to Agung and Darma (2019), numerous businesses have chosen Instagram to focus on photo and video content to support their marketing activities. Similarly, business owners in this study used social media platforms as a communication channel to encourage users to participate and interact, share information, and provide convincing messages. Almost 20% of small businesses employ some type of social media as an essential element of the online marketing technique (Sajid, 2016). I found that all participants used Facebook and Instagram to communicate with customers. Agung and Darma commented that the most influential social media is Instagram, which focuses on

photo and video content and can help business owners reach consumers without regard to time and space. All three participants emphasized the frequent use of Instagram, along with other social media platforms to reach customers; however, business owners still encourage customers to write reviews about their experience on Facebook and post comments on Instagram.

Correlation to the conceptual framework. Theme 1, social media platforms, align with the DOI theory, which is the conceptual framework used in this study. As stated by Rogers (2003), the DOI process is evident when a member of the social system adopts the innovation, such as a new idea or practice, over time. Rogers proposed four constructs of the DOI theory: innovation, communication channels, time, and social system. In this multiple case study, the innovation or new idea was SMM. All three participants used this new way of networking to reach current and potential customers through various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. All participants developed social media web pages to increase awareness and communicate with customers. All participants posted information about products, events, and promotions during special holidays. Over time, each participant attracted more followers by collaboration with customers on their social media sites, which increased brand awareness. P2 and P3 commented that the decision to use Facebook was due to the responses received from customers and friends. All participants claimed that WOM was a driving force for increased business. As their businesses gain popularity, their brand circulated through customers who connected on social media sites. Thus, the timely use

of getting information to customers and the social aspects of social media collectively also align with the DOI theory constructs.

The three study participants' responses aligned with the constructs of the DOI theory. Rogers (2003) stated that the process of DOI theory is constant because new technologies continue to permeate society. The most important aspect of the diffusion process is ensuring that innovation gets adopted (Rogers, 2003). Business owners could maximize an innovation's rate of adoption by understanding the factors that influence their adoption. However, a change does not necessarily have to be new, but only perceived as new to the adopter (Rogers, 2003). In this study, all three participants described their use of social media platforms to market to their customers because of their cost effectiveness and efficiency to reach a large population. Also, through active communication, participants discovered their brand products, which kept customers engaged on their websites and the participants learned some ways of using social media platforms for marketing their products. Business owners can use social media best practices to understand the impact of SMM.

Emergent Theme 2: The Impact of Social Media Marketing

Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are increasingly present in the daily lives of customers, both as a source of information and peer interactions. SMM activity on Facebook and Instagram include posting content and creating brand pages. The following three components of SMM were the basis for this theme: (a) strategic initiatives, (b) WOM marketing, and (c) posts and hashtag strategy. These three components morphed from the data analysis based on data collected from the participants during the interview

process and the review of organizational documentation. All participants in various ways

claimed that by customizing SMM strategies, they witnessed an increase in

sales. Rugova and Prenaj (2016) stated that business owners need to determine whether

the SMM strategy is working for them. All participants described various benefits

stemming from the adoption of social media, including enhanced competitiveness, cost-

effectiveness, customer engagement, relationship-building potential, business exposure,

and real-time feedback. Small business owners must focus on distributing the highest

value to customers through better communication by using the Internet and social media

(Rugova & Prenaj, 2016).

Strategic initiatives. Schlinke and Crain (2013) found that small business owners

must have a strategy to inform, educate, and engage their customers and community.

Small business owners may implement SMM strategies to communicate effectively

with customers. Customers can give feedback immediately to small business owners

through SMM tools (Schlinke & Crain, 2013). P1 found that traditional marketing

strategies did not work for the business; however, customizing the SMM strategy for

Facebook and Instagram tended to work better. P2 tried to use conventional print

advertising, but it did not allow for dynamic changes for marketing items coupled with

time constraints. For example, traditional printing required 2 weeks prior request

and, thus, many items were sold before publishing the advertisement. Also, traditional

printing was not effective because customers were moving, and continue to move, toward

social media platforms where online advertising is dynamic. P2 and P3 reported that since

implementing customized SMM strategies, P2 and P3 had seen an increase in sales

growth. P2 and P3 used various charity events and social gatherings as strategies to reach

customers without any gimmicks or contests. P2 stated that sales increased when were

consistent on social media because the company's merchandise was always visible to

social media followers. P2 had 10,000 organic followers. P2 stated, "customers see our

posts, and they like them." Given the responses from the interviews, participants active

on social media could facilitate positive conversations, identify customer concerns, and

make recommendations for better products. In varying ways, all participants found

initially they were not active on social media, but, after experimentation, they found

social media beneficial for their business needs.

   Word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing. P1, P2, and P3 commented that using

WOM marketing was the most active form to promote their small business and an

excellent way for customers to share ideas and brand choices. P1's company continued to

grow because of WOM marketing. P1's customers talked regularly on the phone,

texted P1, and communicated with P1 through social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram,

and blogs) concerning the new brand merchandise arrivals. P2 stated that word-of-mouth

plays a role in the business as customers modeled the brands during special events,

which brought other customers into the store. Similarly, all 3 participants confirmed that

customers were passionate to share their positive experiences on social media sites. P2

stated that when customers post photos, their friends looked at the photos, liked the

photos, and many visited the store. P1, P2, and P3 commented that WOM advertising was

the most effective form of marketing. All participants discussed that positive marketing

was a suitable strategy for their business. P2 argued that several customers would say

similar things, such as, "I saw this shirt, dress, or shoes on Facebook or Instagram," and "I wanted to try it on or purchase it." P3 posited that WOM marketing had been the principal aspect of success for the business. P3 hired interns from the local college to work, explained expectations, and trained the interns sharing specific details of the various brands.

The interns learned the essential operational business functions, along with the importance of WOM advertising. P3 also engaged in the local community as another form of WOM marketing, training more than 20,000 new students each school year through Instagram. Similarly, the 3 participants' use of WOM marketing certainly aligns with Berger and Iyengar (2013) who found WOM marketing as an effective way for exchanging marketing information.

Posts and hashtags. P1, P2, and P3 mentioned that they posted pictures of their clothing items on Facebook, which helped to increase sales. P1, P2, and P3 claimed that showing the items was the most effective strategy for illustrating products. P1 commented that products posted on Instagram generate customers' calls or direct visits to examine the new products. P1, P2, and P3 using various statements confirmed that posting pictures triggered existing customers and, thus, encouraged their customers to go online to find the items or call into the store and order them. P2 regularly uses a professional photographer to take in-store pictures of the clothing to post them later. P2 and P3 commented they use postings and hashtags for almost every event. P2 stated, "we use hashtags to get feedback from our customers." P3 stated, "new customers can find us and see our brand through our hashtags."

Lee and Carlson (2015) suggested that social media is the future for small business owners to communicate with their employees, collaborate with customers, and grow their business through sales. However, small business owners must be willing to embrace the future of social media platforms to grow their businesses and sustain long-term business acumen. In this study, the participants' practices align with Lee and Carlson's findings in that social media is one method for business sustainability. All participants agreed that when their customers posted photos on Facebook, sales increased. The strategy of posting pictures to generate sales supports the DOI theory in that customers spread the word of a new product or service to their friends through social media or WOM marketing and using hashtag captions.

P2 and P3 postulated that they used general hashtag captions on their posts and videos to track customer comments and preferences. P2 and P3 used public hashtag captions, which were helpful for monitoring events, including the holiday sales. P1's perspective resembled those found by P2 and P3 in that they used personalized hashtags to engage customers on a specific item or to promote a new product. Agung and Derma (2019) found that posting Instagram hashtags can help increase sales for business owners.

During the interview process, I reviewed company archival documentation, such as business ledgers, newspaper clippings, photographs, and websites of participants in this study. P1 had several archival documents that I reviewed during the interview process, which included photos, articles, newspaper clippings, and a business ledger. P1 stated the business originated out of the home of the founder and, as it began to grow, the company moved to its current location. I reviewed an article that contains a photo of a

ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrating the business' 45th year in operation. The celebration was also on Facebook. Several of the photographs I reviewed were of the business owner and members collaborating and making plans for the new establishment. P1 showed me a ledger that contained business transactions from the start of the business until the purchase of computers. I reviewed P1's Facebook and Instagram pages and found pictures of Pl participating in community events. Several of these pictures were hanging on the wall in the business. P2 provided a business report, emails, and a business plan. P2's business plan was in support of the need to open an establishment of a small retail business, not under a flagship. P2's business plan was a 45-page document that outlined the plan for the company. P2's business plan included the business logo, company name, address, phone number, mission statement, market plan, and financial overview. In the financial summary, the business owner summed up the financial requirements to include monthly expenses ($18,000), start-up costs ($20,000), and profit forecasts for the first 3-5 years. P2 posted a photo of the business' employees celebrating its 12th anniversary and sharing champagne with customers. P2's Instagram page contained numerous posts; for instance, one hashtag post, titled #loveknitting had 15,588 followers. P2 also discussed the social media that would reach more customers through the Internet, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram in the business plan.

My review of P1's, P2's, and P3's websites and various social media platforms supported P1's, P2's, and P3's experiences relevant to their SMM presented during the semistructured interviews. P1, P2, and P3 developed their web pages to promote sales and increase awareness of their businesses. According to the findings of this study,

consistently posting engaging content is an essential factor in SMM. Similarly, P2 and P3 found it necessary to post at least three to five times per week and, using different words, both emphasized the importance of using engaging content. These study findings support that customers desire to follow Facebook pages that are personal, up to date, and interactive. A significant aspect of creating and posting engaging, meaningful content is to include photos and or videos.

Correlation to the literature. Previous researchers (Ahmad, Abu Bakar, & Ahmad, 2019; Maduku et al., 2016) confirmed that support from the business owner is usually a key criterion in the organizational adoption of new technology or innovation. The support of a small business owner is critical in constructing a supportive environment and providing enough resources for the adoption of new technology (Lin, 2014). The three participants in this study used multiple strategies to create social media content to communicate, connect, and engage customers to increase sales. P3 commented that the organization adopted social media because a friend had suggested using it. Other researchers (Ahmad et al., 2019; Siamagka, Christodoulides, Michaelidou, & Valvi, 2015) indicated that some small business owners embraced social media simply because everyone else in the industry was doing so, and the business owners did not want to be left behind. In this study, all business owners claimed that they did not have social media presence until a friend or coworker suggested the use of social media as a strategy to interact with customers to generate sales. Social media is conceivably an increasingly popular choice for small businesses because it allows communications to go from a private, one-to-one conversation to a many-to-many conversation (Siamagke et al., 2015).

Correlation to the conceptual framework. The impact of SMM aligns with the DOI theory, the conceptual framework used in this study. Rogers (2003) proposed four constructs: innovation, communication channels, time, and social systems that comprise the DOI theory. The participants' SMM strategies used the DOI constructs to engage customers. The rate of adoption is the time it takes members of the social system to adopt an innovation. However, over time, communication channels have changed to meet the needs of customers, such as email, Internet, and Facebook. In this study, the participants adopting social media as a marketing strategy correlates with Rogers' DOI theory in that these social media forums are conducive to effective communication as social system channels and have the dynamic aspects of reducing time to market. P1, P2, and P3 acknowledged that the use of these innovative social media platforms connects their businesses to customers and the community, which generates growth in sales.

Emergent Theme 3: Customer Relationship Management

The CRM strategy has components that are similar to those Rahimi and Kozak (2017) mentioned when they claimed that there should be the right balance between three organizational resources: people, technology, and processes. According to Rahimi and Kozak, marketers have been shifting from transactional to customer relationship marketing. Rahimi and Kozak posited that social CRM is more about people; that is, delivering customer service, putting the customers first, and using social media accounts to connect one to one. Praise and complaints from customers in social media can spread quickly, and positive and negative comments can have a disproportionate effect on business (Schaupp & Bélanger, 2014).

A business owner could use the Internet to build relationships with current and potential customers, as evident in the findings of this study. P2 said, "one way to extend relationships with potential and existing customers is to establish a process by providing detailed information about products, such as color, sizes, and reviews, doing this may lead to a purchase and repeated purchases." P1, P2, and P3 discussed the important value that customers have on the success of the three participants' businesses. P1 wholeheartedly believed that first impressions are lasting impressions. I reviewed testimonial and messages from customers on the business owners' websites. Similarly, all three participants understood the importance of establishing excellent customer relationships and pride themselves in ensuring customer satisfaction. I found participants' emphasis on the importance of excellent customer relationships by examining feedback customers provided through the participants' websites.

P1 stated, "We have established personal relationships with our customers and endeavor to meet their clothing needs successfully." P2 commented, "We pride ourselves in giving back to our community and having excellent customer service." The participants' responses confirmed the importance of emphasizing people, technology, and processes. I found three categories related to CRM: (a) quality of interactions, (b) engaging customers, and (c) customer loyalty.

Quality of interactions. The three participants in this study used social media to market to the customer and improve the quality of interactions. P1 noted that P1's family had established personal and meaningful relationships with long-lasting customers, and P1 continued these relationships with the next generation. P1 regularly introduced

product changes and provided product warranties to all customers. P1 found that trust and loyalty attributes have a significant role in retaining existing customers and that experiences shared through word-of-mouth marketing helped gain new customers and, as a result, increased profit and market share.

Another method of building quality interaction P1 used was offering customers small incentives during particular seasons. During Mother's Day and Father's Day, P1 gives small gifts to the customers to show appreciation. P1 said, "customers remember how the business owner or salesperson made them feel when they came into the store." When customers are satisfied with their in-store shopping experiences, they tend to return to the store for additional purchases. P1 also said, "with God and the customers, the business remains operational even through the tough times." P1 claimed that P1's business has been operational for 45 years and continues to grow through catering to the needs of each generation. Similarly, P2 said "customer relationship is vital to my business . . . being nice to customers, knowing what they like or dislike, spending time with them, and knowing their preferences is the means used to gain customer loyalty." P2 stated, "everyone wants to look good, and if I sell sunshine, it builds customer loyalty."

P3 placed importance on the devotion and loyalty of the customers and the personal relationship gained over the years. P3 mentioned the longevity and growth of the business by identifying the number of stores and their various city locations. P3 catered to the business market, as P3' business grew through charity and football events that allowed P3 to showcase the business and show appreciation to the local community. P3 said that, "prices do not drive loyalty, but professionalism, knowledge, and knowing

customers do." Small business owners engaged in quality interactions that, according to Schaupp and Bélanger (2014), could use SMM to build relationships and trust with customers to generate sales.

Engaging customers. P1 discovered that engaging customers is an excellent SMM strategy to market the business and drive sales. P1 also understood that engaging and retaining customers is valuable to a business organization because the retention of customers may lead to the securement of new customers. P2 stated that engaging customers and building strong relationships with customers is an important strategy that is essential to the business organizations. Customer engagement obtained through building strong relationships with customers allowed P2 to stay in business. P3 mentioned that engaging customers was beneficial to P3's business because customers want to feel important. According to Schaupp and Bélanger (2014), small business owners can increase sales by engaging in an SMM strategy that includes building relationships and trust with their customers.

P1, P2, and P3 owned brick-and-mortar businesses where customers go to the store to procure products and services. All three participants commented that although selling products and services online is profitable, having a brick-and-mortar establishment allowed them to better interact with their customers. P1, P2, and P3 recruited customers to model their clothing during special events. P3 commented, "we truly want you to feel at home in our store and a part of our family."

Customer loyalty. P1 claimed that "customers treated well remained loyal." P1 also said, "making customers feel special and happy, coupled with having quality

products, can also ensure customer loyalty." P2 found confirmation of customer loyalty

when P2 was able to outfit the entire family. P3 claimed that customer loyalty was the

reason P3 had been in business for a long time because four generations of families were,

and continue to be, loyal to the business by purchasing products and services. All three

participants underscored the necessity to treat customers with respect and keep them

informed through Instagram and Facebook about charity, football, and store events. All

three participants confirmed in their various responses that ensuring customer loyalty was

key to a successful and thriving business.

In my analysis of data collected, I found that P1, P2, and P3 posted pictures of

customers from special events on their social media platforms. I also found personalized

remarks from P2, posting the following statement: "who is coming to Moonlight

Madness? . . . we cannot wait to see you!" I also found that P1, P2, and P3 regularly

reached out to their customers to get feedback through social media in hope that

customers would come into their store to attend events and purchase merchandise. P2's

and P3's websites consisted of photographs of different events, providing evidence of the

business owners' support to community activities.

Correlation to the literature. CRM aligns with the work of several researchers

(Abubakar & Mukhtar, 2015; Elena, 2016; Men & Muralidharan, 2017) who found that

small business owners engaging their customers tend to build relationships with them,

resulting in an increase in sales. Men and Muralidharan (2017) found that social media

has an effect on a business' image, reputation, and relationship with customers. Social

media has become a communication toolbox for external stakeholders, including

customers and the public in general. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are tools used to engage customers. The three participants in this study explored these tools to engage customers and generate growth in sales. P1, P2, and P3 found that their social media, such as website presence, and interactions with customers helped them gain insight about customers. Business owners used social CRM as a tool to better understand customer needs to enhance customer experience, which is key to customer retention, organizational growth, and profitability (Abubakar & Mukhtar, 2015; Elena, 2016). P1, P2, and P3 agreed that long-term customer relationships are an essential part of their business strategy.

      Correlation to the conceptual framework. The findings of this study align with Rogers' (2003) DOI theory key constructs, which are (a) innovation, (b) communication channels, (c) time, and (d) social system. DOI occurs when members of the social system adopt the change, such as a new idea or practice, over time (Rogers, 2003). Three categories emerged within the theme of CRM, which are (a) quality of interactions, (b) engaging customers, and (c) customer loyalty. In this study, the participants adopted three CRM strategies to help improve their relationships with customers and the delivery of services. All three participants took pride in promoting customer relationships. P1, P2, and P3 discussed the importance of loyalty and placing the customers first. P1 claimed that P1's business had been operational for a long time because of the love and loyalty from people and the delivery of good customer service. P2 acknowledged that P2's company had experienced customer loyalty over 70 years. P2 noted that each day presents a lesson to be learned regarding effective ways to build customer loyalty, having

trust as an essential element. P3 enlightened me on the way a trusting customer had selected 30 presents prior to the Christmas season. However, on December 23, the customer called in desperation because she had not picked up the presents. The customer informed P3 that she was out of town at the beach more than 90 miles away. Therefore, P3 wrapped all the packages with Christmas paper and drove to the customer's home to deliver the packages before Christmas. P3 specified that focusing on core customers and keeping them happy is important to the success of a business.

Rogers (2003) explained the process and factors that influence the adoption of innovations. P1, P2, and P3 shared the way their social media presence strengthened electronic word-of-mouth marketing, which is consistent with the construct known as communication channels of the DOI theory. According to Elena (2016), an organization that adopts CRM as a present and future strategy will build better relationships with customers, grow its business, and gain customer trust and loyalty. P1 claimed, "word-of-mouth marketing is how I get all my sales." P2 and P3 agreed that most of their sales also comes from electronic word-of-mouth marketing, as customers share posts and communicate with one another. Cesaroni and Consoli (2015) claimed that small businesses could successfully use social media technologies to improve their ability to manage relationships with customers. The study's findings align with the DOI theory and the existing body of knowledge.

Applications to Professional Practice

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the SMM strategies that some small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry use to generate

growth in sales. Small business owners could use the information presented in this study to verbalize short- and long-term plans to help their organization seek SMM platforms to generate growth in sales. Small business owners in the retail apparel industry can use the findings of this study to create their SMM strategies using different social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. In addition, small business owners could gain a better understanding of the strategies used to convince their employees to implement SMM strategies.

The three themes that emerged in this study, which were (a) social media platforms, (b) the impact of SMM, and (c) CRM, support professional practice in different ways. Aligning with the first theme, the participants described some social media platforms that small business owners could use to generate growth in sales. In this study, the participants were pleased to use Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to reach their customers immediately. Similarly, supporting the second theme, the participants highlighted the impact of SMM and the best way to present their products to their customers in a cost-effective manner. Finally, relevant to Theme 3, CRM, participants talked about the fact that small business owners could engage customers in a positive manner. Loyalty increases trust between business owners, employees, and customers, thereby allowing for increased sales and retention of customers. In summary, small business owners also could use the results of the finding from this study to increase their knowledge about how SMM strategies were used to generate growth in sales by engaging customers through social media platforms.

Implications for Social Change

The results from this case study may provide business owners with useful SMM

strategies to better communicate with customers. According to Kim and Lee (2015),

social media is a crucial tool to assist business owners in developing and understanding

customers. All business owners in this study could gain from using social media because

it allows business owners to communicate with, listen to, and learn from their customers

through feedback. I was able to confirm that a small business owner could use SMM

strategies to communicate with and engage customers, enable customers to make more

informed decisions and obtain faster service. Small business owners could use social

media as an inexpensive yet effective way to engage new customers in the community.

Contributions to positive social change could include SMM best practices and strategies

to improve small businesses' steadiness in the economy. The information provided in this

doctoral study could help small businesses to foster positive social change by reducing

the unemployment rate within the local community.

The three identified themes were (a) social media platforms, (b) the impact of

SMM, and (c) CRM that emerged from this study could influence positive social change.

By applying the social media platforms strategies that emerged from this study, women's

retail apparel business owners could contribute to inspiring potential business owners to

engage in similar practices. Private and public business owners could use the study

findings to create business plans, initiatives, and approaches to improve the resilience of

small businesses in the community. Small business owners could gain a better

understanding of social media strategies to help support local communities, businesses,

and local colleges. Also, increasing community relations by allowing customers to communicate on businesses' social media pages. Business owners could implement SMM strategies to improve communication between the community and businesses.

Recommendations for Action

Small business owners, managers, and leaders in the retail apparel industry could use the information, research findings, and recommendations in the study to create and implement SMM strategies that should generate growth in sales. I have four recommendations for small business owners to consider. The first recommendation is that small business owners should research and determine which social media platforms are most beneficial for their businesses and align their policies with the goals of their small businesses. Second, I recommend taking advantage of SMM training opportunities for enhancing small business owners' knowledge and increasing sales through effective strategies using the best social media platforms. Third, recommendation is small business owners create an SMM plan. Participants 1 and 2 in this study did not have an SMM plan; therefore, they could not implement these strategies and had no consistency. Fourth, recommendation is that a small business owner share the findings with a SMM expert responsible for implementing SMM strategies. Small business owners could employ a dedicated employee empowered to analyze SMM strategies. Participants in the study had no single employee responsible for implementing SMM strategies.

I plan to disseminate the results of this study in several ways. I plan to provide each participant with a summary of the findings. Also, the findings from this study could be useful information to create training programs for small business owners. The

ProQuest/UMI dissertation database will maintain a published version of this qualitative

multiple case research study for review. Additionally, I will present the findings of this

research study in business forums and other intellectual milieus.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings of this study may serve as a foundation for further research in the

areas of SMM strategies. In this multiple case study, I noted two main limitations. The

first limitation was that the study had a sample size of three small businesses. The small

number of businesses in a specific region in South Carolina limits generalizations from

this study's findings. However, the results offer preliminary insights for future studies on

the use of the Internet and social media platforms for small businesses. The study only

included successful small business owners. The second limitation was that the

participants might not have been fully engaged when answering the interview questions

during the interview process. The study only included participants willing to participate

in the study, excluding those participants having started the research process but ended up

withdrawing from the study. Researchers could expand this study to include other types

of small businesses in the retail industry, such as consumer electronics and food

franchises, to see different strategies those leaders use. The recommendation for further

research is that other researchers should also consider studying profitable small business

owners from various geographic locations in the United States. Additionally, I

recommend that researchers use the themes that emerged from this study and conduct a

quantitative study.

Reflections

The Walden University's Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program has been the most demanding, challenging, and gratifying experience. I began the program in search of pursuing my long-time dream of obtaining a doctoral degree in business. Also, I was retiring from the military and had already received my Master's in Business Administration, and my benefits included funding for going back to school. Therefore, this was my opportunity to pursue my dreams of obtaining a doctoral degree. Of course, I had many challenges; however, the DBA doctoral study process has allowed me to improve my research skills and to enrich my academic competence.

I chose to research SMM strategies based on my desire to know more about social media and how small business owners could use it to grow their businesses. I also plan to become a small business owner, and this would allow me to learn more about becoming an entrepreneur and using SMM strategies. In the military, I worked on numerous projects promoting the military through an SMM campaign. I wanted to learn more about how social media could be a driving factor in helping businesses generate growth in sales. The study enhanced my knowledge of research. Also, I learned the challenges that small business owners face staying in business beyond 5 years and the competition they face with larger firms. I will take the lessons learned at Walden University with me on my journey and pass them forward to assist others on their doctoral journey.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the SMM strategies that some small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry use to

generate growth in sales. I conducted semistructured interviews with three small business owners who were successful in using SMM strategies to generate growth in sales. The three participants in the study provided data through interviews and archival document review. The study included three small businesses in South Carolina that participated in the interviews process to explore this subject. The participants openly shared rich data with me. Through the interview process, I gained invaluable information on implementing SMM strategies for small businesses to generate growth in sales. Also, I gathered information from using archival organizational documentations from the business owners and websites. I gathered information from the websites on customer service, history of the business, testimonials, financial reports and a 45-page business plan.

Additionally, archival organizational documentation from the participants' websites also allowed me to review photographs and newspaper articles. Participants shared numerous photographs of organizational events to engage customers and increase sales. Using the websites, I was able to gain invaluable knowledge from the financial reports, testimonials, SMM plans and social media budgets. Some participants had a small social media budget but took full advantage of having access to a new way of marketing their products and communicating with new customers quickly and economically, reaching a broader audience through social media platforms. Reviewing testimonials allowed me to understand CRM through customers' feedback. I collected data using methodological triangulation of two data sources: interviews and archival organizational documentation. I used archival document review and interview data from

the participants of the study to ensure consistency of meaning I found during the interview process.

According to Yin (2018a) an interview is the most crucial source of data collection. After analyzing and coding the data, three themes emerged: (a) social media platforms, (b) impact of social media, and (c) CRM. I used member checking to ensure data saturation and validity. I reached data saturation when there was no new information gathered. The analysis of each new theme was linked back to the literature, existing bodies of knowledge, and the conceptual framework for this study.

The results of this study aligned with the evidence that I found in the current research that business owners using SMM strategies could generate growth in sales. The data collected from the participants' interviews and document review, I found that business owners are moving away from traditional marketing, such as radio and television. All participants confirmed that using some type of SMM helped generate growth in sales.

In this study, I found that when business owners use strategic initiatives based on consumers' feedback, consumer behaviors, and market trends, business owners develop a successful innovative strategy. Rogers (2003) provided strategies to analyze and assess organizational growth through innovations of SMM tools to sustain business activity. Small business owners could look at their business practices and develop procedures to ensure appropriate SMM strategies and methods to support themselves beyond 5 years.

The findings, conclusions, and recommendations could help small business owners to understand and use SMM strategies in their business plans. Facebook,

Instagram, and Twitter were the most commonly used SMM platform by the three participants in the study. All three participants used social media platforms mainly because they are free, provide immediate feedback, and could reach many customers. All participants revealed that valuing and developing relationships that fostered personal and professional growth contributed to small business profitability.

The findings from this study could provide small business owners with more data to sustain their success in business beyond 5 years of operations. Social media has increased in acceptance, as compared to traditional methods of marketing. All participants of the study have implemented some form of social media as their primary source of marketing. All participants shared that their business had gone through its high and low but if one conduct market research and understand trends business could remain successful beyond the 5 years. However, the participants' responses confirmed the importance of using SMM strategies to generate growth in sales. The findings of this study confirm that business owners' use of social media to communicate with customers could foster long-lasting relationships and increase sales through WOM. Also, WOM could create positive social outcomes and improve the sustainability of small businesses. All participants agreed that repeat business creates stability and success. Based on the findings from the study, I conclude that social media is an influential marketing tool for small business owners when used and properly employed.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore the SMM strategies that some small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry use to generate growth in sales. The target population includes at least three small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry in South Carolina who have successfully used SMM strategies to generate growth in sales for 5 years. Small businesses could use the results of this study to learn how to increase return on investment for the business owners, which could increase the local community's tax base to improve social programs. In addition, positive social change can result from increased employment to stimulate local economies from growth in sales.

Interviewee:_____   Location:_____

Date:_____   Time:_____

Step 1. Introduce myself to the participant

Step 2. Give a brief overview of the study, and open dialogue with the participant

Step 3. Discuss and review Consent Form Content/Get participant consent and signature prior to the interview. Verify participant's consent form.

Step 4. Answer any questions or concern of the participant

Step 5. Discuss confidentiality and privacy of the Interview

Step 6. Reestablished with the participant that the interview will be recorded. Start the recording of the interview noting date and time

Step 7. Introduce each participant with coded Identification (P1), (P2), and (P3)

Step 8. Start the interview with Question 1 proceed to final question

Step 9. Allow for follow-up of questions, if desired.

Step 10. End interview questions and stop the recording

Step 11. Thank the participant for his or her participation in the study and send a thank

you card after each interview

Step 12. Ask for contact information and number for follow-up questions and member

checking interview.

Step 13. End protocol

Appendix B: Interview Questions

The following interview questions will explore what SMM strategies do some small business owners in the women's retail apparel industry use to generate growth in sales?

1. What led you to start using social media?

2. How did you customize your SMM strategies to generate growth in sales?

3. How does SMM fit into your marketing mix?

4. What other SM M strategic processes and tools do you use to generate growth in sales?

5. How did you use social media contribute to improve your SMM strategies?

6. What trends do you see in the role of SMM in your business shopping experience?

7. How do customers make purchases from your business, for instance, do they approach your products from an online platform, or do they come into the store?

8. How have alternative shopping behaviors impacted your storefront success?

9. What sets your business apart from other women's apparel businesses both locally and strictly online shopping experience?

10. How do you strategize and gain customers' loyalty?

11. What additional information would you like to share regarding your successful SMM strategies that I did not ask?