

2020

Effective Strategies for Sustaining Small Retail Businesses

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Eddie D. Harris

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

Abstract

Effective Strategies for Sustaining Small Retail Businesses

by

Eddie D. Harris

MS, Bethel University, 2012

BS, LeMoyne-Owen College, 2009

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2020

Abstract

Small business owners have major issues in sustaining their businesses. Small business owners who do not use successful strategies to sustain their businesses are destined to fail. Grounded by the systems theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore effective strategies for sustaining small retail businesses beyond 5 years. The participants comprised 6 small business owners who successfully sustained their business beyond 5 years in Memphis, Tennessee. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and reviewing company documents and analyzed using Yin's 5-step process. The 4 themes that emerged from this study were: be adaptive to external stakeholder participation, marketing strategy, appropriate financial management strategy, and provide leadership skills training. A key recommendation for small retail business owners is to create a win-win strategy with suppliers by setting common business goals, ensuring successful communication, and setting the tone because first impressions matter. The implications for positive social change include the potential to increase local employment income and local and federal tax revenue through the retail business success and growth.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my beautiful wife (Katrina R. Harris). She gave up her quality time to let me finish this endeavor. Some nights, I would stay up all night writing my research study. Mrs. Harris would wake up for work and encourage me by saying: "You can do this." Also, I would like to thank my lovely mother (Ethel M. Henderson), step-father (Allen Henderson), daughter (Kira R. Hall), son-in-law (John Hall), daughter (Nadia Perry), son-in-law (Darrin Perry), and big sister (Frank Briggs), who suggested that I go back to college. I cannot forget my other two sisters (Marie Martin and Martha Geeter) and my brother (Ernest L. Harris). Thanks to my family!

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Jesus Christ for His grace and mercy to allow me to finish this endeavor. I am thankful for my chair, Dr. Mohamad S. Hammoud. I thank you for your support, patience, and guidance toward the completion of this doctoral program. I thank my second committee member (Dr. Boyd B. Johnson) and my University Research Reviewer (Dr. Lisa M. Kangas). You are all great. To others not mentioned, I thank you all for your support.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Ninety-five percent of small businesses fail in the United States within the first 5 years (U.S. Small Business Administration [U.S. SBA], 2017). This high percent warrants investigation into the factors and processes that can help sustain small businesses. This study is about successful strategies that small retail business owners can use to sustain their business beyond 5 years.

Background of the Problem

According to the SBA, 50% of businesses fail within the first year, and 95% fail within the first 5 years (U.S. SBA, 2017). The reasons often have nothing to do with the business's product or service, but rather with management's challenges, which include a lack of strategies to sustain their businesses (Villa & Bruno, 2013). Challenges faced by managers may include political, social, and economic issues, all factors to balance as part of the operational plan (Rice, 2013). The contribution of small retail businesses to the United States economy overall, and local economies in particular, creates a need for small retail business owners to develop strategies to sustain their business. By understanding what successful strategies some small retail business owners use to sustain their business beyond 5 years, it may be possible to contribute to the success of other small retail business owners in the Memphis, TN area. Small retail businesses play a significant role in the local and national economy, which underscores the value of understanding factors that contribute to the success of such businesses (Calderwood & Davies, 2012).

Problem Statement

Small business owners have major issues in sustaining their businesses (Turner & Endres, 2017). Small businesses fail at a rate of 95% within the first 5 years (U.S. SBA, 2017). The general business problem was that some small retail business owners are not prepared to sustain their business, which results in business failure. The specific business problem was that some small retail business owners lack strategies to sustain their business beyond 5 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the strategies used by small retail business owners to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The target population comprised of six small retail business owners who have successfully used strategies to extend their business beyond 5 years in Memphis, Tennessee. Small retail business owners may be in a better position to succeed, make good decisions, and contribute to social change when given information about how to sustain their business longer. The findings from this study might contribute to improvements in small retail business owners' success strategies to sustain their business beyond 5 years and increase profitability. The implications for positive social change include the potential to create job opportunities in the community.

Nature of the Study

The three types of research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Lyall & King, 2016). The qualitative method is appropriate for conducting studies where the researcher's focus is on building a holistic understanding of complex processes (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). Researchers use the qualitative method to

explore a phenomenon, relying on text and image data and open-ended questions (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). The qualitative method was appropriate for this study because I wanted to explore strategies relying on interview questions and document review. Researchers use a quantitative method for inferential statistical testing (Ridder, 2017) and when trying to determine cause and effect relationships (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). The quantitative method was not appropriate for this study because my objective was not to test hypotheses but to explore a phenomenon using open-ended questions. Mixed methods research focuses on exploring organizational issues by joining qualitative and quantitative elements (Kasim & Al-Gahuri, 2015). The mixed method was not an appropriate choice for this study because the purpose of the study was not to test hypotheses. In this study, qualitative research was the most beneficial because the purpose was to explore new insights on strategies used in the specialized industry of small retail business owners.

Researchers using a phenomenological design focus on searching for clarity about the same lived experience shared by multiple individuals (Kato, Nunes, & Dey, 2016). This study did not focus on participants' lived experiences. Ethnographers study a group of people who share the same culture (Kato, et al., 2016), which is not the purpose of this study. Yin (2017) defined a case study as an empirical inquiry in which a researcher investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. Yin noted case studies illustrate events and their specific context. A case study design was the best option for this qualitative research study. I used a multiple case study to explore a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. This phenomenon was small retail

business owners sustaining their business beyond 5 years.

Research Question

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

Interview Questions

1. What strategies do you use to sustain your business?
2. What methods and processes do you use to identify and update these strategies?
3. What barriers do you encounter in implementing your strategies to sustain your business?
4. What do you do to address the barriers to implementing these strategies?
5. How do you determine the adequacy of your strategies for the sustainability of your business?
6. How do you measure the effectiveness of your strategies to sustain your business?
7. What other information that you consider relevant to this research would you like to share with me?

Conceptual Framework

System theory was the conceptual framework used in this study. Systems theory resulted from Ludwig Von Bertalanffy's general systems theory, originally introduced in the 1930s (Von Bertalanffy, 1972). Von Bertalanffy (1972) explained how external and internal environments coexist within a system and how each influences the other's

responses and general stimuli of given circumstances. Bridgen (2017) emphasized later that there is a dynamic and nonlinear interaction between the parts to create the whole. System theory provides a concept for looking at systems, consisting of multiple components, as a whole (Keegan, Rowley, & Tonge, 2017).

Von Bertalanffy (1972) discussed external and internal influences that may have a direct or indirect influence on behaviors and organizational outcomes. Internal aspects described by Von Bertalanffy focus on organizational influences, while external influences may be environmental. Rice (2013) clarified environmental influences consist of political, social, and economic aspects, key components used in balancing the operational plan of the business. Strategic planning, according to Boons and Ludeke-Freund (2013), involves assessing the external socioeconomic environment, and the internal organizational environment. By examining the relationships of the whole system, patterns and themes develop which provide new meaning to the problem (Kennickell, Kwast, & Pogach, 2015). The ability to understand strategies used by some small business owners may provide insight into sustaining other businesses.

Operational Definitions

Business failure: Business failure is a business that has not made a net profit for the previous 2 years, and whose status may include business termination (Pereira, Basto, & Ferreira-da-Silva, 2014).

Business success: Business success means a business with profitability and prolonged existence of 5 or more years of operation (Koosha & Albadvi, 2015).

Small business: A small business is an independently owned and operated for-

profit business not dominant in its field, employing less than 500 people (U.S. SBA, 2017).

Strategic management: Strategic management is the process of developing corporate strategies (Lillestol, Timothy, & Goodman, 2015).

Strategic planning: Strategic planning is the process of deciding on the future work of a company (Lin & Tsai, 2016).

Sustainability: Sustainability is an organizational leader's ability to meet the needs of the firm and stakeholders while maintaining environmental, financial, and social performance (Searcy & Buslovich, 2014). The concept of sustainability includes the organization leaders' concerns with social and environmental issues in business activities and interactions with stakeholders (Mallapragada, Grewal, Mehta, & Dharwadkar, 2015).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

An assumption is something unverifiable but perceived to be true (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). If there are no assumptions, the research problem could not exist (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). For this case study, there was an assumption that small retail business owners could recall and identify what strategies contributed to their business' success. The second assumption was that the participants were honest in their responses to the interview questions.

Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses that can affect a research study (Morgado, Meireles, Neves, Amaral, & Ferreira, 2017). Every study has some limitations (Marshall

& Rossman, 2015). The potential limitations of this study included the possibility participants did not remember all events, or were not able to communicate the information accurately. Limiting the research to the perspectives of participants may reduce the research breadth.

Delimitations

Delimitations are restrictions or boundaries that researchers impose to focus on the scope of a study (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). Delimitation of the study included the geographical location, which included small retail business owners in the Memphis, Tennessee area. Another delimitation of the study was to include only businesses with fewer than 500 employees.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant to business practices as the findings may include the strategies used by small retail business owners to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The study could affect many small business owners because the findings could enhance their understanding of how to sustain their business long term. Moreover, the study may provide an opportunity to improve small retail business owners' strategies to increase sustainability rates.

Contribution to Business Practice

Over six million Americans start small businesses every year (Mathooko & Ogutu, 2015). Song, Zhao, Arend, and Im (2015) emphasized that strategic planning positively affects profitability. According to Harris, Gibson, and McDowell (2014), small retail business owners typically launch the business with limited resources, but good

strategic planning may offset these shortages. The U.S. Small Business Administration (2014) reported that approximately 50% of new businesses survive 5 years or more, which has changed little over time; however, the likelihood of survival increases with each year of operation. Small retail business owners who are knowledgeable about the business environment have a better understanding of how to make good strategic choices (Harris et al., 2014). In this study, I identified successful strategies that some small retail business owners use to sustain their operations and improve their likelihood of survival.

Implications for Social Change

Small retail business owners create an opportunity to initiate and promote activities that contribute to economic and technological growth (Mathooko & Ogutu, 2015). Small retail business owners play a major role in the health and growth of the United States economy (Johnson, Faught, & Long, 2017) by increasing local and federal tax revenue (Schoenung & Dikova, 2016). When small retail business owners succeed and grow, local taxes and employment income contribute to the wealth and sustainability of their connected communities (McCann & Barlow, 2015). The results of this study may provide strategies to small retail business owners that will allow them to sustain their business and contribute to their local economies.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The objective of this literature review was to explore literature regarding systems theory and how it may relate to strategies needed to sustain a small retail business. Practitioners of the systems theory focus on how internal and external parts of a system work together. I searched a variety of multidisciplinary studies, economics, and

management and business databases. The compilation of data emanated primarily from ProQuest Central, ABI/INFORM Complete, Emerald Insight, SAGE Journals, Google Scholar, and government sites. Keyword searches included *small retail businesses, small retail business strategies, small business success, success rates, systems theory, chaos theory, complexity theory, and retailer skills*.

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the strategies used by small retail business owners to sustain their business beyond 5 years. I divided the literature review into sections, including the systems theory, application of systems theory, alternative theories, small retail business contributions, small retail business strategies, marketing orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, small retail business survival strategies, small business leadership skills, small business corporate social responsibility strategies, small business new product development strategies, and small business sustainability and market intelligence. There were 255 sources cited in this research study, 221 (87%) were peer-reviewed and 145 (57%) were published between 2016-2020.

The Systems Theory

Systems theory was the conceptual framework used for this study. Systems theory was the product of Ludwig Von Bertalanffy's original general systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1972). Von Bertalanffy (1972) explained how external environments and internal environments coexist within a system and how each influences the other's responses and general stimuli of given circumstances. The systems theory bridged various disciplines and inspired other researchers to apply the systems theory to their

studies and other general dynamic principles (Von Bertalanffy, 1972). Due to the flexibility of the systems theory, models of the system theory could transfer from one field to another (Morse, 2015), which made it a good fit for the study. Moore et al. (2018) indicated the use of systems thinking as a control element can be used to recognize problems in small businesses. Organizations like small retail businesses fit the systems theory and the pattern of relationship between parts of a system; a phenomenon often overlooked by business owners in general.

In the 1930s, after becoming dissatisfied with the linear approach to change and growth, Ludwig von Bertalanffy coined the term systems theory (Pehrsson, 2016). Von Bertalanffy (1972) suggested that the contribution of a functioning system come from all parts of the entity (Barratt, Ferris, & Lenton, 2015). Instead of individual patterns, systems theory enables researchers to identify interrelationships and parts of the system. Ludwig Von Bertalanffy used systems theory to examine coexistence between events and components (Von Bertalanffy, 1972).

Since the 1900s, the literature on the importance of small retail business owners to the growth of the economy has grown (Park & Campbell, 2017). To understand systemic interrelationships that small retail business owners must understand, improve, and control, viewing systems holistically allows one to note interactions among clusters of elements. General systems theory was the appropriate framing for this qualitative multiple case study. There must be an understanding of the interrelations of business needs and activities for a small retail business owner to sustain operation. Pehrsson (2016) described systems theory as a dynamic interaction between a phenomenon and its

aggregates in correlation with the scientific doctrine of wholeness. Innovations in marketing, technology, customer satisfaction, and financial dealings are thriving factors that adaptable business owners must work through when desiring to create a sustainable business (Boons & Ludeke-Freund, 2013). Oyemomi, Liu, Neaga, and Alkhuraiji (2016) emphasized the importance of knowledge sharing among organizations as a way of overcoming challenges. For other aspiring small business owners, studying and exploring the activities of successful business owners who have sustained their business beyond 5 years may reveal valuable insights.

A new business owner has an ideal business in mind paired with assumptions on how to run that business. Systems thinking may contribute to sustainable, systemic relationships and areas of financial actions, internal and external stakeholders, and social and environmental concerns (Senge, Smith, Kruschwitz, Laur, & Schley, 2010). Systems theory enables one to view a process regarding how a system and its parts interact.

Lussier and Halabi (2010) attempted to use systems theory for the likelihood of business failure in three countries by developing a prediction model. The outcome of their 5 years of research was that a single model was not successful because of variances in regulations, taxes, and customs. This outcome was in alignment with Safa and Von Solms (2016) who posited that the environment significantly influences an organization. The focus of this multiple case study is to explore the strategies used by leaders of small retail business organizations to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years.

Systems theory provides the foundation for the idea that the promotion of openness may shape the survival and prosperity of an environment (Ren & Dewan,

2015). Systems theory is a broad, practical approach, applicable to various disciplines (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998). Domegan et al. (2016) emphasized that systems' thinking is a more holistic approach, which considers all issues involved in the required change. Systems thinking, according to Nguyen and Bosch (2013), create the best fit for processes and refine how individuals approach various problems. Domegan et al. (2016), emphasized that by examining the relationships of the whole system, patterns and themes develop, providing new meaning to a problem. Von Bertalanffy (1972) posited that general systems theory involves the examination of wholes. Kaine and Cowan (2011) further defined systems theory as a system rather than the behavior of individual components and the culmination of individual components that when linked together are equal to or greater than the sum of their parts.

Popescu (2018) focused on systems theory as two overlapping systems, internal and external, which business owners must respond to as part of maintaining their business. Von Bertalanffy (1972) emphasized the struggle to balance interactions between internal and external forces, which form a collective whole. Laszlo and Krippner (1998) emphasized the systems theory provide a foundation for exploring the distinction between a person's or individual's perception and conception and consists of four things: the elements of the system, the properties of the system, the internal relationship of its objectives, and the environment. Mania-Singer (2017) emphasized that by examining the relationships of the whole system, patterns and themes developed will provide new meaning to a problem. Open systems are the best fit for information received and used to associate and refine processes within an environment (Resnick, Cheng, Simpson, &

Lourenço, 2016).

The open systems concept is centered on the idea that systems and the matter of the environment intertwine as every natural system does (Von Bertalanffy, 1972). Researchers who used open systems understood that beyond the view of the organization lie the principles of work organizations and systems (Kasim, Haračić, & Haračić, 2018). The concept of the systems theory led to the more complex theories, especially those applicable to business, which grew to include team structures from vast business franchises to small self-owned establishments (Mania-Singer, 2017) System theory, as stated by Mania-Singer provided a model for investigating organizational theory, centered on leaders managing multiple environments in striving to sustain their business.

The connection of these theories relates directly to decision-making and leadership skills (Kim, 2017). The problems derived from whole systems enable these approaches to coexist and relate one way or another (Von Bertalanffy, 1972). Instigation of the transition to the system(s) occurs when organizations change and adapt on a phenomenal scale (Gilstrap, 2015; Von Bertalanffy, 1972). Regarding business, the wholes and wholeness of an organization are the base scientific investigation for the general systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1972). Kim emphasized that system theory offers a method to gain understanding through a consideration of the relationships of critical business factors. The expansion of the general systems theory brought strong results into the new and growing fields of study and brought about the fundamental solutions to vast, complex problems (Tarka, 2017).

The factors and unpredictable challenges that a small retail business owner

experiences in launching, managing, and sustaining a small retail business align with systems theory. The internal components of this study focus on factors under the control of the business owner, external components are environments outside the control of the owner. The competition, finances, regulatory environments, logistic challenges, marketing options, as well as one's experience, education, and leadership skills are examples of internal and external challenges faced by small retail business owners. This study might help potential small retail business owners or small business owners to determine successful strategies to sustain their small businesses beyond 5 years.

Businesses and organizations could greatly benefit from individuals who are cultured in systems thinking and systems theory to help with the decision-making processes of a company (Linton & Solomon, 2017). Researchers testing systems should understand that theory testing and empirical testing do not provide the same results (Linton & Solomon, 2017). Systems thinking and systems theory impact decision-making and risk analysis should represent core value as well as how people think and act should be of concern if an organization desires sustainability (Mohamad Radzi, Mohd Nor, & Ali, 2017; Russell, Swanson, Atun, Nishtar, & Chunharas, 2015). Managers should apply differing systems thinking concepts because of different philosophical, cultural, and sociopolitical backgrounds found in the workplace (Van Rijnsoever, 2017).

Von Bertalanffy's systems theory (1972) provides useful methods for acquiring sustainability in small businesses. The complexity and interdependence of the objects and their environment are the focus points of systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1972). System theory will provide the framework for evaluating small business strategies. Using systems

theory as the lens may provide a better understanding of what strategies some leaders of small retail business organizations use to sustain their business. To ensure the collective behaviors result in a final system product, small business owners must exhibit certain principles of interrelationships, such as totality and chain of command (Von Bertalanffy, 1972). An open organizational system is part of sustainability in small businesses. A qualitative analysis process revealed the principles governing the whole, affecting the behavior of the parts (Von Bertalanffy, 1972). Systematically, all essential elements bind together in systems theory as suggested by Adams, Hester, Bradley, Meyers, and Keating (2014).

Application of Systems Theory

Thinking processes molded by philosophical, cultural, and sociopolitical backgrounds differ on appropriate problem-solving processes, and systems thinking in general (Van Rijnsouwer, 2017). To avoid cultural conflicts when using systems, individuals who use systems theory should remember to include cultural differences during process development. The domino effect of incompetent management affecting the overall poor performance and unsustainable business processes has led to business losses (Sun, Hyland, & Cui, 2014). Familiarity with systems thinking helps small business managers realize its importance and usefulness when applied to business management aspects (Sun et al., 2014). If small business leaders can incorporate systems thinking into their management approaches, then the ability to transfer knowledge and skills will lead to basic problem-solving skills (Sun et al., 2014). Lewis (2015) explained that systems analysis is the practical use of systems theory.

McManners (2016) shared that in systems theory; the researcher investigates principles common to entities and models the theory to describe them. Von Bertalanffy (1972) suggested that all parts of an entity influence a functioning system along with the conceptual basis of the systems theory. In the 1930s, the systems theory led to a wide application in many other disciplines thus creating a new perspective of science (Von Bertalanffy, 1972). Von Bertalanffy suggested that components, when linked together, are greater than or equal to the sum of their smaller parts. The objects, their attributes, accompanying internal relationships, and the environment of the systems are all essential components of the systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1972).

Alternative Theories

While exploring alternative theories, I also considered the chaos theory and the complexity theory. I discussed both theories, described each, and rationale for not selecting either theory. Both were good choices, but neither theory supported my holistic research.

Chaos theory. Chaos theory is a mathematically oriented theory used by some researchers to identify patterns and systems in apparently disorganized contexts. Chaos theory is a system-level theory also used in inter-professional fields, primarily in health sciences (Suter et al., 2013). Chaos theory is based on a complex system of interrelated parts that are dynamic and constantly changing. Coupled with systems theory, researchers use chaos theory to enhance business effectiveness when seeking to explore and expand the current knowledge base regarding management behaviors (Bauman, 2015).

Small retail business owners develop and implement strategies that might

contribute to their success but must recognize chaos that exists in the internal and external environment when considering business decisions. While there are similarities between chaos and system theory, Chaos theory was not used because the environment must be preplanned to yield a known outcome. Small business development and planning does not provide a preplanned environment with any consistency, making this theory less ideal than the system theory.

Management research indicated that there is an enhanced view of leadership and management with business organizations. Small business owners do an excellent job dealing with the demand and ever-changing environments, providing insights into new approaches that stem from other paradigms. Compared to the issue of a small business dealing with survival in critical times, traditional management approaches rooted in regularity and stability are inadequate (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014). Systems are in constant evolution and undergo ongoing unpredictable patterns as indicated by chaos theory. Lechner and Gudmundsson (2014) noted that small businesses are the backbone of every economy. Small business owners need to overcome crises because the survival of small businesses is crucial to the existence of the business environment as revealed during the recession at the beginning of 2008 (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014).

To understand how small businesses, survive in turbulent conditions, a distinct need exists to develop new perspectives (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014). Lechner and Gudmundsson conducted a qualitative study using chaos theory to build survival models of small to medium-sized businesses. According to chaos theory, Lechner and Gudmundsson noted that systems continuously self-organize to adapt to ways to adjust to

various dynamic environments. By influencing the behavior of the system, alterations in a system's structure, such as the structure of the business, industry/technology, or market/regulation can affect the overall performance and productivity of the business. Creativity and innovation happen within the edge of chaos even though these systems do not lack order (Turner & Endres, 2017). Small business owners must be able to take the following steps to deal with dynamic and changing environments: diagnosis, action, learning, and growth as well as business owners understanding the trend of development of the environment (Turner & Endres, 2017). Chaos theory is more about organization management rather than the internal and external components that affect business, which does not fit the model of small retail business strategies.

Complexity theory. Complexity and chaos theories are comparable as both present systems as self-organizing, unpredictable, and units are studied in isolation (Turner & Endres, 2017). Complexity theory is a subset of systems theory that appeared in the literature in the 1930s and 1940s (Stacey, 2012). Nicolis, Prigogine, and Nicolis (1989) described complexity theory as an idea where varying environmental conditions and different modes of behavior occur. Anderson, Drakopoulou Dodd, and Jack (2012) emphasized that complexity is not being complicated, it infers that there is an interconnection between all elements in the system, the interconnected whole.

Researchers who use the complexity theory challenge traditional management assumptions within the literature of the past two decades (Surowiec, 2015). Leaders of small retail business organizations face difficulties in understanding how all aspects of a variety of conditions (social, economic, and environment) affect the business (Anderson

et al., 2012). A benefit to viewing small retail business owner's challenges as a complex system is the ability to demonstrate how the owner creates order from the disorder brought on by constant change (Anderson et al., 2012). Change may include differences in cultures, new global marketplaces, interactions with internal and external customers, and variances in available resources. Because of the dynamic evolution of events, long-term forecasting can be challenging, and predictability may lack (Anderson et al., 2012). Perhaps understanding complexity theory might contribute to new insights or factors that might be useful to existing or aspiring small business owners, with the high failure rate of new small business startups, on factors relating to successful business initiatives.

Complexity theory indicates that organizations reflect adaptive, complex environments with many individual components acting in total, but also in isolation (Surowiec, 2015). Like chaos theory, complexity theory focuses on organizational adaptation to uncertain and changing environments (Fyall, Garrod, & Wang, 2012). Complexity theory, originally founded in the fields of mathematics, eventually found integration into sciences and business by researchers of those respective areas of study (Pollack, Adler, & Sankaran, 2014).

The complexity theory is commonly used among organizational theorists to aid in an understanding of organizational issues (Pollack et al., 2014). Due to a variety of factors, such as socioeconomics, cultural and political issues, and emerging competition, there is instability in the environments of owners, creating a need for small business owners to adopt more sophisticated and structured management practices (Büyükbaykal, 2015). Büyükbaykal (2015) conducted multiple case research on small and medium-sized

businesses to identify different effects complexity theory played in the business environments. Surowiec (2015) concluded that a small business owner could simultaneously fill a variety of management positions, as opposed to a medium-size business owner, which requires more staff to manage the business. Job flexibility, loose organizational structure, and self-organization are essential factors in enhancing overall business efficiency and productivity (Büyükbaykal, 2015). Complexity theory does assess multiple environmental complexities that may have an impact on an organization but primarily focuses on an understanding of organizational issues, rather than how internal and external environments influence decisions. Therefore, chaos and complexity theories did not fit the purpose of this study.

Small Retail Business Contributions

Small retail businesses play an important role in stimulating the economy (Kirkwood & Price, 2013) within the United States. However, in the United States, only about half of all new small businesses survive after 4 years (Malebana, 2014). The success of small businesses helps create jobs, increases tax revenue for local and federal governments, and helps stakeholders support the organization's vision, mission, and goals. Therefore, small business sustainability and growth are an important part of any community.

Small retail businesses contribute to creating job opportunities in the community. Small retail businesses are major players in stimulating the economy and expanding growth (Searcy & Buslovich, 2014). In the United States, only about half of all new small businesses survive after 4 years (Francioni, Musso, & Cioppi, 2015). Sustainability is a

concept that encompasses the ability of owners of organizations to meet the needs of the firm and stakeholders while maintaining environmental and financial performance (Searcy & Buslovich, 2014). Thirty percent of small businesses make less than \$100,000 annually (Gerhardt, Hazen, & Lewis, 2014). The United States is a small-business-driven nation, which means that financial growth comes from the small business sector. The success of small businesses helps create jobs, increases tax revenue for local and federal governments, and helps stakeholders support the organization's vision, mission, and goals. Over 6,000,000 Americans start small retail businesses every year with an aspiration for it to change their lives (Büyükbaykal, 2015). Effective small retail business strategies may help in improving growth and success to future small business owners operating small retail businesses. Strategies may contribute to decreasing the number of small retail business failures beyond 5 years; strategies are essential to the success of a small business.

Small Retail Business Strategies

Kitching, Hart, and Wilson (2015) noted that despite many small businesses entering the market, there are also a significant number of small retail businesses exiting the market. The SBA (2014) also reported that the startup rate and closure rate of 13% is almost equal on both fronts. Kitching et al. (2015) took into consideration managerial capability as an important characteristic of survival. Small retail business owners, according to Rodhiah and Nawawi (2017), must possess a competitive advantage and strive for improvements regularly as part of their strategy. Mitchelmore and Rowley (2013) further stated that all small business owners should understand the environmental

changes, regularly re-assess the business practice, and develop strategies that respond to these changes.

Small retail business owners wanting to achieve sustainable growth need to utilize diverse skills to understand the market by scanning the environment, which will allow them to organize and react to unpredictable events (Harrauer & Schnedlitz, 2016). Diversity, in terms of the small retail business owner, includes seasonality, which may significantly impact processes and performance as well as the less than predictable shopping behavior of customers (Harrauer & Schnedlitz, 2016). Retail store owners need to recognize their role and the needs of various stakeholders, both internal and external, as all have a significant influence on retail practices (Harrauer & Schnedlitz, 2016).

Mitchelmore and Rowley (2013) indicated that small retail businesses could survive competition through some type of consolidation. An international marketing alliance may provide an opportunity if two or more firms located in different countries form a cooperative agreement to share marketing resources and activities enabling each firm to accomplish more together than it could achieve on its own (Gensler, Völckner, Egger, Fischbach, & Schoder, 2015). By engaging in a marketing alliance with a foreign partner, a small business enterprise has the potential of overcoming severe resource gaps and meet the needs of more stakeholders.

Small business owners typically work with a less formalized organizational structure than larger enterprises, which accentuates the importance of owner knowledge, attitudes, and values and the significant impact these have on strategies and outcomes (Jansson, Nilsson, Modig, & Hed Vall, 2017). Effective small retail business strategies

may help in improving growth and success to future small business owners operating small retail businesses. Strategies may contribute to decreasing the number of small retail business failures beyond 5 years. Kajalo and Lindblom (2015) identified that marketing orientation and entrepreneurial orientation are proven to increase business performance among small retailers.

Gupta and Muita (2013) argued that the path and scope of any organization are dependent upon established strategies. Strategic planning provides the basis for driving an organization in a preferred direction for the future (Abdalkrim, 2013). Trifu (2013) defined strategy as the general plan of action, and tactics are the qualitative component finalizing the chosen strategy. Gupta and Muita (2013) viewed strategy as actions giving support for the achievement of organizational goals. Abdalkrim (2013) shared that planning is an exercise to anticipate the future and act accordingly. Karanja et al. (2013) agreed that a significant component of the strategic plan must include a plan for customer retention. Harris et al. (2014) concurred on the need to address other external challenges such as economic conditions and government regulations.

A strategic plan should include a plan for dealing with internal and external issues such as (a) fast-paced technological changes, (b) tough competition, (c) short term and long-term financial goals, and (d) a clear plan for engaging employees, dealing with suppliers, and communicating with bankers (U.S. SBA, n.d.). To survive changing environments, managers must continue to revise strategies and modify actions based on barriers (Hassan, Nadzim, & Shiratuddin, 2015). Creating a strategic plan is a significant factor for small retail business owners who desire to succeed and sustain their business in

a rapidly changing environment. The key to the strategic planning process, according to the U.S. SBA (n.d.), is to assess the economic environment and examine internal and external factors that may affect the company's performance.

Santos-Vijande, Lopez-Sanchez, and Trespalacios (2012) emphasized companies that survived economic downturns focused on both external and internal environments as part of strategic planning and adapting to change. The recommendation to focus on both external and internal influences is a connection to systems theory, the conceptual framework of this study. Abdalkrim (2013) noted that while profitable companies can weather recessions, smaller organizations might fail because of ineffective strategies; however, Perrott (2011) noted the importance of strategies aligning with the current business climate. Urban and Naidoo (2012) mentioned that small businesses in general have the capability of enabling strategy implementation rapidly in comparison to larger entities.

The climate in which a business operates may influence the chosen strategies. These strategies as described by Gupta and Muita (2013) are planned actions for the achievement of small business goals. Teller and Kock (2012) pinpointed four key strategies: (a) entrepreneurial strategy-making process, (b) adaptive strategy, (c) participative strategy, and (d) simplistic strategy-making process. Adaptive strategists, according to Teller and Kock, should focus on external forces, especially customers, working to meet their needs, and suppliers, responding to feedback, which means owners or managers of the business must spend time talking and listening to people outside their firm. Similarly, Relich and Pawlewski (2018) discussed adaptive strategy and

emphasized the need to involve external stakeholders in business planning. Participative strategic planning relates primarily to management style, where managers or owners maintain an internal focus, building relationships with employees, which may be a benefit for ideas that will help the business respond to the changing external environment (Osuna, Ortiz, Jiménez, & Hernández, 2016). Relich and Pawlewski (2018) also supported the participative strategy process, which should include maintaining an open exchange of ideas with employees, managers, shareholders, or other internal stakeholders to sustain the business in a changing environment. The simplistic strategy reflects a business owner or manager that lacks variety in his or her activities, with a focus confined to the ideas that made the business successful at the beginning (Kaptein & Parvinen, 2015).

Strategy implementation is critical. Identifying strategic plans are one aspect, while implementation is the other. Linton and Solomon (2017) defined implementation as managerial actions intended to re-route the course of business. Based on study findings of differentiating factors among the top-performing small retail businesses, Taneja, Pryor, and Hayek (2016) claimed that a small business strategy encompassing a leadership development plan is necessary for success. The principle of leadership development plans focuses on accepted principles and shared beliefs. Linton and Solomon further defined implementation as putting actions to words. While the owner is responsible for identifying and executing strategies, owners should garner the support of shareholders. Spence (2016) noted that strategy creation is primarily a result of creative and critical thinking, which is more valuable than finding an immediate solution.

Small retail business owners should assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats and review against the mission statement as a way of staying focused on the overall goal of the business when developing a strategic plan (U.S. SBA, n.d.). Spence (2016) argued that the elimination of capability gaps depends upon the companies' resources and capabilities. Each business owner should identify key result areas essential to the success of the business, which will contribute to a good foundation for a strategic plan (U.S. SBA, n.d.). Mardian, Astuti, and Rahardjo (2018) mentioned that while strategies do not need to be perfect, they should be a combination of ingenuity, investigation, testing, knowledge, and preparation. Mardian et al. emphasized the need to create a formal strategic plan, balanced with enough flexibility to address the changing business and economic environment. Turkson, Amissah, and Gyeke-Dako (2020) stated that competition drives many small retail businesses to enter international markets. When competitive forces become too high in a specific area, it is deemed necessary to expand to other markets. Turkson et al. (2020) explained that consumers appreciate businesses that give them more for their money, especially when times are tough. Efficient service, fast delivery, and flexible payment terms will help to persuade people to spend with this type of small retail business rather than a competitor (Turkson et al., 2020)

Marketing Orientation. A marketing orientation has been linked to sustainability as noted by Kajalo and Lindblom (2015). Small retailers have a competitive advantage due to their close contact with customers and their ability to adjust and adapt more quickly to changing markets than larger retailers as noted by Kajalo and Lindblom (2015). Atanassova and Clark (2015) also emphasized that small retail business owners

need to utilize different marketing strategies than large retailers. Small retail business owners should assess their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats and review against the mission statement as a way of staying focused on the overall goal of the business when developing a strategic plan (SBA, n.d.).

Market orientation has both internal and external factors (Fang, Chang, Ou, & Chou, 2014), which aligns with Systems Theory. Von Bertalanffy (1972) discussed external and internal influences as part of the Systems Theory that may have a direct or indirect influence on behaviors and organizational outcomes. Internal marketing orientation occurs when the owner/manager relays the goals and marketing strategies to employees and when managers also take time to understand their employees' needs (Fang et al., 2014). Understanding employee needs and wants will create a positive job perception and overall job satisfaction, which has a direct correlation with the employee working to satisfy external customers (Fang et al., 2014), which leads to a positive job perception. Internal Marketing orientation, according to Fang et al. (2014) is important in building organizational competencies, since having internal marketing orientation rooted in the business culture creates a consistent pattern of behavior that contributes to generating superior performance.

When small retail businesses can penetrate international markets, they can expand their customer base beyond the local area which can lead to increased profitability. Another reason that SMEs may wish to enter a foreign market is due to increased competition in their primary locations (Hang, Xuan, & Hiep, 2019). External market orientation enables the business owner to identify, or sense, changes in their target market

and thus identify opportunities or threats and be able to implement changes quickly (Fang et al., 2014). One method of monitoring changes in customer preferences or buying habits is to collect data from customers as well as competitors and be aware of other environmental factors such as government regulations, technology, and economic changes (Fang et al., 2014). When compared to the Systems Theory, this information aligns with why business owners, even retailers, should monitor the external environment relative to multiple areas such as legal, sociological, and technological. Some enterprising small retail owners successfully navigate through the environments of their respective organizations and maximize their career prospects by identifying and seizing new opportunities which help them sustain their businesses (Hang et al., 2019)

Entrepreneurial Orientation. Entrepreneurial orientation has been linked to positive performance within a firm, however, studies specific to small-sized retailers are limited (Kajalo & Lindblom, 2015). In the context of small retailers, findings presented by Kajalo and Lindblom (2015) strongly suggested that entrepreneurial orientation and marketing orientation form a foundation for improved business performance, but it should be recognized that the two are closely linked to overall business performance. Small retailers typically adapt to entrepreneurial initiatives more quickly than large retailers, which would indicate the importance of entrepreneurial orientation on the decision-making abilities of the small retailer (Grimmer, Miles, & Grimmer, 2015).

Another aspect of entrepreneurial orientation is for retailers to combine retail mix strategies by being more selective in displaying products, maintaining appropriate inventory levels, and selecting products that meet target customer needs (Rodhiah &

Nawawi, 2017). Understanding the retail mix definition for this discussion focuses on the retailer's products, promotion efforts, personnel, presentation, place, and price, most of which are in the control of the retailer (Holtgrave & Onay, 2017). To achieve this goal, retailers need to measure performance by subjectively tracking sales volume, customer loyalty, and net profit, and involve internal and external stakeholders (Rodhiah & Nawawi). Performance evaluators should consider the needs and wants of all stakeholders, including employees, customers, and suppliers (Rodhiah & Nawawi, 2017). Small business owners-managers should have a general guide on how they might better manage their operations (Tendai & Alessandro, 2020). Retailers should combine retail mix strategies by being more selective in displaying products, maintaining appropriate inventory levels, and selecting products that meet target customer needs (Tendai & Alessandro, 2020)

Small Retail Business Survival Strategies

Survival is challenging for small business owners in general because of greater exposure to risk and the effects of competition as compared to large businesses (Cahyadi & Prananto, 2015). Haynes and Brown (2016) shared that the most important factors to the survival of small retail business include (a) employment, training, and retention of high-quality staff members; (b) prevalence of good products, services, and optimum timing in introducing these into the marketplace; (c) excellent relationships with customers; and (d) availability of top managers with good leadership qualities. Martin, Lakshmi, and Venkatesan (2013) recognized that small business owners face several challenges limiting growth and included managerial capabilities as an important

characteristic. A small business with 100 employees or less should focus on the factors introduced by Haynes and Brown and Marin et al. as they relate to quality staff, excellent service, and customer rapport. However, as noted by Haynes and Brown (2016), good leadership qualities are what ultimately affects the overall success or failure of the retail business.

Small retail businesses need to innovate and establish new economic activities which drive economic growth and create new economic wealth and employment (Mallett, Oliver & Wapshott, Robert, 2020). There are diverse and complex characteristics of local and regional economies which lead to small retail business owner vitality and endow the large and small firms within them with international competitiveness (Mallett et al., 2020). Montalbano, Nenci, and Pietrobelli (2018) stated that business owners must understand the strategies that are necessary to operate effectively because an advanced understanding of effective business strategies can promote more business revenue and increase the likelihood of staying in business. Strategic objectives in a viable operating company include specific financial objectives, an ecological *footprint* to improve the balance of the consumption of natural resources with the existing capacity. Wang, Pellegrini, Xue, and Wang (2019) explained in their recent studies that when finances are uncertain, consumers cut their spending, and therefore small retail business owners should keep their customers coming by giving them loyalty schemes, small discounts, and regular communications.

Small Business Leadership Skills

Leadership is a process of influence (Chinomona, 2013). According to Alasadi,

and Al Sabbagh (2015), leadership skills are critical to the sustainability of small businesses. Haynes and Brown (2016) shared that leadership skills have an impact on implementing effective strategies to improve business longevity. Creating good leadership focuses on the ability to exercise control and authority during difficult times. Şen, Kabak, and Yanginlar (2013) shared that courageous leaders are brave, they have heart, spirit, exceptional intellectual, and emotional capacity to make changes. Leaders must use effective communication skills to help all members understand the task (Wagner, Beimborn, & Weitzel, 2014).

Family entrepreneurial leaders are visionary and have the motivation and ethics of a leader (Wang et al., 2019). Entrepreneurial leaders that seek to maintain focus on the future must foster an environment that focuses on continual changes and business evolution. Entrepreneurial leadership behaviors are essential for innovation, growth, and organizational success (Wang et al., 2019). Tomada and Innocenti (2019) explained that business leaders should utilize strategic and operational management techniques to achieve their business objectives. Without adequately defined business techniques and targets, it can be difficult for organizational leaders to determine if the company has reached the level of success necessary to promote business sustainability.

Small Business Corporate Social Responsibility Strategies

Porter and Miles (2013) addressed the drivers behind the changing mindset of organizational leaders on the need to incorporate sustainability into their business strategy. Spence (2016) explained that leadership must take responsibility for ethical actions, including those related to corporate social responsibility (CRS). Popescu (2018)

focused on a sample of U.S. companies with a method to compare CSR longevity. The drivers behind the changing mindset of organizational leaders are the need to incorporate sustainability into their business strategy (Dadzie, Amponsah, Dadzie, & Winston, (2017). According to Ekman et al. (2015). The changing legal and industry standards, customer awareness, and other stakeholders are driving forces for organizations to focus on CSR. The dilemma is that there is no one standard for measuring CSR and definitions between CSR and sustainability are unclear, with the lack of clarity whether they are synonymous or distinct. Albareda (2013) focused on the concept that sustainability is an idea or vision of the future, with no measurement or way of determining achievement. CSR is the organizational level concept, the actions, and attitudes that move organizations and society towards sustainability. The researcher indicated that firms with CSR longevity were 88% more profitable than the control group. Ucbasaran, Shepherd, Lockett, and Lyon (2013) suggested that CSR practices, when incorporated into a corporation's mission and business strategy, are a win-win for the organization and the endeavor towards a sustainable future. Ludmila, Lubor, and Dimitris, (2017) provided an interesting method for measuring the value of CSR to an organization and society as a whole, a slightly different view than the typical triple bottom line concept previously studied. This is a long paragraph.

Popescu (2018) proposed a conceptual stakeholder systems model to link nascent CSR strategy to implementation through CSR processes designed to result in equity-based CSR outcomes. The model for the strategy incorporated ethical and moral concerns from the stakeholder perspective as measurements of CSR (Popescu, 2018). Boulouta and

Pitelis (2014) conducted a quantitative study and review of the literature to determine whether CSR affected national competitiveness, and if so, in what way and those nations could benefit from CSR. Sustainable Asset Management (SAM), a fund management firm based in Zurich, collected CSR performance data used in studies regarding CSR. Boulouta and Pitelis (2014) concluded that CSR did positively affect competitiveness at the national level and was a stronger impact on small business that was less innovative. The study was limited because the focus was on developed countries, which have regulatory safeguards to protect the economy and potentially negative effects of CSR. Further research and larger population sizes could increase the generalizability of the findings. Choudhary, Akhtar, and Zaheer (2013); and Sarti (2014) focused on a theoretical model of the value of CSR to business organizations. CSR initiatives discussed included actions such as changing production methods to reduce environmental impact improving labor relations internally and externally, investing in the local communities, and developing community initiatives.

Choudhary et al. (2013) and Sarti (2014) discussed reactive and proactive social change, the triple bottom line, and provided specific corporate examples for review and discussion. Ucbasaran et al. (2013) provided evidence that a fair working environment affects employee well-being and job satisfaction, which in turn affect employee turnover. Ucbasaran et al. indicated that employees and other stakeholders judge the social actions of the organizational leaders and respond accordingly. Ucbasaran et al. provided a base of understanding of the relationship between employee turnover and the organization's CSR efforts.

Oye, Sorensen and Glasdam (2016) emphasized the need for additional research on how local business owners incorporate CSR concepts into business models. The research focused on an organizational ethnography of the management of multiple social, ethical, and business logic of CSR in a Danish frontrunner firm. Franco (2013) contributed to insights into the ongoing organizational management of potentially opposing logics in CSR. Managing contradictions of CSR is a continuing challenge and accomplishment influencing whether ethical, social, and business logic collides or reinforces each other (Farrell, 2015).

Persons (2012) incorporated CRS and Sustainability into a business course. There were four assignments, a project with CRS questions, seven ethics cases, and 17 ethics scenarios secured to a Corporate Code of Ethics. Sloan, Klingenberg, and Rider (2013) shared the finding of CRS in a classroom setting will help students to be more focused on sustainability also value it to improve our society. Also, it makes them more qualified for the business world, which gives them a cutting edge for an organization. Popescu (2018) posited that an essential response to environmental degradation, climate change, and declining biodiversity had been the growing adoption of market principles to better value the social good of nature. Through concepts such as natural capitalism and corporate environmentalism, nature becomes more alleged as a domain of capitalist endeavor (Franco, 2013). There are convention theory and a pluralist understanding of social goods to investigate how the social good of the environment is usurped by the other social good of the market (Sloan et al., 2013). The analysis of interviews with sustainability managers and corporate documentation shared how organizational actors employ compromise to

settle disputes among rival claims about environmental activities (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Small retail businesses, social responsibility may simply be a new way to be more engaging with the community which they do already by investing in broader social values that go beyond profit (Letizia et al., 2019). Corporate social responsibility has become an increasingly important issue for many consumers and could provide a new way of attracting and retaining new customers. Taking steps such as supporting local initiatives and becoming more environmentally friendly may help to differentiate an organization from the competition (Wang et al., 2019).

Small Business New Product Development Strategies

Howieson, Lawley, and Selen (2014) explained how small businesses deployed a stage-gate approach to new product development strategy. Howieson et al. (2014) used a qualitative method to conduct the study. Howieson et al. (2014) indicated that the modified stage-gate approach was an effective new product development strategy. Ivanov and O-Phartkaruna (2014) emphasized the need for companies to build a strong organizational structure and improve the internal communication system to stay competitive. Orobia, Byabashaija, Munene, Sejjaaka, and Musinguzi (2013) pointed out that managers need to decentralize power and entrust some responsibilities in the hands of qualified employees. Mitchelmore and Rowley (2013) mentioned that the absence of the organizational structure hindered the growth of the small business.

McGee and Shook (2015) emphasized on the pressure by small businesses to find new ways to sustain and gain control over competitive advantage. It is from this backdrop that the researchers wanted to examine the different capabilities, which will help small

business managers, and owners respond to competition emerging from small business consolidation. Mitchelmore and Rowley (2013) indicated that small businesses could survive competition through consolidation. Mitchelmore and Rowley (2013) further stated that small businesses are supposed to understand the environmental changes, re-assess the business practice, and develop strategies that respond to these changes.

Lee, Hong, Katerattanakul, and Kim (2012) explored the factors that affect the successful implementation of Manufacturing Execution Systems (MES) in the small manufacturing business in Korea. Vanberg (2014) indicated that top management support, sufficient investment, systems development, and user participation are the main factors responsible for successful MES in small businesses in Korea.

Zaefarian, Thiesbrummel, Henneberg, and Naudé (2017) asserted that the value of companies ultimately lies in the worth of the brands and the owners' awareness of the target market, with the real importance of the brand being in the distinction it has against competing products. Wang et al. 2019 revealed that leaders who employ product development strategies pay attention to data that can help a small retail business sustain. Small retail business managers need to examine consumer trends, noting when a shift in the target demographic occurs (Basly & Saunier, 2020). The new innovations in technology, science, and creative ideas can contribute to products (Basly & Saunier, 2020).

Small Business Sustainability and Market Intelligence

Small business owners in the progressively more complex competitive environment have led to organizations targeting high economic performance, thus

increasing their interest in the formulation and implementation of development and diversification strategies (Villa & Bruno, 2013). Small business owners can develop elements that lead to changes in organizations and their management, generating a more dynamic and innovative economic sector (Brouthers, Nakos, & Dimitratos, 2015). Regardless of their activity, the proficient management of a small business should place at the forefront the use of strategic management and appropriate economic strategies, to achieve the goals of generating strong competition between businesses globally (Jones, Suoranta, & Rowley, 2013).

The introduction of strategic management in activities of small business has become a necessity, and this has resulted in market actions and of the action of the changing economic environment upon such small businesses (Villa & Bruno, 2013). The authors came out with an idea of studying the strategic actions carried out by small businesses to determine their strategic behavior as related to their performing growth. Lefebvre et al. (2014) explained that performance relies heavily on the entrepreneur's ability to anticipate the future. Small business owners know, as well as have the capacity to develop and implement appropriate strategies for their firms (Villa & Bruno, 2013). Thus, one can say that the strategy of a small company reflects a very high degree of the personal traits of its owner (Galpin, Whittington, & Bell, 2015). Strategies for SBOs show certain particularities determined by their size and the level of managerial training of their entrepreneurs. In achieving high levels of performance and competitiveness, small business enterprises need to think long-term, and this requires the use of specific methods of strategic management (Prajogo & McDermott, 2014). Long-term planning is

one of the determinants of planned development with positive effects on the economic environment (Gambari & Yusuf, 2016).

Small business owners wanting to achieve sustainable growth, and a high level of performance need to understand the market by scanning the environment to know the forces acting on their growth and sustainability (Villa & Bruno, 2013). Jones et al. (2013) revealed that business owners should determine the strategic vision and identify the actions they should take to achieve sustainable growth. Renna (2013) highlighted the factors that constitute the basis for formulating strategic actions, the strategies most commonly used, and the courses of action in response to market competition proceedings.

Hervas-Oliver, Sempere-Ripoll, and Boronat-Moll (2014) suggested that small businesses might benefit in two different ways from marketing alliance participation. First, participating in a marketing alliance may allow the small business to fill a gap in marketing capabilities. Small business owners engage in marketing alliances in foreign countries because such alliances bring resources including specialized foreign market knowledge and unique insights into the effectiveness of various advertising and other promotional methods in that country (Grossberg, 2015). Utilizing specific knowledge is vital for the small business to gain legitimacy with foreign market customers and policymakers (Brouthers et al., 2015).

Small business owners participating in foreign country marketing alliances provide a small business with the ability to better its' products position in the market. Also, there is a recognition that technology use among small businesses stimulates economic growth, spawning a range of research on topics associated with innovation,

including new product development and business performance (Jones et al., 2013). Small business owners, the relatively smaller size of Small Business, react to market changes expeditiously through innovative initiatives (Harrison & Rouse, 2015).

For small businesses to survive in today's competitive business environment, enterprises need to initiate new products and services and sustain their competitiveness through innovation (Villa & Bruno, 2013). Villa and Bruno (2013) defined the innovativeness of firms as their potential to connect creativity and to implement that creativity in the face of challenges during improving processes, procedures, and products. As outlined in the definition, innovativeness is crucial for firms to upgrading or making radical changes in their existing products and services. According to the researchers, upgrading and innovativeness are different aspects of business development.

For example, Brink (2014) revealed innovation as the process by which a firm ensures that continuous improvement is part of the product and processes. Upgrading is similar to innovation only when it is present in a relevant context. Villa and Bruno (2013) alternatively described upgrading as a function of innovativeness used to increase value to the firm or brand, often achieved by entering new markets, sectors, and niches and generating new product/service functions.

Ogbari, Ibidunni, Ogunnaike, Olokundun, and Amaihian (2018) investigated the challenges faced by family businesses and how they could survive during a financial crisis. The author linked the challenges to similar problems encountered by small businesses. Ogbari et al. (2018) indicated that family businesses required business skills in decision-making. Ogbari et al. (2018) underscored the importance of budget flexibility

as an important parameter in responding to a financial crisis. Ogbari et al. (2018) pointed out how research in business development is slow while business ventures are emerging at high speed. Ogbari et al. (2018) explored how different firms achieve their growth over a prolonged period. Zheng (2013) indicated that ownership is the main factor that shapes the growth of an organization. Sadler, Gibson, and Reysen (2017) also indicated that leadership style and knowledge of management are also essential factors that influence the growth of a business. Sadler et al. explored the perspectives of black Barbarian women in small businesses, claiming barbarian women went into business to fight social and economic injustice. Muhamad (2014) indicated that black women were in business for survival, cultural enhancement, and opportunities for future generations. Alonso-Nuez and Galve-Gorriz (2012) explored the consequences of government policies on businesses. Alonso-Nuez and Galve-Gorriz (2012) investigated how government policies that create businesses affect the survival of those same businesses.

Sadler et al. (2017) investigated how portfolio risk management affects project portfolio success. As the authors contended, risk managers prepare the ground for organizations to embark on arising opportunities and threats. Sadler et al. indicated that risk identification, risk formalization, and risk management influence risk transparency. Ucbasaran et al. (2013) indicated that risk transparency and risk coping affect project portfolio success. Jacques, Moylan, and Nigro (2016) examined the strategies small businesses could use to minimize risk in project management. Weber and Geneste (2014) found that small businesses neglect the importance of aligning small business projects with the company's goals. Vanberg (2014) examined the choice of business aims and

strategies by small business enterprises, particularly in developing countries. Soininen, Puumalainen, Sjögrén, Syrjä, and Durst (2013) highlighted that growth strategy is the most business strategy chosen by small business owners to expand the growth of their businesses. Sadler et al. shared strategic planning can help organizations develop strategic thinking and adapt to environmental changes; small business organizations may run into challenges when using strategic planning in their management practice. Strategic planning can be time-consuming and cost extra human capital and monetary resources that many small nonprofit organizations have limited access.

Ayala and Manzano (2014) claimed that it is worthwhile to examine the application of strategic planning and management to small businesses and evaluate the benefits and challenges that strategic planning can bring to small business organizations. Shields and Shelleman (2013) evaluated the essential elements of the strategic plans and the unique challenges in strategic planning. Shields and Shelleman (2013) suggested that strategic planning if executed properly, could provide small business organizations opportunities to not only improve their existing services but also, build capacity to sustain and expand their programs in an uncertain environment.

Sadler et al. (2017) shared strategic planning can help organizations develop strategic thinking and adapt to environmental changes; small business organizations may run into challenges when using strategic planning in their management practice. Strategic planning can be time-consuming and may cost extra human capital and monetary resources that many small businesses have limited access. Waterhouse (2013) suggested that strategic planning if executed properly, could provide small business opportunities to

not only improve their existing services but also, build capacity to sustain and expand their programs in an uncertain environment. According to Turner and Endres (2017), many small businesses do not get the time to focus on this important issue, as they lack the dedicated people management resources of their larger rivals. Leaders and managers should answer some basic questions and put the business in a better state of readiness. Avoiding having a strategy may only create a greater risk. The essential component of a successful strategy is just to get started on one's plan (Harvey, Edrada-Ebel, & Quinn, 2015).

Freel and Robson (2017) indicated that value creation and value capture are essential components of successful innovation. When small retail business owners utilize new technologies, they may be able to better differentiate their businesses from other businesses that have similar organizational objectives. Regulatory environments are important as strategies are developed to make better products and provide better solutions to consumers for businesses to sustain (Basly & Saunier, 2020).

Transition

Section 1 focused on the problem that some small retail business owners lack strategies to sustain their business. The research question was: What strategies do small retail business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years? I searched and presented the literature from different researchers on the strategies used by small retail business owners to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. I also explained the nature of the study and operational definitions.

Section 2 includes information on the role of the researcher, selection of the

participants, ethics in research, and detailed support for the selected research method and design. Section 2 also includes information on the data collection process and data analysis, including the instruments, data collection techniques, and data organization, and concludes with an overview of reliability and validity. Section 3 encompasses a presentation of the findings, application to professional practice, and implications for social change. Section 3 also includes recommendations for action and further research, followed by a personal reflection and a concluding statement.

Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I provide the rationale for selecting the qualitative method and case study design to explore the strategies used by small retail business owners to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. Included in this section are descriptions of my role as the researcher and the ethical standards that were applied during the research process. This section also includes information regarding participant selection criteria and the study population. Additionally, this section covers details of the data collection instruments, data collection process, data collection techniques, and the process of qualitative data analysis, including a discussion of the use of triangulation and member checking. Further, Section 2 includes facts regarding the reliability and validity of this qualitative study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the strategies used by small retail business owners to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The target population comprised of six small retail business owners who have successfully used strategies to extend their business beyond 5 years in Memphis, Tennessee. Small retail business owners may be in a better position to succeed, make good decisions, and contribute to social change when given information about how to sustain their business longer. The findings from this study might contribute to improvements in small retail business owners' success strategies to sustain their business beyond 5 years and increase profitability. The implications for positive social change include the potential to create job opportunities in the community.

Role of the Researcher

My role in the data collection stage consisted of (a) seeking qualified research participants to interview and determining other data collection methods to use in my study, (b) conducting the data collection process by scheduling and conducting interviews, and (c) reporting the data collected and analyzed. Carolan, Smith, and Forbat (2016) also noted the importance of the researcher's role in qualitative research, pointing out that researchers must be able to collect reliable and valid data through interviews, review of documents, and sample observations. Researchers can use multiple forms of data collection including interviews, participant observations, and company documents (Park & Park, 2016; Patterson & Malpass, 2015). My role in the data collection process of this multiple case study was to select multiple data collection techniques and use the most effective data collection methods.

Even though I was living in Memphis, Tennessee at the time I conducted this research, I had no relationship with the research participants. I knew about operating a small business, which provided a foundation for keeping the conversation focused on the questions during the interview process. Using personal experiences for understanding the participants' situation was one way to manage personal bias, as long as the researcher approaches the data critically and reflectively (Popescu, 2018).

It is the responsibility of the researcher to conduct ethical research and follow all principles set forth by the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects and Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979), specifically the principles of respect of persons. A key component of the effort to safeguard participants' rights is to ensure that each participant has a clear understanding of the purpose of the

research (Miracle, 2016). I ensured that ethical protection for participants was adequate by complying with the ethical standards set forth by the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB), as well as the U.S. federal and civil regulations on ethical standards. I submitted required forms for approval to the IRB before I began any research as required by the Walden IRB (#09-05-19-33140373), I validated the ethics of the process. Additionally, I completed the required National Institutes of Health training course, *Protecting Human Research Participants*.

Another role of a researcher is mitigating bias throughout the data collection process by maintaining self-awareness (Morgan, Pullon, Macdonald, McKinlay, & Gray, 2017). Pedersen, Gwozdz, and Hvass (2016) argued that the questions of a researcher must supersede his or her existing knowledge, and emphasized that a researcher must maintain focus on the participants' responses while avoiding departures from the study topic. To mitigate bias during the data collection process, I was an active listener, was careful to avoid leading questions, and sought to maintain self-awareness. According to Liberale and Kovach (2017), personal biases may affect the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Popescu (2018) contended that such biases may develop from demographic patterns, personal values and beliefs, and historical exposure to the topic of the research. Miracle (2016) suggested the use of an interview protocol to achieve consistency and to mitigate bias. I developed an interview protocol (see Appendix A) that served as a guide so that all questions were addressed, without deviation, in the same manner with every participant. Using an interview protocol mitigated potential bias.

Participants

To identify appropriate participants, there must be a clear definition of the research question in addition to an understanding of who should benefit from the study (Hancock, Amankwaa, Revell, & Mueller, 2016). The participant eligibility criteria and characteristics that aligned with the research question for this study were that participants were small retail business owners who had successfully used strategies to extend their business beyond 5 years. As an active member of my local community, I was familiar with the small retail businesses in the area at the time I conducted this research. Through the Tennessee Department of Administration, Office of Employment and Population Statistics, I obtained a list of company names to identify possible participants who met the eligibility criteria if personal outreach did not provide the needed participants. I visited the websites of these companies to get additional insights and contacts. Then, I sent an invitation letter (see Appendix B) to the business owners to introduce myself.

Recruiting participants can be difficult and require multiple personal communication attempts (Obeng & Blundel, 2015). When I made initial contact with an owner, I followed up as agreed during our first meeting. I explained to the small retail business owners the research topic and asked if they were willing to share successful strategies that they have used to sustain their business beyond 5 years. If the potential participant met the inclusion criteria and was interested in taking part in the study, then I considered him or her as a research participant.

According to McNamara et al. (2015), researchers can build better working relationships with participants by following the stages of motivational interviewing, which include choosing a setting with few potential distractions, explaining the reason for

the interview, addressing confidentiality, and explaining the format of the interview.

Researchers should establish trust with participants (Pinsky, 2013) concerning the intended purpose and outcome of a study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I established a working relationship of trust with the participants by reassuring them of the confidentiality of the study and explaining the use of the consent form and my adherence to a strict academic code of ethics.

Research Method and Design

The three research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method (Almalki, 2016). There are four research designs for the study: phenomenology, ethnography, narrative inquiry, and case study (Yin, 2017). Almalki (2016) noted the responsibility of the researchers to select the appropriate method and design for their study. The qualitative method was the most suitable method for this study because the qualitative method aligned with my research goals and the research question.

Research Method

Qualitative researchers study real-world settings (Stichler, 2016). The qualitative research method was appropriate for studies in which the researcher's focus is on building a holistic understanding of complex processes or realities and where there is no precise measurement or predetermined hypothesis (Stichler, 2016). In contrast to qualitative researchers, researchers who conduct quantitative studies deal with numerical data, measurements, explanations, and hypothesis testing, along with claims to objectivity with experimental outcomes (He, 2018). A quantitative methodology is appropriate when a study involves statistically testing existing hypotheses while examining variable

correlations (Yin, 2017). The quantitative method was not appropriate for this study because this study's purpose was to gather new insights on successful strategies for small retail business owners to sustain their business beyond 5 years, not to conduct hypothesis testing or analyze numerical data.

With a mixed research method, a researcher uses both qualitative and quantitative methods in tandem to enhance the study (He, 2018). When neither the quantitative nor the qualitative research method alone supports the purpose of a study, a researcher can use mixed methods to complete the investigation (Duta & Duta, 2017). A mixed-method was not suitable for this study because the purpose of the study was not to test hypotheses or examine variables, but to gain insights into successful strategies used by small retail business owners to sustain their business beyond 5 years.

Research Design

There are five common types of qualitative research designs: (a) phenomenological design, (b) grounded theory, (c) ethnography, (d) case study, and (e) narrative analysis (Morgan et al., 2017). Researchers using a phenomenological design focus on a lived experience shared by multiple individuals (Bevan, 2014). This study did not focus on lived experiences, but on a business problem that involved the strategies used by small retail business owners. Grounded theory researchers develop theories to describe a phenomenon (Pisani et al., 2016). Developing a theory was not the purpose of this study. In an ethnography study, a researcher explores how culture works through extended observations (Duta & Duta, 2017). I did not study a culture or community over time; therefore, I did not select the ethnographic design for this study. Narrative design is

a form of inquiry that researchers use to study the lives of individuals by asking individuals to provide stories about their lives (Duta & Duta, 2017). The purpose of this study was to explore participants' strategies for business success and not stories about participants' lives; therefore, the narrative design was not an appropriate fit.

The case study approach is a design that researchers use to explore cases through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources such as observations, personal interviews, and reports (Duta & Duta, 2017). The core benefit of a case study is that it makes it possible to explore how individuals construct meaning concerning events, programs, or processes in a reasonable manner in a specific social setting (Yin, 2017). A case study was the most appropriate design because the focus of this study was about small retail business owners' strategies for sustaining their businesses beyond 5 years.

Data saturation occurs when the information gathered from participants becomes repetitive and no new information emerges (Tran, Porcher, Ravaud, & Viet-Chi, 2017). The selection of appropriate cases increases the likelihood of reaching data saturation through detailed questions and data collection (Tran et al., 2017). Yin (2017) emphasized that data saturation requires the researcher to collect relevant data through multiple collection methods when doing a qualitative study. I collected and analyzed data through interviews with qualified participants and documents, such as strategic plans, marketing plans, or business plans from each participant. I reached data saturation after interviewing the sixth research participant where no new information appeared.

Population and Sampling

Purposeful sampling is essential to recruiting and selecting participants with

specific knowledge and skills related to the phenomenon being researched (Rosenthal, 2016). Rosenthal (2016) noted that purposeful sampling enables the selection of participants who can provide in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon. In this study, I used a purposeful or judgmental sampling approach. According to Williams and Needham (2016), purposeful sampling is a qualitative sampling technique that researchers use to choose participants who possess the knowledge, experiences, and characteristics of the study subject. Dorney (2016) explained that purposeful sampling helps define criteria to select participants who meet the qualification and requirements of the research topic. Qualitative researchers use purposeful sampling to understand a diverse range of detailed information sources and to focus more on the quality and richness of data than the number of participants (Randles, 2016). Williams and Needham posited that many factors could influence purposeful sampling size including the research purpose, study design, available financial and human resources, and characteristics of the targeted population. Unlike probabilistic sampling techniques, purposeful sampling, which is a non-probabilistic sampling technique, provides researchers autonomy to gather information from different perspectives regarding the study topic (Barratt et al., 2015). I selected participants using the purposeful sampling method. According to Wolf, Clayton, and Lawrenz (2018), researchers use purposeful sampling when they need to recruit participants with specific knowledge and skills related to the phenomenon being researched. Wolf et al. noted that purposeful sampling enables a qualitative case study researcher to select participants who will provide rich, in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon. Purposeful sampling that focuses on individuals with specific knowledge

relevant to the topic may include as few as four or five participants to achieve data saturation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study sample size for this qualitative case study included three retail business owners. This small sample size, according to Fusch and Ness (2015), was adequate to aid in the identification of themes.

Data saturation improves the credibility and quality of a study and transpires when information from the participants becomes repetitive (Tran et al., 2017). This approach for data saturation is consistent with quality assurance practices in qualitative research (Tran et al., 2017). Interviews should continue with the participants until no new information or themes emerge (Tran et al., 2017). Researchers reach data saturation when during the analysis of the data collected, the same themes recur, and no new ideas emerge (Constantinou, Georgiou, & Perdikogianni, 2017). Hennink, Kaiser, and Marconi (2017) stated that data saturation occurs when there are no new insights or new data, and when there are enough data to replicate the study. Nelson (2017) explained that failure to reach data saturation calls to question the quality, reliability, and validity of the research. To ensure data saturation, I collected and analyzed data from multiple data collection sources until no new findings or themes emerged which resulted when interviewing the sixth participant.

Interview settings can determine the quality of information the participants disclose (Rosenthal, 2016). Participants, small retail business owners, who have successfully used strategies to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years determined the settings for the interviews; however, I suggested a location that was quiet for quality audio recording and free from distractions. I conducted the interviews at places suitable

to the participants in their business. Rosenthal described a conducive interview environment as a private and comfortable place free from distractions so that study participant could freely share focused, comprehensive, and honest information.

Ethical Research

Researchers must review and integrate sound ethical judgment practices to ensure confidentiality and respect (Roets, 2017). Researchers must ensure ethical standards by providing participants a full disclosure of the doctoral study's purpose, the process of the interview, and a review of the practices used to protect participants' rights (Roets, 2017). As the researcher, I engaged in established ethical practices that protected research participants, minimize harm, and instilled trust and integrity.

I asked all participants to agree to partake voluntarily in the interview process of the study, as indicated in the approved informed consent form, to ensure compliance with the applicable ethical standards. Every participant could voluntarily withdraw at any time during the interview process. I did not give an incentive to the participants.

All digital data gathered from interviews of participants resided on a password-protected external hard drive. The external hard drive, transcribed data, or other printed material related to the interviews will remain in a secure, locked safe for at least 5 years following the study to protect participant confidentiality. After 5 years from the conclusion of this study, I will electronically erase the digital data and shred all printed data.

The established ethical practices included strict adherence to Walden University IRB guidance during the research and interview process. Information gathered was

private and confidential as outlined in the consent form. Rosenthal (2016) discussed the importance of researchers keeping data collected confidential. Once Walden IRB approved the study, I began contacting potential participants and initiated the interview process.

I maintained participant confidentiality by assigning each participant an alphabetic identifier using letters (i.e., P1 for the first participant, P2 for the second, P3 for the third, and so on). Because I only interviewed the owner of each business, a secondary numeric identifier was not necessary. The alphabetic identifier assured confidentiality, by protecting the identity of each participant. Walden University's approval number for this study is 12-19-19-0437607 and it expires on December 18, 2020.

Data Collection Instruments

The researcher is the primary data collection instrument in qualitative research (Ross, Iguchi, & Panicker, 2018). As the primary data collection instrument, I used open-ended questions to obtain information as part of a semistructured interview process and requested any supporting documents such as the business plan, strategic plan, and any other documents or news articles in their possession that may support the responses to the interview questions. According to Ross et al. (2018), qualitative researchers use a list of interview questions for face-to-face interviews. I used predefined questions and collected any of the above documents available to explore successful strategies used by small retail business owners to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years.

During the face-to-face semistructured interviews, I asked open-ended and

probing questions, and concluded by providing the opportunity for each participant to provide additional information as part of the wrap-up process. Following the interview, I reviewed any notes I made and asked any clarifying questions if necessary.

Semistructured interviews involved the use of prepared open-ended questions to guide consistently and systematically, with additional probing techniques that kept conversations focused and productive, leading to in-depth, detailed data (Roulston, 2016).

A detailed interview protocol is a tool in qualitative research involving interviews, which enhance the trustworthiness of the study (Yin, 2017). Interview protocols include brief details of the case study, the main features of the data collection routine, the precise wording of the interview inquiry, and a study report guide (Yin, 2017). The case study protocol serves as a guide during the interview process (Yin, 2017). The interview protocol (see Appendix A) developed for use in this study as part of the data collection process guided my interview process. Yin (2017) noted the value of a script, or protocol list, for researchers to reference. My interview protocol served as a reminder to ask additional probing questions based on the interview questions during each interview to gain deeper insights.

According to Madill and Sullivan (2017), member checking involves contacting each participant about his or her interview to determine if the themes, arguments, or assertions developed after analysis accurately reflect his or her statements. Member checking ensures reliable capturing of meaning and word choice in the analysis process by giving participants opportunities to offer explanations for the findings, refute findings, or question interpretations (Roulston, 2016). To improve the reliability and validity of

this study, I conducted member checking with participants.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection in a case study can vary and may include observations, interviews, documents, archival data, or artifacts (Roulston, 2016). I used semistructured interviews and reviewed company documents to collect data. Yin (2017) suggested that questions that start with *what* led to additional questions relevant to a study. The questions I developed for this case study led to additional questions relevant to the study topic.

On the day of each interview, I arrived at the agreed location early to set up the recording device and my smartphone. I had the interview protocol (see Appendix A) and my interview questions printed out with room for note-taking. I had my smartphone charged to use as a backup recorder and time tracker. Restating and summarizing the information provided by the participant during the interview is a recommended method for researchers to avoid follow-up interviews (Wolf et al., 2018). Asking questions, rephrasing, and being an active listener are valuable actions for a qualitative researcher (Sligo, Nairn, & McGee, 2018). Karadag (2015) emphasized that qualitative researchers using interviews improve probing questions, which contributes to improved questions for the following interviews. I used semistructured interviews, asked probing questions, and used member checking, which minimized the risk of participants not understanding the questions, improved the questions for following interviews, and reduced erroneous interpretations of the participant's responses. Nordstrom (2015) revealed that an audio-recording interview enables researchers to capture the information they might miss during notetaking. Therefore, I audio-recorded interviews if participants approved and

wrote others at the request of participants. During the interview, the interviewer needs to take note of inconsistencies such as body language, nonverbal and gestural cues, long pauses, and any indications meaningful to the study (Myers & Lampropoulou, 2016). Researchers ensure the privacy and confidentiality of all participants and provide them the opportunity to indicate their agreements with the information collected for the validity of the analysis (Reed, Khoshnood, Blankenship, & Fisher, 2016).

An advantage of interviews is that they require less pre-knowledge than designing an adequate questionnaire while a disadvantage is the data collection process is more demanding than distributing a questionnaire (Madill & Sullivan, 2017). The advantage of using the semistructured face-to-face interview is the flexibility and the control the researcher will have to get detailed information from the participants (Madill & Sullivan, 2017). The disadvantage of the face-to-face interview is that participants' behavior can change because of the researcher's presence (Madill & Sullivan, 2017).

During the onsite visit, researchers could check the archives' and companies' documents to get additional information related to the topics (Doll, 2017). During the interviews, I asked participants to provide me with documents related to strategies they use to sustain their business such as strategic or business plans. I reviewed these documents and used the content as another source in the data analysis process. The advantage of reviewing documents is that the data may be readily available and may not require much effort in having access to them (Zafar et al., 2017). The main disadvantage is that the document may not be very detailed as to the information being sought out by the researcher (Zafar et al., 2017).

I used member checking to ensure the response to the interview questions were accurate and that I interpreted the interview responses correctly. A researcher conducts multiple interviews for data collection, and member checking to improve the quality and accuracy of the data (Madill & Sullivan, 2017). I performed member checking by sharing my interpretations of each participant's responses and allowing him or her to provide additional feedback to enable me to correctly interpret his or her responses to the interview questions.

Data Organization Technique

Data organization technique is essential to analyze, review, and report interview data accurately (Watkins, 2017). Each participant's file included the company's documents obtained during the study, the date, time, and location of the interview, the informed consent, and transcribed interviews. I used P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6 to designate each of the six participants, labeled, and organized my files. I used NVivo 12 software, which was software for qualitative data management and analysis. I stored data according to Walden University IRB requirements to protect the confidentiality of the six participants. After collecting data, I guaranteed to handle participants' files to ensure confidentiality. To protect participants' rights and confidentiality, I stored paper format data in a locked fireproof file cabinet in my home. I will shred any paper format data with a shredder machine and permanently delete recordings 5 years after concluding the study.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process for this multiple case study included methodological triangulation from two data collection methods: open-ended interviews and review of

business and marketing plans and documents received from the participants. Data analysis in qualitative research involves a review of data to discover meaningful patterns that lead to thematic answers to the central research questions of a study (Yin, 2017). Using methodological triangulation to identify similarities of findings was appropriate for my study.

I provided a logical and sequential process for data analysis. Data coding aids recognition of patterns and themes (Baskarada, 2014). The coding features in NVivo software expedited the identification of similarities in data. Following classifications and coding, I analyzed the data to determine the major themes. The next step involved the interpretation of data, which included building reliable judgment from data.

I used NVivo 12 software to detect the patterns and themes presented in this research study. I audio recorded each interview, transcribed and coded the data using NVivo 12 software. Oliveira, Bitencourt, Zanardo dos Santos, and Teixeira (2016) shared that researchers use NVivo 12 to organize data based on the established categories. During the data analysis stage, researchers utilize NVivo 12 to analyze and review work in progress, identify common themes, present the insights noted during the coding process, and work with the data in other applications such as Microsoft Word or Excel (Oliveira et al., 2016). Houghton, Casey, Shaw, and Murphy (2013) opined that researchers use NVivo 12 to manage the details of conducting qualitative research. Qualitative researchers use various sources of information including interviews, audio recordings, company documents, and newspaper clippings (Paulus, Woods, Atkins, & Macklin, 2017). Researchers use NVivo 12 software to collect, organize, and analyze

varied data types (Paulus et al., 2017). I used NVivo 12 software during the process of organizing, coding, and analyzing data. NVivo 12 software, is a manageable software for beginner researchers to use for qualitative data analysis (Paulus et al., 2017). MAXQDA is a Windows-based software similar to NVivo 12 that researchers use to analyze qualitative data used for content analysis (Oliveira et al., 2016). MAXQDA and NVivo 12 contain important features relevant to thematic content analysis (Oliveira et al., 2016). Although similar, I did not use MAXQDA because the cost to purchase MAXQDA was higher than that of NVivo 12.

I used methodological triangulation from two data collection techniques. Yin (2017) shared that triangulation entails using different sources, investigators, theories, and methods to provide corroborating evidence about the study focus. Turner, Cardinal, and Burton (2017) shared that qualitative researchers use a triangulation approach to find evidence from many sources to validate and support the same result. Triangulation is the convergence of evidence from unlike sources including open-ended interviews, focus interviews, direct or participant observations, and documents (Renz, Carrington, & Badger, 2018).

According to Yin (2017), there are five steps to analyze data in qualitative research: (a) compile the data, (b) disassemble the data, (c) reassemble the data, (d) interpret the data, and (e) review the data to draw conclusions. First, in compiling the data, grouping is the strategy used as the organizing process (Yin, 2017). To compile the data was the first step. I grouped the data and compiled them based on content similarities. Second, the researcher disassembles the data to analyze the data collectively,

instead of individualized data sources (Yin, 2017). During this step, I had the opportunity to analyze the data collectively, instead of individualized data sources. Third, reassembling the data and grouping core themes involves narrowing the themes developed during the previous step into core themes (Yin, 2017). Core themes were more directly related to using the research questions. Next, interpreting the data involves reviewing all of the data sources to identify patterns reflected in the transcribed interview responses (Yin, 2017). It is important to determine if the information provided in the transcribed interview responses align with the other data sources. Finally, the data are reviewed to draw conclusions that involve assessing the data to make connections to the research questions (Yin, 2017). During this step, I drew conclusions that were related to the research questions and the core themes developed during my previous steps. In completing the final step, the results of the study were based on participants' perceptions related to the research question. I compared the themes with the results from the recent studies in the literature review to find similarities and differences. Also, I discussed the generated themes and the systems theory, as the conceptual framework of this study.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are two terms that relate to the accuracy and precision of research (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012). They are essential elements of data collection and ethical research (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012). Reliability and validity in qualitative research do not have the same meanings as reliability and validity in quantitative research. Researchers utilize interview protocols to attain commonality and strengthen validity, consistency, and reliability (Yin, 2017). The criteria used to judge the rigor of

qualitative research include (a) dependability, (b) credibility, (c) conformability, and (d) transferability (Houghton et al., 2013). The essential determinant of quality and rigor in qualitative research was validity.

Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research involves dissecting the data into groups and subgroups and matching the data against the conceptual framework to add credibility and reliability to the findings (Black, Palombaro, & Dole, 2013). When subsequent researchers collect and explore similar data using the same method, the conclusions will approximate the outcomes in the initial study (Black et al., 2013; Houghton et al., 2013). Qualitative reliability implies consistent execution of the researcher's procedures (Houghton et al., 2013). According to Black et al. (2013), dependability is similar to reliability in quantitative research and takes place when another researcher can follow the decision trail of another researcher's study. Consistency and dependability in qualitative research are essential components (Hess, McNab, & Basoglu, 2014).

Dependability. Dependability relates to the stability of data over time and under divergent circumstances (Elo et al., 2014). Consistency of a qualitative research study creates dependability (Hays, Wood, Dahl, & Kirk-Jenkins, 2016). Dependability was vital to provide the trustworthiness of the findings. To ensure dependability in this research, I audio-recorded the interview, transcribed interview responses, and used NVivo software to analyze the data collected. I based the data analysis on the recorded and written raw data to ensure further researchers come to similar results when using the same data analysis procedure. Another technique to ensure reliability is by triangulation (Robins & Eisen,

2017). Turner et al. (2017) shared that triangulation involves using multiple data sources to support the interview data to ensure the trustworthiness of the research outcomes. I used methodological triangulation to triangulate data I collected from interviews and reviews of company documents.

Validity

The validity of qualitative data refers to the trustworthiness of the data, whether findings accurately reflect the situation and there is adequate evidence to support the findings (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011). Validity was essential to ensure the quality of qualitative research. Validity involves accuracy and the truthfulness of data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the findings of the study (Dennis, 2018). To ensure validity, researchers provide triangulation by using several sources of information to validate the interview data (Kern, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasized trustworthiness in qualitative studies equates to internal and external validity in quantitative research, providing the strength of qualitative research. Validity is a sign of accuracy in the outcome of the research that relates to reality (Houghton et al., 2013; Stanley & Nayar, 2014; Wahyuni, 2012). Validity includes areas of dependability, trustworthiness, credibility, and transferability (Lub, 2015). Qualitative researchers use credibility, transferability, and confirmability to validate the study. Black et al. (2013), Houghton et al. (2013) suggested that credibility, transferability, and confirmability bring an element of truth to qualitative research.

Credibility. Researchers maintain credibility by assessing whether there is a match between the source data and the researcher's interpretation (Munn, Porritt,

Lockwood, Aromataris, & Pearson, 2014). Researchers use credibility to ensure that outcomes reflect participants' opinions and hold (Colorafi & Evans, 2016). I improved the credibility of the research by allowing participants to authenticate the data through member checking.

Transferability. Transferability is the extent to which the findings of the qualitative research apply to other contexts or settings (Pozzebon, Rodriguez, & Petrini, 2014). Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules, (2017) posited that transferability is the level to which the results of a qualitative investigation can be applied or transferred beyond the boundaries of the research. Researchers increase transferability by providing a systematical description of the population and the geographic boundaries of the study and the data collection process for readers to apply their situations (Morse, 2015). To comply with transferability, I provided information about the participants' geographic limits and the research method and design. Secondly, I gave a thorough description of the data collection instrument and procedures to enable readers with the opportunity to transfer the study results to other settings. Finally, I provided readers with enough evidence that the results of the research could apply to different contexts, situations, times, and populations.

Confirmability. According to Houghton et al. (2013), confirmability relates to objectivity in quantitative research, and qualitative researchers establish confirmability by ensuring the accuracy and neutrality of the data. Member checking is essential to the validation process when researchers use the interview to eliminate any biased perceptions and errors in the data collection (Lance, Verreyne, & Griffiths, 2012) and the use of an

audit trail provides confirmability (Black et al., 2013). I used an audit trail to outline the decisions made throughout the study, to establish confirmability and qualitative rigor.

Data saturation. According to O'Reilly and Parker (2013), data saturation improves the credibility and quality of a study. Data saturation occurs when the information from the participants becomes repetitive, and no new information emerges (Stanley & Nayar, 2014; Torresan et al., 2015). Nelson (2017) explained that failure to reach data saturation calls to question the quality, reliability, and validity of the research. Researchers reach data saturation when during the analysis of the data collected, the same themes recur, and no new ideas emerge (Constantinou et al., 2017). Hennink et al. (2017) stated that data saturation occurs when there are no new insights or new data and when there are enough data to replicate the study. Nelson (2017) explained that failure to reach data saturation calls to question the quality, reliability, and validity of the research. To ensure data saturation, I collected and analyzed data from multiple data sources until no new findings or themes emerge.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I detailed the study's purpose, the role of the researcher, the criteria used to select potential participants, and the justification of the research method and design. Next, I gave detailed information regarding the population and sampling of the study and ethical research. Also, I included the description of the data collection instrument and technique, data organization, and analysis process, reliability, and validity of the findings. In Section 3, I present the findings of the study, application to professional practices, implications for social change, recommendations for actions and

further research reflections, and finally the summary and conclusions.

The presentation of the findings included a discussion of the themes, and how they link to the conceptual framework. In Section 3, I presented my findings relevant to the research question. After I conducted the interviews and analyze the documents, I transcribed and coded the themes to compare the findings with the literature review, supplementary sources of the data, and the conceptual framework. I included a reflection of my experience during the DBA Doctoral Study process and discussed my individual biases, ideas, or values that I have about the study, which could affect the participants or the interview process.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies used by small retail business owners to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The data came from six small retail business owners who have successfully used strategies to extend their business beyond 5 years in Tennessee. The findings contributed to improvements in small retail business owners' success strategies to sustain their business beyond 5 years and increase profitability.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching question for this study was: What strategies do small retail business owners use to sustain their business beyond 5 years? After the analysis, four themes emerged: (a) be adaptive to external stakeholder participation, (b) marketing strategy, (c) appropriate financial management strategy, and (d) provide leadership skills training.

Theme 1: Be Adaptive to Internal and External Stakeholder Participation

The subthemes under be adaptive to internal and external stakeholder participation themes are *creating strategies for building relationships with suppliers*, *creating strategies for building relationships between employees and managers*, and *creating strategies for building relationships with customers suppliers*. The subthemes and the corresponding frequencies are in Table 1.

Table 1

Frequency of Subthemes for Be Adaptive to Internal and External Stakeholder

Participation

Subthemes	Frequencies
Creating strategies for building relationship with suppliers	40
Creating strategies for building relationships between employees and managers	38
Creating strategies for building relationship with customers	35

Small retail business owners must know that stakeholders can affect or be affected by the organization's actions, objectives, and policies. Stakeholders are creditors, directors, employees, government, owners, suppliers, unions, and the community from which the business draws its resources (Rodhiah & Nawawi, 2017). Retail store owners need to recognize their role and the needs of various stakeholders, both internal and external, as all have a significant influence on retail practices (Harrauer & Schnedlitz, 2016). Participants mentioned that creating strategies for building a relationship with suppliers, creating strategies for building relationships between employees and managers, and creating strategies for building a relationship with customers suppliers were strategies which helped their small retail business to sustain beyond 5 years.

Bertalanffy (1972) explained how external environments and internal environments coexist within a system and how each influences the other's responses and general stimuli of given circumstances. Participants noted that creating strategies for building relationships with suppliers helps small businesses to sustain. Participants emphasized everyone in a business must be on the same page because of the importance of a strong supplier relationship. P2 said that "If any employee or supplier is not putting

your company's best foot forward, you'll constantly take steps backward." Participants recommended that everyone have the same goal. There must be visible examples and training sessions roll-out on new processes and principles to everyone including suppliers. P2, P3, and P5 all mentioned that owners and managers must communicate with suppliers to be successful. P3 said that "Communication will produce transparency on both sides of the channel and prevent missteps, like incorrect inventory count or missing purchase orders." Participants asserted that business owners must set the tone because first impressions matter, so owners should ensure they start their relationships in the right way with their suppliers.

Participants said that creating strategies for building employee and manager relationships brings strength to their business. P1, P2, P3, and P5 all stated that when employees and managers have a strong relationship, communication will improve, which helps to avoid employee misunderstanding and unnecessary tension. Friction between employees, especially management and employees will decline. A strong and enduring relationship between employees and managers enables managers to set clear goals and expectations which helps a business to sustain. Participants emphasized that creating strategies for building employees' and managers' relationship helps employees to feel valued and focus on the company's missions and values.

Participants noted the value of creating strategies for building relationships with customers, clarifying that without customers there is no business. P6 stated that "The customer is not always right, but if you treat your customers right, you do not have to worry about if the customer is always right." P2, P3, and P6 all mentioned how they

provide customers with very important person (VIP) treatment. This treatment is exceeding the customers' expectations, and learn their name which makes them feel valued. P2, P3, and P6 said that this helps customers to continue to frequently shop with their business. Wang, Pellegrini, Xue, and Wang (2019) explained that when finances are uncertain, consumers cut their spending, and therefore small retail business owners should keep their customers by giving them loyalty schemes, small discounts, and regular communications.

Small business owners should have a general guide on how they might better manage their operations (Tendai & Alessandro, 2020). Based on the information gathered from the participants, small retail businesses are adaptive to internal and external stakeholder participation. McManners (2016) wrote that in systems theory, the researcher investigates principles common to entities and models the theory to describe them. Von Bertalanffy (1972) suggested that all parts of an entity influence a functioning system along with the conceptual basis of the systems theory. The focus is on all parts of an entity which will influence a functioning system. So, if one considers organizational sustainability as a functioning system and organizational strategy as an entity, then adaptive strategies that are parts of the entity will influence the sustainability of that organization. Successful sustainability strategies will lead to sustained businesses.

Theme 2: Marketing Strategy

Marketing strategy theme includes the following subthemes: *understanding customer needs for sales and promotion* and *fixing problems quickly and efficiently*. The subthemes and the corresponding frequencies are in Table 2.

Table 2

Frequency of Subthemes for Marketing Strategies

Subthemes	Frequencies
Understanding customer needs for sales and promotion	36
Fix problems quickly and efficiently	35

Marketing strategies enable small retail business owners to identify the best opportunities and thus invest their rare resources and increase sales. Harrauer and Schnedlitz (2016) wrote that small retail business owners wanting to achieve sustainable growth need to use diverse skills to understand the market by scanning the environment, which will allow them to organize and react to unpredictable events. Participants recognized that understanding customer needs for sales and promotion and fixing problems quickly and efficiently were strategies which helped their small retail business to sustain beyond 5 years.

P1, P2, and P5 acknowledged that understanding advertising promotions and sales based on customers' needs played a significant role in enabling their business to sustain. Participants said that when the price is right, it draws a diverse group of customers which gives the business a large customer base. P2, P3, and P6 shared that a customer base is the group of customers who frequently purchase the goods or services of a business. These customers are the key foundation of revenue for a business. P1, P2, and P4 shared that promotions are the part of marketing that definitely involves communicating company or product information to targeted customers. Participants shared that they create their sales and promotion depending on their customer base also customer

behaviors are well understood through market research or past experience. Participants said that small business owners must understand needs for sales and promotion because it helps small business to sustain over 5 years.

Participants noted that internal stakeholders must fix problems quickly and efficiently. P1, P2, and P5 acknowledged that fixing customer problems quickly and efficiently demonstrates to the customer that their time is valuable. P1, P2, P3, and P5 said that when a customer knows that their time is valuable, they become frequent shoppers which increases revenue. Participants all used a decision-making framework to fix problems quickly and efficiently. This model enables business leaders to gain the information needed to make the best decision.

Von Bertalanffy (1972) explained how external and internal environments coexist within a system and how each influences the other's responses and general stimuli of given circumstances. Bridgen (2017) later emphasized that there is a dynamic and nonlinear interaction between the parts to create the whole. System theory provides a concept for looking at systems, consisting of multiple components, as a whole (Keegan et al., 2017). For a retail business to be successful, managers need to understand all the functioning departments and bring different functions together to complement each other. By developing a marketing strategy, the business owner can develop pricing, promotion, and product strategy that are competitive in the business environment (Pehrsson, 2016).

Theme 3: Appropriate Financial Management Strategy

The subthemes under appropriate financial management strategy theme are *achieving the desired financial goals* and *using the funds available*. The subthemes and

the corresponding frequencies are in Table 3.

Table 3

Frequency of Subthemes for Appropriate Financial Management Strategy

Subthemes	Frequencies
Achieving the desired financial goals	37
Using the funds available	36

Small retail business leaders need to set financial goals so that financial obligations are met with the best available financial practices involving working capital and current asset management. The appropriate financial and investment strategy supported the existing body of literature that indicated owners and managers ensure they acknowledge, understand, and implement specific financial strategies to stay competitive (Mallett et al., 2020). Participants said that small business owners must focus on achieving the desired financial goals and using the funds available because it helps small business to sustain over 5 years.

Participants stated that achieving the desired financial goals helps small businesses to have a well-stocked emergency fund and get out of debt. P3 emphasized that “an emergency fund is one of the greatest financial goals that small business owners should plan to achieve. Such a fund provides a reserve of funds in case of financial hardship.” P2, P3, P5, and P6 noted that an emergency fund will provide the financial resources to remain competitive if the market should take a temporary fall. Participants shared that every small business should have a desired financial goal because this is what

helps a small business to sustain.

Participants stressed that using the funds available is important for small business when first starting up. P2, P3, P4, and P5 explained that every small business owner should know that cash flow is a top priority because cash is what makes the business operate. P1 was clear in saying that “No cash flow, no business.” P3 said, “Personally, some of the biggest challenges affecting any small business is cash flow.” P3 and P5 explained that some of the problems stem from a domino effect of one business having poor profitability earlier on in the chain that then starts to directly affect all the others, as many small businesses trade with other small businesses. According to P2 and P3, the introduction of an appropriate financial and investment strategy would provide steady and sustainable growth for the company in the future. P4 and P6 explained the dependence on overdrafts as a form of working capital could be eased by the owner-manager planning with the bankers to have a fixed-term loan agreement. There are other sources of finance like having business relationships with more than one bank and engaging business angels (Ludmila et al., 2017). The appropriate financial management strategy theme supported Mallett et al.’s (2020) view that indicated owners and managers ensure they acknowledge, understand, and implement financial strategies that are specific to stay competitive.

Theme 4: Provide Leadership Skills Training

The subthemes that constitute provide leadership skills training themes are *entrepreneurial leaders* and *courageous leaders*. These subthemes and their corresponding frequencies are in Table 4.

Table 4

Frequency of Subthemes for Provide Leadership Skills Training

Subthemes	Frequencies
Entrepreneurial leaders	36
Courageous leaders	35

Leaders focus on the ability to exercise control and authority during difficult times. Haynes and Brown (2016) stated that leadership skills have an impact on implementing effective strategies to improve business longevity. Participants noted that entrepreneurial leaders and courageous leaders must be present for a small business to sustain over 5 years.

Participants stressed that entrepreneurial leadership skills help small business owners to make the changes to be ready for the future. Participants underlined that strong entrepreneurial leaders bring good communication skills and good listening skills to their business, and strive to promote a supportive and cohesive culture. Participants also declared that good communication skills enable leaders and managers to articulate their thoughts and plans, which leads to everyone achieving a common goal.

P1, P2, and P6 accentuated that an entrepreneurial leader recognizes the importance of initiative and reactivity and will go out of their way to deliver all the support that the team needs to accomplish their goals. P1 said that “leaders must acknowledge the involvement of others and share the praises with them.” Participants emphasized that entrepreneurial leaders will take time out to informally chat with employees and understand their work and personal challenges. Participants shared that

entrepreneurial leaders who are honest can win the trust of their employees which helps to accomplish all goals. According to Wang et al. (2019), entrepreneurial leadership behaviors are essential for innovation, growth, and organizational success, which aligns with the statements from study participants.

P2 said that “if there were no courageous leaders, no one would be brave enough to make drastic changes to sustain the business.” P4, P5, and P6 noted that leadership skills start with the owner which are viewed by their managers which they use to help to implement for better outcomes to small businesses. P3 and P6 said that good leadership skills are the key to the team achieving their desired goals. P1, P2, P4 said that they have a leader skill program that every leader has to finish during their 90-day probation period which helps to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of their leaders. P4, P5, and P6 stressed that leadership skills start with the owner who sets the example and tone for managers and employees, creating the desired culture. P3 and P6 said that good leadership skills are the key to the team achieving their desired goals.

Leadership is a process of influence (Chinomona, 2013). According to Alasadi and Al Sabbagh (2015), leadership skills are critical to the sustainability of small businesses. Creating good leadership focuses on the ability to exercise control and authority during difficult times. The information obtained from the participants further aligned with Von Bertalanffy’s (1972) theory that all parts of a business contribute to a functioning system. Leadership skills produce a successful team which is important for small businesses to sustain over 5 years.

Applications to Professional Practice

The study findings may contribute to the business practices through procurement, decision making, financial management, and leadership training processes. The procurement leaders should use win-win strategies with suppliers by setting common goals between small retail business owners and their suppliers and ensuring that communication with suppliers be successful. Business owners must set the tone when dealing with suppliers because first impressions matter. The needs and wants of suppliers are a priority not only to suppliers but also to their customers (Rodhiah & Nawawi, 2017), who in this case are the small retail business owners.

The study findings may contribute to the decision-making process. Understanding customer needs and fixing problems quickly and efficiently through the use of a decision-making model were strategies used by interviewed leaders to sustain business. System theory provides a concept for looking at systems, consisting of multiple components, as a whole (Keegan, Rowley, & Tonge, 2017). Businesses and organizations could greatly benefit from individuals who are cultured in systems thinking and systems theory to help with the decision-making processes of a company (Linton & Solomon, 2017).

A third business process that may benefit from this study findings is the financial management process. Creating strategies for desired financial goals and using the funds available helps small businesses to develop a well-stocked emergency fund and get out of debt. Setting financial goals so that the various financial obligations are met with the best available financing available is a good practice to follow. Mallett et al.'s (2020) indicated owners and managers ensure they acknowledge, understand, and implement financial strategies that are specific to stay competitive.

The last business process that may benefit from this study is leadership training. Having training strategies to create entrepreneurial, courageous, and communicative leaders may enable small businesses to be ready for the future and promote a supportive and cohesive culture with employees. Haynes and Brown (2016) shared that training is the most important factors to the survival of small retail business. Schnedlitz (2016) confirmed that small retail business owners wanting to achieve sustainable growth need to utilize diverse skills.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of this study could contribute to positive social change. In the United States, small business owner plays a major role in the health and growth of the economy (Johnson, Faught, & Long, 2017) by increasing local and federal tax revenue (Schoenung & Dikova, 2016). When small retail business owners succeed and grow their contribution to local taxes and employment income grows which increases the wealth and sustainability of their connected communities (McCann & Barlow, 2015). Successful small retail organizations may also invest part of their profits in creating new job opportunities to better serve their customers and expand their business. The implications for positive social change include the potential to create job opportunities in the community.

Sustaining small business is important because a flourishing economy means consumers are spending money. When consumers are spending money in the economy, small business owners have the advantage to sell their products, services, and generate revenue. Business owners' generating revenue contributes to economic growth by

providing jobs in the local communities.

Recommendations for Action

Creating strategies for building relationships with suppliers may enable small retail business leaders to sustain their businesses because of the importance of a strong supplier relationship. Procurement leaders should include in their plans actions to reinforce their relationship with their suppliers. Sales executives of suppliers of small retail businesses should also work on improving this relationship by providing quality products and services to their customer organizations to enable them to sustain their businesses as these suppliers will also benefit from an enduring relationship.

Understanding customer needs and fixing problems quickly and efficiently are strategies to sustain business. Small retail business owners may use a decision-making framework to fix problems quickly and efficiently; they can do so by using the system theory. System theory provides a concept for looking at systems, consisting of multiple components, as a whole (Keegan, Rowley, & Tonge, 2017). Businesses and organizations could greatly benefit from individuals who are cultured in systems thinking and systems theory to help with the decision-making processes of a company (Linton & Solomon, 2017).

Small retail business leaders may develop a well-stocked emergency fund and get out of debt by creating strategies for desired financial goals and utilizing the available funds. Chief financial leaders of small retail business should set financial goals so that the various financial obligations are met with the best available financing from banks, investors, and friends. Leaders should know that cash flow is a top priority because cash

is what makes the business operate and sustain.

Small businesses may get ready for the future and promote a supportive and cohesive culture with employees through training strategies to create entrepreneurial, courageous, and communicative leaders. Leaders must have good communication skills to articulate their thoughts and plans, which leads to achieving organizational goals. Small retail business owners should improve their communication skills through specific training courses. I will provide a short summary of this report to all participants, and a copy of the entire final publication if requested. I will seek to publish this study in the ProQuest/UMI dissertations database to be available to other researchers and attempt to publish in other scholarly journals. I will also seek to present the findings of this study to small retail business owners and all other stakeholders.

Recommendations for Further Research

The limitations of this study resulted in boundaries or a restricting cap or ceiling on the study. I restricted study participation to six small retail business owners that have successfully implemented strategies to sustain their business beyond 5 years in Memphis, Tennessee. Because this study focused on successful strategies for small retail business, future researchers could expand the breadth of their research by increasing the population to include large organizations. To address the small targeted population and number of participants, I would recommend that future researchers build on the findings of the research pertaining to profitable small retail business by selecting different industries and different geographic locations. For future research I also recommend that researchers

consider factors beyond profitability to include sustainability of small business strategies and small business in nongovernmental organizations.

Reflections

In this research study, I explored the strategies used by small retail business owners to sustain their business beyond 5 years. From this research study, I learned that the six participants have different practices with overarching similarities to ensure profitability and long-term growth. All participants were glad to share their success.

During this doctoral journey, I gained additional knowledge about effective strategies for sustaining small retail businesses. This journey enabled me to identify strategies that small retail businesses in Tennessee use to sustain their business beyond 5 years. I am now confident to share my research findings with small retail business owners. I will stand behind my recommendations to help each small business owner develop effective strategies for sustaining their small retail businesses.

I followed the interview protocol to minimize error and research bias. Another step I took to reduce bias was to select participants that I did not personally know. During the interviews, I controlled my reactions to the interview responses, so that I would not influence the participants to answer questions differently. Based on the participant responses, being prompt and thoughtful, I believe I was able to remain neutral and did not react or respond in a way that influenced their responses. Each business owner confidently and willingly responded to the interview questions, and each shared a similar passion and desire to succeed in business, even though they all operated in different types of small retail business.

Conclusion

Research indicates small retail businesses do not have a high survival rate; according to the U.S. SBA (2017), 50% of businesses fail within the first year, and 95% fail within the first 5 years. For a small retail business to ensure profitability, long-term growth, and competitive advantages owners must implement successful strategies to sustain their business beyond 5 years. This study focused on four themes: be adaptive to external stakeholder participation, marketing strategy, appropriate financial management strategy, and provide leadership skills training. Successful strategies lead to customer satisfaction, employee motivation, increased revenue, lower operational cost, community well-being, and above all business sustainability.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Selecting Respondents and Explaining the Study and Consent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial contact will be by phone:
Interview Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greet the participant • Review consent forms and obtain signature
Recording the Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start the recording and take notes.
Transcribing the Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcribe each interview, • Review transcribed data, and • Incorporate additional notes and information from document review.
Member Checking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpret each interview response individually and prepare a paragraph of responses to each interviewee • Establish timeframe when information should be available, and time allowed for review. • Determine if information is missing based on transcribed data and/or member checking; schedule follow-up as needed.
Additional questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remember to ask additional probing questions based on the interview questions during each interview to gain deeper insights

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate in Business Research

Greetings Mr. or Mrs. **XXX**,

My name is Eddie D. Harris and I am a student at Walden University pursuing a Doctor of Business Administration degree. You are invited to voluntarily participate in a research study on strategies used by small retail business owners. The purpose of this study is to explore strategies that small retail business owners use to succeed in business beyond 5 years.

The study will include individual interviews and review of documents with small retail business owners. The names or any other information that could identify the participants or small retail businesses will not be included in the study reports. I will share the findings from the study with study participants, other scholars, and the local agencies that work with small retail business owners in Memphis, Tennessee and the local SBA office.

If you meet the eligibility criteria, I request that you participate in my study. Please call or e-mail me if you have any questions or would like additional information. Please let me know if you are willing to participate at your earliest convenience. I will contact you within the next 10 days to answer any questions that you may have and to ask for your decision concerning participation in the study.

Thank you for your consideration of my request. Your willingness to participate in the study will be greatly appreciated. If you are interested in participating in the study, please review the attached consent form. This document provides detailed information

regarding study procedures and protection of information that you provide should you decide to participate. Walden University's approval number for this study is _____ and it expires on _____.

Respectfully,

Eddie D. Harris

Doctor of Business Administration Candidate