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Effective Digital Marketing Strategies for Small Businesses in the Caribbean

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Nicole Williams Smith

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Effective Digital Marketing Strategies for Small Businesses in the Caribbean

by

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MS, Kaplan University, 2016

B.A., University of Western Ontario, 1991

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

June 2021

Abstract

A thriving small business sector is vital to Caribbean countries' economies; however, nearly 60% of small businesses fail within the first 10 years, partially because of poor marketing. Caribbean small businesses with ineffective digital marketing strategies may fail to attract the buyers necessary to sustain their organization. Grounded in the competitive advantage theory, the purpose of this study was to explore the digital marketing strategies that Caribbean small business owners use to sustain their organizations beyond 10 years. Using the case study research design, the participants consisted of 7 small business owners who operate in a Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) country and successfully used digital marketing strategies to help their organization surpass 10 years of operation. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and review of business documents and artifacts and analyzed using thematic analysis. Five themes emerged from the data: metrics, social media, differentiation, websites, and digital technology. A key recommendation is for small business owners to keep abreast of emerging digital technology like artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, blockchain, and big data. The subsequent positive social change resulting from successful small businesses might increase employment opportunities in local communities.

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Dedication

This academic achievement is the result of my parent's hard work, dedication, and sacrifice to ensure I always had access to quality education during my formative years and beyond. Thank you to my mother for showing me firsthand that you are never too old to pursue higher education. Your perseverance positively impacted the child who colored beside you while you studied every evening. Thank you for being an excellent role model for juggling work, school, motherhood, marriage, and the craziness of life in general. This accomplishment is a gift I wish she had lived to see. I also dedicate this achievement to my husband and my son. The practical success of my doctoral journey is primarily due to their patience, understanding, and support. To my father, sister, other family members, and friends, thank you for keeping me focused when I began to waver. Finally, to other parents of special needs children, never let a difficult path derail the pursuit of your dreams. Continue to learn, grow, and thrive regardless of the hurdles faced by you and your family.

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The principles instilled in me by my parents provided the foundation on which I was able to manage and complete this monumental undertaking. And while my mother was not alive when I began this doctoral journey, her memory and drive were the inspiration that fortified me through many seemingly insurmountable hurdles. My husband, son, father, and family were also sources of invaluable encouragement and support.

My Walden experience would not have been successful without the contribution of my chair, Dr. Cheryl Lentz. Thank you for your patience and guidance during this journey. I also acknowledge my additional DBA committee members, Dr. Dina Samora and Dr. Williams Stokes, for their valuable participation.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Section 1 includes an overview of the business problem and the methodology used to explore the effective digital marketing strategies that Caribbean small business owners use to sustain their organizations beyond 10 years. This section also contains justification for the need for new research into this business problem and information about the conceptual framework for this study. Section 1 concludes with a critical review of the professional and academic literature regarding effective digital marketing strategies for Caribbean small businesses.

Background of the Problem

Marketing is a significant factor that impacts a business' performance and competitiveness (Sadiku-Dushi et al., 2019). Digital tools, such as the Internet, mobile devices, and social media have a prominent role in a business' marketing strategy (Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019). Leveraging digital tools is necessary for growing businesses (Linton & Solomon, 2017). Businesses use digital marketing tools such as social media to improve their performance, increase profitability, and thereby achieve a competitive advantage (Etter et al., 2019; Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019). However, to be effective, digital marketing requires a well-executed strategy (Negoiță et al., 2018).

Marketing knowledge is critical to a business's success (Bacon & Schneider, 2019). However, many small business owners lack the marketing knowledge professional marketers possess (Bacon & Schneider, 2019). Business owners with an awareness of effective marketing strategies are proficient at getting buyers (Eryigit, 2017). Using an

effective digital marketing strategy can reduce the odds of failure by allocating funds on the activities that attract customers to sustain the business (Gilmore & Carson, 2018).

Globally, small businesses are a critical part of any local economy (Resnick et al., 2016). In the Caribbean, economic development depends on these businesses' successful growth (Alleyne et al., 2017). Research shows that many small businesses in the region are failing to thrive (Alleyne et al., 2017). A lack of knowledge, small domestic markets, and persistent vulnerability to external shocks continue to challenge businesses in this region (Alleyne et al., 2017). Digital tools help eliminate some of the growth obstacles, such as time and distance between Caribbean businesses and their customers (Amaghionyeodiwe & Annansingh-Jamieson, 2017).

Problem Statement

Regional barriers exacerbate persistent business challenges for small businesses in small, vulnerable economies such as in the Caribbean (Minto-Coy et al., 2016; Pacheco & Pacheco, 2020). A 2015 study of 380 small businesses in the Caribbean country of Guyana showed a failure rate of 59% (224 businesses) within the first 10 years of operation, in part because of poor marketing (Bandyopadhyay, 2016; Pasha et al., 2018). The general business problem is small business owners unable to develop effective digital marketing strategies may not successfully sustain their organization. The specific business problem is that some Caribbean small business owners lack effective digital marketing strategies to help sustain their organizations beyond 10 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore effective digital marketing strategies that Caribbean small business owners use to sustain their organizations beyond 10 years. The research population included Caribbean small businesses. To ensure a higher degree of certainty, Yin (2018) suggested multiple case studies contain five or more cases to explore a straightforward phenomenon and theory. Therefore, this study's sample was seven business owners in the Caribbean who developed effective digital marketing strategies to help sustain their organizations beyond 10 years. The implications for positive social change are that businesses with effective digital marketing strategies thriving beyond 10 years can continue or increase the numbers of employed individuals and improve the economic opportunities for communities in small nations within the Caribbean (Minto-Coy et al., 2016).

Nature of the Study

There are three methodological choices for doctoral research: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). A quantitative method is a deductive approach to solving business issues by examining statistical associations among variables (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). The quantitative method involves forming a hypothesis and then testing the assumption to determine if the hypothesis is correct (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). By contrast, qualitative researchers use an inductive approach to explore a phenomenon via research techniques such as interviews, observation, and focus groups (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). The final option is to use both methodologies to produce data via a mixed method study (Yin, 2018). The objective

of this study was to explore the business phenomenon of effective digital marketing strategies and obtain in-depth information on how small businesses in the Caribbean use digital marketing to be sustainable for more than 10 years (Dasgupta, 2015; Göttfert, 2016). Because the intent was not to collect and interpret statistical data for examining variables' relationships, neither the quantitative nor mixed method was appropriate for this study (Göttfert, 2016).

Phenomenology, ethnography, and case studies are examples of qualitative research designs. Scholars use the phenomenology design when the research is about the life experiences with phenomena (Mohajan, 2018). Because this study was not about using interview data to provide an understanding of a phenomenon that several people experienced over a period of time, the phenomenology design was not appropriate for this study. Ethnography involves a researcher participating in a lengthy observation of participants' everyday lives to gain cultural insight (Mohajan, 2018). Because this study was about the digital marketing strategies of Caribbean small businesses use and not on Caribbean culture, ethnography was not a suitable research design.

The research design for this study was the multiple case study because the approach allows researchers to identify and understand themes via intense, in-depth inquiry (Alpi & Evans, 2019). Data from the case study approach is comprehensive and can provide real-world insight into a business problem (Alpi & Evans, 2019; Morgan et al., 2017; Yin, 2018). Researchers using multiple case studies are more rigorous because of replication logic; each case is independent, and additional findings from subsequent cases add credibility to original data (Docherty, 2018). Researchers using multiple case

study can do a cross-case analysis, which can improve the credibility of results (Dasgupta, 2015; Docherty, 2018). This was an additional reason why the multiple case study was the appropriate design for this study.

Research Question

RQ: What effective digital marketing strategies do small Caribbean business owners use to sustain their organization beyond 10 years?

Interview Questions

1. What effective digital marketing strategies did your organization use to sustain the business beyond 10 years of operation?
2. How would you describe the evolution of your business' digital marketing strategy?
3. What key barriers did the business face implementing digital marketing strategies?
4. How did your organization address the key barriers to implementing the digital marketing strategy?
5. What performance metrics did you use to track the efficacy of your digital marketing strategy?
6. What were the most significant outcomes, as measured by your performance metrics, resulting from those digital marketing strategies?
7. Which digital marketing strategies, as measured by your performance metrics, had the most impact in sustaining the business beyond 10 years of operation?

8. What else can you share about the digital marketing strategies your organization developed and deployed to achieve and maintain sustainability?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was Porter's (1980) competitive strategy theory. Porter's competitive strategy is the cornerstone of multiple management and leadership studies (as cited in Worsley, 2016). The central principle of the competitive strategy theory is that as businesses create more consumer value for their goods or services, the business will generate more revenue than their competitors (Porter, 2008). Competition is a reality for organizations because the public can choose to become involved with, purchase from, or enroll with multiple organizations (Worsley, 2016). Lin and Tsai (2016) determined the importance of businesses attaining a competitive advantage. There are two ways an organization can achieve competitive advantage: cost leadership and product differentiation (Malkawi et al., 2018). Business owners use cost leadership and differentiation to find a way to achieve business sustainability, especially in a competitive environment (Al-Rdaydeh et al., 2018). A business achieves a competitive advantage when the business outperforms its competitors (Malkawi et al., 2018).

Once a business has a competitive advantage, differentiating itself in ways that a rival cannot imitate is how the edge is maintained (Al-Rdaydeh et al., 2018). Differentiation involves the way a business sets itself apart from its rivals via emphasizing features or services their opponents cannot duplicate (Al-Rdaydeh et al., 2018). Creative strategies are often the best option to overcome rivals (Worsley, 2016).

One of marketing's core functions is to creatively differentiate a business's goods or services to potential customers (Kaleka & Morgan, 2019). Porter's (1990) viewpoint also included international tenets that filter global study data (as cited in Reyes & Useche, 2019). Hence, Porter's competitive strategy theory was a suitable lens through which to view information from this study's findings from exploring digital marketing strategies that help Caribbean small businesses achieve and sustain a competitive advantage.

Operational Definitions

Business sustainability: Business sustainability is the economic survival, growth, and continuity of business (Amin Mohamad & Chin, 2019).

Competitive advantage: Competitive advantage is the ability of a business to outperform its rivals (Arbi et al., 2017).

Digital marketing: Digital marketing is the promotion of something of value through electronic distribution tools like computers or hand-held devices such as smartphones (Nikunen et al., 2017).

Marketing: The American Marketing Association (2017) defined marketing as all actions, institutions, and processes involved in developing, communicating, providing, and exchanging something of value for consumers, associates, and the community (as cited in Liu, 2017; Putsenteilo et al., 2018).

Marketing performance: The performance standards a business assesses regarding the outcomes of marketing-related activities (Katsikeas et al., 2016).

Small business: The definition of what constitutes a small business varies based on the level of a country's economic activity and its development (Maduku et al., 2016;

Omelogo, 2019). Some of the common characteristics used to identify small businesses include a for-profit orientation, independent or partnership ownership structure, and if the business has limited sales, revenue, assets, and market share (Omelogo, 2019; Pasha et al., 2018). In the absence of a definitive definition of what constitutes a Caribbean small business, this study used the U.S. definition, which is a business with fewer than 500 employees (Bacon & Schneider, 2019).

Social media: Social media is any Internet-based application that allows users to create, consume, and exchange user-generated content (Vinerean, 2017).

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM): Formerly known as the Caribbean Community and Common Market, CARICOM is the Caribbean regional governance and integration entity that develops cooperative strategies among the 15 members and five associate member countries (Dos Santos, 2019; Fenton, 2017; Lim & Simmons, 2016). CARICOM members are independent nations and nonsovereign territories, many of which are also islands (Armstrong & Read, 2018).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

An assumption is something accepted as true but that lacks verifiable proof (Schoenung & Dikova, 2016). Assumptions can impact the design of a study, what data eventually emerges, the analysis of that data, as well as the findings and recommendations in the study (Cleland, 2017; Degen, 2017). There were several assumptions associated with this study of effective digital marketing strategies that help Caribbean small businesses achieve and sustain a competitive advantage. The first

assumption was that all participants would provide truthful responses to the open-ended interview questions. Additional assumptions were that each participant engaged in regular marketing programs for their business had adequate knowledge about the phenomenon under study and would share that knowledge for this study. The final assumption was that any archival records and business documents, such as sales or social media data, would be made available and were authentic and accurate. Paperwork such as business records is a source of secondary data that can corroborate participant's responses (Cleland, 2017).

Limitations

A limitation is an uncontrollable circumstance that can potentially weaken a study (Morgado et al., 2017). Limitations of a study can influence confidence in any findings (Munthe-Kaas et al., 2019). A limitation of this study was that the participants were from a small business operating in English-speaking CARICOM countries. The results might differ in CARICOM countries where English is not the national language. A second limitation of this study was the ability of participants to recall events accurately. Time constraints were another limitation of this study. The schedule and timeframe of the doctoral program placed limits on the ability to broaden the collecting of information from participants from all CARICOM countries. While 20 CARICOM members exist, this study interviewed seven participants from CARICOM countries as determined by data saturation. The final limitation was the varying levels of operational data available from Caribbean small businesses. Though there was every attempt to access the most current regional data, such as the use of peer-reviewed articles and government sources,

the operational data depended on the levels of support documentation on organizational activities in each business.

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries set by a researcher for a study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The scope of this multiple case study was digital marketing strategies that help Caribbean small businesses achieve and sustain a competitive advantage. There was a specific geographical restriction to jurisdictions to include CARICOM members. Study participants were only small business owners who engage in digital marketing. Finally, the small businesses needed to be operational for more than 10 years. This study contained no data from small business owners whose business was operational for less than 10 years.

Significance of the Study

This study is potentially significant because of the substantial role small businesses play in global economies (Daengs et al., 2019; Omelogo, 2019; Williams-Morgan, 2017). In small island nations, such as those in the Caribbean, small businesses are vital to the nations' economies because businesses are valuable job creators (Williams-Morgan, 2017). When small businesses thrive, they hire employees, thereby benefitting local economies (Minto-Coy et al., 2016). Digital marketing strategies can help small businesses reduce the probability of failing by growing into profitable and sustainable entities.

Marketing models help business decision-makers to make better choices (Eryigit, 2017; Tarka, 2018). However, some business owners lack knowledge of effective digital

marketing strategies to help sustain their organizations beyond 10 years. Effective digital marketing strategies can reduce the probability of failure by focusing small businesses' limited budgets on the tactics that attract customers to sustain their operations (Gilmore & Carson, 2018).

The results of this study can also have implications for effecting beneficial social change in the Caribbean region. There is an undercurrent of hopelessness among the populations of the West Indies that continues to cause community violence (Wessinger, 2016). For some islands, the poverty rate is in the double digits (Minto-Coy et al., 2016). Small businesses positively impact the economic and social welfare of developing countries, such as those in the Caribbean (Shallow, 2017). New small businesses promote job creation (Minto-Coy et al., 2016). Profitable new businesses improve national employment rates, grow the economy, and decrease crime rates (Shallow, 2017).

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore effective digital marketing strategies that help Caribbean small businesses remain profitable for more than 10 years. This literature review explored various digital marketing strategies for small businesses through the competitive strategy theory. The review included 123 reports and peer-reviewed journal articles. A total of 88% of the references were peer-reviewed journal articles with publication dates between 2017 and 2021. This review provided a thorough evaluation of information collected from peer-reviewed journals, government websites, and published doctoral dissertations.

The object of this literature review was to explore relevant published information on the topic of digital marketing strategies in small Caribbean businesses to contribute depth and understanding and to identify the need for the study. Peer-reviewed articles and dissertations came from the Walden University Library, Google Scholar, and government websites. The literature review search strategy included using the following keywords: *competitive strategy theory; marketing and small businesses; marketing strategy; marketing's impact on profitability; digital marketing and small businesses; social media and small businesses; the Caribbean; Caribbean small businesses; and Caribbean digital marketing*. The next subsection begins with an overview of the competitive strategy theory, digital technology, and digital marketing. The subsection also includes a review of the various digital marketing tools used by small businesses, as well as background on the Caribbean.

Overview of Competitive Strategy Theory

This study used Porter's (1980) competitive strategy theory as a conceptual framework. Porter's competitive strategy theory is the theoretical basis of many studies (as cited in Worsley, 2016). The essence of Porter's theory is that a business that creates consumer value for their products generates more sales than their rivals (as cited in Daengs et al., 2019). Once companies develop this perceived value among consumers, they have a competitive advantage over their rivals (Kaleka & Morgan, 2017). Businesses can achieve this competitive advantage by either focusing on cost or differentiation (Al-Rdaydeh et al., 2018; Brett, 2018; Liu & Atuahene-Gima, 2018; Quaye & Mensah, 2018). Competitive advantage is a strategic theory that Caribbean businesses could use to

sustain their organization beyond 10 years. This study included an exploration of how Caribbean business owners could leverage the competitive strategy theory to ensure their digital marketing strategies sustain their small business.

Barney (2001) and Porter (1991), agreed that competitive advantage was a business' superior performance; however, Barney (1991, 1997) championed the view that a business achieved its advantage via resources (as cited in Arbi et al., 2017). By leveraging digital resources like the Internet, small businesses can inexpensively transmit information for commercial or social purposes around the globe (García et al., 2019). Digital marketing, which leverages the Internet, is a fundamental business tool because it is a marketing alternative that can reduce a business's traditional marketing costs (Dumitriu et al., 2019; García et al., 2019). Because cost focus is a way to achieve a competitive advantage, Caribbean small businesses could use digital marketing to help achieve and sustain a competitive advantage.

Similar to Porter (1980), Conner (1991) believed that businesses gained a competitive advantage when its goods or services were distinctive in the eyes of the consumer (as cited in Bednarz et al., 2017). Hall (1993) identified intangible resources, such as a brand, as potential sources of competitive advantage (as cited in Bednarz et al., 2017). A brand is an intangible yet powerful business asset that can help achieve a competitive advantage (Dumitriu et al., 2019; Honarmandi et al., 2019; Kim & Yoon, 2018; Liu & Atuahene-Gima, 2018). If a small business's goal is to create a sustainable competitive advantage, it should differentiate its brand from its competitors, and its digital marketing must emphasize that differentiation (Dumitriu et al., 2019; Gómez et al.,

2019). According to Williams and Ramdani (2018), Caribbean small business success depends on brand development; hence, using digital marketing to promote brand differentiation might help small businesses in this region achieve and sustain a competitive advantage.

Porter's (1980) theory focuses on business strategy at a managerial level, making it an ideal framework to explore effective digital marketing strategies for Caribbean small businesses. Because of its tactical approach, Porter's theory is central to strategic business management. A strategy is a defensive business tactic that helps businesses succeed and achieve goals (Porter, 2008). Some managers have difficulty determining which strategies help maintain or acquire a competitive advantage for their business (Arbi et al., 2017). If managers do not find a unique source of competitive advantage, the objective of long-term sustainability becomes unobtainable (Arbi et al., 2017). Sustainable competitive advantage means the long-term existence of competitive advantage (Arbi et al., 2017). Because Caribbean businesses are not immune to competitive forces, small business owners must learn how to develop a competitive advantage (Beharry & Pun, 2011). This study included exploration of how effective digital marketing help Caribbean small business owners achieve that competitive advantage.

Proponents of the market-based perspective believe competitive advantage results from either a good or service's performance or socioeconomic environment such as culture (Arbi et al., 2017). Morgan and Hunt (1996) linked this theory to marketing by noting that mutual trust and engagement built extraordinary relations between businesses and customers, bonds rivals cannot copy (as cited in Bednarz et al., 2017). This unique

relationship morphs into a competitive advantage (Bednarz et al., 2017). The diverse consumer demographic and landscape in the West Indies increases the difficulty for quantitative studies to detect variables, like consumer culture or geographical location, that could help Caribbean small businesses achieve a sustainable competitive advantage (Williams & Ramdani, 2018). The Caribbean region has linguistic blocs that reflect the different colonial rulers in the area: Spanish, English, French, and Dutch (Benitez-Rojo, 2018). Colonization, its historical Atlantic economy, slavery, the struggle for independence, and American influence further complicated the Caribbean sociocultural system (Benitez-Rojo, 2018). Hence, a qualitative exploration was the ideal method to determine effective digital marketing strategies that help Caribbean small businesses achieve and sustain a competitive advantage.

Research showed that one way a business can gain a competitive advantage was to be innovative in ways their competitors were not (Elrod & Fortenberry, 2018). Small businesses cannot reach competitiveness and profitability without innovatively adopting the appropriate technology (Herhausen et al., 2020; Maduku et al., 2016; Neirotti & Raguseo, 2017). Digital technology allows businesses the opportunity to access vast amounts of consumer data that can help them better meet their wants and thereby achieve a competitive advantage (Bartosik-Purgat & Ratajczak-Mrozek, 2018; Gupta et al., 2020). The Internet and mobile activities of both consumers and businesses provide insight into consumers' needs and behaviors (Bartosik-Purgat & Ratajczak-Mrozek, 2018). Using the data analysis from digital sources also gives businesses a chance to develop customer relationship competitive advantages (Bartosik-Purgat & Ratajczak-

Mrozek, 2018). Caribbean small businesses that need to achieve a competitive advantage could leverage and implement technology rather than product differentiation (Beharry & Pun, 2011). However, many Caribbean businesses do not engage in any innovative behavior (Broome et al., 2018; Dagher, 2019). Because small business innovation brings opportunities and is key to long-term competitiveness (Aksoy, 2017), this study focused on those Caribbean small businesses that leverage innovative digital marketing strategies and technology to sustain their organization. The results from this study may help those Caribbean businesses that do not engage in innovative behavior.

The Internet and other state-of-the-art digital technology help businesses overcome geographical boundaries and distance so they can sell effectively to a broader market (Hales & Mclarney, 2017). Mobile devices enable businesses to seek both targeted and general consumer markets at the same time (Hales & Mclarney, 2017). The Caribbean is a group of islands in the Atlantic and the Caribbean Sea covering over 3,000 km (Murray & Watson, 2019). Leveraging mobile devices could help small businesses in the region promote and sell their goods or service to consumers on different Caribbean islands.

Despite technological advances and iterations to the theory since its inception, Hales and Mclarney (2017) argued that Porter's (1985) competitive strategy remains relevant to businesses. Regardless of jurisdiction, sustaining a competitive advantage is an essential goal of most businesses (Kaleka & Morgan, 2017; Quaye & Mensah, 2018). Strategies like Porter's competitive advantage provide the business and academic world a filter to process information (Hales & Mclarney, 2017). Beaudreau (2016) noted that

competitive advantage could result from numerous factors, thus making empirical testing problematic. Hence, Porter's competitive strategy theory was a suitable conceptual framework for this qualitative study exploring digital marketing strategies that help Caribbean small businesses achieve and sustain a competitive advantage.

Digital Technology

Regardless of where they operate, small businesses face highly uncertain, competitive, and dynamic market conditions (Qosasi et al., 2019; Upson & Green, 2017). Research showed that businesses could not reach competitiveness and profitability without adopting appropriate technology (Karabulut, 2020; Maduku et al., 2016). Leveraging digital tools enable small businesses to identify, reach, inform, sell to, provide products to, and effectively maintain relationships with more customers (Qosasi et al., 2019). This study included exploration of how Caribbean small business owners leverage digital technology to research, engage, and sell to consumers to help achieve and sustain a competitive advantage.

Because of digital technology, consumers, especially in remote locations, can voice their needs, attitudes, and values through many channels (Grubor & Jakša, 2018; Kietzmann et al., 2018). When small businesses better understand consumer wants, they produce better products and services to meet those needs, thereby enhancing their ability to achieve a competitive advantage (Foroudi et al., 2017; Gupta et al., 2020). For example, in the remote Scottish isles, digital technology empowers consumers and has increased market competition (Freathy & Calderwood, 2016). However, deciphering and analyzing consumer desires and the path customers take to fulfill them is complex.

Digital innovations significantly assist small businesses in transforming data into valuable consumer insights (Kietzmann et al., 2018). This consumer insight might help facilitate better business choices by small Caribbean business owners.

For traditional marketing tasks, digital technology helps to detect, analyze, and refine consumer wants, manage customer relationships, and facilitate brand engagement and product development (Kietzmann et al., 2018). Small business failure is often the result of business owners not having a strong understanding of the marketplace and inadequate marketing (Gilmore & Carson, 2018). Digital technology also helps a marketer to amass vast amounts of data that, once analyzed, becomes valuable consumer insight about a brand (Du et al., 2021). Williams and Ramdani (2018) insisted that Caribbean small business prosperity depended on brand development. Hence the knowledge gained through leveraging digital technology could enable Caribbean small business owners to make sound branding decisions that result in a flourishing business.

Leveraging technology is essential to a small business's success (Attaran & Woods, 2019; Busaidi et al., 2019). The Internet allows small businesses to access technology-enabled services, like MailChimp for email marketing, with minimal management effort and technical infrastructure (Attaran & Woods, 2019). This access to Internet-based technology saves small businesses money by lowering costs, as well as enhances customer acquisition, service, and support, thereby creating a competitive advantage (Attaran & Woods, 2019; Berawi et al., 2020; Valdez-De-Leon, 2019). This study included exploration into how Caribbean small businesses leverage digital

technology, such as the Internet or access technology-enabled services, to achieve a competitive advantage.

Marketing and Performance

In this study, the topic discussed was what digital marketing strategies Caribbean small business owners use to sustain their organization beyond 10 years of operation. Digital tools revolutionized marketing, which is the business process that assesses consumers' wishes and manages the steps to develop, price, promote and deliver goods or services to meet those desires (Elrod & Fortenberry, 2018; Herhausen et al., 2020). Creating and communicating customer value is also one of marketing's vital functions and a way to maintain a competitive advantage (Kannan & Li, 2017; Kumar & Reinartz, 2016). Marketing drives customer satisfaction, loyalty, and, eventually, small business profits by creating and promoting this value (Herhausen et al., 2020; Kumar & Reinartz, 2016). However, Caribbean small businesses, such as in the nation of Guyana, continue to fail at a rate of more than 50% within the first 10 years of operation, in part because of poor marketing (Bandyopadhyay, 2016; Pasha et al., 2018). This study included exploration of what successful Caribbean business owners do to help sustain and achieve a competitive advantage.

Marketing, especially strategic marketing, contributes to improved small business performance by helping companies to sustain a competitive advantage (van Scheers & Makhitha, 2018). Marketing creatively generates hard to imitate value and gives consumers additional reasons to purchase, thereby giving a business a way to achieve a competitive advantage (Liu & Atuahene-Gima, 2018). For example, marketing strategies

help retain customers and generate and promote different competencies (Puspaningrum, 2020). Marketing strategies also help small businesses concentrate limited resources on the best opportunities that reach target audiences and provide substantial value for the money, thereby helping to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage (Maduku et al., 2016; van Scheers & Makhitha, 2018). Small business marketing resources include both tangible and intangible propositions, tools, processes, and assets (Adedoyin & Ezenwakwelu, 2020; Herhausen et al., 2020). When Caribbean small business owners understand which strategies make the best use of their limited resources, they can ensure those marketing resources better support reaching and sustaining a competitive advantage.

Businesses that use differentiation to achieve a competitive advantage create the perception of uniqueness in its industry, thereby garnering appreciation from consumers who rewarded the business for its distinctiveness (Budiarti, 2018; Wakhu & Belt, 2019). Cultivating a positive brand image is one way to leverage differentiation to create and sustain a competitive advantage (Kannan & Li, 2017; Panda et al., 2019). A unique brand image can positively impact a small business's reputation by defining its good or service for consumers and differentiate its business' offerings from its competitors (Panda et al., 2019). A brand can motivate a consumer to purchase goods or services from a small business because of its attributes, the symbolic meaning connected with the brand, or the practical benefits associated with them (Panda et al., 2019). Satisfied buyers are loyal to a brand, promote that brand via positive word of mouth, and are return customers for a small business (Panda et al., 2019). Any small business with a positive brand image can

sell more goods and services and have a larger market share, thereby creating a competitive advantage (Panda et al., 2019). This study discovered if successful Caribbean small business owners differentiate their business' brand to sell more goods and services than their rivals.

A positive brand image especially helps small businesses, particularly those in the service sector, differentiate themselves and create a competitive advantage (Odoom et al., 2017; Panda et al., 2019). Because services are intangible, buyers have a more challenging time evaluating their quality; hence, branding is more critical for small business service providers (Panda et al., 2019). Research shows that a small business' reputation is critical in creating a brand because of reducing buyer uncertainty about the quality of a good or service, as well as the reliability and trustworthiness of a business (Panda et al., 2019; Upson & Green, 2017). This positive brand perception of service helps to differentiate a small business from the competition (Kim & Yoon, 2018; Panda et al., 2019). The sustainability of a Caribbean small business could benefit from having a positive brand perception.

Measuring marketing performance is a complex, multidimensional task for both academics and businesses (Du et al., 2021; Katsikeas et al., 2016). Research into marketing performance metrics remains inconclusive because of the variety of options available to both businesses and scholars to employ (Katsikeas et al., 2016). Usually, businesses measure performance against operational (goal attainment) or organizational (economic outcomes) principles (Katsikeas et al., 2016). Marketing metrics include operational measurements like word-of-mouth (WOM) and market share or financial-

based results such as profits and revenue growth (Hatta et al., 2019; Katsikeas et al., 2016). When business owners can approximate the financial contribution generated by marketing activities, they can better justify any marketing budget (Hatta et al., 2019). This study included exploration of how Caribbean small businesses measure and monitor their digital marketing activity.

Digital Marketing

Digital marketing is a potential source of competitive advantage for small businesses (Foltean, 2019; Morzhyna et al., 2019). With the right strategy, a Caribbean small business can gain benefits from leveraging digital marketing to create the conditions for consumers to feel open to share their needs, discuss concerns, express appreciation for products or services, and give recommendations for improvement (Foltean, 2019; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Morzhyna et al., 2019). This study may help determine which digital marketing strategies are effective for Caribbean small business owners to use to sustain their organization beyond 10 years of operation.

Since the Internet's inception, the concept of digital marketing continues to evolve from only referring to marketing goods or services via electronic distribution channels (Kannan & Li, 2017; Olson et al., 2021; Saura, 2020). The term encompasses an organization's activities and processes enabled by digital tools to research, acquire, service, and retain customers (Kannan & Li, 2017; Morzhyna et al., 2019; Saura, 2020). The evolution of the definition of digital marketing denotes that it is a rapidly changing subject because of advancing technology (Kannan & Li, 2017; Nikunen et al., 2017). Hence, small businesses need to keep pace with developments in digital marketing that

transform marketing processes and contribute to a business' competitiveness (Blazheska et al., 2020; Foltean, 2019). This study might help those Caribbean small business owners who are unaware of how technical advances influence effective digital marketing strategies that could assist their small business to achieve and sustain a competitive advantage and remain operational beyond 10 years.

Digital marketing includes processes that leverage online and offline digital channels, while Internet marketing, a digital subset, is strictly occurring on the Internet (Grubor & Jakša, 2018). The Internet is a business marketing and communications tool that allows customers to actively interact with businesses, co-create value, judge an organization's activities, and assist with a marketing campaign (Grubor & Jakša, 2018; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Olson et al., 2021). Marketers intermittently use three labels (online marketing, Internet marketing, or e-marketing) when referring to digital marketing (Kannan & Li, 2017). This study followed this digital marketing definition and included online marketing, Internet marketing, and e-marketing within the all-encompassing term digital marketing.

Many small businesses embark on digital marketing more slowly than their larger counterparts in part due to limited knowledge and insufficient digital skills (Dumitriu et al., 2019; Gilmore & Carson, 2018; Ritz et al., 2019). According to Cole et al. (2017), small businesses often feel pressured to copy larger companies' digital marketing strategies. However, they lack the expertise and skill needed to make digital marketing strategies successful (Cole et al., 2017). According to Omelogo (2019), it is essential to

consider strategy specifically in the context of small businesses; hence, this study only focused on small businesses in the Caribbean.

Research shows a managerial skills gap in monitoring and assessing marketing actions that could weaken digital strategy and deter small businesses from digital marketing (Omelogo, 2019; Ritz et al., 2019; Saura, 2020; Saura et al., 2017). Lack of knowledge also means business owners make decisions with an incomplete or erroneous understanding of the impact of those marketing actions (Gilmore & Carson, 2018; Saura et al., 2017). The findings from this study may provide Caribbean small business owners with guidance about effective digital marketing strategies to help sustain their organizations beyond 10 years.

Businesses leverage digital marketing because the tool has enormous benefits at low costs (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Patrutiu-Baltes, 2017). Digital technology facilitates continuous collaboration between businesses and online users regarding the value of products or services (Kannan & Li, 2017). The benefits of digital marketing include the capacity to target consumers, evaluate a website's effectiveness, and the capability to track requests to determine the demand for a good or service (Oklander et al., 2018; Ritz et al., 2019). Digital tools also enable wide-spread WOM sharing by customers, which is an effective marketing strategy (Kannan & Li, 2017). Positive WOM could be an effective digital marketing strategy that might help Caribbean small business owners attract the needed customers to sustain their organizations beyond 10 years.

Kannan and Li (2017) said a business's geographical location could impact digital marketing tools' effectiveness since geography influences online consumer preferences.

Williams and Ramdani (2018) stressed the importance of context-specific research since the Caribbean's unique attributes, like geographic location, meant data from this region differed from research done in developed economies. Hence to ensure this study explored effective digital marketing strategies for this region, the sample was only small businesses that operate in a country that is a part of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM).

According to Oklander et al. (2018), a lack of a digital presence was a reliable indicator that a business could fail. Digital marketing strategies help small businesses become visible, viable, and, more importantly, sustainable (Blazheska et al., 2020; Cole et al., 2017). A survey of over 200 small business owners in the United States showed that only 30.3% had a company website, and 24.9% were involved in social media (Cole et al., 2017). The study also showed that 23.4% of small businesses did email marketing and 8.5% had a company blog (Cole et al., 2017). Cole et al. (2017) discovered that having a low percentage of small service businesses involved in the digital sphere was an indicator that those businesses would not remain operational because they would fail to connect with their customer base. This study helped determine if this phenomenon is pertinent to Caribbean small businesses. However, because qualitative research better discovers how small businesses achieve growth in this part of the world, this study used qualitative methodology to explore digital marketing strategies (Williams & Ramdani, 2018).

Understanding the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies requires small businesses to have the capacity to analyze and measure the strategy's impact (Saura et al.,

2017). Web analytics (WA) and key performance indicators (KPIs) should have a central role in digital marketing strategy formulation (Saura et al., 2017). Suitable, timely, and accurate digital marketing metrics are vital for a business to assess if it is meeting its goals (Saura et al., 2017). While it is not easy to calculate a return on investment (ROI) for digital marketing, small businesses should try to dedicate resources to the effort (Hatta et al., 2019; Saura et al., 2017). According to Gilmore and Carson (2018), small businesses can use modern technology at relatively little cost and time to efficiently analyze data. Hence, this study included an exploration of how thriving Caribbean small businesses measure the effectiveness of their digital marketing strategies and the ensuing impact on developing and maintaining a competitive advantage.

The Internet and Websites. The Internet is the most noteworthy influence on cultural, economic, and social shifts since the beginning of the 21st century (García et al., 2019; Olson et al., 2021). The Internet is the system that permits the use of electronic marketing techniques and facilitates the World Wide Web (García et al., 2019). Hence, properly leveraging the Internet could positively impact small businesses' marketing budgets by allowing them to gain more value from their online presence (Wang et al., 2020). However, small business in developing countries, like the Caribbean, face barriers that limit their ability to leverage the Internet like limited resources, inadequate access to computers and internet connections, or a lack of trust and security in internet usage (Qosasi et al., 2019; Taneja et al., 2016). This study included exploration if issues like infrastructure, financial, time, and human constraints were barriers to Caribbean businesses implementing digital marketing strategies.

A website is a useful digital marketing tool that helps small businesses leverage the Internet (Blazheska et al., 2020). Because small businesses must compete in a global environment with large businesses for the attention of informed, knowledgeable consumers, any tool that facilitates exposure to a potential customer is crucial (Blazheska et al., 2020; van Scheers & Makhitha, 2018). A 2018 study confirmed that even in distant locations like Bucharest, Romania, a business's website was its predominant digital technology (Negoiță et al., 2018). A properly functioning, quick website that is free of typos with adequate content about a small business can help make a competent first impression with consumers, which could eventually lead to a competitive advantage for that small business. This study included exploration if websites are a tool that Caribbean small business owners use, as part of their effective digital marketing strategy, to help sustain their organization beyond 10 years.

Websites generate an attractive digital presence that reinforces positive views of small businesses and helps small business owners engage in persuasive communications with consumers (Beachboard, 2017). A website with a unique identity appeals to web-users, differentiates a business, and makes a website more memorable (Beachboard, 2017; Blazheska et al., 2020). Because differentiation is one of the ways a business can obtain a competitive advantage (Quaye & Mensah, 2018), this study investigated if Caribbean small business owners use websites to differentiate their organization to achieve a competitive advantage and remain operational beyond 10 years.

For those small businesses with limited budgets and scarce technical or marketing resources, there is the option to use third-party websites, like regional or business

directories (Burgess, 2016). Social networking websites, such as Facebook, are another example of third-party web presence support for small businesses that facilitate interaction with consumers (Burgess, 2016). Studies show that leveraging social media technology can give businesses substantial benefits (Vinerean, 2017). Using third-party websites is important to small businesses and has the potential to be an effective digital marketing strategy for Caribbean small businesses (Burgess, 2016).

Social Media. Since the beginning of social media in 1997, this tool continues to transform traditional business operations, becoming a central element of most modern businesses (Felix et al., 2017; Gómez et al., 2019). Social media is any platform that leverages Internet-based or mobile technology to facilitate people distributing, discussing, co-creating, and amending user-generated content (Cheng et al., 2019; Gómez et al., 2019; Holsapple et al., 2018; Vinerean, 2017). Social media includes blogs, discussion boards, networking sites, multi-media sharing sites, and review sites (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020; Holsapple et al., 2018). Users interact with other users or organizations by generating or sharing content like opinions, videos, or advertisements (Wang et al., 2020).

Social media provides businesses an opportunity to execute marketing campaigns, deliver responsive customer service, develop relationships, promote brand awareness, and improve sales (Cheng et al., 2019; Foroudi et al., 2017; He et al., 2017; Morzhyna et al., 2019). The medium allows small businesses to have a global presence by affordably providing visibility, developing customer relationships, and promoting products and services (Busaidi et al., 2019). Social networking can also help small businesses mitigate

the size-related advantages of larger firms (Vinerean, 2017). Given its usefulness, social media might be a valuable tool for Caribbean small business owners.

Social media is one of the most popular digital tools for businesses in many jurisdictions (Wang et al., 2020). Worldwide social media use should reach a third of the world's population (more than three billion monthly users) by the year 2021 (Gómez et al., 2019). An analysis of 10 top Romanian businesses' digital activity showed that paid search was a significant factor for raising the level of brand awareness while search engine optimization (SEO) was a critical element that sent traffic to a business' website (Niculescu et al., 2019). The same study also showed that social media facilitated consumer interaction and the development of user-generated content like compelling consumer brand stories (Niculescu et al., 2019). This study explored if paid search, search engine optimization (SEO), and social media are a dominant digital marketing tool for Caribbean small business owners.

Small business social media adoption and use are different from big companies (Aksoy, 2017; He et al., 2017; Neirotti & Raguseo, 2017). Choi and Burnes (2017) determined that small businesses leverage social media to establish a relationship with potential customers and encourage consumers to circulate company messaging. Social media can attract potential supporters who, in turn, refer new customers to a small business (Connell et al., 2019). Small businesses also use social media to create and build relationships with potential consumers because the bonds developed between businesses and consumers help that small business to generate profits (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020; Choi & Burnes, 2017). Based on the results of a 75-response qualitative survey, Al Badi

(2018) recommended that small businesses in Oman should leverage social media as a promotional tool to attract consumers to purchase their goods or services. Because social media is a useful tool for businesses to gain a competitive advantage (Busaidi et al., 2019; Gómez et al., 2019), this study investigated if Caribbean small business owners use social media to help their organizations remain operational beyond 10 years.

Social media remains a vital small business marketing tool in the digital era because small businesses have limited resources and employees (Choi & Burnes, 2017; Neirotti & Raguseo, 2017). Social media is a useful tool that can facilitate marketing and customer outreach at little cost, helping small businesses to increase productivity and make money (Busaidi et al., 2019; He et al., 2017). Karatum's (2017) study of small Turkish businesses concluded that reaching and promoting to customers via digital marketing was an efficient and precise process for small businesses. Small businesses use social media networks for advertising their goods and service, receive recommendations from customers for product development, and build relationships with consumers (Wang et al., 2020). The platforms also help small businesses enhance an organization's reputation and communicate effectively with customers (Wang et al., 2020). To raise awareness of their social media accounts, many small business owners and managers physically promoted their sites inside their offices or store (He et al., 2017). Caribbean small business owners could duplicate this American strategy to promote their social media sites to local consumers.

Small businesses also leverage sites like Facebook because of the cost and time-saving in promoting their goods and services and publicizing their brand (Wang et al.,

2020). He et al. (2017) surveyed 27 small U.S. businesses and determined that Facebook was the leading social media network used by small businesses. Participants frequently posted promotions, daily specials, exciting stories, and pictures as well as respond to customer comments on their Facebook pages (He et al., 2017). Most of the study participants said their Facebook site resulted in more customers and revenue since many of their customers found their business via social media. He et al. (2017) determined that only a fraction of small businesses used social media to build customer loyalty. Further, the study showed that acquiring Facebook' *likes*' or new followers and maintaining social media networks were the two challenges experienced by small business owners and managers (He et al., 2017). These challenges could also be a barrier to leveraging digital technology for Caribbean small business owners.

Social media analytics can help businesses achieve a competitive advantage (Holsapple et al., 2018). Social media analytics is all the activities that support the assembly and analysis of relevant social media information, so business owners can detect potential issues, notice trends, and gain insights to make business decisions (Holsapple et al., 2018). Social media metrics allow small businesses to gauge the traffic, interest, and sales generated through their social media marketing efforts (Cole et al., 2017). Social listening is the observation of digital behaviors by recording, analyzing, and evaluating social media posts, shares, and likes to capture the mood and the opinion of social media users to get market intelligence (Lies, 2019; Saura, 2020). Marketing intelligence is the insight developed from data that later helps with marketing decision-making (Lies, 2019). Several data analysis tools can automatically monitor social media

data to help small businesses with decision making (Lies, 2019). To obtain better marketing intelligence, Caribbean small business owners could engage in social listening and use data analytic tools to monitor and analyze their social media users (Holsapple et al., 2018).

For some small businesses, social media management is too complex or time-consuming to be the sole domain of a business owner or manager (Felix et al., 2017). He et al. (2017) determined that most business owners or managers directly operated their social media sites while only one out of 27 business owners surveyed outsourced their social media management to an external resource. When a small business owner manages their own social media networks, there often no clear plan or strategic objectives to guide actions (Bauman, 2020). To rectify these challenges, researchers recommended that small businesses have a digital marketing strategy and a social media implantation plan before starting any site (Busaidi et al., 2019; Dumitriu et al., 2019; He et al., 2017).

Second, small business owners must determine, and if necessary secure, a trained resource to manage social media sites (He et al., 2017). Finally, there must be a set of metrics for any social media plan to indicate performance levels (He et al., 2017). When small businesses have a clear plan, social media can reach target markets, build long-term bonds with consumers, secure growth, and thereby have a positive impact on those small businesses trying to achieve and sustain a competitive advantage (Busaidi et al., 2019; Dumitriu et al., 2019).

Mobile. The adoption of mobile devices is a global phenomenon resulting in mobile marketing no longer being an option for small businesses but is a matter of

survival (Bauman, 2020; Cvitanovic, 2018). Mobile marketing is the set of practices that use wireless technology and networks to create interactive and personalized communications that create value for both a business and mobile user (Maduku et al., 2016). Mobile marketing includes text messaging, geotargeting, mobile advertising, and mobile telemarketing (Maduku et al., 2016). This study could show if mobile marketing among Caribbean small businesses reflects or contradicts the global trend.

Mobile devices transformed marketing by allowing businesses to personalize massive amounts of content and transmit, regardless of time or location, to individual recipients (Łukowski, 2017; Cvitanovic, 2018). The information received by consumers is precise and personalized based on their mobile profile data like geo-location, time, interests, sex, or other attributes (Lies, 2019; Łukowski, 2017). Consumers use their cell phones to conduct research on goods or services before making a purchase (Dumitriu et al., 2019; Fritz et al., 2017). Because of the way consumers use their mobile devices, many organizations adopted online-to-offline (O2O) marketing strategies to entice potential shoppers to visit their businesses to buy products or services (Chiang et al., 2018). Caribbean small business marketing managers could adopt this digital marketing strategy to generate profits that could help their organization remain operational beyond 10 years.

There are several strategic advantages for small businesses using mobile marketing. First, consumers always have their devices turned on and connected to networks or the Internet, which results in an immediacy of message delivery (Fritz et al., 2017). This immediacy of message delivery helps small businesses short-term price

promotions and specialized marketing campaigns based on time, date, weather, or natural disasters (Cvitanovic, 2018). Second, mobile devices provide small businesses with the ability to generate location-sensitive content (Fritz et al., 2017; Tong, et al., 2020). For example, small Caribbean businesses can distribute marketing content to only specific islands where they operate instead of the entire region. Third, businesses can develop mobile applications, known as apps, to create stronger consumer attachment to a brand since apps keep a brand top-of-mind with users building a bond between the two (Ford, 2017; Yoo et al., 2019). Caribbean small business owners could harness the potential of apps to develop customer relationships. Finally, mobile technology allows small business personnel to send relevant and personalized messages and promotions that acknowledge the cultural nuances within the Caribbean (Fritz et al., 2017, Tong et al., 2020).

Mobile device use occurs in some of the most remote parts of the world, providing rural areas communication access (Hoang, 2020; Mullan et al., 2017). However, most mobile marketing research focuses on developed countries, and evidence suggests there is a difference between large nations and small island nations, which makes generalizing any findings to small or undeveloped jurisdictions like the Caribbean problematic (Maduku et al., 2016). Kumar et al. (2016) determined that culture was a significant variable in mobile marketing activity. For example, there are significant differences between Bangladeshi and Canadian consumers because of cultural traits (Kumar et al., 2016). Canada is an individualistic society; thus, its citizens prefer more personalized marketing offerings than Bangladeshis (Kumar et al., 2016). Hence this

study included exploration of the effectiveness of this marketing tool from the small Caribbean island perspective.

Important Characteristics of Caribbean Small Businesses

The Caribbean is an area of over 3,000 km, consisting mostly of islands in the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean (Murray & Watson, 2019; White, 2018). Shared geography, history, and colonial structure led 12 countries to establish the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) in 1968 to promote growth, free trade, harmonized policies (Fenton, 2017). In 1973, the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) replaced CARIFTA to further strengthen ties within the region (Dos Santos, 2019; Fenton, 2017). There are fifteen CARICOM members; Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Belize, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago (CARICOM, 2019; Dos Santos, 2019). The organization also has five associate members; Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, and Turks and Caicos Islands (CARICOM, 2019). This study included exploration of small businesses operating in one of these CARICOM-members or associate member islands.

There is a lack of academic business research on the Caribbean region (Broome et al., 2018; Punnett, 2019; Reyes & Useche, 2019). Much of the peer-reviewed literature focuses on the tourism sector since most Caribbean island economies depend on tourism, which is the largest provider of direct and indirect employment as well as needed foreign exchange (Ajagunna et al., 2017). The financial sector (banks, credit unions, and insurance) also dominates the economies of Caribbean nations (Rambocas & Arjoon,

2019). Some Caribbean nations are also commodity exporters (minerals, oil, or agricultural products) or provide offshore financial services (Dagher, 2019). Upson and Green (2017) recommended that researchers analyze the competitive environment where small businesses operate because understanding the market dynamics in a region influence survival rates. Broome et al. (2018) described the Caribbean business culture as conservative and risk-averse. Because business owners and managers rely on their intuition and firsthand experiences to make decisions (Tarka, 2018); this conservative nature could impede Caribbean small business owners use of effective digital marketing innovation and strategies such as the blockchain or artificial intelligence (A.I.), that might help their organizations remain operational beyond 10 years.

Regardless of the jurisdiction, small businesses provide jobs, stimulate competitiveness, and promote overall economic growth for communities (Busaidi et al., 2019; ; Chatterjee & Kar, 2020; Odoom et al., 2017; van Scheers, 2018). Hence, government leaders in the Caribbean focus on promoting small businesses throughout the region by instituting policies to encourage small business development and growth (Ajagunna et al., 2017; Pacheco & Pacheco, 2020; Shallow, 2017). For example, the Jamaican and Bajan governments invest in their island's infrastructure (Ajagunna et al., 2017; Pacheco & Pacheco, 2020). However, Shallow (2017) suggested that Caribbean government leaders' attempts to foster small businesses might be in vain because small business owners lacked the expertise to avoid failure. Because many small business owners have inadequate marketing skills (van Scheers, 2018), only those small business

owners who have operated their business for more than 10 years were the focus of this study.

Barriers to Growth

There are several obstacles to Caribbean economic growth that impact small businesses in the region (Armstrong & Read, 2018; Dagher, 2019; Knight, 2019; Pacheco & Pacheco, 2020). Caribbean small business faces similar economic barriers as their counterparts in the small Pacific island countries: high energy costs; imperfect infrastructure, transportation, communication, commercial facilities; and fragile natural environments (Douglas et al., 2018). The Caribbean struggles with adequate data and Wi-Fi coverage, up-to-date equipment, technical support, and communication infrastructure maintenance (Ahmad, 2019). The substantial national debt, a slow economy, and a likelihood of natural disasters can also prevent small businesses in the Caribbean from reaching their full potential (Pacheco & Pacheco, 2020).

Caribbean Culture. Research showed it is vital to recognize the contextual variations of a region; however, defining Caribbean culture is problematic (Ahmad, 2019; Benitez-Rojo, 2018; Lwoga & Sangeda, 2019). The Caribbean region has linguistic blocs that reflect the different colonial rulers in the area: Spanish, English, French, Portuguese, and Dutch (Benitez-Rojo, 2018; Knight, 2019). These linguistic differences among islands result in a unique blend of diverse cultures that can fragment the region, restricting small businesses to selling to only their small domestic market (Benitez-Rojo, 2018; Bowen, 2019). For example, the Spanish-speaking owner of a small business in the Dominican Republic must either be multilingual or hire employees who speak English,

French, or Dutch to effectively communicate and sell to consumers in the Bahamas, Martinique, or St. Marteen. This cumulative effect of the region's multilingual nature might impact a Caribbean small business owner's ability to effectively implement digital marketing strategies.

Despite the massive tourism industry throughout the region, residents experience socio-economic adversity (Ajagunna et al., 2017). Relentless hardship is an everyday reality for the Afro-Carib culture (Dagher, 2019). The prohibitive cost of living prompted many business-minded islanders to migrate abroad because they can no longer afford to reside or operate a small business in the Caribbean (Wessinger, 2016). Those individuals who never emigrated developed a culture of creativity and resilience to survive (Murray & Watson, 2019).

The shared trauma of each island's colonial heritage has not only had a long-term impact on the region's growth; colonial heritage impacted its culture (Benitez-Rojo, 2018; Punnett, 2019). European explorers and settlers either evicted indigenous people from their land or enslaved them (Knight, 2019). Surviving colonialism, suffering, and hardship over generations resulted in a culture that has a resilient spirit, a proud and hospitable nature that values respect but is desperate for change (Wessinger, 2016). However, there is an undercurrent of hopelessness that continues to spur on violence in the community (Knight, 2019). This study can effect positive social change in the Caribbean by helping small business owners to ensure their organizations remain operational beyond 10 years, thereby providing employment opportunities in the community (Pacheco, & Pacheco, 2020).

The indigenous people of this region are Arawaks, Taínos, and Carib (Bowen, 2019; Wessinger, 2016). Thanks to colonization, the Caribbean is, at present, a culturally diversified area. While there are still remnants of Arawaks and Caribs, the region's demographic consists of West and East Indian, British, Spanish, French, American, Dutch, South African, and Asian people (Punnett, 2019; Wessinger, 2016). This assorted mix of people means the Caribbean is a diverse consumer marketplace of potential customers of various languages and religions, yet share a similar landscape and history (Punnett, 2019). Marketing to this unique consumer base may contribute to the high failure rate for Caribbean small businesses (Punnett, 2019).

Digital Technology in the Caribbean. The Internet and mobile technology positively impacted several Caribbean countries, eliminating time and distance barriers between businesses and their customers (Amaghionyeodiwe & Annansingh-Jamieson, 2017). A 2017 study, based on World Bank statistics, showed that most of the business in Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, and Trinidad and Tobago use the Internet for commercial purposes (Waters, 2017). While the type of industry has no impact on the rate of internet adoption rate in the Caribbean, the size of a company does influence the initial adoption rate (Waters, 2017). Small businesses adopt the use of the Internet slower in comparison to their larger counterparts (Waters, 2017).

Many Caribbean islands diligently work towards improving their digital technology infrastructure. The Jamaican Government implemented a development plan entitled Vision 2030 National Development Plan, which aims to enable technology on the island (Inniss, 2017). However, most islands struggle with financing the cost of installing

the technical infrastructure to facilitate small businesses' digital use. According to Edwards (2018), securing money to pay for digital technology is difficult for business. Participants in a study of Jamaican credit unions said digital tools used up a sizable portion of their budget; however, the expenditure was money well spent (Edwards, 2018). There is also growing importance in the role of digital technology, such as mobile phones, in the sustainability of small businesses in developing countries like Jamaica (Ahmad, 2019). The sentiment is the same for Barbados businesses, where half of all the companies host a website (Inniss, 2017). This willingness by some Caribbean businesses to adopt digital tools meant this study located an assortment of small business owners with effective digital marketing strategies.

Research showed that achieving a competitive advantage depended on a business's capacity to integrate and take advantage of the opportunities evolving from technology (Aksoy, 2017). If small businesses cannot capitalize on technology's potential, then innovation is counterproductive and is a real threat to businesses by undermining existing markets and customer segments (Freathy & Calderwood, 2016). When island consumers are unhappy with the local retail provision and considered the home-grown goods to be expensive, buyers resort to online shopping for foreign products (Freathy & Calderwood, 2016). Freathy and Calderwood (2016) concluded that the Internet reconfigures the consumer behavior of island residents. This study might show that island residents' shifting consumer behavior was a barrier to implementing digital marketing strategies.

Social Media in the Caribbean. According to Williams-Morgan (2017), there is inadequate data on social media use in the Caribbean. For example, most mobile marketing research focuses on developed countries, but evidence suggested a difference between large nations and small island nations, making generalizing any findings to small jurisdictions like the Caribbean problematic (Kumar et al., 2016; Maduku et al., 2016). The minimal existing academic research on the subject focuses on the larger islands in the region, like Jamaica and Trinidad. While some of Jamaica's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) use social media, many organizations do not fully maximize its usefulness (Williams-Morgan, 2017). Budget constraints, lack of human resources (HR) and skills, plus a laid-back attitude are some of the reasons why some SMEs do not fully leverage the tool (Busaidi et al., 2019; Williams-Morgan, 2017). This study might show that the business social media usage issues associated with larger Caribbean nations apply to the smaller ones.

Views Related to Previous Research and Findings

This qualitative multiple case study explored effective digital marketing strategies that Caribbean small business owners use to help their organizations be sustainable beyond 10 years. Small Caribbean businesses, like those in the country of Guyana, have a failure rate of almost 60% within the first 10 years of operation (Pasha et al., 2018). This high small business failure rate is in part because of poor marketing (Bandyopadhyay, 2016). Digital marketing is a potential source of competitive advantage for businesses that may help sustain Caribbean small businesses beyond 10 years (Morzhyna et al., 2019).

The findings from the literature review showed that digital marketing tools and techniques are a necessity for most modern small businesses (Dumitriu et al., 2019). All businesses are reallocating their marketing spend from traditional advertising to digital marketing tools like social media (de Vries et al., 2017). However, small businesses do not always adhere to generic marketing theories that rely on data from big companies (Gilmore & Carson, 2018). Because small businesses lack the resources and know-how to plan and execute marketing activities, small businesses often poorly perform marketing, which contributes to their failure (Gilmore & Carson, 2018; van Scheers, 2018).

The literature review also showed that Caribbean small businesses have many growth challenges because of the region's characteristics (Armstrong & Read, 2018). These challenges include small yet culturally diverse domestic markets, inability to achieve economies of scale, limited resources, little innovation, and vulnerability to natural disasters (Armstrong & Read, 2018; Brissett, 2018; Dagher, 2019; Knight, 2019). These barriers also contribute to a persistent digital gap and a sense of hopelessness between developed economies and the developing ones of the Caribbean (Ahmad, 2019; Knight, 2019).

Porter's (1980) competitive strategy theory was the conceptual framework in this study of current literature. Porter asserted that cost and differentiation strategies provided a business with the ability to achieve a competitive advantage and thrive in a competitive environment (Brett, 2018). Marketing provides ways, like differentiation or improved communications, to achieve a competitive advantage (Durie & Andualem, 2018). Because Porter's concept of competitiveness has tenants that relate to global, regional,

management, and a good or service, the competitive advantage theory was the ideal conceptual framework for this study (Reyes & Useche, 2019).

Transition

The purpose of this study was to explore effective digital marketing strategies that Caribbean business owners use to help their organizations be sustainable beyond 10 years. Section 1 introduced the foundational elements of the study: (a) problem statement; (b) purpose statement; (c) nature of the study; (d) the central research question; (e) interview questions; (f) operational definitions; (g) assumptions, limitations, and delimitations; and (h) significance of the study. The literature review identified and explored various digital marketing strategies for small businesses through the competitive strategy theory standpoint. Topics include: (a) overview of competitive strategy theory, (b) digital technology, (c) marketing and performance, (d) digital marketing, (e) important characteristics of Caribbean small businesses, and (f) views related to previous research and findings.

Section 2 includes an explanation of the research methodology of this study. This section contains the rationale for the chosen participants, data collection instruments, and techniques used in the study. To ensure research reliability and validity, Section 2 also includes a detailed description of data collection and organization techniques, data analysis techniques, and reliability and validity. Section 3 includes the presentation of findings, with the further rationalization of the intended social change impact of the study.

Section 2: The Project

This section includes a detailed discussion of the method used for this study regarding effective digital marketing strategies used by Caribbean small business owners to help organizations remain operational beyond 10 years. The discussion begins with a recap of the purpose statement. Subsequently, the role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population and sampling, and ethical research will follow. Finally, this section includes the presentation of the data collection instruments, data collection techniques, data organization techniques, data analysis techniques, and reliability and validity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore effective digital marketing strategies that Caribbean small business owners use to sustain their organizations beyond 10 years. The research population was Caribbean small businesses. To ensure a higher degree of certainty, Yin (2018) suggested that multiple case studies contain five or more cases to explore a straightforward phenomenon and theory. Therefore, this study's sample was seven business owners in the Caribbean who developed effective digital marketing strategies that sustained their organizations beyond 10 years. The implications for positive social change are that businesses with effective digital marketing strategies thriving beyond 10 years can continue to increase the numbers of employed individuals and improve the economic opportunities for communities in small nations within the Caribbean.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the main data collection, organizational, and analysis tool in qualitative research (Clark & Vealé, 2018; Fusch et al., 2018); Karagiozis, 2018). As the principal data collection instrument, my role in this study was to collect, organize, analyze, and interpret responses from semistructured interview questions. Additionally, the role mandated finding credible and current peer-reviewed academic and government sources cited in this study. A disciplined investigation requires assessing current factual data (Nagasaka et al., 2016). Digital tools, such as social media, continuously document countless forms of data within a digital system (Leckner & Severson, 2019). Information automatically created by a digital system is secondary data (Leckner & Severson, 2019). In addition to interviews with Caribbean small business owners, this study used business records and digital data, such as the business website or social media analytics to explore the effective digital marketing strategies used to sustain the organizations beyond 10 years.

Researchers using online data should use multiple sources to triangulate findings to ensure trustworthiness (Natow, 2019). To achieve triangulation, this study used analytical reports from each business's website and social media sites to corroborate interview data. Social media is an extensive source of information for researchers because the medium generates massive amounts of measurable data for analysis that might not emerge from traditional data collection methods (Burles & Bally, 2018; Byrne, 2017; Misirlis & Vlachopoulou, 2018). Social media analysis complements and provides benefits to qualitative researchers' traditional approaches (Leckner & Severson, 2019;

Lynch & Mah, 2018). Social media networks archive and store data, giving researchers access to current and historical information (Lynch & Mah, 2018). As part of the consent to take part in this study, all participants provided access to their organization's social media analytics. This study included screenshots of the analytic reports from business' social media sites, namely Facebook and Instagram, to record information because screenshots not only preserve the data, but these elements also include a time and date stamp (Byrne, 2017). This documentation facilitated easier organization of the substantial amount of data (Byrne, 2017).

Adhering to scientific procedures is another hallmark of disciplined research (Nagasaka et al., 2016). Following the principles of research is a way to ensure that research is fair, accurate, and useful. The Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) conducted an institutional review, granted permission to complete the research, and provided the required documentation to verify enrollment as a current student conducting this study in partial fulfillment of the requirements to complete the Doctor of Business Administration Program.

Participants of a study should receive ethical, trustful, and respectful treatment (Karagiozis, 2018). The 1979 *Belmont Report* protects the rights of all research participants by serving as an ethical framework for all research (Brothers et al., 2019). This central ethical document protects the rights of human research participants with three components that all studies must follow: (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence or doing good, and (c) justice for all (Miracle, 2016). This study adhered to the ethical framework of the *Belmont Report* by ensuring participants received truthful and adequate

information to make decisions; protection of confidentiality so no harm comes to a business; and equal treatment and sharing of findings with contributing parties. Every participant received, reviewed, and provided informed consent to ensure each understood the nature of the research and their role before any research began.

Potential small business owners received an initial correspondence detailing all research steps to identify and mitigate any potential risks. Additionally, small business owners received an IRB-approved letter identifying this study's certification by the National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research for Protecting Human Research Participants. To maintain participant confidentiality, all participant's identities were protected when presenting the findings of this study. Instead of using their legal names, characteristics became the label for participants to ensure transcripts and audio recordings were kept private and confidential (Cleland, 2017). For example, P3FI would be Participant 3, female, interview. Password encryption on the computer used for this study protected the collected electronic data. All information associated with this study, including transcripts, digital screenshots, and documents, will be kept for a minimum of 5 years. After 5 years, I will discard the physical data by shredding and erase the digital data from a universal serial bus (USB).

Because a researcher's views can impact a study's findings, it is prudent to include a disclosure of and steps to mitigate any risks (Clark & Vealé, 2018). There is a risk that a professional career might bias the research process (Råheim et al., 2016). At the time of this study, my job title was Corporate Communications, Public Relations, and Marketing Consultant for a telecommunications company in Bermuda. The role involves

working in the marketing field and influenced this study's research question and research location. Any professional experiences related to the context of the research locations and were useful in the interview questions' design; however, there was no personal relationship with any of the business owners participating in this study.

To mitigate bias in research, I acknowledged personal career experiences to keep any work experience separate from the research and stayed consistently mindful to remain objective through reflexivity while conducting research (Cleland, 2017).

Reflexivity is the explanation of the impact a researchers' views and beliefs have on the research process (Bleiker et al., 2019). To track personal views on the research process, I maintained a journal to document impressions of different participants and the decision-making rationale during the data collection process (Bleiker et al., 2019; Karagiozis, 2018; Ngozwana, 2018). Reviewing personal impressions aids in detecting personal bias and promotes transparency (Karagiozis, 2018).

Following an interview protocol for all participant interviews helps ensure consistent professionalism (Yeong et al., 2018; see Appendix A). The interview protocol helps organize a researcher, thereby enabling the efficient gathering of detailed information from participants (Yeong et al., 2018). Using an interview protocol allows a researcher to actively listen and make participants feel comfortable with the interview process (Karagiozis, 2018; Twis et al., 2019). The participants' perceptions of a researcher's professionalism can impact responses and, therefore, the quality of the information provided (Karagiozis, 2018). This study included the use of an interview protocol for all participant interviews.

To ensure the accuracy of responses and interpretation of meaning, the study included member-checking, which is when participants review their interview records (Cleland, 2017; Karagiozis, 2018). Participants received a transcript of their interview via e-mail to ensure the correctness and accuracy of the words, as well as the meaning and correct interpretation of those comments (Cleland, 2017). Allowing participants to review transcripts helps instill confidence in the validity of the data used in a study (Yin, 2018).

Clark and Vealé (2018) recommended presenting a summary table of study findings as an effective way to present themes in data and demonstrate transparency. Researchers should also disclose assumptions and biases while analyzing data to ensure an accurate representation of the phenomenon in question (Clark & Vealé, 2018; Karagiozis, 2018). This study contains a summary table of the findings in Section 3 to show the logic behind the themes and instill confidence in the unbiased study results (Clark & Vealé, 2018).

Participants

This study's participants were small business owners of organizations who successfully operated for at least 10 years. In the absence of a definitive definition of what constitutes a Caribbean small business, this study used the U.S. definition, which is a business with fewer than 500 employees (Bacon & Schneider, 2019). All the small businesses in this study conduct business in at least one of the 15 member or five associate member CARICOM countries (Dos Santos, 2019). As a marketing professional in a CARICOM island, I had familiarity with small business organizations (SBOs) whose members could form the pool of participants for this study. Any professional

relationships with SBOs helped identify small Caribbean business owners operating in a CARICOM country to participate in this study.

A study should also incorporate various insights from a wide range of participants (Cleland, 2017). Different CARICOM SBOs, like the local Chamber of Commerce and Small Business Associations, recommended successful small business owners who would likely agree to take part in an interview and share their company's digital data. I verified that each recommended business was operational since 2010 by searching the Registrar of Companies website to confirm incorporation dates. A check of the Internet confirmed that each business had a digital presence. Any business not operational for more than 10 years or lacking a digital presence was not a potential candidate for this study.

All recommended candidates received an email inviting them to participate in the study and a consent form. All research studies require a signed consent form from all participants (Miracle, 2016). Recipients then received a telephone call to confirm receipt of the email inviting them to participate and to answer any questions regarding the study. The first 10 business owners to return their confirmation agreement became the participants for the study. Selecting 10 participants ensured a contingency pool of participants in the event some business owners withdrew from the study during the data collection process. In the event 10 participants did not confirm to take part in the study, I would have solicited additional SBOs for recommendations and repeated the process. If SBOs in CARICOM countries did not provide additional recommendations, I would have solicited SBOs in countries part of the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR).

The findings from any study depend on the participants' inclination to share that data (Råheim et al., 2016). To establish a positive working relationship with participants, all participant emails regarding this study included a personalized professional greeting and closing. To further develop rapport and credibility, participants' professional and personal schedules took priority when organizing any interviews. Responses to participant emails and replies to missed calls occurred within 24 hours of receipt. Cordial and respectful communication with participants before an interview builds trust between researchers and participants and impacts interview responses (Karagiozis, 2018; Ngozwana, 2018).

Follow up e-mails and phone calls were made to coordinate interview times with each participant. After confirming the logistics of these meetings, the interviews with the participants via video conference. Because of the health issues associated with the global COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews occurred via video conferencing. Every interview followed an interview protocol because equal professional treatment and fairness promote an element of trust between the researcher and the participant (Miracle, 2016; see Appendix A). Following an interview protocol also helps to mitigate researcher bias and miscommunication between the researcher and the participants (Fusch et al., 2018).

Research Method and Design

Research Method

The methodology of a study is the strategy a researcher uses to gather data. (Bleiker et al., 2019). The three research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (Creamer, 2018; Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). A qualitative method is an inductive

approach that primarily uses open-ended questions and small sample sizes to obtain in-depth information (Alsharari & Al-Shboul, 2019; Creamer, 2018; Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). A quantitative method is a deductive approach that shows statistical associations among variables through close-ended questions and a large sample (Alsharari & Al-Shboul, 2019; Creamer, 2018; Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). The mixed-method is when a researcher uses both quantitative and qualitative methods in a study (Ivankova & Wingo, 2018).

Researchers use qualitative methodology to obtain a thorough understanding of a phenomenon in its real-world context (Bleiker et al., 2019; Wäscher et al., 2017). The qualitative method is also useful when researching small business marketing issues because of providing the opportunity to engage participants (Resnick et al., 2016). The purpose of this study was to explore effective digital marketing strategies and obtain information on how Caribbean small business owners use those strategies to sustain their organizations beyond 10 years. Because the intent was not to amass and interpret statistical data for examining variables' relationships, neither the quantitative nor mixed method was an appropriate methodology for this study (Fusch et al., 2018).

The next subsections will include details of the research design. Lack of understanding about the execution of a study can create doubts about whether the findings are reliable (Munthe-Kaas et al., 2019). Sharing the rationale for the elements of a qualitative study's design helps to instill confidence in the trustworthiness of study findings (Alsharari & Al-Shboul, 2019; Munthe-Kaas et al., 2019). This study instills confidence in the trustworthiness of its content by disclosing the details of the research

design into the exploration of the effective digital marketing strategies that Caribbean small business owners use to sustain their organizations beyond 10 years.

Research Design

The research design of a study is all the logical steps taken to collect and analyze data (Ngozwana, 2018; Yin, 2018). The major types of qualitative research design are ethnography, narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, and case study (Cleland, 2017). Researchers use ethnography to immerse themselves in the participants' environment for extended periods to comprehend to gain cultural insight (Cleland, 2017; Mohajan, 2018). This study explored the digital marketing strategies of Caribbean small business owners, not their culture; hence, ethnography was not a suitable research design. The grounded theory provides a higher understanding of a social phenomenon that emerges from a systematic study of data (Cleland, 2017). Because the purpose of this study was to explore a business phenomenon, not a social one, the grounded theory was not an appropriate research design. Researchers use the phenomenology design to describe real-life experiences with phenomena from the perception and interpretation of the participant (Cleland, 2017; Mohajan, 2018). This study was not about using interview data to understand a phenomenon that many people experienced over time; therefore, the phenomenology design was not appropriate for this study.

Researchers use the case study design to understand a real-world phenomenon within its context via intense, in-depth inquiry (Alpi & Evans, 2019; Cleland, 2017). The case study method uses multiple sources of evidence and enables a researcher to explore within a specific context like a limited geographical area or a small number of

participants (Cleland, 2017). Case studies can include exploration of a business phenomenon through comprehensive contextual analysis of multiple sources and types of data to provide real-world insight into a business problem (Alpi & Evans, 2019; Cleland, 2017; Morgan et al., 2017; Yin, 2018). Because the case study design is ideal when a phenomenon and its context intertwine (Alsharari & Al-Shboul, 2019), the case study design was the type of inquiry adopted for this study.

Case studies can be single or multiple in design (Yin, 2018). A study that includes multiple case studies is more rigorous than an individual case because of replication logic, which is when the findings from subsequent cases improve the credibility of the original data (Docherty, 2018; Ridder, 2017). Having multiple cases in a study also facilitates analysis of each case study before contrasting the evidence from each one to find patterns that run throughout each one (Ridder, 2017; Yin, 2018). The cross-case analysis of evidence improves the accuracy and completeness of the case study and strengthening the credibility of the research findings because of corroboration (Morgan et al., 2017; Ridder, 2017). Because multiple cases provide stronger confidence in the findings generated from a study (Morgan et al., 2017), this approach was the research design for this study.

Data saturation is the point when a researcher's queries yield no additional information (Tran et al., 2017). A repetition of responses or a lack of new themes indicates data saturation (Lowe et al., 2018). Researchers can meet saturation by conducting semistructured interviews consecutively and noting the types of responses (Nascimento et al., 2018). To achieve data saturation in this study, different participants

received the same questions until there were no novel answers. This study had a contingency pool of 10 participants in the event saturation was not reached with the initial sample of 6-8 participants. The likelihood of saturation increases as a sample size grows (Etikan et al., 2016).

Population and Sampling

Etikan et al. (2016) defined population as the range of the cases, people, or things that are the subject of a study. The population for this study was small business owners who operate in a country that is a member of CARICOM. Participants for this study had firsthand experience owning and marketing a small business successfully for at least the last 10 years and provided insight into effective digital marketing strategies used to sustain a small business in a CARICOM country.

If securing participants for this study becomes problematic, as a contingency, the population would have expanded to small business owners who operate in a country that is part of the WCR. The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) (1974) defines the WCR as including the 28 islands and countries with coasts around the insular Caribbean Sea (Parris, 2016). The area encompasses approximately 15 million square kilometers (as cited in Parris, 2016). Expanding the geographical limits defining the Caribbean means business owners in eight additional islands or countries, such as the U.S. Virgin Islands and Costa Rica, could have become part of this study population (Infante, 2018).

A sample is a portion of the population of a study (Etikan et al., 2016). Sampling involves identifying the location of a study and a manageable number of individuals to

participate within a timeframe to generation adequate study data (Ngozwana, 2018).

There are two ways to conduct sampling, probability, and nonprobability (Etikan et al., 2016). Probability sampling is when every participant has an equal probability of being selected for a study (Etikan et al., 2016). Nonprobability sampling is when researchers use subjective methods to choose which participants are in a sample (Etikan et al., 2016). Researchers should use the sampling process conceptually aligned with the purpose of a study and is credible, reasonable, and efficient (Benoot et al., 2016). Because nonprobability sampling is often less expensive and quicker to implement than probability sampling (Etikan et al., 2016), I used this sampling methodology in this study.

In multiple case study design, researchers use different nonprobability sampling strategies, like purposeful or snowball sampling, to achieve different objectives (Ridder, 2017). Purposeful sampling is when a researcher selects, before actual data collection, detail-rich cases for use in a study (Benoot et al., 2016; Etikan et al., 2016; Gentles & Vilches, 2017). By using purposeful sampling, researchers obtain in-depth information that aligns with the purpose of the study (Benoot et al., 2016; Ridder, 2017). The snowball sampling method is a research data collection process where a participant provides the researcher with the name of another potential participant for the study (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018). The sample in a study grows if each participant provides more than one referral (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018). Because purposeful sampling allows researchers to obtain in-depth information that aligns with the purpose of the study (Benoot et al., 2016), the approach was suitable for finding participants for this study.

Purposeful sampling is a practical option for researchers facing constraints such as time and resource availability (Benoot et al., 2016). Patton (2002) suggested that a specific type of purposeful sampling, such as the purposeful random sampling technique, added credibility to the sample used in a study (as cited in Benoot et al., 2016). The process involves deliberately choosing individuals as potential participants who have experience with the phenomenon and are available, willing, and capable to adequately share their knowledge (Etikan et al., 2016). Random selection determines the actual participants of a study from the pool of potentials (Benoot et al., 2016). Purposeful random sampling reduces potential bias by limiting the researcher's judgment calls during the sample selection process (Benoot et al., 2016). This reduction in bias made the purposive random sampling process a suitable choice for this qualitative multiple case study.

It is the researcher who determines the information requirements and seeks to find participants who can and will provide the data based on their knowledge (Etikan et al., 2016). I selected the potential sample based on a judgment about the information needed and the purpose of the research. Potential participants for this study met several qualifications. First, all participants were a small business owner of organizations who successfully operated for at least 10 years. All eligible participants conducted business in a country that is a member of CARICOM and engage in digital marketing. Finally, every potential participant was available and willing to share their experiences with digital marketing.

This study relied on professional experience with CARICOM business organizations to facilitate the process of securing a sample from the available population. Contacting SBOs, such as the local chapters of the Chamber of Commerce, produced a list of business owners that met the qualification requirements. Local organizations, such as business associations, are significant networking channels for small business owners (Resnick et al., 2016). I verified each recommended business' qualifications, such as being operational for 10 years, by checking the Registrar of Companies website. A check of the Internet confirmed each business had a digital presence that included, at a minimum, a website and social media accounts such as Facebook and Instagram. Any business not operational for more than 10 years and lacking a digital presence was not part of the sample.

When using the purposive sampling technique, the researcher must obtain data saturation (Etikan et al., 2016). Saturation is when there is no new data attained from new participants (Etikan et al., 2016). To help ensure certainty, multiple case studies should contain more than five cases to explore a straightforward phenomenon (Yin, 2018). This study included seven business owners in the Caribbean who developed effective digital marketing strategies to help sustain their organizations beyond 10 years. Exceeding the minimum of five cases increases the likelihood of reaching data saturation.

All participant interviews took place via video conferencing at a time convenient for small business owners. The interviews had a time allotment of at least 45 minutes to ensure adequate time for the participants to thoroughly answer each question. If there was no data saturation with the first six participants, two additional interviews would occur. If

interviews with eight participants failed to achieve data saturation, additional interviews would continue until data saturation.

Ethical Research

Acting morally, adhering to correct protocol, and avoiding any harm that may emanate during a study are the cornerstones of ethical research (Ngozwana, 2018). The first step to any study involves receiving approval from an institution's ethical body, known as the IRB. IRBs are academic panels that review research proposals to protect participants from harm (Dixon & Quirke, 2017). Researchers must design studies to minimize harm to participants, and IRBs ensure research complies with the Belmont Report and other ethical codes (Brothers et al., 2019). Receipt of approval to conduct research from Walden University IRB (Approval No. 06-17-20-0670503) began the process of contacting SBOs to recommend individuals to participate in this study.

The ethical principle of respect for individuals means researchers give participants the chance to consider the risks and benefits of taking part in a study before voluntarily agreeing to participate by signing an informed consent (Brothers et al., 2019). Potential participants received a request to sign an informed consent form to ensure they understood their role in this study. Informed consent is the agreement between researchers and participants to ensure that participants have the relevant details and confidentiality before voluntarily agreeing to take part in a study (Sabar & Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2017). To indicate their willingness to participate in this study, all potential participants provided their informed consent before interviews and data collection commenced.

Signing the informed consent form also demonstrates that individuals read the explanation of the study, were competent to make an informed decision, and understood that the research analysis would protect participant's privacy (Dixon & Quirke, 2017; Sabar & Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2017). This study's informed consent form included detail about confidentiality in addition to a declaration that the signee understood the content of the form. In a small-scale qualitative study, the researcher must get informed consent, ensure confidentiality and anonymity, as well as allow participants to withdraw from the study (Ngozwana, 2018).

As part of the informed consent process, this study informed participants there were no incentives in return for their involvement in this study. By signing the informed consent, their participation was voluntary and only based on their interest in this study. All participants received a copy of the findings of the study.

Researchers conducting qualitative research often come across ethical challenges like participant withdrawal from the study (Ngozwana, 2018). Participants have the right to change their mind about being involved in a study at any time (Sabar & Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2017). If individuals declined to participate in this study, they would not have been subject to negative consequences. Participants who withdraw from the study after agreeing to participate could do so at any time without repercussions. This study informed participants that they only needed to call or email to express their desire to withdraw. Researchers must inform all participants about their right to withdraw or refuse to answer specific interview questions (Sabar & Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2017). No participants opted to withdraw from this study.

According to the *Belmont Report* (1979) (as cited in Brothers et al., 2019), all researchers must maximize benefits and reduce any risk associated with a study. Because the participants were business owners of thriving organizations who shared their company's data, ensuring confidentiality was vital. Protecting participants' confidentiality is an obligation of researchers; hence the use of pseudonyms to hide participants' identities is commonplace in research (Sabar & Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2017). Instead of using legal names as labels, participants' characteristics were the substitute to ensure transcripts and audio recordings were kept private and confidential (Cleland, 2017). For example, P4MI would be Participant 4, male, interview. Password encryption on the computer protected the collected electronic data. All information, not just transcripts, associated with this study will be held for a minimum of 5 years and then discarded by shredding physical documents and erasing digital files.

Ethical issues also impact the analysis of data and the dissemination of findings (Dixon & Quirke, 2017). Qualitative researchers must balance between sharing rich, accurate accounts of the phenomenon under exploration and protecting their participant's identities (Sabar & Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2017). The transcribing of interviews is when there is a significant risk of disclosing a participant's identity because of direct quotes (Sabar & Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2017). This study replaced any identifiable content with a pseudonym or a pronoun to mitigate the potential risk of any dialogue containing legal names that could identify the business or an individual. Researchers should delete identifiable details or slightly alter quotes to ensure confidentiality (Burles & Bally, 2018).

Digital data from various online sources are increasingly popular because of the significant role the Internet has in businesses and people's lives (Burles & Bally, 2018; Cooky et al., 2018). The prominence of online sources and social media require researchers to contend with how to ethically analyze large volumes of user-generated Internet data (Dixon & Quirke, 2017). Ethical privacy concerns exist because social media blurs the lines of what is public and private (Cooky et al., 2018; Leckner & Severson, 2019).

This study got consent from business owners to review their online data, and they provided access to their online accounts and analytical reports. To achieve triangulation, this study used analytical reports from the business' website and social media sites to corroborate interview data and show trends. Confidentiality is a vital consideration when using digital data because online users did not create content for research purposes, and individuals can easily find information when searching the Internet (Burles & Bally, 2018). Researchers should consider protecting Internet users' privacy and diminishing the traceability of online data (Burles & Bally, 2018). The study adhered to Burles and Bally's (2018) recommendation to aggregate common themes to reflect the trajectory of numerous users' experiences with each business. The analysis focused on finding commonalities across the data to avoid identifiable characteristics or direct quotes that can easily lead to the detection of individuals on the Internet.

Data Collection Instruments

Researchers are typically the primary data collection and analysis instrument in qualitative research (Clark & Vealé, 2018). I was the primary data collection instrument

for this qualitative case study exploring effective digital marketing strategies that Caribbean small business owners use to sustain their organizations beyond 10 years. There are numerous ways a researcher can amass data: physical artifacts, documents, participant observation, direct observation, interviews, archived records, and documents (Yin, 2018). This study included the use of interviews, business documents, and physical artifacts such as downloaded data from the Internet. The principal sources of data for this study were semistructured interviews and business documents from each participant's organization to corroborate interview responses.

Interviews are one of the most significant sources of data collection for case studies (Bleiker et al., 2019; Whitmore et al., 2018). Researchers using the interview process try to find themes from participants (Cleland, 2017). This study collected data from participants using eight semistructured interview questions that align with the primary research question. Semistructured interview questions should be open-ended and broad, allowing participants the opportunity to share fruitful dialogue (Bleiker et al., 2019; Degen, 2017). The questions in this study were open-ended and broad, allowing to facilitate detailed responses from participants.

This study documented interviews in two ways. First, during each participant's interview, observations were chronicled. Whitmore et al. (2018) advocated for researchers documenting interview observations because the information contributes to better interview descriptions. Second, this study recorded all interviews, and the transcribed interview files will remain in a password-locked data file. Audio recording an interview creates a permanent record that facilitates verification of statement accuracy

(Alsharari & Al-Shboul, 2019). Recordings also capture a participant's inflections, hesitations, and emphases (Alsharari & Al-Shboul, 2019).

The researcher's skill and rapport between the researcher and the participant impact the quality of interview data (Karagiozis, 2018). Researchers need to be fully present, accepting, and actively listen during the interview process (Karagiozis, 2018). To ensure professionalism, researchers follow an interview protocol (Yeong et al., 2018). Following an interview protocol also contributes to the validity of a study (Yeong et al., 2018). This study adhered to an interview protocol as an instrument to collect data (see Appendix A).

Member checking compares the researcher's account and the participants to ensure alignment between both versions of data (Birt et al., 2016; Cleland, 2017). If there are any inconsistencies, the participants' edits to the analysis, the researcher incorporates the changes into the study (Cleland, 2017). Getting feedback from study participants confirms the accuracy of interpretations and strengthens data analysis (Alsharari & Al-Shboul, 2019). Member checking also helps mitigate bias during the data collection process because participants verify the researcher's accuracy and interpretation (Birt et al., 2016; Fusch et al., 2018). This study used the validation technique of member checking to verify all participant interviews. Participants had an opportunity to review their interview responses, the interpretation of the transcribed interviews, and any notes from their interview.

Yin (2018) recommended that researchers using the case study approach gather data from multiple sources such as gathering and reviewing documents and artifacts. The

goal is to have information from two or more different data collection sources converging, which results in an understanding of a real-world phenomenon (Cleland, 2017; Whitmore et al., 2018). This convergence of multiple data patterns to produce the same findings is known as triangulation (Cleland, 2017; Leckner & Severson, 2019; Yin, 2018). This study included business documents and physical artifacts such as downloaded data from the Internet to augment information from interviews and secondary sources to compare against primary data.

Data Collection Technique

Data gathering is a critical process in research because the data contribute to the understanding of a phenomenon (Etikan et al., 2016). Interviews provide an opportunity to get insight into an individual's experiences with a phenomenon (Hennessy et al., 2018; Jentoft & Olsen, 2019). The interview process is also the most used data source for case studies (Ridder, 2017). Interviews were the primary data collection technique for this multiple case study exploring effective digital marketing strategies used by small Caribbean business owners to sustain their organization beyond 10 years.

There are three types of interviews: structured, semistructured, and unstructured (Chu & Ke, 2017). A structured interview is a formal questionnaire, while an unstructured interview consists of questions developed ad-hoc at the interview site (Chu & Ke, 2017; Yin, 2018). A semistructured interview is when a researcher prepares a list of queries, as well as follow-up questions, ahead of an interview (Chu & Ke, 2017). Researchers use the semistructured interview process because the procedure is a flexible way to obtain data from an individual (Chu & Ke, 2017). A semistructured interview

gives researchers a broad scope to explore each participant's experience with a phenomenon (Yeong et al., 2018). Because of its flexibility in application, this study obtained data from participants using the semistructured interview process.

After receiving IRB approval to conduct this study, I solicited SBOs, such as the Chamber of Commerce, to recommend small business owners as candidates for this study. The next step was to email an introductory correspondence to recommended small business owners. The initial correspondence included details regarding the research steps of the study as well as a consent form. All research studies require a signed consent form from all participants (Miracle, 2016). The first 6-8 business owners to return a signed consent form became the participants for this study. Selecting more than six participants ensured a contingency pool of participants in the event some business owners withdrew from the study during data collection. However, no participants withdrew from this study.

An advantage of face-to-face interviews is that the process helps to generate trust between a researcher and a participant (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018; Twis et al., 2019). Face-to-face interviews are also more engaging and yield more accurate data than alternative data collection tools (Fischer & Bayham, 2019). A disadvantage of face-to-face interviews is that the process is time-consuming (Twis et al., 2019). Initially, this study intended to use the face-to-face interviewing technique primarily. Because of the health issues associated with the global COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews occurred via video conferencing on Zoom. Each participant selected a video conference interview time convenient for them.

An interview protocol ensures an efficient and organized discussion that elicits extensive data from participants (Yeong et al., 2018). This study used an interview protocol to maintain focus on the topic and ensure professionalism (see Appendix A). A researcher must respect a participant's rights throughout a study (Karagiozis, 2018; Sabar & Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2017). As per the interview protocol, each interview began with a reminder about confidentiality and all participants' right to withdraw from the study. It is essential to keep a participant's identity confidential (Dixon & Quirke, 2017).

This study advised all participants about the recording of their interviews. A disadvantage of recording is that transcribing the recording is a time-consuming process (Alsharari & Al-Shboul, 2019). However, the benefit outweighs the costs because recording allows a researcher to review the recording, note a participant's tone, and inflections which is a source of invaluable data (Alsharari & Al-Shboul, 2019).

After reminding participants about the purpose of the study, a series of semi-structured interview questions ensued. Each participant for this multiple case study engaged in eight open-ended verbal interview questions. The purpose of a study is to answer the primary research question (Fusch et al., 2018). The eight open-ended interview questions aligned with the primary research question of what effective digital marketing strategies do small Caribbean business owners use to sustain their organization beyond 10 years?

Personal notes augmented the participant responses to the semi-structured interview questions in this study. An advantage of taking notes during an interview is that researchers record a participant's body language during an interview to achieve more

abundant data from each discussion (Houé & Murphy, 2017; Whitmore et al., 2018). I recorded notes for each interview in a study journal and included details about the space setting and dynamics of the conversation. A potential disadvantage of field notes is that researchers often make assumptions that can produce wrong conclusions about underlying causes of behavior (Degen, 2017). Because of the opportunity to enhance the level of detail from interviewees, this study chronicled all observations of participants during their interview and any other subsequent follow-up meeting in a journal.

Every participant reviewed the transcripts and analysis of their recorded interviews. Member checking facilitates accurate descriptions or interpretations of phenomena and contributes to the validity of a study (Birt et al., 2016). Member checking occurred within 14 days of an interview. Each participant received an email containing the transcript and interpretation of his or her interview for verification. Participants had the opportunity to edit or accept that the translation and interpretation were correct.

Triangulation of participants' comments occurs by using multiple research sources (Ngozwana, 2018). Business documents and artifacts were also data collection techniques for this multiple case study exploring effective digital marketing strategies used by small Caribbean business owners to sustain their organization beyond 10 years. Documents and artifacts are two ways a qualitative researcher can collect data (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 2018). Documents are records containing words and pictures not chronicled by a researcher (Bowen, 2009). An advantage of using documents is the ability to provide additional insight and helps researchers to verify a participant's assertions (Bowen, 2009; Cleland, 2017; Whitmore et al., 2018). Additional benefits of using documents are that they are an

efficient method of gathering data, cost-effective, and unobtrusive (Bowen, 2009). A disadvantage of leveraging documents for data collection is that the authors of the records did not create them for research and maybe missing enough detail (Bowen, 2009). Additionally, access to some documents might be deliberately blocked or the content aligned to corporate policy and, therefore, biased (Bowen, 2009). Because the advantages exceed the disadvantages, this study used documents as a means of obtaining data.

Researchers should coordinate with participants access to business documents earmarked for review (Yin, 2018). Before each interview, participants received an invitation and reminder to assemble copies of any business documents or artifacts related to their small business's digital marketing for the interview. Researchers must critically evaluate documents to determine their relevance to the research purpose and if the documents align with the conceptual framework of the study (Bowen, 2009). A review of the participant's documents occurred following all interviews to determine relevance. This study either kept copies of any business documents forwarded by a participant or took a photo of the business documents. Participants discussed each document and provided information about the digital marketing strategies used in the respective business.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) (as cited in Natow, 2019) recommended that researchers treat downloaded online resources as artifacts. Artifacts can include past and current digital marketing materials (Natow, 2019). Yin (2018) considered technological tools or devices as artifacts. A benefit of artifacts is the technical insight it provides (Yin, 2018). Availability is a disadvantage of artifacts (Yin, 2018). After each interview, a

review of the business' website and any online marketing materials, online newsletters, and Internet advertisements took place. Screenshots recorded information about digital marketing materials. Screenshots not only preserve the data; a screenshot includes a time and date stamp, which facilitates easier organization of the substantial amount of data (Byrne, 2017).

This study used analytical reports from a business' website and social media sites to corroborate interview data and show trends. Engagement rates, customer response, and volume of likes and comments are dominant social media metrics on sites such as Facebook (Díaz-Faes et al., 2019; Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019). If participants mentioned social media metrics in their interviews, this study used downloaded analytical reports from the applicable social media sites to corroborate claims.

An advantage of digital data sources is the ability to provide information about a phenomenon that might remain hidden from offline data collection methods (Burles & Bally, 2018). Digital data also mitigates research bias because data collection occurs without human intervention (Leckner & Severson, 2019). The ethical debate about the issue of consent regarding the use of online communication is a disadvantage of using digital data in qualitative research (Burles & Bally, 2018; Cooky et al., 2018). To protect social media users' privacy, researchers can aggregate common user themes to show a trend (Burles & Bally, 2018). In this study, social media metrics appear as a cumulative summary, or aggregate, of numerous individuals' actions to ensure user and participant's privacy.

Data Organization Technique

An essential aspect of research is the management and organization of the enormous volume of data (Maher et al., 2018). For redundancy purposes, this study recorded each participant's interview using both cassette tape and by the computer software Audacity. I created a folder for each participant's audio file on a computer and labeled the folder with the business's pseudo name and location. Each digital voice recording from a participant's interview then resided in their organization's folder. The next step was to transcribe each participant's audio file into Microsoft Word and verify the content. Password encryption on the computer protected the collected electronic data. Digital and cassette recordings of interviews reside in a safe with all hard copies of data.

A principle of solid data collection is to create a database to organize research documentation (Yin, 2018). The use of a study database enhances the reliability of a study (Yin, 2018). Digital software is a valuable tool for the organization, management, and analysis of data (Maher et al., 2018). This study used the data organization tools Mendeley, Microsoft Word, Audacity, and NVivo12.

This study used Mendeley to organize peer-reviewed references, business documents, and artifacts. Mendeley is an online academic reference and document manager that is password protected (Zahedi & Costas, 2018). A database should store collected data and facilitate easy retrieval (Yin, 2018). Folders exist for each business in Mendeley. All data about a business had the code name of the participant's organization and the date of data collection before storing in its applicable folder.

This study used observation field notes from each interview. Transcriptions of field notes from a journal went into Word documents. All the Word documents had the name of the code name of the participant's organization and date of collection. The digital copies of the field notes remained in its organization's folder in Mendeley.

All printed copies of business documents supplied by a participant were screenshot to transform the information into digital documents. The digital documents had the code name of the participant's organization and date of collection. After organization, the digital copies of the business documents remained in Mendeley.

Software attacks such as viruses and worms, hardware failure, theft, and sabotage are some of the cybersecurity issues researchers face while conducting a study (Pătrașcu, 2018). To mitigate cybersecurity issues, the computer used in this study had its ransomware, virus, and threat protection settings activated. This study regularly uploaded duplicates of files onto an external drive with two-factor authentication required to access the storage device. Public Wi-Fi networks can also expose devices to security breaches (Dan-Suteu, 2018). This study only used private, password-protected Wi-Fi networks to access the Internet.

After the study, all raw electronic data will remain in secure, electronic, password-protected files on a USB drive for 5 years. After 5 years, I will delete and destroy the electronic data files from the USBs. This study will retain all raw physical data in a locked container in a safe place for 5 years. Researchers should integrate ethics into all stages of the research process (Dixon & Quirke, 2017), including participant data disposal. After 5 years, shredding will dispose of the paper copies of data.

Data Analysis

Triangulation is the combination of multiple aspects of research to strengthen the design of a study and improve the analysis of the same phenomenon by either combining data sources, theories, researchers, or methods to generate cross verification (Kern, 2018; Leckner & Severson, 2019). Combining several different perspectives increase understanding and the validity of findings (Joslin & Müller, 2016; Kern, 2018). There are four types of triangulation researchers can use; data, investigator, theory, and methodological (Fusch et al., 2018; Moon, 2019; Yin, 2018). Researchers can use each type of triangulation alone or in a combination (Moon, 2019). The research question and study design determine which triangulation will be used (Moon, 2019).

As the primary data collection instrument, this study used interviews, documents, and artifacts; this process confirmed the use of methodological triangulation in this study. Methodological triangulation is the use of multiple data collection methods concerning the same phenomenon to enhance the understanding of that topic (Birt et al., 2016; Fusch et al., 2018). The multiple sources a researcher can use for triangulation include documents, artifacts, interviews, and participant and direct observations (Fusch et al., 2018; Ridder, 2017). Researchers compare the data gathered from multiple sources (Jentoft & Olsen, 2019). Triangulation can lead to more valid interpretations by deepening a researcher's understanding of a phenomenon (Birt et al., 2016; Jentoft & Olsen, 2019; Moon, 2019; Yin, 2018).

In qualitative research, the researcher interprets the data to extract its meaning and then converts it to information (Degen, 2017). There are numerous data analysis

techniques a researcher can use for a study. Pattern-matching logic is a data analysis technique where a researcher compares empirically-based patterns with predicted patterns (Ridder, 2017; Yin, 2018). Other data analysis techniques include cross-case synthesis, explanation building, logic models, and time series analysis (Ridder, 2017; Yin, 2018).

Multiple case study research can use cross-case synthesis to process data (Ridder, 2017; Yin, 2018). Cross-case synthesis analysis can only be used for multiple case studies because the process features the researcher systematically comparing various case data to find similarities and differences (Ridder, 2017; Yin, 2018). First, the researcher analyzes each case on its own and then looks for similarities and differences among cases (Ridder, 2017). Eisenhardt (1991) (as cited in Ridder, 2017) indicated that multiple cases facilitate replication between cases and are a way of corroboration.

There are several advantages to using cross-case synthesis. An advantage of cross-case analysis is that the researcher retains a holistic approach to exploring their topic (Yin, 2018). The cross-case synthesis can also facilitate researchers using the data to make a robust assertion (Yin, 2018). An additional benefit of cross-case analysis is that the technique might point to other terms of the outcome (Beach & Rohlfing, 2018). This study used the cross-case synthesis analytical technique.

Qualitative data analysis uncovers patterns, relationships, and themes (Cleland, 2017). Prior to cross-case synthesis, an analysis of each individual case occurred. Because multiple case study data consists of participant interview transcripts, researcher notes, documents, and previously published literature; researchers conduct thematic analyses using coding and sorting procedures (Clark & Vealé, 2018). Thematic analysis

is when researchers look for patterns in the data (Bleiker et al., 2019; Bowen, 2009; Clark & Vealé, 2018). With the inductive approach, key themes and connections gradually develop from iterative data comparisons (Alsharari & Al-Shboul, 2019). This study used thematic analysis before cross-case synthesis.

Themes generation and coding is the most used analysis method for qualitative data (Rashid et al., 2019). Coding is the transitional process from data collection to analysis and occurs in two phases (Clark & Vealé, 2018). The first step is decoding, which is when the researcher interprets the core meaning from a passage (Clark & Vealé, 2018). The second step is encoding, the labeling of a passage with a word or phrase that represents the core or attributes of various data (Clark & Vealé, 2018). Coding condenses data without diminishing its meaning (Clark & Vealé, 2018). This study followed this encoding and decoding process.

The accurate interpretation of data depends on a thorough reading of the text and identifying any emerging themes (Clark & Vealé, 2018). Because documents are supplementary data, a researcher often uses codes from interview transcripts for documents (Bowen, 2009). This study used interview codes to commence an analysis of secondary data. I created additional codes when a new theme emerged from documents.

Any software should elevate the research process, not substitute a researcher's role in exploring and interpreting data (Wilk et al., 2019). Digital tools only help facilitate analysis so that a researcher gets more in-depth data (Wilk et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). Coding software is well suited for data from multiple structured interviews and other sources (Alsharari & Al-Shboul, 2019). The visual output from software help a

researcher understand exploratory research data because it produces semi-automated analysis (Wilk et al., 2019). Digital tools facilitate a more sequential form of reasoning, while manual analytical methods support relational cognition (Maher et al., 2018). Despite this semi-automated analysis, the process is still researcher driven because the researcher selects the themes and notes the emergence of any patterns (Alsharari & Al-Shboul, 2019; Yin, 2018).

This study used NVivo software to support data analysis. NVivo is good for text retrieval to support analysis and coding (Burns et al., 2019). With NVivo, researchers create codes and highlight text that aligns with a code. This involvement ensures that the researcher's interpretation of the meaning is incorporated at the coding stage, not just during the analysis process (Wilk et al., 2019). An advantage of this NVivo feature is that the human perspective is included in the assignment of meaning to the data, ensuring key themes get identified (Wilk et al., 2019). Software such as NVivo is also good for data management during the analysis process, safeguarding the reliability and validity of this study research data (Burns et al., 2019). A disadvantage of digital software is that analysis with NVivo is subjective and time-consuming (Wilk et al., 2019).

A scholar needs to review all evidence, consider alternative rationale, remain focused on the critical issues, and demonstrate in-depth knowledge about the topic (Yin, 2018). To ensure the focus remained on the research question, key themes extracted from interviews, documents, and artifacts highlighted the digital marketing strategies small Caribbean business owners use to sustain their organizations beyond 10 years. A researcher should never discount data that contradicts an emerging explanation of a

phenomenon because current information helps improve analysis (Cleland, 2017). To ensure up-to-date data is in this research, a search for new peer-reviewed articles that align with the conceptual framework and purpose of this study continued until submitting this dissertation. I correlated the key case study themes with the most current published literature and Porter's (1980) competitive advantage theory.

Reliability and Validity

Trustworthiness is one way to evaluate qualitative studies (Maher et al., 2018; Ngozwana, 2018). To ensure trustworthiness, research should satisfy four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Maher et al., 2018). Scholars also refer to the creditability of a researcher's explanation, interpretation, and findings as validity (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018). According to Yin (2018), the quality of any study centers on its validity and reliability. Strategies such as triangulation ensure the reliability and validity of study data and any findings (Fusch et al., 2018). Another critical measurement of reliability and validity in qualitative studies is the quality of the research findings (Yeong et al., 2018). Because credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability determine the excellence of qualitative research (Cleland, 2017), this study explored the issue of validity and reliability.

Reliability

Qualitative researchers must attempt to understand a phenomenon from a participant's perspective, not their own (Bleiker et al., 2019). Bias impacts the methodology, treatment, and analysis of data (Karagiozis, 2018). Member checking helps mitigate bias during the data collection process (Fusch et al., 2018). This study used

member checking to confirm the accuracy of the initial interpretation of the participant's interviews. Member checking addressed the dependability of a participant's data.

To achieve reliability, researchers document the data analysis procedure to show transparency and create an audit trail (Maher et al., 2018). This study established a database using the software Mendeley, conducted thematic analysis and cross-case synthesis, and used NVivo to support the analysis process. Creating a study database is a strategy to help achieve reliability (Yin, 2018).

An audit trail supports dependability by providing enough details to theoretically allow another researcher to repeat the study (Maher et al., 2018; Yin, 2018). Realistically, researchers using the case study method achieve reliability by being transparent about the steps in the data collection process (Yin, 2018). Researchers also show dependability by detailing the research process by disclosing steps like the participant selection process and including and reflective notes (Bleiker et al., 2019). The data collection process documentation for this study was clear and included an interview protocol, information on participants' selection, and reflectivity.

The procedural reliability of a study helps establish the trustworthiness of its research (Alsharari & Al-Shboul, 2019). This study used peer-reviewed journals for literature review, received IRB approval, and utilized consent forms. By using peer-reviewed journals, researchers can demonstrate reliability (Yin, 2018).

Using triangulation contributes to the reliability of the findings of a study (Fusch et al., 2018). Qualitative researchers work closely with data, creating a need to mitigate the risk of subjectivity (Leckner & Severson, 2019). Triangulation reduces the risk of

bias because of the use of multiple sources (Fusch et al., 2018; Leckner & Severson, 2019). This study used interviews, documents, and artifacts as data collection instruments. This multi-source approach confirmed the use of methodological triangulation in this study. Methodological triangulation is the use of multiple data collection sources to better understand a phenomenon (Rashid et al., 2019).

Validity

Triangulation supports reliability and is also a way to increase the credibility, confirmability, and transferability of the findings of a study (Moon, 2019). Triangulation is the way to explore different perspectives of a phenomenon, thereby ensuring the confirmability of the findings of a study (Fusch et al., 2018). This study used data about the same phenomenon from interviews, documents, and artifacts. When case studies achieve triangulation from multiple data sources, the findings help ensure the validity of a study (Alsharari & Al-Shboul, 2019).

Multiple sources of data improve the accuracy of a study, strengthening the credibility of the research findings (Morgan et al., 2017). Triangulation also helps a researcher corroborate findings across data sets and reduce potential researcher bias (Bowen, 2009). When researchers triangulate data, they provide a convergence of evidence that promotes the credibility of a study (Bowen, 2009). Because this study collected data using interviews, business documents, and artifacts, findings are accurate and corroborated, enhancing the credibility of findings.

Achieving data saturation also contributes to the validity of a study (Nascimento et al., 2018). When collecting data, the researcher must obtain data saturation (Etikan et

al., 2016). This study had a contingency pool of 10 participants in the event saturation was not reached with the initial sample of 6-8 participants. In the event, data from 10 participants did not achieve data saturation, the recruiting and interviewing of additional participants would continue until new participants provided no original information.

There is an additional strategy to strengthen credibility in a study. A credible study measures the intended phenomenon and accurately reflects participants' real-world experiences (Maher et al., 2018). Member checking helps ensure credibility by ensuring an accurate transcription of participant interviews (Maher et al., 2018). Member checking was a strategy used in this study.

Reflexivity helps maintain credibility and conformity because it documents the views and opinions felt by a researcher (Ngozwana, 2018). Confirmability is when a researcher minimizes bias by acknowledging their predispositions (Maher et al., 2018). Because researchers need to remain objective (Bowen, 2009), a journal documented impressions about different participants and the decision-making rationale during the data collection process.

The transferability of the research can establish the soundness of qualitative research (Alsharari & Al-Shboul, 2019). Transferability is the provision of rich data about a study so readers can apply the findings to other contexts (Bleiker et al., 2019; Fusch et al., 2018; Maher et al., 2018). This study provided details about the data collection process, such as an interview protocol, and documents the data analysis procedure. This in-depth information may allow others to determine the transferability of the findings.

Transition and Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore effective digital marketing strategies that Caribbean business owners use to help their organizations be sustainable beyond 10 years. Section 2 included an explanation of the research methodology used in this study. This study used a qualitative multiple case study design to collect data from multiple sources such as semi-structured interviews, business documents, and artifacts. Section 2 also contained details on the organization, security, and analysis of data. Finally, Section 2 included an explanation of how this study will establish the dependability, credibility, and validity of findings.

Section 3 contains the findings of this study. Details about the analysis of interview responses, recommendations for future studies, and potential application to professional practice are also in the next section. Section 3 will also include a discussion about the implications for social change. This study will conclude with a reflection on the doctoral study experience and a summary of the study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore effective digital marketing strategies that Caribbean small business owners use to sustain their organizations beyond 10 years. All the participants in this study possessed knowledge about digital marketing in the fields of design, health, restaurant, retail, and technology sectors. Also, every participant operated a business in at least one CARICOM country for at least 10 years. Collectively, the participants conducted business in Barbados, Bermuda, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and Trinidad. Four of the participants expanded their businesses to provide goods and services beyond their shores. Participants 2, 4, and 7 provide their service worldwide, while Participant 3 exports their products globally from their island headquarters. The findings indicated that the business owners were early adopters of technological innovation and leveraged the Internet to implement digital marketing strategies to sustain their organizations effectively.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question was,

RQ: What effective digital marketing strategies do small Caribbean business owners use to sustain their organization beyond 10 years?

This study's data came from semistructured interviews with seven business owners, applicable business documents, and digital artifacts. The interviews occurred over 9 weeks, and the average duration of each interview was approximately 22 minutes. After conducting five interviews, a review of the journal notes and interview transcripts

showed a repetition of themes. A further two interviews occurred to ensure data saturation. Data saturation is the point when a researcher's queries yield no additional information because of a repetition of responses or a lack of new themes (Lowe et al., 2018).

Within 14 days of their interview, participants received an electronic copy of the proceedings. Each participant reviewed the content to ensure accuracy and proper interpretation, a process known as member checking (Cleland, 2017). Participants then provided electronic confirmation that the interview transcript was an accurate record and interpretation of their comments. After member-checking, thematic analysis commenced on each participant interview.

Business documents and artifacts were secondary sources of data for this study to provide additional insight and verify participants' assertions (Cleland, 2017; Whitmore et al., 2018). Participants emailed business documents associated with their digital marketing strategy. A review of the participant's documents occurred following all interviews to determine relevance and if the documents aligned with the research question and conceptual framework. Only relevant business documents received analysis.

Artifacts include past and current digital marketing materials (Natow, 2019). After each interview, there was a review of the business' website and digital marketing materials, including online newsletters and Internet advertisements. Analytical reports from each business' website and social media sites helped corroborate interview data and show trends. Engagement rates, customer responses, and volume of likes and comments were the dominant social media metrics used in this study. Screenshots recorded the

information about each business' digital marketing materials and provided a time and date stamp, which facilitated easier record-keeping (Byrne, 2017).

Saldaña's (2016) descriptive code process generated the codes in this study. A descriptive coding process assigns meanings to raw data segments, thereby providing words or phrases that allow for categorization and thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2016). NVivo12 facilitated the line-by-line coding of the interviews, business documents, and artifacts because of the substantial amounts of data, and software programs are useful tools to support the process (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). The software also helps researchers do better data analysis because the programs make it easier to deeply explore the data (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Through an iterative process of multiple reviews of the original code list, I modified the initial codes. This modification process clarified any codes to accurately reflect meaning. The iterative review process also aligned codes with the conceptual framework. Emerging themes were the outcome of this coding and categorizing process, as shown in Appendix B.

Thematic analysis was the first step in the data analysis process. The rationale for themes was a combination of repetition by the participants, mention in the academic literature, and alignment with Porter's (1980) competitive advantage theory. The thematic analysis considered all data obtained from the study, including transcribed interviews, review of documents (including websites), literature review, and artifacts such as online newsletters.

The participant interview from each case was the first data source coded line-by-line. The same line-by-line coding then occurred on the business documents and artifacts

for that case. After the descriptive coding process, NVivo software identified reoccurring themes between the three data sources for each case.

Triangulation of participants' comments occurred by analyzing data from multiple research sources, namely interviews, business documents, and artifacts. By methodologically triangulating the interview, artifacts, and business documents using thematic and cross-case analysis, five significant themes emerged. As shown in Table 1, the five themes related to the digital marketing strategies used by business owners to sustain their organizations beyond 10 years were: (a) metrics, (b) social media, (c) differentiation, (d) digital technology, and (e) website. Table 2 shows the frequency of themes across the seven cases used in this study.

Table 1

Coding of Participants' Responses, Business Documents, and Artifacts to Themes

Themes	Participants ^a	Responses ^b	Documents ^c	Artifacts ^d
Metrics	7	69	20	34
Social media	7	49	16	64
Differentiation	7	40	33	23
Digital technology	7	38	33	19
Website	4	37	32	8

Note. ^a Number of owners who answered interview questions. ^b Number of participant responses connected to the themes. ^c Number of business documents linked to the themes.

^d Number of artifacts linked to the themes.

Table 2

Cross-Case Analysis (Theme Frequency of Occurrence by Case)

Cases ^a	Metrics	Social media	Differentiation	Digital technology	Website
Participant 1	13	16	8	8	22
Participant 2	22	31	11	13	11
Participant 3	23	23	19	8	29
Participant 4	18	10	21	18	4
Participant 5	10	19	10	13	8
Participant 6	17	30	14	5	12
Participant 7	20	9	13	30	8

Note. ^a Number of participants' responses, business documents, and artifacts connected to the theme.

Porter's (1980) competitive strategy theory was the conceptual framework for exploring the overarching research question of this qualitative multiple case study. The competitive strategy aligned both the literature and the themes by acting as a lens to filter data. By comparing the findings with the literature and the conceptual framework, this study adds to the existing literature on this phenomenon. A discussion of each theme and the related subthemes, as well as the cross-case analysis, occurs in the following sections.

Theme 1: Metrics

The first theme from this study was the use of metrics to measure a digital marketing strategy's efficacy. Marketing metrics include qualitative measurements like WOM or quantitative results such as sales growth (Hatta et al., 2019). The findings indicated that all participants (Ps) relied on some type of metrics to evaluate their digital marketing strategy. As shown in Table 3, participants measured their digital marketing efficacy in a variety of ways.

Table 3

Cross-Case Analysis of Significant Metrics Themes (Frequency of Occurrence by Case)

Cases ^a	Analytics	Sales	Customer feedback	Awareness/ WOM	Relationships
Participant 1	4		1	2	3
Participant 2	5		11	2	8
Participant 3	2	5		3	5
Participant 4	5	4		5	
Participant 5	4	2	2	2	
Participant 6	5		9	2	3
Participant 7	16	2			2

Note. ^a Number of participants' responses, business documents, and artifacts connected to the metric theme.

Tracking digital marketing activities provides guidance on how to allocate marketing budgets in a cost-efficient and effective way to attract consumers. Metrics also signal when to increase resourcing levels. P2 realized the need to allocate more time to digital marketing to increase appointments after monitoring the growth on social media channels and service bookings. Without metrics, a business owner could not determine if digital marketing helped sustain the business instead of strictly being a cost center. The findings aligned with current research that indicated that measuring marketing performance was necessary for businesses to justify their marketing spend (Hatta et al., 2019; Saura et al., 2017). When businesses focus on efficiency and cost savings, they can achieve a competitive advantage over their rivals (Al-Rdaydeh et al., 2018; Brett, 2018; Liu & Atuahene-Gima, 2018; Quaye & Mensah, 2018).

Businesses can evaluate digital marketing performance in two ways, qualitative insight into their customer behavior such as WOM or quantitative, number-based results

such as sales (Hatta et al., 2019). While digital marketing tools provide a plethora of quantitative analytics, as shown in Table 4, the majority of participants focused on qualitative metrics to determine the efficacy of their digital marketing initiatives.

Table 4

Cross-Case Analysis of Qualitative Versus Quantitative Metrics Use

Cases	Qualitative ^a	Quantitative ^b
Participant 1	6	4
Participant 2	22	5
Participant 3	8	7
Participant 4	5	9
Participant 5	4	6
Participant 6	14	5
Participant 7	2	18

Note. ^a Number of participants' responses, business documents, and artifacts connected qualitative metrics. ^b Number of participants' responses, business documents, and artifacts connected to quantitative metrics.

P2 noted that qualitative feedback resonated more than quantitative data like analytics. "I get an email back saying that was wonderful, or that was very helpful, so I'm going to refer my friend," said P2. The customer-oriented focus provided by qualitative metrics provides business owners with a deeper understanding of meeting their customer's needs better. When businesses exceed consumers' expectations, satisfied customers share their positive experiences with relatives and friends. The WOM feedback highlighted by P2 is a qualitative marketing metric that reinforces existing literature that stresses the importance of operational or goal-attainment measurements such as WOM (Hatta et al., 2019; Katsikeas et al., 2016). Positive WOM reinforces the brand image,

and any small business with a positive brand image can sell more goods or services, thereby creating a competitive advantage (Panda et al., 2019).

The reliance on qualitative metrics, as shown in Table 4, also aligns with the market-based perspective of competitive advantage. Morgan and Hunt (1996) linked the market-based competitive advantage theory to marketing by suggesting that mutual trust and engagement built special bonds between businesses and customers that rivals cannot copy (as cited in Bednarz et al., 2017). Taking the time to respond to online customer feedback makes a lasting impression that can go beyond that single customer. Those initial impressions with consumers can start one-of-a-kind relationships that evolve into a competitive advantage. A content analysis of digital messages posted by the small businesses in this study showed an effort to stimulate direct engagement with consumers. The business owners encouraged qualitative feedback and made efforts to enhance the interaction between themselves and digital users. For example, P6 actively monitored channels, responded to comments, solicited permission to share comments, and then immediately shared qualitative digital feedback from customers. P6's actions helped solidify bonds with the customers who provided feedback and turned those patrons into brand advocates for P6. Those brand advocates frequently shared positive reviews of themselves patronizing P6's establishment. Positive brand perception of service helps differentiate a small business from its competitors (Kim & Yoon, 2018; Panda et al., 2019).

Despite a reliance on qualitative data, quantitative analytics can also effectively guide business owners' digital marketing decisions. The data associated with two

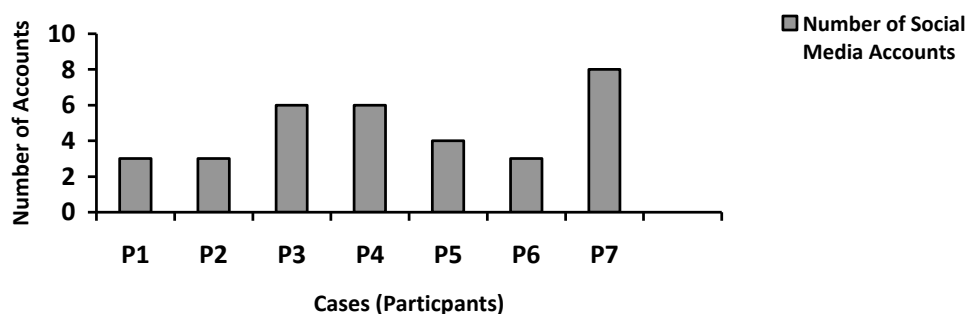
businesses indicated a heavy reliance on quantitative metrics. P4 placed reliance on the conversion rate for users signing up for the service, verifying their accounts, and then using the service. P7 built in-house analytical software to track the performance of their custom digital applications. Leveraging internal digital analytics aligns with Barney's (1991) resource-based view, which holds that businesses enhanced performance by using internal resources (Alqershi et al., 2020). When there is synergy between a business' resources and capabilities, that organization functions better. Those operational efficiencies result in organizational cost savings, higher profits, and ultimately a competitive advantage.

Theme 2: Social Media

The second theme from this study's data was social media. Social media is any platform that leverages Internet-based technology to enable people to share, debate, develop, and modify user-generated content (Cheng et al., 2019; Gómez et al., 2019). Previous research indicated that social media was a valuable tool for small businesses to promote brand awareness, run marketing campaigns, and build relationships with consumers (Cheng et al., 2019; Morzhyna et al., 2019). Similar to other jurisdictions, social media is a central component of Caribbean businesses' digital marketing strategy. The data from business documents and artifacts showed that social media was vital to every participant's digital marketing effort. As shown in Figure 1, every business involved in this study operated multiple social media business accounts.

Figure 1

Cross-Case Analysis of Operational Social Media Accounts (Occurrence by Case)



A review of artifacts showed that, on average, the participants in this study managed a total of four social media sites. In addition, 6 out of 7 participants referenced social media sites as significant components of their digital marketing strategy. “I have been able to find in my business a way to connect and to connect meaningfully to my clients in a way that I would not have been able to do it before,” said P2 about social media. This data aligns with research from other jurisdictions that showed that social media was an integral part of a business’ digital marketing strategy (Bauman, 2020).

A 2020 survey of 36 small U.S. businesses showed that Facebook was the leading social media network used by small businesses, followed by Twitter and Instagram (Bauman, 2020). Among the participants of this survey, every business used Facebook and Instagram. Fifty-eight percent of (four individuals) participants used Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, while 43% (three participants) leveraged five social media platforms. Only one participant managed eight different social media channels. The level

of social media use by study participants was higher than the United States small business social media participation rate reported by Bauman (2020). This high level of social media use highlighted Caribbean businesses' willingness to adopt digital tools such as social media. The adoption levels for social media also reinforce creativity and the survival instincts associated with the Caribbean culture. During COVID-19, several participants immediately shifted all customer relations activities to social media. The level of social media use by study participants indicates that these business owners sensed that social media was indispensable to sustaining their business.

Social media networking sites also include blogs, discussion boards, multi-media sharing sites, and review sites (Holsapple et al., 2018). Seventy-one percent or five businesses in this study hosted a blog or discussion board. P4's company blog is a user-friendly, up-to-date repository of industry-specific information. P3 used blogging to increase search engine optimization (SEO), thereby improving visibility and eventually, in turn, conversion through their website. Previous research has shown that SEO was a critical element that sent traffic to a business' website (Niculescu et al., 2019). Content analysis of participant's blog posts showed an effort to share useful content that informed consumers. The prevalent use of blogs and discussion boards underscored a recognition of a global trend towards consumer-oriented and relationship-building social media sharing. Providing industry insight, facilitating user collaboration, or educating consumers all engage and develop loyalty. Bauman (2020) noted the shift away from the hard-sell (product-focused) technique and urged American small business owners to adopt the social media trend. P7 recommended using social media to "get them to

respond, build a relationship, and connect with you. And then look for how you can drive a sale”. When businesses use social media to communicate to consumers in a customer-oriented way, the interaction forges relationships that morph into a competitive advantage (Bednarz et al., 2017).

Social media users interact with other users or organizations by generating or sharing content like videos (Bauman, 2020). Eighty-six percent or six out of the seven participants created videos for their social media accounts. “Video are very, very effective,” said P5. Five participants in this study host their videos on YouTube, but only P7 also used the video-sharing app TikTok. Videos stimulate, engage, and may capture viewers’ attention. Videos provide a creative way to differentiate a business from its rivals. When a business is distinctive in the eyes of consumers, it creates a competitive advantage. P2 differentiated the business by creating a weekly educational video series that ran consistently for two years on Instagram and Facebook. Using video to differentiate a business supports literature backing the use of online videos for this purpose (Morzhyna et al., 2019). The perception of uniqueness garners appreciation from consumers, who then reward the business for its distinctiveness (Budiarti, 2018; Wakhu & Belt, 2019).

As is the case with their global counterparts, Caribbean small business owners experienced similar resourcing issues associated with sustaining a social media presence. According to current literature, acquiring likes or new followers and maintaining social media networks were the two challenges experienced by small business owners and managers (He et al., 2017; Ritz et al., 2019). The findings of this study indicated that

participants struggled to provide the resources needed to gain the benefits associated with a consistent social media presence. “I, with my team, have seen an increased demand of our time to manage our strategies and campaigns efficiently and effectively,” said P1. P5 noted: “We would go for like a month where we are posting 4 to 5 days a week and then after that, we're exhausted and just can't do it anymore, and then we would disappear for 3 months.” P2, P6, and P7 also echoed the sentiment. The human, time, and monetary costs associated with properly maintaining a competitive social media presence resonates universally with small business owners. Software solutions such as Hootsuite can inexpensively alleviate the logistical and scheduling issues associated with social media. A total of 57% of the participants sought professional help or hired a dedicated social media resource to lessen the strain. “I never, ever imagined that I would get to a place where I would have to have a social media person working for me,” P2 lamented. He et al. (2017) recommended that small business owners secure a trained, dedicated social media resource to maximize the competitive advantages associated with the digital tool.

Any business that can effectively leverage social media could gain a competitive advantage over its rivals. (Busaidi et al., 2019; Gómez et al., 2019). Tarka (2018) suggested that Caribbean business owners' reliance on their intuition and first-hand experience to make decisions could impede their success with digital tools, like social media. The findings of this study contradicted the current literature about the decision-making process of Caribbean business owners (Broome et al., 2018; Tarka, 2018). Caribbean business owners are usually conservative (Broome et al., 2018); however, most participants were not risk-averse about implementing any component of their digital

marketing campaign, including social media. Only two business owners identified themselves as the initial barrier to properly implementing digital tools like social media. P2 said, getting past traditional Caribbean sensibilities regarding relationship management was a hindrance to adopting digital marketing.

I think one of the other barriers was me personally moving into accepting that this was the type of marketing that was now available, and we couldn't do things that good old fashion way and that it couldn't always just be about sweat equity and meeting the people and engaging them during a meet and greet.

For most of this study's participants, cultural sensibilities were not an early hindrance in adopting digital tools like social media.

Theme 3: Differentiation

Every business owner interviewed used differentiation to achieve a competitive advantage. The use of differentiation by Caribbean business owners reinforces current literature about the need to create the perception of uniqueness in an industry, thereby garnering appreciation from consumers who reward a business for its distinctiveness (Budiarti, 2018; Wakhu & Belt, 2019). As shown in Table 5, three significant subthemes emerged related to leveraging differentiation as a strategy to sustain their organizations beyond 10 years were: (a) expertise, (b) brand, (c) Caribbean culture

Table 5

Cross-Case Analysis of Significant Differentiation Themes (Case Occurrence Frequency)

Cases ^a	Brand	Caribbean culture	Expertise
Participant 1	7	3	2
Participant 2	9	5	2
Participant 3	6	17	3
Participant 4	1	3	11
Participant 5	1	1	7
Participant 6	1	2	3
Participant 7	3	8	3

Note. ^a Number of participants' responses, business documents, and artifacts connected to the metric theme.

Specifically, the participants positioned themselves as experts in their field, leveraged the Caribbean culture, or built their brand based on authenticity. Further details on these subthemes follow.

Expertise

Research indicated that once a business develops a perceived high value among consumers, they have a competitive advantage over their rivals (Kaleka & Morgan, 2017). To achieve that perception, some participants position themselves as experts in their industry. In its sector, being the first to market with a service allowed P4 to deploy this strategy. "Because I was the first to offer something, I was the authority on the subject, I had something to say on the subject," recalled P4. This positioning as a subject-matter expert (SME) helped increase the digital exposure of P4's articles, public speaking videos, and blogs. P3 also noted an additional impact of being viewed as an expert in the sector because "as you gain credibility, it really boosts your SEO." Every participant also

digitally publicized awards in recognition of their excellence in their respective sectors. Promoting awards is a cost-effective way to migrate a business's goods or services from standard to premium and create the perception of superiority. Consumers pay more for premium goods and services, allowing that business to charge higher prices. When consumers view goods or services from a business as exceptional, that improves revenue, thereby creating a competitive advantage (Hales & Mclarney, 2017).

Brand

Cultivating a unique brand is a way to leverage differentiation to create and sustain a competitive advantage (Panda et al., 2019). The findings of this study align with current literature indicating that a distinct brand can improve a small business's reputation by defining its good or service for customers and differentiating its business' offerings from its rivals (Panda et al., 2019). According to P1, building a brand based on authenticity and transparency helped set the business apart from its rivals:

The person in me is reflective of what my company is. And while there was a time when people said you should really keep them separate and segmented and make sure they don't integrate, I really think in these days more than ever; it is important that people understand the personality behind the brand.

P2 echoed the sentiments noting that personally being front and center in their digital marketing content was critical "for my brand to stay alive, and to be authentic and to stay true to me." Aligning a brand with the business owner's distinct persona is a competitive strategy that results in a unique position in the market that adversaries cannot replicate. Charismatic business leaders add a one-of-a-kind persona to a brand that makes the

business more dynamic, engaging, and, more importantly, human. If a business can differentiate itself as relatable to consumers because of its leader, the entity can achieve a competitive advantage.

Caribbean Culture

Capitalizing on local culture to achieve a competitive advantage is a strategy leveraged by 71% or five participants. Content analysis of digital marketing collateral showed that participants capitalized on the natural beauty, local dialect, and cultural tradition associated with the region. P2 and P5 were the primary business that produced collateral in a foreign language and local dialect. P5 noted that digital video content emphasizing local content and accent stirred island pride and helped to secure business. “People are like ‘oh, you're local, okay, I’ll deal with you,’” said P5. P2 produced digital material in Spanish, the primary language of Caribbean nations colonized by the Spaniards. By offering service and digitally marketing in Spanish, P2 acquired clients in Spanish-speaking Caribbean countries like the Dominican Republic. Using free software packages like Google translate can help small business expand their small domestic markets and attract consumers from non-English speaking countries.

According to Williams and Ramdani (2018), Caribbean small business success depends on brand development; hence capitalizing on local culture and geographical beauty for brand differentiation helps small businesses in the region achieve a competitive advantage over their global counterparts. P3 noted: “So what Bermuda is about as a lifestyle, as a place, as an emotion, is fundamental to who we are.” Content analysis of digital collateral indicated that every participant exploited the geographical

beauty of the Caribbean. Impactful imagery is an inexpensive way to get attention on digital channels. Because of cellphones' high-quality, photographing colorful scenery to accompany social media posts requires no equipment investment. The natural beauty of the Caribbean provides a free competitive advantage to small business owners over their foreign counterparts.

Broome et al. (2018) characterized the Caribbean business culture as risk-averse. The findings of this study indicated support for this notion about the conformist tendencies of the Caribbean culture. P4 lamented that West Indian marketing professionals lacked ingenuity and were averse to the unconventional. “Their whole reason for being is to be creative about your business, and they are not,” said P4. “They are cookie-cutter; they follow what’s out there.” P5 reinforced the importance of staying on top of trends and adapting to change because “the internet has evolved so rapidly.” P5 said: “It’s got to be impactful; it’s got to be to the point, you can’t waste time, it’s got to catch people’s attention immediately. And the faster you can do that, the better.” A content review of digital data found no evidence of avant-garde collateral. Instead of embracing guerrilla marketing tactics, participants embrace cultural traditions associated with their particular nation. Appealing to the shared common heritage develops unity and builds a bond between a business and the community.

Theme 4: Digital Technology

Small businesses need to keep pace with digital technology developments to improve their marketing processes, thereby contributing to their competitiveness (Foltean, 2019; Karabulut, 2020). Since the Internet’s inception, the concept of digital

marketing continues to progress and provide access to services, like MailChimp for email marketing, requires minimal technical infrastructure (Attaran & Woods, 2019; Kannan & Li, 2017). Every participant in this study adjusted their initial digital strategy as the technology evolved. Seventy-one percent of the participants began their digital marketing strategy with an informational website and email marketing. “We had to evolve, which initially was upgrading and changing the website, “ said P2. “So it went from being just unidimensional and giving information to being more interactive and having components of it that would allow us to extrapolate information like, for instance, collect names for a database.”P2 added: “We then went to using things like [Mail Chimp and Constant Contact] to stay connected to our database.” Staying abreast of digital technology advances gave participants the ability to exploit new digital tools before their rivals used them. The benefits of that head start were marketing cost savings, easier access to consumers in new jurisdictions, and closer relationships with clients because they were interacting with or servicing them in new ways. An additional advantage was positive WOM from satisfied customers, which resulted in referrals, thereby improving revenue. Internet-based technology enhances customer access and acquisition, thereby helping to create a competitive advantage (Attaran & Woods, 2019).

Small businesses cannot reach competitiveness and profitability without innovatively adopting the appropriate technology (Maduku et al., 2016; Neirotti & Raguseo, 2017). Small business innovation brings opportunities and is key to long-term competitiveness (Aksoy, 2017; Hales & Mclarney, 2017). However, the literature indicated that many Caribbean businesses do not engage in any innovative behavior

(Broome et al., 2018; Dagher, 2019). P4 contradicted this assertion by achieving a competitive advantage by leveraging and implementing technology, namely blockchain technology. “I use cutting-edge technology that allowed us to leapfrog existing systems and provide a more efficient solution to our end users,” explained P4,” and thus put us ahead of the novelty curve.” The core of P7’s operation focuses on expanding and developing new digital resources, such as apps. P2 also leveraged science to create a first-of-its-kind service that shifted from a traditional approach to an all-new service delivery model. This type of innovation challenges the position that conservatism impeded Caribbean small business owner’s innovation.

Theme 5: Website

The findings of the study indicated that websites are a tool that Caribbean small business owners use, as part of their effective digital marketing strategy, to help sustain their organization beyond 10 years. Like other jurisdictions, websites helped small businesses leverage the Internet and increase exposure to potential customers. In this study, every participant’s website was the anchor for their digital marketing activities with links to social media accounts, blogs, or third-party sites. A review of business documents indicated that most participant’s websites evolved from static repositories of information to transactional sites that facilitated two-way communications with customers.

A 2018 study indicated that a business's website was its predominant digital technology (Negoiță et al., 2018). The impact of the 2020 global pandemic on the participant’s business operations highlighted the significance of websites to small

businesses' survival. The restriction of face-to-face sales throughout the region because of lockdowns resulting in many businesses experimenting with online sales. Three participants shifted all business sales to their websites. “We were grateful that our website was already operational because it became our main revenue stream, thereby enabling us to transition and pivot very quickly and seamlessly, “ said P1 regarding the pandemic’s impact on in-person sales. Because P2 operated the largest e-commerce website on their island, transitioning into a full online operation was seamless. The social distancing associated with COVID-19 elevated the website's significance and moved consumers from the store onto online shopping. This shift amplified the importance of having a transactional website that was the foundation for any digital marketing activities.

Caribbean business must overcome several barriers before gaining any benefits associated with having a website. Limited resources, apprehension, plus technical and regulatory issues were barriers participants encountered. After technical issues rendered the first website ineffective, P1 faced information technology (IT) obstacles and banking and regulatory issues like anti-money laundering (AML) associated with hosting a shopping portal on a website. Because many Caribbean countries have favorable tax rates, compliance paperwork for electronic payment is extensive. Regulatory requirements place an administrative burden on small business owners who often lack compliance experience. These issues align with the current literature on small businesses in developing countries, such as the Caribbean, having administrative challenges with leveraging the Internet via a website.

Burgess (2016) suggested that small businesses use third-party sites, like regional or business directories, to overcome limited budgets and scarce human and technical resources. An additional benefit third party sites provided to Caribbean small businesses was the access the sites provide to foreign markets. US-based sites supply a new market that is significantly larger than the Caribbean domestic market. Forty-three percent, or three participants, employed this tactic and leveraging both local and foreign websites. P1, P3, and P7 promote their businesses on third-party sites, such as Trip Advisor or Wedding Wire, in addition to home-grown sites. The use of alternative websites supported Burgess's assertion that this tactic could potentially be an effective digital marketing strategy for Caribbean small businesses.

To maximize effectiveness, a website should be multifunctional, transactional, and distinctive. According to Beachboard (2017), websites with a unique identity appeal to users, differentiate a business and make a website more memorable. In 2006, P5's initial website received a nomination for a Webby Award, an annual recognition of excellence on the Internet by The International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences. Every participant's website was more than a basic repository for information. P1 and P3 host transactional websites, allowing consumers to purchase goods 24/7. "I am the Island's biggest online trading business," noted P3. Similarly, users can subscribe and then conduct unlimited transactions via P4's platform at any time of the day. P7's website is a portal to a host of digital services provided by the business. Because differentiation is a way a business can obtain a competitive advantage (Quaye & Mensah, 2018),

developing memorable, transactional, and user-friendly websites is a valuable tool to help achieve a competitive advantage.

The linguistic differences among Caribbean nations fragment the region and restrict small businesses to selling to only their small English-speaking domestic market (Benitez-Rojo, 2018; Bowen, 2019). More small Caribbean businesses should take advantage of translation software and translate key components of their website. The addition of another language facilitates exposure to a new market to help grow and sustain a business. P2's website offers users the option of a fully functional site in English and Spanish. By offering a bilingual site, P2 can promote its service to Spanish-speaking Caribbean countries like the Dominican Republic. The bilingual website gave P2 a competitive advantage over its rivals.

Cross-Case Analysis

Every study participant represented a case, or a unit of analysis, for the cross-case analysis. Each case data received the same analytical and pattern-matching technique used during the initial analysis. The cross-case analysis in this study came from the findings from individual cases compared to the findings from other cases. As shown in Table 6, several patterns emerged.

Table 6

Summary of Differences and Similarities Between Themes in Each Case by Target

Market and Sector (Frequency of Occurrence by Case)

Cases	Differentiation	Digital technology	Metrics	Social media	Website
Market					
Domestic ^a	40	64	28	26	32
More than one country	79	70	63	77	48
Business sector					
Graphic Design	8	13	10	19	5
Health	11	13	20	29	11
Restaurant	13	5	17	29	5
Retail	25	26	37	38	51
Technology	34	46	35	19	8

Note. ^a Customers are in the country where the business owner operates.

Domestic and multi-jurisdictional small business owners shared similarities, such as leveraging digital technology and using websites. According to Connell et al. (2019), websites are a vital connection to consumers and the foundation for a business' online activities. Aside from educating consumers about a business, facilitating blogs, or connecting social media accounts, website process transactions. Those businesses with a transactional website have a competitive advantage over rivals without that online sales capability. Transactional websites are a 24/7 gateway to consumer sales. A total of 71% (five of the seven) of the businesses participating in this study leveraged the advantage of having transactional websites.

Further, a transactional website is significantly more vital to business owners in the Caribbean retail sector. Outside of the Caribbean, online retail businesses have better-

operating margins (Wang et al., 2020). In one study case, online sales accounted for nearly a third of all sales before the global pandemic. The global pandemic highlighted the benefits of having a transactional retail website. Unlike their rivals, having the ability to conduct online sales provided online stores with a revenue stream when local regulations associated with the global pandemic closed their stores.

Regardless of whether a small business owner operated solely in their domestic market or throughout the region, digital technology helped sustain the organization. Digital technology positively impacts costs, and research indicates a correspondence between leveraging digital tools and organizational growth (Berawi et al., 2020; Valdez-De-Leon, 2019). Technology also provides opportunities to access markets beyond their current borders (Church & Oakley, 2018). For Caribbean small business owners, digital technology offers cost savings, speed of interaction, and easy ability to interact with domestic and foreign markets. For example, posting on social media or emailing a discount offer is free and reaches consumers faster than paying postage to mail coupons to Caribbean households. Focusing on cost is one way a business can secure a competitive advantage (Puspaningrum, 2020). Achieving the cost savings is significant for Caribbean businesses, especially for organizations operating on remote islands. The cost of doing business is higher because of the shipping costs associated with importing raw materials or products from distant ports. When Caribbean small business owners lower their marketing cost, they can pass that savings to consumers, thereby achieving a competitive advantage over their rivals.

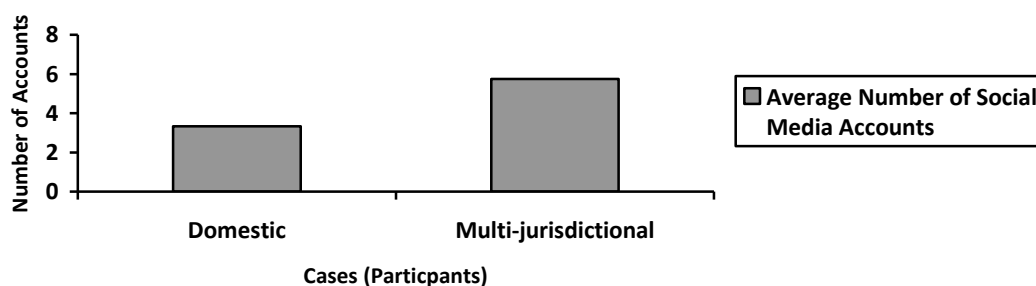
The cross-case analysis results indicated a causation pattern between digital technology and Caribbean small business operating in the technology sector. Small Caribbean businesses in the technology sector use information and communication technology (ICT) to develop new or improved goods, services, methods, and networks for consumers. Operating in the technology sector with the ICT focus is a catalyst for these small businesses to exploit new and emerging digital marketing tools. When businesses use innovative digital technology, there is an improvement in business communication, customer relations and efficiently market a brand, thereby creating a competitive advantage (Berawi et al., 2020; Karabulut, 2020). In addition, digitally innovative businesses can achieve and sustain a competitive advantage (Karabulut, 2020). By being early adopters of innovative digital technology, Caribbean small businesses reinforce consumer perception about them being innovative.

Differentiation was a more significant matter to business owners who operated beyond their domestic market. Small businesses that attempt to attract consumers outside their country increased their potential market and increased their number of rivals. As competition increases, small businesses must work harder to make the organization and its goods or services appear unique to potential overseas customers. Those Caribbean small businesses selling outside their domain need to invest more into efforts to uniquely brand their organization and highlight its inimitable attributions to stand out against their foreign rivals. To achieve this goal, several business owners actively showcase the natural beauty and island culture of the Caribbean to attract global clients.

To affordably differentiate their goods and services to potential consumers beyond their shores, Caribbean small business owners operating in more than one jurisdiction relied more on social media than their domestic counterparts. As shown in Figure 2, domestic business in the Caribbean operated fewer social media accounts.

Figure 2

Cross-Case Analysis of Domestic Versus Multijurisdictional Operational Social Media Accounts (Occurrence by Case)



Social media transcends geographical boundaries, captures consumer attention, and builds or sustains customer relationships (Church & Oakley, 2018; Wang et al., 2020). In addition, social media enables Caribbean small businesses the opportunity to develop brand awareness among new audiences efficiently and inexpensively. For \$10, a Caribbean small business owner can promote a post on a social media network and reach hundreds or thousands of potential consumers in a chosen jurisdiction. The cost-effectiveness and potential consumer reach associated with social media mean this digital tool significantly resonates with Caribbean small business owners operating in more than one jurisdiction.

Tracking and measuring marketing efforts was more imperative for business owners operating in more than one jurisdiction than their domestic counterparts. Previous research indicates the importance of businesses consistently measuring their return on marketing expenditures (Stewart, 2019). As operations grow and extend beyond their original jurisdiction, digital marketing activity also increases. These regionally and globally expanding Caribbean small businesses need to verify that digital marketing activities produce positive results and not waste funds.

Metrics also improve Caribbean business owner's decision making about allocating limited resources. According to Mintz et al. (2020), using metrics improves the quality of decision-making and increases a business' performance. When a business outperforms its rivals, the organization achieves a competitive advantage. Researchers suggest that knowing which type of metrics to use for a given decision was a problem for many business owners and managers (Mintz et al., 2020; Nath, 2020). However, this study found there were similarities and differences between Caribbean business owners' reliance on qualitative and quantitative metrics depending on the potential market. As shown in Table 7, domestic Caribbean small business owners, in this sample, place less emphasis and reliance on quantitative metrics compared to those operating in more than one jurisdiction.

Table 7

Cross-Case Analysis of Domestic Versus Multijurisdictional Metric Use (by Case)

Cases	Qualitative metrics ^a	Quantitative metrics ^b
Domestic	8	5
More than one country	9.25	9.75

Note. ^a Average number of participants' responses, business documents, and artifacts connected qualitative metrics. ^b Average number of participants' responses, business documents, and artifacts connected quantitative metrics.

As regional or global sales expand, the scope of digital marketing intensifies for Caribbean small business owners. Digital marketing activity on social media and other digital mediums automatically produces analytical reports on any activity. This quantitative data enables monitoring and measuring digital marketing 's performance (Cvitanovic, 2018), giving Caribbean small business owners the ability to determine what resonates with consumers. Armed with this information, Caribbean small business owners can achieve higher returns on their marketing investment, improve customer relations, and develop a competitive advantage.

Correlation to the Conceptual Framework

Porter's (1980) competitive strategy theory was the conceptual framework for this study. The core of Porter's theory is that once a business creates or develops a real or perceived value among consumers, they have a competitive advantage over their rivals (as cited in Kaleka & Morgan, 2017). Businesses obtain this competitive advantage by either focusing on cost or differentiation (Brett, 2018; Liu & Atuahene-Gima, 2018;

Quaye & Mensah, 2018). Differentiation is how a business distinguishes itself from its rivals by making itself appear unique to consumers (Al-Rdaydeh et al., 2018). Porter's differentiation competitive strategy aligns with this study because creative strategies are the best way to outdo rivals, and marketing's core function is to creatively differentiate a business to potential customers (Kaleka & Morgan, 2019). Also, digital marketing facilitates advertising cost savings, which aligns with the cost focus tenant of Porter's competitive strategy theory.

Caribbean small business owners leveraged the tenants of Porter's theory to help sustain their organizations beyond 10 years. Businesses gained a competitive advantage when its goods or services are distinctive to consumers (Bednarz et al., 2017). Eighty-six percent of the participants in this study used digital marketing to apply this competitive strategy theory's differentiation principle. For example, P4 shared articles, in prestigious magazines, about the business on their social media channels. Meanwhile, P2 encouraged customers to share photos taken in front of their unique selfie wall to post on social media. Those efforts to make the business memorable to online consumers helped set those Caribbean businesses apart from their rivals.

The results from previous research indicate that a small business's reputation is critical for a brand because it reduces buyer uncertainty about the quality of a good or service, as well as the reliability and trustworthiness of a business (Panda et al., 2019; Upson & Green, 2017). This positive brand perception helps differentiate a small business from the competition (Kim & Yoon, 2018; Panda et al., 2019). Social media messages initiated by consumers also influence other consumers (de Vries et al., 2017).

Digital tools enable small businesses to reach, inform, and create an impression with consumers they usually would not reach via traditional marketing (Qosasi et al., 2019). The Caribbean business owners participating in this study used digital tools to build their brand's reputation, thereby differentiating their businesses from their competition. Leveraging influencers or organizations with a large digital media following to enhance awareness and the reputation of a brand was a strategy used by 71% of five participants. Some participants shared celebrity support for their products or services on social media. Others circulated images of themselves with influencers or made guest appearances on influencer's social channels to promote their businesses. These actions align with research supporting using influencers to discuss products or services to drive brand awareness (Morzhyna et al., 2019).

Barney (1991, 1997) purported that a business achieved its competitive advantage via resources (as cited in Arbi et al., 2017; Băcanu, 2016). Digital resources such as the Internet help small businesses inexpensively transmit information for commercial purposes (García et al., 2019). Cost focused is a way to achieve a competitive advantage. P4 highlighted the extensive free exposure the business received when something, such as a video or an article in a leading business magazine, goes viral. Several videos hosted on P4's YouTube account received tens of thousands of views. "If there's something cutting-edge, I'm going to integrate with it, and I'm going to put out an article, and then I'm going to let the media do what they want with it," P4 explained. "But I am going to ensure what I put out is so hot, fresh, and radical that they want to write about it, so they

watch us. We make it into publications all the time from simple things such as a LinkedIn article or a tweet.”

The findings that resulted from this research study support the position that digital marketing is a source of competitive advantage that small Caribbean business owners can use to sustain their organization beyond 10 years (Morzhyna et al., 2019). Small businesses can use digital marketing to differentiate a business in the eyes of consumers. In addition, leveraging digital tools provides marketing cost savings. All the Caribbean business owners participating in this study effectively used digital marketing to achieve a competitive advantage to sustain their organization for more than 10 years.

Applications to Professional Practice

Marketing significantly impacts a business' performance and competitiveness (Sadiku-Dushi et al., 2019). Because digital tools have a central role in a business's marketing strategy, knowing how to leverage them effectively is essential for business growth (Linton & Solomon, 2017; Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019). All the participants in this study were successful Caribbean small business owners who used digital marketing to sustain their business for at least 10 years by the interview date. Exploring these small business owners' digital marketing strategies provides practical tactics, such as positioning themselves as an expert, for other business owners to employ.

Embracing digital innovation and emerging technology can help small business owners compete with their larger rivals. Businesses cannot reach competitiveness without adopting appropriate technology (Cvitanovic, 2018; Karabulut, 2020). Small business owners should be open to innovation and using current or emerging digital tools. For

example, digital solutions make it possible for small businesses to provide customers with real-time question answering assistance or translate comments into foreign languages and vice-versa. By enhancing customer communications and service, small business owners improve customer relationships and loyalty, turning those clients into advocates and a source of referrals.

To keep abreast of those emerging trends, business owners must continuously search for new digital marketing tools. Once located, properly leveraging any new tool will also require a willingness to improve the skill set and knowledge because technology continuously evolves. Every participant in this study was an early adopter of digital technology, and some even enhanced their skills to better leverage digital tools. By improving their digital technology acumen, business owners will make better digital marketing decisions and efficiently allocate limited resources.

Small business owners should configure their digital operations to create an integrated digital engagement network. At the heart of this ecosystem should be a transactional website that is mobile-friendly to facilitate 24/7 sale of goods or payment for services. The website should also anchor all the businesses' digital activity such as blog posts, videos, podcasts, and links to social media channels. This ecosystem needs to focus on promoting consumer engagement and relationships, differentiating the brand, and facilitating user-generated content like reviews to promote WOM.

If small business owners are not already doing so, they need to track their digital marketing strategies to determine what is and is not working. Small businesses have limited resources that need careful management. Efficiently allocating resources can help

small businesses maximize those limited resources. Marketing metrics help a small business owner detect cost issues or highlight savings. The sooner a small business owner can confirm if a digital activity is effective or ineffective, owners can either direct more resources towards supporting that positive activity or divert funds away from an unprofitable one.

Caribbean small business owners, especially those conducting business beyond their domestic market, should maximize the region's unique characteristics to differentiate their goods or services. For example, the region's natural vistas are exotic and can leave a memorable impression on foreign consumers. These striking visuals are a competitive advantage that Caribbean small business owners should leverage to differentiate their business. Consumers are usually willing to pay higher prices for differentiated exotic goods or services, resulting in more significant revenue for a business and outperforming their rivals (Hales & Mclarney, 2017).

Implications for Social Change

In the Caribbean, small businesses are vital to regional economies because of the jobs they create (Williams-Morgan, 2017). The findings of this study could contribute to positive social change by helping small Caribbean business owners remain competitive and operational beyond 10 years. Improved small business owner knowledge about effective digital marketing strategies help them efficiently attract customers, thus reducing the failure rate. Sustainable small businesses improve the economic and social welfare in the region through the circulation of wealth. When Caribbean small businesses employ individuals, it improves residents' living standards, thereby strengthening island

economies (Minto-Coy et al., 2016). Local communities' also benefit when employment rates improve and economies grow because of the potential to lead to decreased crime rates (Shallow, 2017). This type of impact is a strong positive social change for the people living in the region.

Recommendations for Action

This qualitative multiple case study involved exploring the digital marketing strategies Caribbean small business owners use to sustain their organizations for more than 10 years. Digital marketing is a requirement for most modern small businesses and a potential source of competitive advantage for small businesses (Dumitriu et al., 2019; Foltean, 2019; Morzhyna et al., 2019). Recommendations stemming from this study should be of interest to (a) current and prospective small business owners, (b) SBOs, and (c) students and researchers who study marketing strategy and competitive advantage.

Disseminating the findings of this study through multiple outlets will increase the likelihood that small business owners will access this study. Publishing this study in a peer-reviewed journal will ensure the information is accessible to students and researchers. Distributing this study to Caribbean small business associations will support regional training seminars for current and potential small business owners. Any small business training seminar should focus on the following recommended steps for action identified from the study: (a) stay current on emerging technology, (b) develop a plan with measurable goals, (c) allocate appropriate resources, (d) monitor the results of each marketing decision, and (e) customer retention.

The first recommendation is to keep abreast of emerging digital technology. Artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), blockchain, and big data are all emerging digital technology that can gather consumer data from some of the most private places in a home (Berawi et al., 2020; Cvitanovic, 2018; Khan et al., 2018). This consumer data can assist businesses to identify valuable customers' needs and predict future trends. If small business owners better understand consumer demand, businesses can create better products or services to meet those needs, thereby increasing the likelihood of achieving competitive advantage (Foroudi et al., 2017). Small business owners should stay informed of emerging technology so they can determine which technical advances align with their needs and how best to leverage innovation.

Every small business should develop a marketing plan with measurable goals. The plan should focus on the business' goals, the target market or audience, and the brand. Effective digital marketing strategies include differentiation, first-to-market, or a subject matter expert (SME), WOM via the use of influencers, or even a combination of various tactics. Business owners should also document that plan and circulate the strategy to key personnel in their organization.

Six of the study participants admitted that a barrier to their digital marketing adoption was a lack of resources. Digital marketing requires time, human capital, and money. While many businesses leverage digital marketing because the tool has enormous benefits at low costs (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019), there are expenses associated with an effective digital marketing strategy. P2 and P7 noted that creating quality content for different social media channels was time-consuming and expensive. Once small

businesses realistically set goals, they need to determine, document and allocate what resources (time, money, and personal) they will need to achieve their objectives.

The literature and the findings both show that measuring marketing performance is a prudent yet complex task. Business owners able to gauge the contribution generated by digital marketing activities can better justify their marketing budget (Hatta et al., 2019). Without measurement, a business will not know if its marketing actions help achieve goals or waste limited resources (Cvitanovic, 2018; Hatta et al., 2019). Businesses should select qualitative (goal attainment or customer feedback) and quantitative (economic or analytical outcomes) metrics to track their digital marketing program's efficacy.

Finally, business owners should use digital tools to retain acquired customers. Emailed newsletters, blogs, and social media posts allow businesses to cement relationships and receive customer feedback for product development (Wang et al., 2020). Customers with strong relationships with a business are loyal and become brand advocates by spreading positive WOM. These customer bonds are a competitive advantage that rivals cannot duplicate.

Recommendations for Further Research

The limitations associated with this study were namely research design and time constraints. However, these constraints are opportunities for further research. By expanding the geography, altering the participant pool, or increasing the sample size, a future researcher could build on the findings from this study.

The geographical region for this study was English-speaking CARICOM countries. Results might differ in CARICOM countries where English is not the primary language. A future study could expand the geographical scope to include Spanish, French, or Dutch-speaking Caribbean countries.

The participants of this study predominantly conduct business-to-consumer (B2C) commerce. Further research could explore effective business-to-business (B2B) digital marketing strategies. According to Alfert and Baaken (2017), the academic world lacks sufficient research to provide innovative, practical help for B2B companies to leverage digital technology. Current research mainly focuses on marketing in a B2C context and with a North American bias (Andersson & Wikström, 2017; Cockayne, 2016).

Time constraints, associated with a doctoral program, placed limits on the ability to broaden collecting information from participants from all CARICOM countries. There are 20 members of CARICOM (CARICOM, 2019). The participants in this study conduct business in six CARICOM countries. Future research could increase the sample size of the study and include participants from more and different CARICOM countries.

Reflections

The desire to make a difference in the island communities unrepresented in current academic business literature was the impetus for this doctoral journey and study. My parents were born in the islands, hence the importance of honoring their heritage through this study. Completing a Doctor of Business Administration degree, with emphasis on marketing, reflected my career in Marketing, Corporate Communications, and Public Relations (PR). The insight gained from my occupation helped me realize the

prevalence of North American centric marketing data and the dearth of the Caribbean context. Further, realization included the need for more success for the struggling small business sector in this region. For example, a 2015 study of 380 small businesses in the Caribbean country of Guyana had a failure rate of 59% (224 businesses) within the first 10 years of operation (Pasha et al., 2018).

The final motivation for this academic quest was to inspire other parents of special needs children. As the mother of a child with autism, my conversations with other parents raising children with special needs indicated that often, a diagnosis immediately extinguishes the personal aspirations of the mother or father. Parents shift their energy and focus on the complexity of caring for a special needs child instead of pursuing personal aspirations. One of the goals for this study was to motivate other parents and prove to myself that it is possible to realize ambitions while balancing raising a special needs child.

A valuable lesson learned on this doctoral journey was to expect the unexpected. The global pandemic, COVID-19, derailed plans to conduct face-to-face interviews. However, in video conferencing, digital technology provided an efficient and effective substitute for in-person interviews. I was still able to see and engage with each participant without risking anyone's safety. The pandemic also increased the difficulty of getting participants for the study because many business owners were busy trying to navigate the unprecedented business disruption caused by government-mandated shelter-in-place and restrictions to limit the virus's spread.

My perspective and knowledge of business marketing expanded because of the exposure to the first-hand experience of business owners. I remain grateful for their willingness to find time in their busy schedules to share their business experiences and knowledge of harnessing the Internet while in a competitive market. Each participant's genuine dedication to their customers and their indelible entrepreneurial spirit was inspiring. Sharing the findings from this study with other Caribbean business owners and marketing professionals will improve their understanding of successful digital marketing strategies for the region.

Conclusion

This qualitative study explored effective digital marketing strategies that Caribbean small business owners use to sustain their organizations beyond 10 years of operation. Seven experienced small business owners contributed to the findings of this multiple case study through semi-structured interviews. A review of business documents and artifacts provided additional data. Thematic analysis, cross-case analysis, and triangulation were the data-analysis techniques.

The study data yielded themes that provided insight into the effective digital marketing strategies that small Caribbean business owners used. The five themes were: (a) metrics, (b) social media, (c) differentiation, (d) digital technology, and (e) website. Based on the participant comments, small business owners need to stay current and keep up with new technology. Every participant in this study quickly determined how best to maximize digital technology to market their business. This action helped them overcome universal hindrances such as lack of time, personnel, and budget. The participants'

ingenuity also surmounted regional barriers such as conservatism, geographical isolation, and language differences.

In conclusion, having an effective digital marketing strategy for building a unique and strong brand remains vital for any modern small business to secure growth (Dumitriu et al., 2019). The results that stemmed from this study's data revealed how developing an effective digital marketing strategy can result in a competitive advantage. The ensuing effect of a competitive advantage is a business sustainable beyond 10 years of operation.

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Appendix A: Semi Structured Interview Protocol

Date_____

Location_____

Interviewer_____

Interviewee_____

Orientation

- Opening salutation, introduction and exchange of pleasantries
- All participant's identification and information will remain confidential.
- All participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time or refuse to respond to any question.
- Introduce participant with pseudonym/coded identification (rule of code identification: first letter of that last name of the participant, dash, and the business industry that the participant is operating. For example. J-insurance, (the participant last name is Jones, the business is an insurance company)
- Turn on recording device and note the date, time and location along with the interviewee pseudonym.

General Reminders to Participants

- Conversations are recorded, and handwritten notes taken during the interactions.
- On completion of the transcription and analyses process, all participants will complete a member checking exercise to ensure accuracy and confirm the meaning(s) of unfamiliar words and phrases.

Participants

- The target participants of this study are small business owners who operate a small business in a country that is a member of Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) or the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR). Each participant has successfully used digital marketing strategies to help their organizations be sustainable beyond 10 years.

Length of Interviews

- Each interview will last approximately 30 minutes. However, I will reserve the right to request at least one 15-20 minutes follow-up interview if required, (a) for further clarification of unfamiliar terms and/or phrases (b) to clarify participant's responses and (c) to validate new information shared in subsequent interviews.
- As mentioned in the consent form, I will require access to business documents regarding your digital marketing plan, and your social media and website analytical reports.

Research Question

- Reiterate main research question: What effective digital marketing strategies do small Caribbean business owners use to sustain their organization beyond the first 10 years?

Interview Questions

1. What effective digital marketing strategies did your organization use to sustain the business beyond 10 years of operation?
2. How would you describe the evolution of your business' digital marketing strategy?
3. What key barriers did the business face implementing digital marketing strategies?

4. How did your organization address the key barriers to implementing the digital marketing strategy?
5. What performance metrics did you use to track the efficacy of your digital marketing strategy?
6. What were the most significant outcomes, as measured by your performance metrics, resulting from those digital marketing strategies?
7. Which digital marketing strategies, as measured by your performance metrics, had the most impact in sustaining the business beyond 10 years?
8. What else can you share about the digital marketing strategies your organization developed and deployed to achieve and maintain sustainability?

Closing

- Interviewer reviews manuscripts with interviewee and allows time for reflection, feedback, and confirmation of accuracy of interpretation of key terms.
- Reminds interviewee that they will receive a transcript of the interview for feedback.
- Thanks, the interviewee for their time and assembling business documentation, reiterates contact details, and request permission to request a follow up meeting if necessary.

After the Interview

- A thank-you note is sent to each participant one day after the interview along with an e-mail.
- After transcription of the recorded interview, each participant is sent a copy of their interview for feedback.

- Member checking will occur by contacting each participant in person or by telephone to review interpretations of the participants' responses of the recorded information for accuracy.
- A determination to identify the need for a follow-up second interview after the translation of data occurs.
- Collected electronic data will be stored with password encryption, and nonelectronic data will be stored in a home locked safe for a minimum of 5 years before discarding all transcripts.
- Each participant receives a copy of the completed study.

Appendix B: Listing of Codes, Categories, and Emerging Themes

Listing of Codes, Categories, and Emerging Themes

Codes	Subcodes ^a	Categories ^b	Emerging themes ^c
Advice			
Agility		Hurdles	Barriers
Agency			
Human capital			
Knowledge			
Technical issues			
Money		Cost	Cost
Time			
Culture		Caribbean	Caribbean culture
Different languages			
Authenticity		Differentiation	Differentiation
Expert			
Brand			
Professional			
Word of mouth (WOM)	Influencers		
Email marketing		Digital	Digital technology
PR	Press releases		
Media	Articles		
Subscription			
Innovation	Blockchain	Technological innovation	
	System integration		
Documentation		Planning	Organization
Analytics	Views	Quantitative metrics	Metrics
	Shares		
	Likes		
	Traffic		
	Click throughs		
Conversion			
Investment			
Revenue			
Sales			

Codes	Subcodes ^a	Categories ^b	Emerging themes ^c
Search engine optimization (SEO)			
Instincts		Qualitative metrics	
Engagement			
Relationships			
Significant outcomes			
Geotargeting		Mobile	Mobile
Social media		Social media	Social Media
Facebook	Tagging		
Instagram	Hash tags		
LinkedIn	Ted Talks		
YouTube	Video		
	Viral		
Podcast	Speaking engagements		
Online to offline			
Blogs		Website	Website
Customer services			
Chat groups			
E-learning			
Online shopping			
Third party platforms			
Translation			
Website	Visits		

Note. ^a Descriptive code that sums up the main idea of segments of raw data. ^b Codes that share common meanings and patterns. ^c Concepts resulting from the coding and categorizing process.