

2021

Sustainability Strategies for Small Business Organizations

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Tajudeen Olatunji

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Sustainability Strategies for Small Business Organizations

by

Tajudeen Olatunji

MBA, Seton Hill University, 2006

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

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February 2021

Abstract

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are essential to every nation's economic growth, including the United States, but more than 67% of SMEs fail within the first 10 years. When SMEs implement long term business sustainability strategies, they continue to generate business and remain profitable, enabling SMEs to remain viable and contribute to local community employment opportunities. Using entrepreneurship theory as the conceptual framework, the purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies used by 3 SME owners in the northeastern region of the United States to sustain their businesses beyond 10 years. Data were collected using semistructured interviews as well as a review of business documents and external websites. Data were analyzed using Yin's 5-phase cycle, resulted in 4 themes: personal investment and identification, proper financial management, strong advertising strategy, and supporting and accommodating staff. The implications for positive social change include the potential for SME business owners' understanding of operational and management strategies required for their businesses continued sustainability. By applying this understanding, SME owners may realize positive social change by reducing local unemployment rates, improving local tax revenue to municipalities, and enhancing local economic development.

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Dedication

I thank God for the grace and opportunity to complete this DBA journey. I dedicate this study to my wonderful family for their unflinching support and for picking me up when I was down; this would not have been completed without all of you. I also dedicate this to my late father, my mentor. How I wish you were here to see your little boy progress in life.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to my chair, Dr. Rocky Dwyer, for his mentorship, support, guidance, and understanding. Also, special thanks to Dr. Washington and Dr. Jack for their feedback and support during this journey. I like to thank my wonderful wife for her moral and emotional support. I would also like to thank my friends, classmates, and other faculty members for sharing their knowledge and experiences. God bless you.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a critical role in sustaining the economies of many countries, especially developing economies (Anderson & Ronteau, 2017; Tehseen & Ramayah, 2015). The qualities that help SMEs to succeed often go hand in hand with those of a successful entrepreneur (Tehseen & Ramayah, 2015). Many small and medium-sized restaurants are driven by successful entrepreneurs who become partners with the local community and foster a sense of identity among citizens by building relationships between employees and the local customers they serve (Prange & Pinho, 2017). The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the sustainability strategies that restaurant owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 10 years, using entrepreneurship theory to frame the exploration. Interviewing three restaurant owners in the northeastern region of the United States provided data for analyzing entrepreneurial strategies that lead to success for small and medium-sized restaurants. This study may contribute to positive social change by helping restaurant owners sustain their businesses and support job security through building businesses that maintain longer periods of employment for local community members. The results of this study could serve as a guide to SME restaurant owners around the world who are in need of strategies to promote business sustainability (De Massis et al., 2018).

Background of the Problem

The success of SMEs is important for the functioning economy of any country, in that SMEs provide employment for most of a country's residents. In most of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries,

SMEs account for 60% to 70% of jobs, with an even larger percentage in Italy and Japan (Sitharam & Hoque, 2016). According to Anderson and Ronteau (2017), in 2003 SMEs represented 90% of all industrial establishments in the United States. The centrality of SMEs to economic success suggests the importance of fostering the profitability, survival, and growth of SMEs.

Although SMEs are economically significant, SMEs also suffer from greater economic vulnerability than larger organizations. There is greater variability in the profitability, survival, and growth of SMEs compared to larger corporations, which relate to special problems of financing. Frid et al. (2016) identified the challenges that inhibit the performance and growth of many SMEs, which include higher interest rates and credit rationing due to lack of collateral. Some of the unique challenges faced by SMEs have been mitigated by policies and programs dedicated to SMEs' success.

The expansion of private equity markets, including informal markets, has increased access to venture capital for startups and SMEs, but there are still numerous challenges to profitability, sustainability, and growth that SMEs face. Issues that arise in financing may vary considerably across businesses, depending on the type of business, profit potential, and the growth stage of the business. The country in which an SME is established also determines the company's financial vulnerability and possibility of success. Luo and Stark (2015) found that restaurants are among the most common types of SMEs in the United States that fail to survive the first few years in business.

Problem Statement

Restaurant businesses are among numerous SMEs in the United States that are failing within the first few years at an increasing rate (Healy & Iomaire, 2019). Only 33.8% of the 29.6 million small businesses in the United States survive beyond 10 years (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2016). The general business problem is that some owners of SMEs fail to remain in business beyond 10 years. The specific business problem is that some restaurant owners lack sustainability strategies to sustain their businesses beyond 10 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the sustainability strategies that restaurant owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 10 years. The target population for this study consisted of three restaurant owners in the northeastern region of the United States who sustained their businesses beyond 10 years. The results of this study could contribute to positive social change by helping restaurant owners sustain their businesses beyond 10 years. Successful sustainability strategies could increase job security and protract periods of employment by preventing closures that would force employees to switch jobs. Restaurants that remain in the community for longer durations can become partners with the local community, fostering a sense of identity among citizens and building relationships between employees and the local customers they serve. Successful restaurants often give back to local communities in the form of hosting events, providing sponsorships, and engaging in citizenship practices.

Nature of the Study

The three major research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Researchers who explore complex social interactions, systems, and processes use a qualitative method to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences (Garney et al., 2017; Gelling, 2015). In quantitative studies, researchers use numerical data to examine the relationships among variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The quantitative method was not appropriate for this study because my goal was not to examine relationships among variables. The mixed-method approach requires researchers to combine qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Gibson, 2017). The mixed-method was also not appropriate for this study because I did not need statistical evidence to examine relationships among variables. I selected the qualitative research method for this study to explore the experiences of SMEs in developing and implementing their sustainability strategies because it was the most appropriate method for identifying and attaining detailed information about successful business strategies employed by restaurant owners.

According to Yin (2017), four of the principal designs used in qualitative studies are ethnographic, phenomenological, narrative, and case study. Researchers use an ethnographic design to characterize a particular culture (Aij et al., 2015). An ethnographic design was not appropriate for this study because my goal was not to understand a culture. Researchers use a phenomenological design to describe how individuals experience a phenomenon (Hood, 2016). I did not choose a phenomenological design because I did not intend to explore the meanings of individuals'

personal experiences of a phenomenon. Researchers use a narrative design to obtain a historical account of participants' experiences through their personal stories (Jones, 2016). Narrative design was not appropriate because I did not want to obtain participants' accounts of their experiences through their personal stories.

I selected a multiple case study design. A case study design was the most appropriate research design for this study because it enables me to identify and understand the strategies that the participating restaurant owners used to sustain their business beyond 10 years. I interviewed three restaurant owners, and each had a unique way in which they developed and implemented sustainability strategies within their businesses to become sustainable over 10 years. Using a multiple case study design allowed for a more in-depth exploration of the restaurant owners' strategies, making it possible to compare findings among cases (Pihlajamaa et al., 2019). I did not choose a single case study design because I explored restaurant owners' strategies from three different businesses rather than one business. The multiple case study design is appropriate to gain data in support of conclusions that broaden the understanding of successful sustainability strategies.

Research Question

What sustainability strategies did restaurant owners used to sustain their businesses beyond 10 years?

Interview Questions

1. What sustainability strategies have you used to keep your restaurant in business?

2. What sustainability strategies are you currently using to keep your restaurant in business?
3. What key obstacles did you have to address to keep your restaurant in business?
4. How did you overcome each of the key obstacles to sustaining your business beyond 10 years?
5. How do you evaluate whether each sustainability strategy that you have implemented is effective or not?
6. How, if at all, have you improved your business's sustainability strategy over time?
7. What other information would you like to add regarding sustainability strategies that you use to sustain your business beyond 10 years?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was entrepreneurship theory. Cantillon (1755) first developed entrepreneurship theory and defined *entrepreneurs* as individuals, who are risk takers and agents of change. Schumpeter (1939) expanded entrepreneurship theory by describing an entrepreneur as an innovator. Schumpeter identified five elements of innovation: (a) product innovation, (b) process innovation, (c) transportation innovation, (d) market innovation, and (e) industrial innovations. Building on Schumpeter's theory of entrepreneurship, Mayr et al. (2017) noted that restaurant owners use these five elements of innovation to reorganize and build sustainable organizations. Schumpeter agreed with Cantillon that the sustainability of an organization depends on

the quality of the entrepreneur. The characteristics of SME business owners affect the success and sustainability of an organization and the use of innovative strategies (De Massis et al., 2018; Frid, 2015). Therefore, entrepreneurship theory was an appropriate conceptual framework to help understand the strategies that the participating restaurant owners used to sustain their restaurants beyond 10 years.

Operational Definitions

Entrepreneur: Scholars have historically understood an entrepreneur as a provider of goods and services for which demand already existed (Marasco et al., 2018).

Schumpeter (1939) described an entrepreneur as the one who is willing and able to transform an idea or invention into innovation.

Entrepreneurship: The process of “creating something different with value by devoting the necessary time and effort, assuming the accompanying financial, psychological, and social risks and receiving the resulting rewards of monetary and personal satisfaction” (Hisrich & Ramadani, 2018, p. 54).

Resilience: A sense of resourcefulness, optimism, and hardiness; a resilient business owner has confidence in their ability to recover from setbacks and respond to many complex situations (Ayala & Manzano, 2014).

Self-efficacy: The belief in one’s ability to succeed (Frid, 2015).

Strategies: The creation, employment, and evaluation of decisions within a company that enable leaders to achieve their long-term objectives (De Massis et al., 2018).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are facts considered to be true, but which researchers are unable to adequately verify (Posthumus et al., 2016). In this multiple case study, I identified three assumptions that may have influenced the study's results. I assumed that the small business owners who would participate in this study would be knowledgeable about business sustainability and give thoughtful and comprehensive details. I also assumed that the participants would be honest and accurate in answering the interview questions and thorough in providing supporting evidence. An additional assumption was that the number of participants selected for this study would be enough to represent SME owners throughout the area under review.

Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses in research and are out of the researcher's control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). A limitation of this study was that the number of participants might not accurately represent the entire restaurant business in the area under investigation. Similarly, potential participant bias and participants' inability to accurately recall an event or experience might have influenced the accuracy of the data. Finally, my lack of previous experience as a researcher might have been a weakness.

Delimitations

Delimitations are those characteristics that limit the scope and define the boundaries of a study (Pyrzczak, 2016). The first delimitation of this study was that the study was limited to the United States' northeastern region due to logistics and funding.

The second delimitation was that the participants' responses, perceptions, and management skills required to develop sustainability might have determined the outcome of this study.

Significance of the Study

The study's findings may be valuable to businesses because of the possible identification of strategies that restaurant owners can use to sustain their businesses beyond 10 years. The results of the study may help SME owners increase the survival rate of SMEs, which is crucial to enhancing economic development of every nation, including the United States.

Contribution to Business Practice

Scholars and business professionals may find this study's results beneficial in facilitating effective strategies that restaurant owners can use to sustain their restaurants. According to Jiang et al. (2016), small business owners must adopt entrepreneurial strategies to promote business sustainability in the current global environment. Individuals may use this study's findings and recommendations to decrease the failure rate of small businesses within their first 10 years of operation and identify entrepreneurial strategies designed to increase small businesses' sustainability. Prange and Pinho (2017) posited that SME owners with entrepreneurial knowledge are more likely to succeed. According to Johnson and Schaltegger (2016), business owners may find value for business practices by studying small businesses' sustainability strategies that help restaurant owners achieve the business success experienced by many larger organizations. The results of this study could serve as a guide to small business owners

for enabling the promotion of business sustainability through strategies for increasing their survival rates.

Implications for Social Change

The results of this study may contribute to social change by benefiting stakeholders associated with restaurants, including business owners, employees, customers, and the community. Business owners and employees can benefit from a sustainable business through long-term relationships between workers and managers. Stable relationships between owners and employees create a better work environment for employees (Suriyankietkaew, 2016). Customers can develop relationships with employees and business owners because of the duration of time that a restaurant is doing business in the community. Furthermore, community members may benefit because SMEs that exist in a locality long enough develop ties to the community through sponsorships, donations, employment of local citizens, and repeated patronage. Repeated patronage can become an act of citizenship as longstanding restaurants provide community meeting venues.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the sustainability strategies that restaurant owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 10 years. Restaurant businesses are among numerous SMEs in the United States, failing within the first few years at an increasing rate (Luo & Stark, 2015). Only 33.8% of the 29.6 million small businesses in the United States survive beyond 10 years (BLS, 2016).

Understanding currently available knowledge on barriers to sustainability for SMEs involved conducting the following literature review.

The review of existing literature was essential to demonstrate the relevance and contribution of this study to the scholarship on sustainability strategies of SMEs.

According to Xiao and Watson (2019), a literature review is essential to identify gaps, inconsistencies, weaknesses, and contradictions in existing works and advance knowledge by building on the existing body of work. A literature review may help to prove the validity and quality of academic research. With integrated findings and perspectives from multiple scholars, a review may help readers gain an in-depth understanding of the research question (Snyder, 2019). This literature review contributes to understanding current knowledge about SME sustainability strategies and the gaps within the existing literature.

The literature review component of this study involved researching and synthesizing the academic and professional literature on the following eight topics: entrepreneurship theory, characteristics of entrepreneurship, the importance of SMEs for economic and social development, sustainability strategies for SMEs, the effect of innovation on the sustainability of SMEs, the factors contributing to success and failure of the restaurant business, and ethics and social responsibilities. I reviewed 137 pieces of literature from multiple databases such as ABI/INFORM Collection, Business Source Complete, Emerald Insight, Sage Journals, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar and books, government reports, and government websites. I used the following keywords in my search: *small business sustainability*, *entrepreneurship theory*, *entrepreneurship's*

characteristics, entrepreneurship finance, entrepreneurship education and training, restaurant survival rate, restaurant business, and entrepreneurial marketing strategies. I incorporated 137 sources in the review of the literature for this study. Of these sources, 109 or 79.56% were peer-reviewed references, 10 or 7.3% were books, and 18 or 13.14% were neither peer reviewed nor books. One hundred twenty or 87.6% of the sources were published in 2015 or later, while 17 or 12.4% were published before 2015.

Entrepreneurship Theory

The conceptual framework for this study was entrepreneurship theory. According to early definitions, entrepreneurs seek a change in their world and are willing to take risks to achieve the change (Cantillon, 1755). Schumpeter (1939) emphasized entrepreneurs' social impact by defining them as individuals who improve the world through innovations in the following five areas: products, processes, transportation, markets, and industries. According to Schumpeter, an entrepreneur can create new products or change how to make a product. The entrepreneur may also change how goods and materials are acquired, change the market, and change the industry. According to Atilla Öner and Kunday (2016), Schumpeterian entrepreneurship focuses on the premises of destructive innovation, where entrepreneurs make changes by displacing existing practices and replacing them with new ones. A different theory of entrepreneurship by Kirzner (2009), stated that successful entrepreneurs could identify and seize opportunities when others cannot. Kirzner posited that an entrepreneur's alertness to opportunities leads to change in the market and financial rewards for the entrepreneur. As the individuals responsible for innovation and seizing opportunities, SME entrepreneurs are

centrally crucial to SMEs' profitability, sustainability, and growth. Therefore, entrepreneurship theory was an appropriate theoretical framework for this study of successful sustainability strategies for small and medium-sized restaurants.

Entrepreneurs may be able to create greater profitability and sustainability for their businesses using entrepreneurial skills and strategies. Johnson and Schaltegger (2016) asserted that SME owners who apply Schumpeter's theory of innovation and use the five elements of innovation to create and maintain sustainability in their businesses might enjoy greater business success. In another study on corporate crisis and how to rebuild bankrupt Austrian SMEs as sustainable organizations, Mayr et al. (2017) noted that SME owners use the five innovation elements to reorganize and build sustainable organizations. In this study, I explored how small restaurant owners in the northeastern region of the United States used entrepreneurship theory to develop sustainable business strategies.

One approach to entrepreneurial theory, known as the *indigenous approach*, emphasizes the regional conditions that impact businesses. By contrast to free-market approaches to entrepreneurial theory, the indigenous approach emphasizes how the role of governments and corporations impact the analysis of businesses (Bruton et al., 2018). The free-market approach emphasizes that the state's role should be limited to providing infrastructures needed by entrepreneurs to grow their businesses (Bruton et al., 2018). The indigenous approach offers a more attentive framework to varying systems of government and infrastructure and how national contexts have shaped the landscape of entrepreneurship (Bruton et al., 2018). Barr et al. (2018) posited that indigenous

entrepreneurial systems could gain a competitive advantage through product differentiation, internal certification, and e-commerce, even while focusing on human rights.

Moreover, indigenous entrepreneurship is becoming increasingly relevant due to current global efforts to strike a balance between environmental protection and the production of desirable goods for the increasing world population (Ratten & Dana, 2017). The indigenous approach to entrepreneurship is important because it has demonstrated the significance of examining business success and failure in context rather than assuming that business success could be achieved according to a universal formula. Understanding business success involves understanding the conditions that make a place hostile or welcoming to SMEs. Entrepreneurial education is an important method for mitigating the context-specific risks faced by SMEs. Entrepreneurial education is how people learn about entrepreneurship in a formal setting, such as a classroom (Walter & Block, 2016). In some countries, unfavorable regulations and other hostile conditions might make it difficult for an entrepreneur to prosper (Walter & Block, 2016). The idea of entrepreneurship-hostile environments is related to the indigenous approach because it acknowledges the importance of understanding the context in which the business operates. Walter and Block (2016) found that the environment in which a student learns about entrepreneurship affects the student's preparedness to run a business as an entrepreneur. In terms of successful business strategies, understanding a country's climate is critical for an entrepreneur who is trying to determine where to initiate a business or how to operate a business successfully in a particular place (Stuetzer et al., 2018). In a

country hostile to entrepreneurship, a small restaurant owner might find it challenging to navigate through various difficult and complicated regulations, but entrepreneurial education may help entrepreneurs to navigate these challenges.

Social entrepreneurship is another approach within the entrepreneurship literature that is important for understanding SMEs' parameters of success and sustainability. The nascent but growing literature on social entrepreneurship emphasizes how businesses create social change in contrast to traditional concerns with shareholder wealth (Phillips et al., 2015). Social entrepreneurs enhance communities by offering solutions to social problems while simultaneously seeking to boost their own economic and financial wealth. According to Rey-Martí et al. (2016), the social entrepreneurship model is used not only to generate social values but also to create jobs and wealth. In a study about the state of social entrepreneurship in Malaysia, Adnan et al. (2018) stated that social entrepreneurship development is still at the ground level; however, governmental and nongovernmental agencies are still using the social entrepreneurship model for Malaysia's socioeconomic development. The principles of social entrepreneurship suggest that building businesses that positively impact the community may contribute to business success.

The Importance of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Economic and Social Development

SMEs comprise a large part of a country's economy. For instance, SMEs were 90% of all industrial establishments in 2003 (Anderson & Ronteau, 2017). SMEs play a critical role in the economies of many countries, particularly those that are developing

(Anderson & Ronteau, 2017; Tehseen & Ramayah, 2015). The important role of SMEs in economic development might be due to SMEs' flexibility and compatibility in different situations (Ayala & Manzano, 2014; Stuetzer et al., 2018). The size of SMEs allows them to adapt to a changing world because there are fewer processes and people involved (Tehseen & Ramayah, 2015). SMEs are the wheels that drive the economy in most countries (Neagu, 2016). In developed countries such as the United States, SMEs account for more than 90% of businesses and employ more than half of the workforce.

Zafar and Mustafa (2017) argued that SMEs are essential to social and economic development. For example, Pakistan's government established the Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority (SMEDA) to improve Pakistan's social and economic development. SMEDA, a governmental agency, provides logistics and funding to SMEs in Pakistan (Hansen et al., 2009; Zafar & Mustafa, 2017). Ribeiro-Soriano (2017) explored SMEs' essential role in any nation's economic and social development and concluded that SMEs create links to connect resources and growth across different cultures, policies, economic conditions, and political situations around the world. SMEs are the bulwark of developing and developed countries alike and deserve detailed attention from business researchers.

Characteristics of an Entrepreneur

Entrepreneurship theory is a body of literature in which authors theorize regarding best business practices to predict and guide entrepreneurs' actions. Researchers have identified that certain character traits tend to be more critical for entrepreneurial success than specific behaviors (Hadi & Abdullah, 2018). Both Cantillon (1755) and Schumpeter

(1939) suggested that an entrepreneur's character indicates how sustainable their endeavor will be. Certain characteristics may indicate whether entrepreneurs will succeed before they undertake their journey (Hadi & Abdullah, 2018; Hsieh et al., 2019; Mayr et al., 2017). According to Przepiorka (2016) and Soomro et al. (2018), specific characteristics, such as inner locus of control, self-efficacy, risk propensity, achievement motivation, and social skills, distinguish an entrepreneur from others. Although specific characteristics can contribute to an entrepreneur's business success, other factors also contribute to the success of an organization (Franco & Prata, 2018). Regardless, knowledge of entrepreneurial characteristics linked to business success can contribute to SME owners becoming more capable of sustaining profitable businesses over the long term.

Successful entrepreneurship entails a specific set of abilities that exceed the demands of business management. Entrepreneurship requires the business owner to be innovative concerning products, processes, transportation, markets, and industry (Schumpeter, 1939). Successful SME owners must be innovative to compete in the current global environment. Entrepreneurial core competencies are necessary to start and maintain a successful business (Sadler-Smith, 2016; Schumpeter, 1939). The core competencies of SME entrepreneurs are markedly different from those of SME managers. Entrepreneurs must be innovative, whereas managers are primarily responsible for managing the enterprise's resources and generating more profits (Isaga, 2018; Lago et al., 2018). Therefore, a successful manager may not be a successful entrepreneur and vice versa because the characteristics required of the two positions are different.

An entrepreneur's propensity to take risks may contribute to the ability to operate a business successfully. Risks refer to situations in which a decision maker cannot determine the outcome of a decision with complete certainty, but that may also present opportunities (McShane, 2018). Further, Dîrvă and Dîrvă (2019) and Gu et al. (2018) argued that risk-taking propensity is the essential responsibility of an entrepreneur; as the primary stakeholder and visionary of the enterprise, the business owner bears the main burden for success. This responsibility of entrepreneurs is especially evident in the aftermath of catastrophe and loss (Dîrvă & Dîrvă, 2019). By contrast to risk management, which involves minimizing risk-related losses (McShane, 2018), risk-taking refers to absorbing the dangers of failure to achieve success. Willingness to experience financial loss may result in businesses that ultimately experience greater sustainability.

Having extensive knowledge of business principles and knowledge regarding the particularities of the context in which one operates a business may also contribute to an entrepreneur's success. Adequate knowledge of the wants, culture, and needs of the community where an SME operates may allow an entrepreneur to enhance the SME's sustainability (Ketprapakorn & Kantabutra, 2019). The growing field of entrepreneurship education seeks to address the importance of both competencies and business knowledge when teaching young people and adults how to become entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship education programs teach aspiring business owners to focus on practical application and thus show them how business knowledge can contribute to their success (Walter & Block, 2016). Entrepreneurship education may result in the business success of future entrepreneurs.

Studying self-efficacy from a variety of perspectives and research reveals its centrality to an entrepreneur's success. Self-efficacy refers to individuals' belief in their ability to succeed (Bandura, 1989; Frid et al., 2016). Exploring self-efficacy, Schenkel et al. (2019) noted a complex relationship among passion, competency, and entrepreneurial behavior and found that self-efficacy includes passion and the ability to perform certain activities. In discussing analytic thinking, Bandura stated that people with strong self-efficacy remain firm in the face of evaluative threats and judgmental failures. As a result, the stronger the self-efficacy in an individual, the higher the motivation and performance in that individual. In another study, Zuhir et al. (2019) examined how human capital translated to organizational development and concluded that the impact of self-efficacy on human capital is significant and led to the firm's growth. An entrepreneur's creative self-efficacy is vital to achieving sustainable development (Tran et al., 2018). Having a strong sense of self-efficacy prepares an entrepreneur to face the numerous challenges that accompany business ownership, which ultimately contributes to success.

Research reveals that numerous factors contribute to self-efficacy, including gender, level of education, and community support. Yu and Chen (2016) found that self-efficacy is stronger in male entrepreneurs than female entrepreneurs. Akolgo et al. (2019) highlighted the role of self-efficacy on entrepreneurship education and innovative activities, and concluded that teaching self-efficacy could increase the number of students venturing into entrepreneurship. Walter and Block (2016) studied the gap between entrepreneurship education and the difference between an individual's perceived preparation for the entrepreneurial world and self-employment. An individual who

trained in entrepreneurship may have developed a real sense of the risks and rewards of self-employment, which could affect their self-efficacy (Hsieh et al., 2019; Walter & Block, 2016). According to Frid et al. (2016), an entrepreneur's interpretation of the support they receive from their community can suggest long-term success. An entrepreneur who feels supported in their work is more likely to find success because they believe their community wants their goods or services, which positively impacts motivation (Garney et al., 2017). While the factors that contribute to positive self-efficacy such as gender identity and a supportive community might be outside of the entrepreneur's control, entrepreneurs can also take steps such as pursuing business education to build confidence in their abilities.

Resiliency can help an entrepreneur survive setbacks and challenges and thus may contribute to business success. Ayala and Manzano (2014) defined resilience as a sense of resourcefulness, optimism, and hardiness. A resilient businessperson has the confidence and self-assuredness to make high-risk decisions. However, if those high-risk decisions result in setbacks, a resilient businessperson does not get discouraged and continues to work hard to expand their business (Ayala & Manzano, 2014; Fisher et al., 2016). Resilient entrepreneurs are dedicated, engaged, and willing to invest more in their firms (Lee, 2018). Since business ownership entails taking risks and often entails setbacks, resiliency can result in the perseverance necessary for success.

The volatile nature of the business makes resilience in the face of hardship necessary for entrepreneurs to succeed. Numerous researchers noted the importance of resilience in successful entrepreneurial activities (Branicki et al., 2018; Fatoki, 2018; Frid

et al., 2016). Entrepreneurs who can persevere in difficult situations and learn from their mistakes without becoming discouraged or losing confidence are more likely to succeed over time (Garney et al., 2017). Also, the entrepreneur's resilience influences the organization's resilience (Branicki et al., 2018; Fatoki, 2018). Resiliency is an incredibly important quality for successful entrepreneurs because business necessarily involves challenges and setbacks that the entrepreneur must survive to sustain their business.

Entrepreneurs can develop resiliency through various means. Frid et al. (2016) stated that entrepreneurs who invest more in their businesses tend to be more successful because entrepreneurs with a significant personal stake in their business's success must be resilient. Their happiness and prosperity might connect them to their business success. After surveying 534 Spanish small business owners, Ayala and Manzano (2014) found that resilience is built over prolonged periods and resulting from previous experience. Numerous factors outside of the entrepreneur's control can affect their ability to start or continue a business, such as race, which affects their ability to secure loans (Johnson & Schaltegger, 2016; Melati et al., 2018). In the face of various factors outside of the entrepreneur's control, resiliency can help an entrepreneur overcome some of the challenges that may accompany structural disadvantage.

In addition to the entrepreneur's characteristics, Numerous factors influence SMEs' potential success, including available resources, personal savings, race and gender, and family background. The amount of human capital available to an entrepreneur can be linked to success because an entrepreneur with more human-capital resources can better navigate challenges unrelated to finances, such as marketing and

human resources management (Frid et al., 2016). In starting a business, the entrepreneur will likely invest more of their resources into their growing venture. In many cases, the investments are financial, though an entrepreneur may also invest time and human capital, among other things (Lee, 2018). One potential factor in determining the longevity and sustainability of an SME is the amount of an entrepreneur's investment in their growing business (Johnson & Schaltegger, 2016; Lee, 2018). Investment extends beyond the financial resources needed to start a business. It also refers to the actions taken and sacrifices made by the entrepreneur to realize their goals.

Personal investments are often considered an indication of the entrepreneur's stake in the business. One way that entrepreneurs can gain access to financial resources is through personal savings. Frid et al. (2016) investigated the relationship between the personal stake and entrepreneurial success, using the personal financial investment to measure success. The more personal financial resources invested in a new business venture, the more likely it is for the business to survive due to the owner's effort to prove their commitment to outside investors (De Massis et al., 2018; Frid et al., 2016). When entrepreneurs have more of their funds invested, they often have a more significant commitment or determination emotionally and mentally, which might help them succeed and allow investors to see the entrepreneur's credibility.

Race and gender also play a role in the entrepreneur's ability to gather financial resources. When applying for loans, White entrepreneurs are more likely to get approved for a loan (Melati et al., 2018). Though Black and Hispanic entrepreneurs apply for loans at similar rates, they are approved less frequently (Lee, 2018). Acceptance or denial for

bank loans does not necessarily point to success or lack thereof, but funding can be a major obstacle to sustain an enterprise. Thus, not being approved for a loan could be detrimental, regardless of the entrepreneur's ability to successfully run a business. In terms of gender, women are more likely to invest smaller amounts of their own money than men (Frid et al., 2016). While personal investment does not necessarily determine an SME's success, personal investments that constitute a large part of a firm's resources might attract outside investors (De Massis et al., 2018). Frid et al. found that women are less likely to view their businesses as successful compared to men, which could indicate a difference in perception. If women do not believe their business is successful, they are more likely to close the venture more quickly than men, resulting in a lower survival rate (Frid et al., 2016). Access to financial resources and willingness to invest those personal resources can contribute to business success, but structural disadvantages may inhibit entrepreneurs from accessing financial resources.

An entrepreneur's family background can also factor into their success.

Jaskiewicz et al. (2015) studied family-owned vineyards to see how often multigenerational family-oriented businesses adopt entrepreneurial practices. Many vineyards in the study are multigenerational firms, implicitly meaning that some member of each generation of the family-owned firm is an entrepreneur (Jaskiewicz et al., 2015). Jaskiewicz et al. found that owners of the family vineyards consistently expressed admiration for their entrepreneurial ancestors and understood those ancestors as having a meaningful role in defining their business identity and behavior. However, transgenerational entrepreneurship implies that an individual may build entrepreneurship

skills by reading or listening to the history of their ancestral entrepreneurial skills. Such individuals may not be directly involved with the business, but the seal to the family reputation and dignity might propel such an individual to become a successful entrepreneur (Jaskiewicz et al., 2015). The transgenerational entrepreneurship could be reluctant to risk a family's reputation or identity or as descendants of entrepreneurs looking to step away from an established family business.

Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises' Strategies for Sustainability

Entrepreneurship theory can illuminate best practices for SME success. Identifying strategies specific to SMEs is essential for the long-term success of different types of businesses (Sadler-Smith, 2016). The success of SMEs is attributable to several factors. The first most crucial element of a successful SME is strong, effective, and efficient leadership. Frid et al. (2016) discussed the importance of entrepreneurs demonstrating a financial and personal commitment to their fledgling businesses. When a leader invests substantial amounts of time and money in a business venture, it signals to the followers that the leader will make a tremendous effort to ensure the business's success (Frid et al., 2016). Conversely, an SME entrepreneur who shows limited investment in their business is at a higher risk of failure (Frid et al., 2016). Ayala and Manzano (2014) researched the impact of resilience on business owners and found that resourcefulness, optimism, and hardiness were all associated with higher business growth. Ultimately, when workers and investors have faith in management and management's vision, an SME is more likely to become profitable and sustainable.

Similarly, a successful SME sets itself apart from other businesses by treating the employees with respect. Dhiman and Marques (2011) studied a Montreal-based Indian restaurant called Le Taj, an SME which had managed to serve its community for 25 years. The researchers found that Le Taj's management's commitment to appreciating and fairly compensating the employees was the key to its success (Dhiman & Marques, 2011). When an SME has employees with a more vested interest in its success, the SME has a higher chance of growth.

Business success also depends on the country where the entrepreneur is living and attempting to begin the business. Walter and Block (2016) noted that the country where an individual is starting a business might affect business success. There are fewer entrepreneurship-friendly regulations in entrepreneurship-hostile countries, which could support the entrepreneur (Stuetzer et al., 2018). Stuetzer et al. studied the concept of regional entrepreneurship by examining the relationship between economic performance, entrepreneurial activity, and *entrepreneurship culture*. The researchers identified that areas with higher entrepreneurship cultures experience higher economic growth (Stuetzer et al., 2018). Those areas have a high level of human capital, a high level of knowledge, and a high level of financial capital. Stuetzer et al. determined that states like California, Florida, and Texas had a more robust entrepreneurship culture and that rust belt regions had low levels of entrepreneurship culture. Changes in politics also have tremendous impacts on entrepreneurship. Skokic et al. (2016) explored the hospitality industry in Croatia following the country's transition from socialism to capitalism. The researchers found that entrepreneurship attitudes were highly polarized. When some entrepreneurs

see themselves as reclaiming their autonomy after a long period of exploitation at the hands of a communist government, public acceptance of entrepreneurship was still low among some Croatians (Skokic et al., 2016). While creating an SME in an emerging economy with relatively little competition may appear to be a prudent business move, but social mores regarding entrepreneurship may hinder the firm's growth. It is essential to understand entrepreneurship from a different perspective other than the United States, which is the predominant location studied by entrepreneurship researchers.

Focusing only on developed nations such as the United States has limited scholars' understanding of diverse business contexts. Bruton et al. (2018) discussed how most of the entrepreneurship literature had focused on the United States model of entrepreneurship and have predominantly conducted studies on American consumers and businesses. Against the grain of research practices, Bruton et al. focused on Chinese entrepreneurship. Despite China's position as one of the world's largest economies, Chinese entrepreneurship is still under research. The researchers further asserted that technological advancement is propelling India and China towards becoming the first and second-largest global economies in a matter of years. So, American entrepreneurs have much to lose by ignoring the tremendous growth these two countries have recently had (Bruton et al., 2018). As well, Skokic et al. discussed the impacts of Croatia's switch from a socialist economy to a capitalist economy on entrepreneurship in Croatia. For example, while some Croatian entrepreneurs started their businesses to celebrate their expanded personal freedoms, leading to a massive increase in the number of SMEs, others still have negative feelings towards the capitalist model of SMEs and consider

themselves socialists. The conflict that emanated from the switch from a socialist economy to a capitalist economy created some challenging situations, where some Croatian entrepreneurs wanted to get involved but realized that any investments in such might be in vain due to the ignorance of their potential customer base (Skokic et al., 2016). Without understanding the local and global contexts in which SMEs exist, the business may run into problems (Soto-Acosta et al., 2016). Understanding the local and global contexts in which SMEs exist may contribute to better business plans and greater success.

The advent of globalization provides new and different business opportunities and challenges to international SMEs. Entrepreneurs are crucial to the SME adaptation to a changing world and global economy. An entrepreneur's ability to adjust and seek new markets in this era of globalization might determine if such an enterprise will succeed or not (Agbim, 2019; Liñán et al., 2019). With globalization, more opportunities opened to SMEs, allowing them to expand and adopt innovation and innovative collaboration (Nordman & Tolstoy, 2016). If SME owners can take advantage of the global market's opportunities, their business can flourish (Isaga, 2018). For example, the increased competition that resulted from the globalization of markets in Nigeria led some Nigerian SME owners to innovate their business practices (Murat & Isaac, 2019; Oladimeji et al., 2017). In another study, Sinkovics et al. (2018) examined the effect of matching network on the UK's SMEs against the backlash from nationalistic and protectionist policies (Brexit) of the UK. Brexit is a threat to globalization and may slow down growth among SMEs worldwide if other countries follow the direction of the UK. However, the

matching networks might reduce the effect of perceived internal and external export barriers (Sinkovics et al., 2018). Taking advantage of the opportunities that arise from globalization may provide SME owners with new possibilities for growth and sustainability.

Another strategy that contributes to SME success is understanding the pros and cons of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in which they operate their business. Malecki (2018) explored entrepreneurial ecosystems' concept and discovered that encouraging entrepreneurship in an area might boost many entrepreneurial SMEs' creations within that area. Malecki defined a high-growth entrepreneurial ecosystem as constituted by entrepreneurs, money, knowledge, support services, civic engagement, and interest in several other entrepreneurial areas. For example, university towns are considered particularly fertile entrepreneurial ecosystems (Fritsch & Wyrwich, 2014; Malecki, 2018). Universities are ideal venues for entrepreneurs due to the high number of highly skilled and highly specialized individuals in direct contact with each other (Malecki, 2018). Fritsch and Wyrwich argued that university towns are notably better locations for innovative startups. Building a business in a hospitable entrepreneurial ecosystem might contribute to the long-term sustainability of businesses like restaurants.

The Impact of Innovation on Sustainability of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

Innovation is one of the central functions of entrepreneurs and plays an essential role in the profitability, sustainability, and growth of businesses. Schumpeter (1939) described entrepreneurs as individuals who carry out new combinations of goods, production methods, markets, or methods of organizing industry and asserted that

innovation is the entrepreneur's essential role in the capitalist system. Schumpeter's understanding of the significance of entrepreneurship continues to resonate with contemporary thinking. Schumpeter's concept of SME innovation, as understood by some scholars, is an extension of a post-Fordist model. Amin (2011) posited that supporters of post-Fordist capitalism focus on extreme specialization as a reaction to the Fordist era's hyper-standardization. Amin discussed how large and small businesses ask themselves the essential question, where is the *leading edge*? Businesses in a post-Fordist economy, Amin (2011) and Soto-Acosta and Cegarra-Navarro, (2016) contended, are continually looking to find a hyper-specific market or niche in which to innovate. As Schumpeter pointed out that, an entrepreneur can innovate in many ways.

It follows that in a contemporary context, entrepreneurs can be understood as innovative in different ways, depending on the market in which they deal. Cultures of innovation tend to beget more innovative businesses. Fritsch and Wyrwich (2014) argued that the level of business innovation might depend on local cultures of entrepreneurship and knowledge creation. The researchers discussed how regions which have shared cultural values sympathetic to entrepreneurship, such as independence and individualism, are generally rife with entrepreneurs. Additionally, regions with dense populations of entrepreneurs are more economically viable over long periods, as areas with many well-established small businesses tend to survive economic downturns more readily than areas that rely on a few primary employers (Marasco et al., 2018). Another study showed that cities with several colleges and universities did not feel the impact of an economic downturn like those with the private sector as primary employers (Fritsch & Wyrwich,

2014). Fritsch and Wyrwich studied the connection between historical knowledge collection and entrepreneurship in Germany. The researchers found that areas with a history of academic knowledge collection in engineering and the natural sciences had higher regional knowledge and entrepreneurship levels. The researchers also found that areas with higher rates of self-employment in science-based industries have a long-lasting effect on innovative entrepreneurship (Fritsch & Wyrwich, 2014; Udonsup & Intrawong, 2019). Cultures of entrepreneurship bolster the success of entrepreneurs.

The Factors Contributing to Success and Failure of Restaurant Businesses

The restaurant business is challenging to study due to the many confounding factors involved in understanding why a given restaurant is successful or not. Some of the factors that make restaurants' success difficult to measure are that restaurants have extremely high business failure levels, low-profit levels, and high employee turnover rates (Van Scheers, 2016). Consequently, it is difficult to pin one business model or set of attributes, which are effective across markets. Although it is difficult to define and measure the qualities of successful restaurants, numerous studies have identified contributing factors that can inform the business strategies of small and medium-sized restaurant owners.

Researchers have identified numerous factors that contribute to the restaurant business's success, such as customer service, financial management, and marketing. Kremer et al. (2017) studied nearly 300 restaurants in Russia to search for a connection between business model and firm performance. The authors found that restaurants with a limited menu were the most successful with regards to growth (Kremer et al., 2017).

Smith (1996) outlined a 13-point plan, which stressed the following themes: (a) going to any length to serve customers, (b) limiting the menu to what the restaurant does well, and (c) treating staff with respect. DiPietro (2017) discussed how diners perceive successful restaurants as unique for their area; as providers of excellent service, products, and discounts; and possessing quality facilities. Van Scheers (2016) discussed management, financials, marketing, and respectful treatment of employees as four crucial elements contributing to restaurant business success. Despite various variables that make each restaurant unique, these research-based success strategies can help entrepreneurs create profitable, sustainable, and growing businesses.

Choices made by restaurant owners may contribute or detract from the success of their business. According to Lee and Moon (2016), the choices made by individual organizations depend on the players in the market. For example, the choices made by each restaurant owner might depend on other restaurants in the community, the availability of skilled workers, and the amount of finance available. The level of entrepreneurship creativity in a restaurant owner might affect the type of choices made by such a restaurant owner, which might separate a successful restaurant from an unsuccessful one (Camillo et al., 2008; Lee & Moon, 2016). Although an entrepreneur's choices may contribute to business success, those choices might significantly determine the specific context in which their restaurant exists. Thus, thorough knowledge of regional and market particularities may help SME owners make sound business decisions.

Effective marketing is one significant area where restaurant owners can contribute to their business success. Imen and Lassâd (2019) posited that the inclusion of marketing into entrepreneurship education significantly influences students' decision to become an entrepreneur. Marketing is a tool that connects innovativeness with organizational success (Finoti et al., 2017). The goal of every business is to make their goods and services available to consumers. Therefore, marketing is a process where firms engage customers, intending to make some profit in exchange for the supply of goods and services required by the customers (Kanthiah Alias Deepak & Jeyakumar, 2019). Shaw and Jones (2005) asserted that SMEs that are willing to compete in the current global environment with other businesses of different sizes worldwide, such SME owners, required adequate knowledge of marketing strategies to survive. Small and medium-sized restaurant owners may benefit from marketing-focused education such that they can create a larger customer base.

Consumer involvement is critical in the survival of an SME, especially the restaurant business. SMEs cannot survive without the patronage of their goods and services. Small restaurants required repeat patronage to survive regardless of innovation and other factors (Handriana, 2016). Handriana stated that customer loyalty is crucial to the survival of SMEs. Building a loyal customer base through trust and strong relationships between the restaurant and its patrons might increase the survival rate of SME restaurants. Moreover, the combination of customer relationship management with marketing innovation might help to create customer value, which might result in organizational success (Sánchez-Gutiérrez et al., 2019). SME success depends on

business owners knowing their customers and potential customers well enough to convince them to patronize their businesses effectively.

Research on business competitiveness illuminates how SME owners should prioritize the strategies they use to create a successful business. The identification and ranking of competitive factors might contribute to an enterprise's success or failure (Lau, 2002; Otubanjo, 2018). Alam and Natsuda (2016) identified three competitive factors that might lead to an enterprise's success: access to market, labor cost, and technological advancement. The researchers further highlighted four factors that might cause a business to fail: labor union activities, corruption, limited infrastructures, and lead-time (Alam & Natsuda, 2016). A restaurant owner's ability to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their restaurants and identify factors that might give the business a competitive edge helped to separate a successful restaurant from others.

Resources and capabilities also contribute to SME's profitability, sustainability, and growth. In their study, Sok and O'Cass (2011) examined the impact of the resource-based view (RBV) on organizational performance. They concluded that it is difficult to evaluate the impact of resources (a firm's assets) alone on the organizational performance without also evaluating capability (ability to use resources). Possessing non-financial resources may not affect the organization's innovation performance, but the use of financial resources might significantly impact the performance of SMEs (Woschke et al., 2017). Exploring the concept of RBV that resources are heterogeneously distributed among firms, Woschke et al. asserted that the ability of owners to put the correct combination of resources to work might enhance the firm's growth. Therefore, owners

with adequate entrepreneurial education might have increased performance, which aligns with the assertions of Stuetzer et al. (2018), who examined the impact of culture and knowledge on the growth of an organization. Tan et al. (2019) concluded that startup planning and networking had a significant positive relationship with innovation capability, which had a significant positive relationship with business venture success. Entrepreneurs who can effectively harness resources together with capabilities are the most likely to operate a successful SME.

Many businesses become successful through developing new products that they patented for the exclusive use of that business. However, such a strategy is often difficult to maintain for businesses in the hospitality industry. Lee et al. (2016) and Peng et al. (2015) found that new concepts, products, and ideas in the hospitality industry are difficult to protect through patents and copyright laws. However, ensuring sustainability, innovation is essential for SMEs in the hospitality industry, such as restaurants. Therefore, innovation happens on multiple levels within the hospitality industry. Leach (2017) argued that restaurant businesses increasingly understand themselves as service-based firms rather than product-based firms. While Lee et al. created a taxonomy of innovation in a restaurant-specific context, which included product and service innovations, process innovations, management innovations, and marketing innovations. This shift in perception follows the post-Fordist business model. The draw of a contemporary restaurant is a niche vision for a market, rather than an easily replicable chain model. Such a view may help restaurant owners more effectively market their restaurants as service-providers to customers.

Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises' Ethics and Social Responsibilities

Within entrepreneurship research, ethical and social responsibilities often are a secondary concern rather than a primary concern. Some firms adhere to the principle of corporate social responsibilities (CSR) to boost economic and financial performance and gain a competitive edge over competitors (Juarez, 2017). According to Youssef et al. (2018), the relevance of CSR for sales and branding strategies of SMEs are scarce. Youssef et al. stated that CSR might not be the reason why industrial buyers purchase a product, but a bad corporate image might lead potential buyers to competitors. The cost of corporate misconduct on both society and the firms are big in the form of costly lawsuits, the cost associated with negative company image, and loss of sales revenue (Price & Sun, 2017).

Although CSR strategies may not be central to SMEs' success, one important way that small restaurants enhance business success is by positively contributing to their local community. In a study of restaurant entrepreneurship, Leach (2017) found that most restaurant owners interviewed discussed how cooking with locally sourced foods was an essential part of their restaurant's identity. These owners discussed how purchasing local food was funneling money back into the local economy and encouraging sustainable farming practices in their communities (Leach, 2017). According to Leach, the restaurant owners interviewed make fostering ethical relationships with other community members a part of their restaurant's brand. Internationally based SMEs that do business in impoverished areas need to be particularly aware of the line between equitable exchange between parties and exploitation of labor. Juma et al. (2017) conducted a study of

sustainable entrepreneurship in Sub-Saharan Africa. They performed two case studies, one study on a beekeeping company called Honey Care Africa (HCA) and another study on a shoe manufacturer called Oliberté. Honey Care Africa is a company that seeks to help develop rural economies in a sustainable, economically viable way. Through alliances with public-sector entities, such as the Kenyan government, World Bank, and the UK Government Department for International Development, HCA has allowed thousands of households to gain another source of income (Juma et al., 2017).

Similarly, Oliberté uses natural leather and natural rubber to make their shoes in addition to their transparent environmental and labor practices (Juma et al., 2017). Both HCA and Oliberté stress that their employees are highly respected business partners treated and compensated as such. Moreover, both companies have expressed that their respective organizations' primary goal is to create social good through strategic resources and empower the communities in which they operate (Juma et al., 2017). Both of the companies profiled in Juma et al.'s study attempt to create socially conscious brands, which equitably interact with and empower the communities in which they work. While corporations might emphasize CSR only to mitigate the risks of a negative reputation, SME owners have much more to gain from centering ethical practices in their business.

Another major ethical concern within entrepreneurship is the environmental impact. Fears surrounding global warming have inspired some small businesses to focus on environmental-friendly practices and products. Both HCA and Oliberté foreground environmental concerns and are transparent about how their business practices affect the environment (Juma et al., 2017). Oliberté's shoe materials and HCA's bees are ethically

sourced and environmentally friendly (Juma et al., 2017). Some of the restaurant owners profiled by Leach (2017) discussed how part of their rationale for buying local foods is the decreased environmental impact from the decreased travel. Not all SMEs will share the same ethical priorities and convictions; however, when an SME shows ethical convictions and concerns, customers notice and respond positively.

Transition

In section 1, I introduced the background of the problem together with the problem statement, purpose statement, and the nature of the study. Also, I included in this section the research question, interview questions, conceptual framework, operational definition, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, significance of the study, and the literature review. The literature review section incorporated the following areas of focus: (a) entrepreneurship theory, (b) the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises for economic and social development, (c) characteristics of entrepreneurship, (d) sustainability strategies for small and medium-sized enterprises, (e) the effect of innovation on sustainability of small and medium-sized enterprises, (f) the factors contributing to success and failure of restaurant business, and (g) small and medium-sized enterprises' ethics and social responsibilities. In section 2, I will explain the role of the researcher, participants, research method, research design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection techniques, data organization technique, data analysis, reliability, and validity.

Section 2: The Project

Restaurant businesses in the United States are among the many SMEs that fail within the first few years of operation (Healy & Iomaire, 2019). Only 33.8% of the 29.6 million small businesses in the United States survive beyond 10 years, and many SMEs that failed are in food related industry (BLS, 2016). In this study, I explored how some owners of SMEs remained in business beyond 10 years by using effective sustainability strategies. In this section, I provide a detailed description of my role as the researcher, the participant selection process, research methods and design procedures, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection techniques, data organization techniques, and reliability and validity of the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the sustainability strategies that restaurant owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 10 years. The target population for this study consisted of three restaurant owners in the northeastern region of the United States who sustained their businesses beyond 10 years. The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by helping restaurant owners sustain their businesses beyond 10 years. Successful sustainability strategies could increase job security and result in protracted periods of employment by helping business owners avoid closures that would force employees to switch jobs. Restaurants that remain in a community for longer durations can become partners with the local community, fostering relationships between employees and the local customers they

serve. Successful restaurants often give back to local communities by hosting events, providing sponsorships, and participating in citizenship practices.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher in this process was to gather, observe, organize, and evaluate reliable and valid information within a reasonable time and with a reasonable expenditure of resources. According to Fusch et al. (2017), a student researcher must choose a research design that allows him or her to answer the research question and achieve data saturation within a reasonable time and with limited finances. I collected data to evaluate in detail the strategies that restaurant owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 10 years. The rate at which restaurants go out of business shortly after opening is alarming. More than 50% of new restaurant owners close their doors within months to a few years after their grand openings; the closure of these businesses has adverse economic effects on communities (Luo & Stark, 2015).

The economic impact of closed restaurants on my community and the United States at large prompted my interest in strategies that can contribute to small and medium-sized restaurants' success. I recognized the existence of potential bias due to my personal experience as a small business owner. Bartholet (2013) found that researchers often allow personal interests and associations to cloud and determine the outcomes of their studies. Whether they are internal or external to the organizations that they investigate, researchers must take every step possible to mitigate the effects of personal bias in the collection and interpretation of data (DuBois et al., 2017; Saunders et al., 2016). DuBois et al. and Bartholet agreed that the level of the researcher's relationship to

the subject might influence the interpretation of research data and that researchers must take every step possible to mitigate all potential biases to improve the reliability and validity of their studies.

To remove any personal bias or influence, I did not engage any participant whom I knew personally or professionally. However, it is impossible to eliminate absolutely all bias on the part of participants and researchers (Guan & Vandekerckhove, 2016). Given that bias is inevitable, a researcher must establish a guide to mitigate the research bias (Fusch et al., 2017; Saunders et al., 2016). According to Saunders et al., a researcher must report each process of a study in a transparent way so that others can judge and replicate the process. A researcher must understand that each decision, from the design stage to the analysis of data, affects the study's quality.

Ethical research practices are of pivotal importance to making rigorous scholarly conclusions. The job of a researcher is to connect with study participants in ways that strengthen the study's findings while minimizing any bias that might affect the results (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). According to the *Belmont Report* (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research [NCPHSBBR], 1979), the role of a qualitative researcher is to follow and uphold basic ethical guidelines for the protection of human subjects. The *Belmont Report* recommends that researchers strictly adhere to three principles: (a) respect for participants, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (NCPHSBBR, 1979). I respected my participants by allowing them to express their thoughts and ideas on the research question freely. I made every effort to protect and secure the well-being of the participants who took part in the

interview process by providing them with a written informed consent form. The informed-consent form confirmed that participants agreed to the research procedure and were aware of any risks that might be involved. I treated all participants equally and used the same questions in each interview to avoid asking inappropriate questions. Lastly, I completed the required education and certification from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Office of Extramural Research Protecting Human Research Participants, and secured approval from Walden University's IRB before commencing data collection activities.

During data analysis, I coded the names of participants and their organizations for the privacy and protection of the participants' identities. Researchers use interview protocols as guides to support structured or unstructured interviews and to increase the quality of data obtained from interviewees (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), an interview protocol consists of an introduction, questions to guide the interview process, and an invitation for the interviewee to provide feedback. I used the interview protocol presented in the appendix, which Castillo-Montoya (2016) suggested, to guide the interview process. Following a specific protocol ensures that interviews are inquiry-based conversations and creates consistency in data.

Participants

I conducted a qualitative multiple-case study to explore the differences and similarities in three restaurant owners' strategies to sustain their restaurants for more than 10 years. I further explored the applicability of the research findings to other restaurants in my analysis. To qualify for this study, each participant needed to (a) be over the age of

18, (b) have owned a restaurant in the Pittsburgh area for at least 10 years, and (c) have experience with using strategies that sustain restaurant businesses. According to Castillo-Montoya (2016), recruiting participants who met eligibility requirements might help to enhance the appropriateness of the sample size and improve the quality of data.

Participants who met the eligibility requirements were allowed to participate in the study and received an informed consent form by email that clearly explained the study's purpose. I used the form to explain to participants that they were free to withdraw from participating in the study at any time without consequence.

Upon IRB approval, I selected the participants from online searches of the Visit Pittsburgh and Greater Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce databases. These databases contained information such as business owners' names, street addresses, cities, counties, telephone numbers, and email addresses, as well as the year that each business opened. I selected eight participants from the search list and contacted the potential participants via email to ask if they were interested in participating in the study. Using the appropriate medium to gain access to participants is critical to research success (Marks et al., 2017). After a restaurant owner agreed to participate, I sent him or her an email message that described the interview process and the purpose of the study. Interested participants replied, "I consent" to the invitation, and individual participants were free to print a copy of the form for their records. I then communicated with the participants in person, by email, or by telephone to schedule interview dates and times.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

I used a qualitative method to explore the successful business strategies used by small restaurant owners. The three types of research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (Yin, 2017). The following key characteristics of the qualitative research method aligned with my research study of strategies that restaurant owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 10 years. First, a qualitative method is holistic. The holistic approach highlights and combines multiple perspectives created by a group of individuals to address a specific research question within a particular environment (Hood, 2016). Second, the researcher is the primary tool for data collection in a qualitative study. The researcher's interaction with the participants fosters the development of in-depth understanding, which can prove valuable to detailed analysis and interpretation of the results (Saunders et al., 2016). Third, the researcher in a qualitative study sets aside assumptions or pretensions, thus capturing the participants' points of view and forming a more vibrant representation of the participants' experiences and situations (Saunders et al., 2016). The detailed collection of firsthand knowledge of the restaurant owners necessary for answering this study's research question aligned best with the qualitative method.

The research question for this study aligned with qualitative method. Qualitative researchers must have strong analytical ability and a commitment to thoroughness and accuracy so that they can meet the demands of data analysis (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Researchers use the qualitative method to ask participants who have relevant experiences

about what, where, and how the phenomenon under study affects them (Hood, 2016). The qualitative method is valuable to business practice because researchers can use it to explore strategies for addressing an existing business problem. Yin (2017) noted that researchers use the qualitative method when a study's objective is to explore organizational development practices and performances.

Due to the nature of this study's research question, a quantitative method would not have been effective. A quantitative research method was not appropriate for this study because quantitative researchers test predetermined hypotheses or examine relationships between two or more variables (Morse & Cheek, 2014). According to Park and Park, the quantitative researcher uses a statistical approach to focus on predictability and control variables to interpret data. Given that this study did not involve testing aggregate data or comparing variables, a quantitative method was not appropriate.

The mixed-method approach focuses on connecting the features of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Researchers who favor a mixed-method approach believe that drawing on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods affords them an advantage. However, they fail to realize that quantifying data can be expensive and time consuming (Hood, 2016). Other researchers have found the use of the mixed-method approach challenging due to the time and resources required to capture an appropriate sample size and interview each participant to gain an in-depth understanding of his or her experience (Garney et al., 2017; Gelling, 2015). A mixed-method approach would not have met the needs of this study because exploring strategies that restaurant

owners used to sustain their restaurants beyond 10 years does not require quantitative components or statistical data.

Research Design

A multiple-case study design was appropriate for this study because it allowed for comparison and contrast of multiple cases to identify a broad range of potentially effective business strategies used by small and medium-sized restaurant owners. In a qualitative study, a researcher can use any of the following to answer the research question: case study, ethnographic, narrative, or phenomenological design (Park & Park, 2016). When researchers select the case study design, they may adopt either a single- or a multiple-case model. Researchers use a multiple-case study design to explore multiple participants' individual experiences and perceptions from different organizations to provide meaningful and comprehensive data (Park & Park, 2016; Runfola et al., 2017). I chose a multiple-case study design for this study to explore the strategies that restaurant owners in the northeastern region of the United States used to address business sustainability. Yin (2017) stated that a multiple-case study allows a researcher to employ replication logic and use the same research questions several times to strengthen a study's findings. A multiple-case study design also benefits the researcher when the research objective is to extend a theory (Hood, 2016). A multiple-case study method was appropriate for this study because it allowed me to obtain information from multiple participants to discover similarities and differences among participants working in different locations.

An ethnographic study design would not have allowed me to answer the research question effectively. Researchers use the ethnographic design as a research strategy to study social issues, learned patterns of behavior, interactions, beliefs, and the language of a cultural group (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Ethnographic researchers immerse themselves in the participants' day-to-day lives as they observe events and look for consistency while documenting participants' social behaviors (Arino et al., 2016). Yin (2017) stated that an ethnographic researcher typically requires a large group of 20 or more individuals who have interacted with each other for an extended period. The ethnographic design was not appropriate for this study because I did not intend to explore restaurant owners' beliefs or immerse myself in the restaurant owners' culture for an extended period. Instead, I wanted to explore the strategies that restaurant owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 10 years.

Narrative researchers encourage individuals to tell stories about important events that have occurred in their lives. Implementing the narrative technique consists of collecting and documenting personal stories from one or two individuals (Jones, 2016). The narrative researcher analyzes the participant's account and rewrites it to link the person's ideas in chronological order (Jones, 2016). The narrative design was inappropriate for this study because it would have included personal stories from only one or two individuals, contrary to my aim of exploring the strategies used by participants for the sustainability of a business, rather than recounting stories as expected in the narrative design. Likewise, the phenomenological design would not have been a

good fit for this study. Runfola et al. (2017) noted that a phenomenological researcher attempts to focus on the emotional expression of the participants' experience.

The ethnographic, the narrative, and the phenomenological designs offer some research benefits. Still, the multiple-case study design was the most appropriate research design for this study. It helped me to understand the strategies that restaurant owners used to sustain their businesses beyond 10 years. A case study format also allowed for a more in-depth exploration of each restaurant owner to draw parallels and contrasts among cases.

Population and Sampling

Finding a sample for this study involved the purposive sampling method. Researchers use purposive sampling to establish qualifications that participants must meet (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Before a researcher creates a sampling strategy for a multiple-case study, he or she must identify the population (Yin, 2017). This study's sample population consisted of three restaurant owners in the northeastern region of the United States. The selection of an appropriate population improves transparency and maintains the continuity of evidence in a study (Runfola et al., 2017). To qualify for participation in this study, each participant needed to (a) be over the age of 18, (b) have owned a restaurant in the northeastern region of the United States for at least 10 years, and (c) have used strategies to sustain that business beyond 10 years. A chosen population is acceptable when participants can provide in-depth data and insight into the central research question (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). For this study, three restaurant

owners were enough to provide diverse data that could be compared and contrasted across cases.

I selected the purposeful sampling strategy because the restaurant owners might have possessed different amounts of information relevant to restaurant ownership and sustainability. I had the opportunity to communicate face to face and follow up with eligible participants in person and via video conferences. According to Palinkas et al. (2015), purposeful sampling maximizes the information gained from qualified participants. Yin (2017) noted that there are three steps that a researcher needs to take when applying a purposeful sampling strategy in qualitative research: The researcher must select participants, identify the type of sample, and determine the sample size. Purposeful sampling allows researchers to collect data from individuals who will be best able to illuminate the research question (Yin, 2017). I selected purposeful criterion sampling because the sampling strategies were nonrandom, allowing me to focus on specific characteristics of individuals of interest and best provide answers to the research question. Palinkas et al. stated that criterion sampling reduces the amount of change and limits the researcher's chance of collecting information that is not directly related to the research question or business problem. The purposeful sampling strategy was appropriate for my study because I intended to interview only participants with the qualifications to answer my central research question.

For this study, I interviewed a sample size of three experienced restaurant owners from three restaurants located in the northeastern region of the United States. The sample size refers to the number of participants that the researcher interviewed to collect data for

their studies (Runfola et al., 2017). Park and Park (2016) stated that the number of interviews for a qualitative case study is usually small. Interviewing three participants allowed me to collect a detailed description of common themes and patterns associated with the participants' experiences. If three restaurant owners did not produce enough data to reach saturation, I would have interviewed additional restaurant owners. Researchers must achieve data saturation to demonstrate transparency and the trustworthiness of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Data saturation occurs when the researcher begins to receive repetitive responses from the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). During the data collection process, the researcher must decide when new information is no longer obtainable. When the researcher can no longer obtain new information, it is time to stop the interview process and analyze the data collected (Yin, 2017). My strategy for achieving data saturation includes extending interviews, conducting in-depth research into various sources, and repeating interviews until there is no new information.

Ethical Research

Ethical research is essential for producing quality research and protecting the well-being of a study's participants. Ethical research is the application of ethical choices or moral considerations that originate from a researcher's daily practice (Birt et al., 2016). Before conducting a research study, researchers must correctly adopt and follow ethical procedures and guidelines to determine the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors for protecting human participants. I complied with Walden University's ethical standards and the Belmont Report (NCPHSBBR, 1979), which serves as a guide for every researcher. I completed a web-based training course on

protecting the rights of research participants, for which I received a certificate of completion from the National Institute of Health's (NIH) Office of Extramural Research. Another measure in place to protect persons' rights and keep them from harm is the institutional review board (IRB). I obtained Walden University IRB approval before I started to collect data or engage with the potential participants. After receiving approval from the Walden University IRB, I emailed an informed-consent form to each participant. Using an informed-consent form strengthens the reduction of ethical bias for every research study.

The consent form contains the study's purpose, possible risks and benefits, compensation, and specific protections for all individuals. I asked the participants to reply "I consent" to the email to confirm their willingness to participate in this study and all participants agreed to voice recording during the interview. I developed working relationship with qualified participants by describing the study's purpose, introducing myself to build trust, communicating my intentions before and after the study was completed, and actively communicating with each participant throughout the process. I asked each participant to save or print a copy of the consent form for their record.

Participants could drop out of the study at any time. If a participant dropped out, I would have shredded and destroyed the participant's data and then focus only on the remaining participants. Runfola et al. (2017) noted that a participant should feel free to withdraw at any time throughout the interviewing process without giving any reason. My study was voluntary, and restaurant owners who agreed to participate did not receive any incentive or compensation for their participation. To maintain confidentiality, I labeled

participants with pseudonyms using the coding structures P1, P2, and P3. Their names will not appear on any documents anywhere in this study. I followed the interview protocol process (see Appendix) for every interview. Data from the study were stored in a file cabinet, locked by me, and shredded five years after the study. I will delete electronic data from all secure databases after five years.

Data Collection Instruments

During this qualitative multiple case study, it was important that I recognize my role as the researcher. The primary instrument used to collect and analyze qualitative data is the researcher (Fusch & Ness, 2015). My role as the researcher includes observing and describing the participants' responses to ensure the study's validity and reliability. I used a semistructured interview technique and follow-up with member checking to obtain information regarding restaurant owners' strategies to sustain their businesses beyond 10 years. When collecting data, I followed an interview protocol (see Appendix). With each participant's approval, I asked open-ended questions and tape-recorded each interview to minimize errors during the data collection process. Hood (2016) noted that a researcher must tape-record each interview and later transcribe the recordings for accurate analysis because any discussion not recorded could deviate from the interview guide. The use of open-ended questions gave restaurant owners the chance to share their ideas and explain problem-solving strategies openly.

I conducted interviews in a comfortable environment free from distractions, such as a private meeting room, conference room, and video conferences. Castillo-Montoya (2016) stated that researchers must consider the entire process of conducting an

interview, which includes selecting the interview location. The interview location also affects the quality of data, mostly when the interviewer used a recording device. The interview location must be quiet and free from distractions to ensure the quality of voice recording (Yin, 2017). The participants had the option to choose a friendlier and more convenient location. When participants have the choice to choose a quiet and convenient location, the researcher enhances openness and minimizes nervousness (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The interview date and time were also crucial to the overall process of planning an interview with participants (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). I scheduled interviews with each participant for 45-60 minutes. Each of these steps created an interview environment where the participants were comfortable enough to share quality data.

The quality of the data collected increased the validity and reliability of the study results. Birt et al. (2016) posited that using data collection techniques such as triangulation and member checking improves the study results' validity and reliability. When I finished interviewing and transcribing the data, I scheduled a second interview to ask follow-up questions to ensure that I did not misinterpret the data and ensure that participants provided all information relevant to the business problem and research question. According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), researchers used follow-up questions to increase the response rate, add more details, and correct misrepresented data. I performed member checking by allowing the participants to revisit their answers during and after the interviews. Member checking is a method for validating study results (Birt et al., 2016). I provided the restaurant owners the opportunity to reflect on their personal experiences and share additional information.

Triangulation ensures the credibility of the study results, triangulating the data across several data sources, including public documents, archival records, interviews, and digital documents from financial institutions, to describe and validate the restaurant owners' strategies' effectiveness for sustainability. Qualitative researchers use data triangulation to ensure quality and corroborate evidence by gathering information from multiple sources (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The use of semi-structured interviews, member checking, and triangulation will improve data collection quality and allow the participants to answer my research questions thoroughly.

Data Collection Technique

For this study, the data collection process included semistructured, open-ended questions, direct observations, audio recordings, and the review of the organization's documents. The data collection technique allows researchers to systematically collect data and answer the research question (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Gibson, 2017). Furthermore, Hurst et al. (2017) stated that the choice of a data collection technique might affect the quality of data collected in a qualitative study. Each data collection technique has unique advantages and disadvantages. According to Runfola et al. (2017) and Yin (2017), the benefits of using semistructured face-to-face interviews include: (a) allowing the researcher to prepare questions ahead of time, (b) empowering participants to express their views in their terms, (c) enabling researchers to capture participants' emotions and behaviors during each interview, (d) providing reliable and comparable qualitative data, and (e) encouraging two-way communication. The disadvantage of using semistructured face-to-face interviews is that the researcher is inclined to introduce bias

into the study (Yin, 2017). Semi-structured interviews are the best approach to data collection for this research study because semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to answer the questions directly while also providing time for tangential remarks and follow-up questions.

The interview protocol for this study includes predetermined, open-ended questions (Appendix). Open-ended questions are designed to prompt participants to explain the strategies related to business sustainability. I used an interview protocol and followed the same procedures for all interviews (Appendix). A researcher must follow a sequence of questions to gain or explore information regarding a phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Predetermined, open-ended questions provide numerous advantages in the data collection process, including; revealing how participants think about the questions, allowing the participants to expand on the phenomenon, and keeping qualitative researchers on track as the data collection process progresses. However, the disadvantages of predetermined open-ended questions are: (a) the participant may take more time and effort to respond to the questions, (b) the interviewee may find it difficult to express their views, (c) answers may vary in their level of detail or scope, and (d) researchers may find it difficult to code the data. In a predetermined order, asking open-ended questions allowed flexibility during the interview process while also providing a structure to keep the data organized and focused.

To gather further information and validate participant responses, I reviewed each restaurant's business documents. Jones (2016) noted that the review of company documents might offer researchers a full description of an event, but it also might contain

irrelevant, disorganized, or incomplete information. For a multiple-case study, a primary strategy for using multiple sources of data collection techniques is creating a database containing all field notes to maintain evidence and practice quality control (Yin, 2017). I kept a database of notes about the company documents and notes from interviews data organized.

To collect the best possible data, I created a comfortable research environment and built rapport with each participant. Wilson et al. (2016) posited that researchers must facilitate collaboration, engagement, communication, and a peaceful environment with the interviewee to create a welcoming atmosphere throughout the interview process. Before the scheduled interview, I called or emailed each participant to provide a description of what they should expect and reaffirm my commitment to protecting participants' identities and privacy. Also, I requested that each participant provide organizational documents describing their business's performance to demonstrate internal consistency. The interviews were scheduled for between 45-60 minutes unless the participant chose to extend the time. Before the end of each interview session, I invited the participant to ask any questions about the study. After completing all the interviews, I transcribed the voice-recorded responses manually and with Microsoft MS word. MS word dictate function allowed me to convert the interview data from voice to text for accuracy. Upon completion, I reviewed the transcripts, and each participant received a copy of the summary to confirm that the data matched the information they provided during the interview. Each step of the interview protocol ensures that the data collected were organized accurately.

Data Organization Technique

To keep track of the collected data, I used a file organization system on my password-protected personal computer. Data organization includes collecting, storing, managing, and analyzing data to maintain a high degree of quality throughout the qualitative research process (Yin, 2017). In a qualitative study, the researcher must take the time to prepare, evaluate, maintain, and transfer data from audio recordings and field notes to a secure location (Arino et al., 2016). I used a password-protected laptop, accessible only to me, as an electronic filing system to maintain interview notes, audio recordings, and other relevant documents in the participants' classification code folders. The labeling process consisted of cataloging all documents, such as the interview transcripts, by identification code in separate folders to ensure each participant's privacy throughout the entire study.

I used NVivo Pro software to store and organize data. NVivo Pro software helps qualitative researchers organize and quickly evaluate data more effectively without losing any information, leading to a better understanding of the participants' experiences (Woods et al., 2016). The use of MS word and NVivo facilitated efficient and cost-effective data organization. Yin (2017) advised researchers to implement a data plan that identifies where, how, and for how long to store data and who will have access to the documents. I locked all physical documents in a file cabinet, and all electronic data will remain stored in folders on a password-protected laptop for five years. After five years, I will shred all physical documents, erase audio recordings, and delete all electronic data from the hard drive.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved three separate components: inductive analysis, software analysis coding for theme determination, and triangulation. I used Yin (2017)'s five-phase cycle data analysis method to analyze this qualitative data. The five-phase cycle includes (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding. I also used McLeod et al. (2016) to discover general themes embedded in the data. This method of reviewing the transcribed interviews provides a thorough understanding of the text and identifies patterns of recurring messages, ideas, and experiences that connected the participants' perspectives. Themes refer to revealed similarities/differences within a text rather than simply words that appear with the highest frequencies (Bou-Llusar et al., 2016). The analysis of thematic statements aided in determining some aspects of the participants' experiences.

The interview questions for this study aligned with the central research question. The research question is: What sustainability strategies did some restaurant owners used to sustain their businesses beyond 10 years? The interview questions included semistructured, open-ended questions for three restaurant owners in the northeastern region of the United States. I relied on data collected via a set of interview questions to explore the research question. I used methodological triangulation in this study. Researchers use methodological triangulation to collect data using more than one method (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Methodological triangulation can help researchers limit bias by collecting data using different methods (Yin, 2017). I reduced bias by conducting semistructured interviews, and review archival records, public documents, and digital

documents from financial institutions associated with the restaurant owners' sustainability strategies to increase the study's validity.

For this study, I used Yin's (2017) five steps to explore the themes and categories apparent through the coding process, allowing any new information applicable to the study to surface and better understand the research question. I coded the data both manually and using NVivo Pro software. I used NVivo software to analyze, to organize codes, and to identify emerging themes, in addition to organizing the unstructured data as necessary, triangulating across data sources and through different methods, also called methodological and data triangulation during the coding process (Saunders et al., 2016). Using NVivo software and backing up the data obtained facilitates identifying and saving data (Oswald, 2019). I backed up the material by retaining some paper copies of the data and using NVivo software to help with coding of themes and determining trends in the participants' responses.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Achieving reliability in this study involved using a consistent data collection, organization, and analysis method throughout the research process. Reliability is the consistency in a study (Fusch et al., 2017). Also, DuBois et al. (2017) suggested that researchers use a consistent research process throughout the study to ensure reliability. In another literature, Birt et al. (2016) insisted that establishing, implementing, and maintaining reliability and validity within a study are vital to ensuring a trustworthy result. The sample size remained consistent and adequate representation of the restaurant

owners' population in the northeastern region of the United States. I conducted one-on-one, semistructured interviews with three restaurant owners in the northeastern region of the United States to explore the sustainability strategies that bring success to their restaurants beyond 10 years. To ensure that this study maintains reliability, I used a consistent data collection, organization, and analysis method throughout the research process. A primary concern regarding validity was the potential for research participants to falsify answers to the interview questions (Saunders et al., 2016). The organization of the data collected, recorded, and transcribed might have removed those possibilities. For consistency, each research participant answered the same questions without any modifications.

Validity

Ensuring validity in this study involved rigorous member checking. Trustworthiness, credibility, relevance, and conformability are the qualitative equivalent of quantitative research validation. Stewart et al. (2017) defined trustworthiness as the qualitative equivalent of quantitative validity. Qualitative researchers have advanced several strategies for addressing validity issues. These strategies are: (a) prolonged engagement, (b) triangulation, (c) peer review or debriefing, (d) negative case analysis, (e) clarifying researcher bias, (f) rich thick description, and (g) member checking (Nowell, & Albrecht, 2019). Also, Birt et al. (2016) identified member checking as the most critical step in ensuring trustworthiness/validity. The research method's alignment with the research question is critical in addressing the study's validity and suitability (Lichtenberg et al., 2016). To ensure internal validity in this study, I used member

checking to confirm my interpretation of the interview with each participant. The one-on-one interviews took place at a secure, private location where the restaurant owners felt comfortable. The participants had the opportunity to review the transcribed data summary to ensure accuracy and remove any ambiguity in their answers. Clarifying the researcher's bias also helped to improve data validation. A researcher's bias can be active or passive, and to reduce the bias's effect, a researcher must consider it from all angles (DuBois et al., 2017; Saunders et al., 2016). Marshall and Rossman (2016) encouraged researchers to reject bias to ensure that it does not affect the research study. I avoided the use of bias or leading questions during the interviews.

Transition and Summary

In this section, I restated the purpose of this study and described my role as the researcher. The section provided detailed information on the research method, design, and the targeted population and participant selection strategies. Also, I described my sampling method, data collection, and analysis process. Section 2 contained a logical and sequential list of all the interview questions. Finally, I described measures to ensure validity and reliability in this qualitative study. In the next section, I will provide an overview of the study's findings, applicability to business practice, and social change implications. Also, I will provide some recommendations for further study and the study's conclusion in this section.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the sustainability strategies that restaurant owners used to sustain their businesses beyond 10 years. SMEs play critical roles in sustaining the economies of many countries, including the United States (Anderson & Ronteau, 2017; Tehseen & Ramayah, 2015). The characteristics that enable SMEs to succeed often go hand in hand with a successful entrepreneur (Tehseen & Ramayah, 2015). Many small restaurants are managed by successful entrepreneurs, who become partners with the local community and foster a sense of identity among citizens by building relationships between employees and the local customers they serve (Prange & Pinho, 2017).

Data collection for this study involved a face-to-face, in-person, and virtual (video call) meetings with three restaurant owners in the United States' northeastern region. Using face-to-face interviews and predetermined questions allowed me to control the interview and keep the interviewees focused on the overarching research question (Runfola et al., 2017). I conducted member checking with the participants and reviewed company documents that were related to the study. I used methodological triangulation to analyze the collected data, the company documents, and the relevant existing scholarship. I did not include the names of interviewees and their companies' names in data collection and analysis. Instead, I used coded pseudonyms (P1, P2, and P3) to protect the interviewees' privacy. I used NVivo pro software to categorize the data once I reached saturation. Four themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) personal investment and

identification, (b) proper financial management, (c) strong advertising strategy, and (d) supporting and accommodating staff.

Presentation of the Findings

I used semistructured interviews in this multiple case study and used a Sony ICD-UX560F audio recorder with an extended Sony noise cancellation microphone to record interviews. Both devices were tested and confirmed to be functional before the interviews. I reviewed financial documents from the participants, which included income statements and statements of cash flow. I transcribed the data manually and used NVivo pro to organize the data into manuscripts labeled P1, P2, and P3. I sent my interpretation of the data to each participant for validation as per the member checking procedure.

The data that I collected from the interviews and the review of company documents contained rich information to answer the research question: What sustainability strategies did restaurant owners used to sustain their businesses beyond 10 years? Most of the data collected came from interviews with participants. I reached data saturation when the interviews and review of company documents started to produce repetitive information. Data saturation occurs when the researcher begins to receive repetitive responses from the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). After member checking, I used NVivo pro software to sort, code, and categorize the data. During data analysis, I sorted and categorized codes to support the identification of four themes from the data: (a) personal investment and identification, (b) proper financial management, (c) strong advertising strategy, and (d) supporting and accommodating staff.

Theme Identification and Analysis

The population for this study consisted of three restaurant owners who successfully implemented strategies to sustain their restaurants beyond 10 years. The participants identified obstacles that ranged from administration to operations. The obstacles included high employee turnover, the effect of the pandemic, inadequate entrepreneurship skills, and inadequate financial support. Two participants, P1 and P2, emphasized the importance of adequate education in the recruitment of labor that would meet the restaurant's needs skillwise and financially.

The existing literature links an entrepreneur's characteristics to business success and the ability to sustain a business for an extended period. Certain characteristics may indicate whether entrepreneurs will succeed before they undertake their journey (Hadi & Abdullah, 2018; Hsieh et al., 2019; Mayr et al., 2017). Moreover, entrepreneurs' specific characteristics, such as inner locus of control, self-efficacy, risk propensity, achievement motivation, and social skills, distinguish entrepreneurs from others (Przepiorka, 2016; Soomro et al., 2018). All participants demonstrated that passion, dedication, consistency, and flexibility were critical ingredients of their recipe for success. However, I identified that one participant (P1) lacked adequate knowledge about government financial stimulus available to small business owners, including restaurants.

Restaurant businesses are challenging to study due to complicated factors that make it difficult to understand why some restaurants are successful, and others are not. Some of the factors that make restaurants' success difficult to measure are restaurants' incredibly high business failure levels, low profit levels, and high employee turnover

rates (Van Scheers, 2016). Although it is difficult to define and measure the qualities of successful restaurants, numerous studies have identified contributing factors that may inform restaurant owners' business strategies. To answer the overarching research question, I interviewed owners of three restaurants: a small pizza shop; a full, traditional restaurant serving food and drink; and a fast-food-model restaurant. All three restaurants located in the northeastern region of the United States.

I used an interview protocol (Appendix) as a guide before, during, and after the interviews. Each participant responded to seven semistructured, open-ended interview questions during the interview session. After completing each interview, I thanked the participant, collected and reviewed company documents, and took note of essential information relevant to the study. I coded the transcribed data and conducted member checking with each participant. Birt et al. (2016) identified member checking as the most critical step in confirming the accuracy of data interpretation and ensuring a study's trustworthiness/validity.

Participant 1 (P1) was a small pizza shop owner, Participant 2 (P2) was the owner of a traditional full restaurant, and participant 3 (P3) was the owner of a fast-food restaurant chain with multiple outlets within a few miles of each other. All the participants' responses aligned with the overarching research question, indicating that the restaurant owners used certain strategies, including flexibility, adaptability, consistency, and good customer service, to remain in business.

Table 1

Summary of Emergent Themes and Participant Acknowledgement

Theme # and description	Occurrence
1. Personal investment and identification	P1, P2, P3
2. Proper financial management	P1, P2, P3
3. Strong advertising strategy	P1, P2, P3
4. Supporting and accommodating staff	P1, P2, P3

Note. All the participants acknowledged each of the themes. However, the participants had different approaches to each of the strategies.

Theme 1: Personal Investment and Identification

To various degrees, all participants indicated that they felt personal identification with the businesses they owned. While they expressed this sentiment differently, all viewed their financial, emotional, and temporal investments in their respective businesses as reflective of some greater sense of personal identity. The literature supports the validity of this theme. As Schenkel et al. (2019) indicated, passion is a crucial entrepreneurial behavior element and a vitally important self-efficacy element. Additionally, Jaskiewicz et al. (2015) indicated through the study of ancestrally inherited, family-owned businesses that personal identification with a business can serve as a motivating factor for business owners. According to Zuhir et al. (2019), this type of personal identification improves self-efficacy in the entrepreneur and contributes to organizational growth.

P1 and P2 discussed their identification with their business in terms of personal responsibility and property. Because P1 and P2 own their businesses, they must wholly submit to their businesses' needs and commit to ensuring their respective business successes. The literature supports this assertion. According to Frid et al. (2016), leaders who invest substantial amounts of time and other business resources demonstrate to followers that they will make a meaningful effort to ensure that they succeed. P1 said, "When you own your business, your business is your life [...] So, my feeling is that you constantly think about how [you] can improve the business." P1 discussed how their perception of their business as "their lives" helped encourage them to think about various ways of improving their business perpetually. P1 discussed how working more, saving more, and investing more are the significant ways in which their business and, by extension, their lives could improve. Per Frid et al., this demonstrates a significant level of personal investment on P1's part, which bodes well for the ongoing success of P1's business. This sense of responsibility and ownership was shared by P2, who discussed the importance of providing additional assistance to workers when necessary. P2 said, "we are not the owners that sit up in the office and wait for the report [...]. We are constantly on the floor [...]. We don't ask our staff to do anything that we don't do ourselves." P2 discussed the many ways in which they and their co-owner passively contribute to the business's essential functions, such as cleaning bathrooms, doing dishes, and bussing tables. By performing tasks slated for the lowest ranking employees in the organizational hierarchy, P2 demonstrates an investment in their business, which transcends hierarchy and involves leading by example.

P3's investment in and dedication to their business allows them to use the business in a manner that demonstrates responsibility to their community. P3 discussed how their commitment to serving a particular group within their community informed their decision to keep their business open during the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak, despite being understaffed due to this decision. In this case, P3 demonstrates how their identification with their business determines how they negotiate customer and employee demands. According to P3, identification with their customer base was the reason why they started their business. P3's commitment to that customer base despite unprecedented pandemic-related setbacks was demonstrated in their business behavior. It shows that P3 has a clear sense of personal identification with their business and has a clear sense of how they relate to its success. The existing literature supports this practice. Additionally, Jaskiewicz et al. (2015) found that owners of family-owned businesses consistently expressed admiration for their entrepreneurial ancestors and understood those ancestors as having a meaningful role in defining their business's identity and behavior. Leach's (2017) and Juma et al.'s (2017) studies of SMEs found that many SME owners sought to serve particular interests or communities within their region.

Theme 2: Proper Financial Management

All three participants discussed the importance of proper financial management. Accounts of what constituted proper financial management varied significantly from one participant to another. While P2 and P3 fairly aligned in the financial principles that they found important, P1's recommendations reflected a less nuanced understanding of business finance. Although the participants' perspectives in this regard are in significant

conflict, they thematically cohere for two reasons. First, concern with proper financial management was expressed by all participants. Second, the gaps in P1's understanding of financial management effectively illustrate a point made by P3 about small business management. The points noted by Participant 1 are coherent with the literature as noted by Frid et al. (2016) and De Massis et al. (2018) in research on successful entrepreneurship and resiliency.

P3 pointed out that limited understanding of finance is why small businesses fail and emphasized how many small business owners do not understand basic tenets of financial management. P3 found that most small business owners focus on using their personal savings as a means of financing their businesses; specifically, P3 identified business owners' limited understanding of how to use revolving lines of credit to finance inventory and payroll separately. Additionally, accessing public financing is a major obstacle to SME success. To P3's point, P1 discussed both a general hesitancy to borrow money—speaking to a general policy of only moving forward in business dealings if the transactions are cash only—and a desire to limit expanding the business due to its impact on profit margins. P3 discussed putting a substantial amount of time into creating a growth-minded business plan that banks would accept, leaving banks eager to lend money equitably. P3 further noted the importance of finding low-interest public financing and grants to ensure that business overhead is as low cost as possible. The existing literature demonstrates support for both P3's and P1's points of view. De Massis et al. (2018) and Frid et al. (2016) agreed that entrepreneurs with significant personal financial investment in a new business effort are more likely to attract greater numbers of outside

investors and continue to survive. At the same time, De Massis et al. stated that personal financial investment on the part of an entrepreneur is not the only determinant of an SME's ongoing success. However, Frid et al. found that a lack of funding can be a significant hindrance to the survival of an enterprise.

P2 discussed the challenges that being a member of a minority group attempting to start a small business presents as it pertains to securing additional business funding. P2 thought that the bank with which they initially attempted to work was a predatory lender and sought to utilize business loans from other businesspeople of color within their community. The literature supports P2's points about obstacles that banks pose to people of color trying to secure business loans. Melati et al. (2018) and Lee (2018) found that among entrepreneurs, fewer who were members of minority groups secured bank loans than White applicants did.

P2 discussed the importance of having a strong sense of financial prioritization and making savings estimates to adjust for a financial year's ups and downs. P2 identified paying their vendors as their most important financial obligation and ensured that vendors got paid before covering their own salary. P2 also found a meaningful business-related learning experience when trying to navigate the real estate market. P2 cited losing their lease and purchasing another building as a major learning experience. During the purchasing and moving process, P2 ensured that the new building was properly renovated and that facilities were maintained to limit the impacts of "surprise" future spending and optimize workflow in the new location. Another major challenge for P2 was that increased investment in the new building led to P2 having to borrow operating costs. This

adaptability demonstrates resilience and bodes well for P2's ongoing participation in the restaurant market. P2 experienced a challenge in finding space for their restaurant, leading to a challenging series of experiences, but managed to persevere without getting discouraged; according to Garney et al. (2017), this demonstrates profound leadership strength and may allow P2's restaurant continued success. Ayala and Manzano (2014) found that entrepreneurs build resilience over extended periods and that repeated exposure to challenging experiences is a crucial means to build resilience.

Theme 3: Strong Advertising Strategy

All three participants discussed the importance of developing a solid advertising strategy to ensure that potential customers know their businesses. The existing literature on restaurant entrepreneurship supports this argument. Shaw and Jones (2005) found that SMEs seeking to survive must have a comprehensive marketing plan to maximize their customer base. The impacts that additional marketing expenditures can have on a restaurant business are quite significant. P3 directly discussed the positive financial impacts of advertising. P3's advertising budget went from \$1,000 a year to \$15,000 a month within 3 years; this investment paid off significantly. P3 found that by increasing advertising spending, sales increased at rates between 30% and 40% a year.

Using food discounts and giveaways to demonstrate community-mindedness was another advertising strategy that the participants discussed. P1 described donating food to local elementary schools as a strong strategy for gaining exposure to local families. By donating food to school events and food coupons as an incentive that teachers can use to encourage student achievement, P1's organization can build a strong relationship with the

community. Through this advertising strategy, P1's business builds a presence with community members, builds a working relationship with potentially significant customers, and demonstrates their sense of values. P2 also discussed the importance of giving back to the community and its promotional value. Specifically, P2 discussed using food donation as a promotional tool; P2 sends free food to organizations hosting events and individuals who have recently experienced hardships as a gesture of neighborly goodwill. Such acts demonstrate restaurant owners' commitments to the communities that they serve while also promoting further word-of-mouth promotion of their business. The existing literature supports these marketing approaches; Handriana (2016) found that customer loyalty is a key element of ensuring long-term SME survival.

Furthermore, Sánchez-Gutiérrez et al. (2019) identified that the combination of customer relationship management and marketing innovation might be a significant contributor to SME success. In this respect, P1 and P2 demonstrated a desire to expand customer relationships by fostering a sense of localist obligation and mutual concern. Offering discounts to particular customer groups was another type of advertising strategy identified. P1 discussed their targeting of university students in their advertising strategies. P1 sought to attract business from students of the two colleges in the community. P1's promotional plan for college students involved giving them significant discounts (between 10% and 25% off). P1 views this as a strong strategy for ensuring ongoing customer loyalty from college students in the local market. This strategy demonstrates P1's awareness of customer needs, as college students are often financially limited.

Changes in media infrastructure have had significant impacts on the approaches that all participants took to advertising. As outlined in the literature review, one of the SME model's strengths is the SME's ability to adapt to new market pressures and needs (Tehseen & Ramayah, 2015). P2 emphasized the importance of social media marketing. As P2 stated, "[if] you've been doing print ads before, or commercials before, people don't watch commercials, and they don't read the newspaper. Now [our advertisement approach is] about 80% social media." P3 has found similar business growth from expanding their restaurant's social media presence; P3 discussed hiring a local student to provide online brand management services. Participants have also utilized non-internet-based advertisements. P3 discussed collaborating with a local radio station on a local advertising campaign. Not all the advertising strategies that participants discussed were successful. P1 discussed trying diverse advertising techniques to understand better what works in each market and have limited success. P1 cited their personal experience with purchasing unsuccessful advertising space in newspapers and sending out coupon mailers as meaningful learning experiences regarding advertisements. Here, P1 displays resilience, something that Ayala and Manzano (2014) identified as a critical trait for a successful entrepreneur. Also, an entrepreneur's resilience translates to the business's resilience (Branicki et al., 2018; Fatoki, 2018). The willingness to make mistakes and the ability to recover from those mistakes and ultimately learn from those mistakes differentiate an entrepreneur from others.

Theme 4: Supporting and Accommodating Staff

All three participants discussed the importance of supporting and accommodating staff to ensure employee morale is high and to limit employee turnover. The existing literature supports the argument on the effect of employee turnover. Van Scheers (2016) found that employee turnover rates are typical throughout the restaurant industry and that respectful treatment of employees is a significant indicator of ongoing restaurant success. Smith (1996) corroborated this account, finding that staff members' respect was a fundamental condition for successful restaurant growth.

P3 identified stability in labor turnover as a critical obstacle to sustaining a restaurant business. P3 emphasized that the number of customers coming into the restaurant might not translate to revenue if there is a shortage of employees to service them. The hourly nature of restaurant work, P3 claimed, leads to high levels of employee turnover. According to P3, without meeting the employee's labor needs, the business is in a state of precarity. To remedy high employee turnover levels and to ensure greater levels of employee's satisfaction, P3 discussed hiring and providing boarding for international employees. P3 indicated he supports employees and gives each employee the appropriate attention they need to develop into exceptional employees. Additionally, P3 stated many of their employees ultimately become strong managers or outgrow the business, which enables them to go and start their restaurants. By giving support to employees in this manner, P3 limits employee turnover, boost employee morale, and ultimately allows P3 to develop lasting ties with new business owners. P3 seemed to suggest that this "familiar" atmosphere of employee support manifests in customer experience. P3's high

level of employee investment has positive implications for growth, as supported by the existing scholarship. Dhiman and Marques (2011) found that owners and managers who demonstrate genuine investment in staff lead to employees with high levels of commitment to the firm's success; this committed staff can significantly help a restaurant lead to growth. Employee investment, particularly in the extensive manner P3 performs it, can also be understood as an owner making a financial investment in their business. This practice is in line with Frid et al.'s (2016) assertion that entrepreneurs who put significant financial investments in their businesses tend to be more successful.

P1 and P2 also agreed that employee turnover was a significant challenge but attempted to remedy their respective staffing setbacks in very different ways. P1 found that strictness with employees often added to turnover-related problems and instead sought to become more flexible regarding time off. P1 acknowledged that it is impossible to keep a balance between disciplined and experienced employees. At the same time, P1 recognized that undisciplined staff members could cause a significant hindrance to productivity. P1 ultimately found that the experience of an experienced employee is needed to improve workflow. P2 discussed the importance of developing a sense of pride amongst staff members. Like P3, P2 recognized that staff members often have mentally taxing work, citing customers' high expectations and occasional tendency to treat staff with hostility as a particular indignity. P2 discussed ensuring that employees felt valued at work but suggested that certain categories of employees cannot be adequately engaged. P2 also discussed going out of their way to assist the understaffed department in ensuring that all aspects of the business are running as smoothly as possible. These practices

demonstrate a stage in Ayala and Manzano's (2014) and Frid et al.'s (2016) models of resiliency. Both P1 and P2 recognize a significant organizational problem and attempt to find sustainable methods of addressing this problem. This common problem within the restaurant industry has many idiosyncratic solutions; only through diligent evaluations of their businesses can P1 and P2 adequately address employee turnover in their context (Van Scheers, 2016). Here, both participants demonstrated an early stage of this process.

Applications to Professional Practice

This study focused on the strategies three restaurant owners in the northeastern United States used to keep their businesses afloat for at least ten years. The strategies discussed in this study may provide useful information for established restaurant owners who are seeking to expand or maintain their business past the ten-year mark. Restaurant owners seeking to explore entrepreneurship theory and SME sustainability strategies may find this study useful for understanding its tenets and potential applications.

The three participants owned and operate different model of restaurants. The model ranges from a pizza shop with less than 10 employees, traditional restaurant with employees between 10 – 20, and a fast-food model of about 50 employees. Despite variation in size and model, all participants identified similar obstacles, and commitment to overcoming any barrier to sustaining their businesses. The suggestions and themes from this study have broad applicability to many different types of restaurant businesses. They do not only provide information tailored to particular restaurant business models or particular types of restaurants.

Implications for Social Change

The outcome of this study may contribute to positive social change. Restaurant owners might learn strategies for becoming more economically secure, reducing employee turnover, and performing greater community outreach, all of which contribute to staying in business. Longstanding businesses with firm ties to the communities they serve may create a more coherent sense of unity within the business and the community.

Recommendations for Action

The results of this study could help restaurant owners create new strategies for sustaining their businesses. This study's outcome could have positive implications for growing restaurant businesses, increasing effective advertising strategies for restaurant businesses, and increasing job retention rates within the restaurant industry. Considering these possible implications, restaurant owners should consider the following recommendations:

- Stay loyal to well-established customer bases.
- Take a visible role in providing support within the restaurant.
- Limit reliance on bank loans.
- Find low-cost lending options.
- Utilize a multimedia advertising strategy.
- Perform acts of community outreach as a part of advertising strategy.
- Invest in employee growth.
- Try new things to ensure the best possible solution is identified.

To encourage restaurant owners to utilize these potentially effective strategies, I will give each person who participated in this study a summary of the findings after this study has been made widely available. Further, I will share summaries of this study with restaurant managers, owners, and other foodservice professionals.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study helped expand knowledge regarding sustainability strategies for independent restaurant owners. Although this study allowed for new knowledge creation to occur, by no means does it, suggest a conclusive understanding of sustainability strategies. There are some limitations to this study, and further research is necessary to create a fuller understanding of the topic. One such limitation that researchers might address in further research is location. All the participants featured within this study were located within the northeastern region of the United States. While most of this study's conclusions may likely transfer across geographic locations, the specific demographics, infrastructure, and markets within this region are unique; thus, the impacts of this geographical location may not be readily visible. Dedicated studies of particular cities or metropolitan areas within the northeastern United States and studies of different geographical regions may be conducted with a similar methodology to expand knowledge of restaurant owner sustainability strategies.

One theme, which was raised and perhaps warranted further study, is the impact of an entrepreneur's personal identification with their business and its impacts on longevity. As Theme 1 suggests, all three of the participants seemed to understand their respective businesses as meaningful extensions of themselves. Most concretely, P3

implicitly identified an abiding sense of responsibility to a particular diasporic group as a motivating factor for keeping their business alive. A phenomenological study of personal identification with business may be worthwhile for studying entrepreneurial sustainability.

Another theme that may warrant further research is finance methodology for small businesses. Theme 2 demonstrated a meaningful disagreement between two participants on successful financial management, which was not adequately addressed by the literature on entrepreneurship characteristics. While a review of the literature regarding SME financial management may be a useful means of expanding knowledge on this issue, a comparative multi-case study of successful restaurant owners with a particular focus on financial strategies may be another generative means of expanding knowledge on restaurant entrepreneurship.

Reflections

When I first started working on my DBA, I had no idea what a challenging and rewarding process I had before me. The intricacies of entrepreneurship theory and business scholarship at large were much less familiar to me than I had initially anticipated. Putting in the work to ensure that my dissertation was up to the high standards Walden expected of me was a daunting and rigorous process. Ultimately, if I had to do this dissertation again, I would have budgeted more time for performing a literature review, and I would have perhaps interviewed more regional restaurant owners to collect more data. Summarily, I feel a great sense of satisfaction with this work. Also, I

look forward to continuing the learning process and continue to grow within the business world and feel very prepared for my next steps.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multi-case study was to explore strategies that restaurant owners used to sustain their businesses beyond ten years. In this study, the three participants featured all owned restaurants in the northeastern United States, which had been in business for longer than ten years. I analyzed data collected through interviews alongside existing literature on entrepreneurship theory and restaurant entrepreneurship. During data analysis, I identified four themes in response to the research question, “What sustainability strategies did restaurant owners used to sustain their businesses beyond 10 years?” These four themes were: (a) personal investment and identification, (b) proper financial management, (c) strong advertising strategy, and (d) supporting and accommodating staff.

The data analysis suggested that to sustain a restaurant business beyond ten years, employees should stay loyal to restaurants, and the owner must build well-established customer bases. Also, owners must play a visible role in providing support within the restaurant, limit reliance on bank loans, find low-cost lending options, utilize a multimedia advertising strategy, perform acts of community outreach as a part of the advertising strategy, invest in employee growth, and try new things to ensure the best possible solution is identified. The strategies and themes that this study identified may be a significant asset for restaurant owners looking to strengthen their business’ longevity, efficacy, profitability, and sense of community.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Participant coded Name:	
Interview Date	Interview Time
Researcher Do	Researchers Say
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce self to participant • Go through the consent form, and answer questions, and/or concerns of participant on the consent form. 	<p>A. Good day Mr/ Mrs XXX. My name is Tajudeen Olatunji, a doctoral student in the department of Business management of Walden University, I am conducting a research on Sustainability Strategies for small restaurants in the northeastern of the United States.</p> <p>B. Thank you for your time, I appreciate your participation in this study.</p> <p>C. I believe you have read, understood, and content to the agreement in the informed consent form. If you have questions or concerns on the process or the study, I will be glad to attend to them before we start the interview.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn on recording devices • Follow procedures to introduce participants with pseudonym / coded identification; note the date and time • Begin interview with question #1; follow through to final question • Follow up with additional questions • End the interview session and discuss member checking with the participant. • Thank the participant for his/her participation in the study. Confirm contact phone number for follow up questions or concerns from participants • End of the interview protocol. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What sustainability strategies have you used to keep your restaurant in business? 2. What sustainability strategies are you currently using to keep your restaurant in business? 3. What key obstacles did you have to address to keep your restaurant in business? 4. How did you overcome each of the key obstacles to sustaining your business beyond 10 years? 5. How do you evaluate whether each sustainability strategy that you have implemented is effective or not? 6. How, if at all, have you improved your business's sustainability strategy over time?
<p>Wrap up the interview by thanking participant for sharing his/her experience and time.</p>	<p>Thanks for sparing time to share your experiences with me. I will transcribe the interview recording and bring you a copy within the next 2 days for a review to ensure the correctness of the interview data.</p>

Schedule follow-up member checking interview	I would appreciate if we agree on time to meet for review of the recordings and interpretation of interviews for approximately 30 minutes.
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