

2021

Strategies Required for Complying with North American Free Trade Agreement

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Daniel Chavez

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Strategies Required for Complying with North American Free Trade Agreement

Regulations

by

Daniel Chavez

MS, University of Phoenix, 2000

BS, University of Texas, 1980

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2021

Abstract

The failure of U.S. small home textile business owners to comply with North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) regulations can have adverse business outcomes. Small U.S. textile owners must comply with NAFTA regulations to sustain business operations. Grounded in the resource-based view theory, the purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore strategies small home textile owners use to comply with North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) regulations when trading with Mexico. The participants were four owners of SMEs located in the greater New York City area who use successful strategies to export to Mexico. The data were collected using semistructured open-ended questions, a review of public documents and were analyzed using the six-step thematic process from which three themes emerged: (a) acquisition of proper machinery, equipment, and human resources; (b) improved understanding of Mexico's culture; and (c) the use of understanding pertinent North American Free Trade Agreement regulations. A key recommendation is to hire an experienced export agent to help SME owners reduce export mistakes and improve export margins. The implications for positive social change include the potential to create jobs, reduce poverty; thus, improving the quality of community members' lives.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my wife, Holly Chavez. She has continued to motivate and encourage me throughout my entire DBA journey. Holly comprehends the demands of achieving a doctoral degree and provided me with the time I needed to study. Holly is the wife a doctoral student dreams of and one cannot help but recognize her beautiful attributes that helped me achieve my goal. Achieving this goal of becoming a Doctor of Business Administration is a steppingstone to my goal of helping others achieve their dreams.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my dearest God for giving me the strength to complete my doctoral studies and earn my Doctor of Business Administration degree. A special thanks to my wife, Holly Chavez, for being at my side and keeping me strong and focused throughout my study. I would like to thank my mother, Rosa Gonzalez, and my cousin, Ruby, for all their prayers.

Thank you to Dr. Kenneth Gossett, Dr. Isabel Wan, and Dr. Marilyn Simon, who served as my committee members for my study. A special thanks to Dr. Gossett, who served as my chair. Dr. Gossett gave me strength and inspired me throughout the DBA journey. Dr. Gossett was always available to me to discuss my study. Without Dr. Gossett the journey would not have been as fun and inspiring. Dr. Gossett, thank you with all my heart for all your help and guidance.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The focus of this study was to identify successful strategies that owners of small-to-medium enterprises (SME) in the U.S. home textiles industry could use to increase exports. SME owners have failed to increase exports because they are not using successful strategies to comply with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) regulations (Vargas-Hernández et al., 2019). The number of exports from the United States to Mexico decreased by 6.3% from 2017 to 2018 (Alix-Garcia & Sellars, 2020). By establishing successful strategies, SME owners can increase profitable exports to Mexico (Cervantes-Martínez et al., 2016). By understanding Mexico's export regulations, which are affected by government, labor laws, cultural diversity, comparative advantage, and trade treaty revisions, SME owners can establish successful strategies to export to Mexico (Giumelli & van Roozendaal, 2017). Establishing successful export strategies could be more auspicious if SME owners recognize the need to understand Mexico's cultural diversity, government, and labor laws. The continued success of such export strategies remains dependent on SME owners keeping current and informed of trade treaty revisions. In this study, I explored successful and profitable strategies that U.S., home textile, SME owners use to comply with NAFTA regulations to export to Mexico. The use of successful export strategies by SME owners could be one of the most vital means of increasing profitable exports to Mexico.

Background of the Problem

Free trade agreements are established to allow trade among two or more countries without import tariffs, and these trade treaties are designed to promote trade among

participating countries (Cervantes-Martínez et al., 2016). Government officials establish free trade treaties to enhance export demand for their products to increase their gross domestic product (Hakobyan & McLaren, 2016). For example, the lower the landed price of imports by a foreign country, the larger is the increase in demand for imports, stimulating the growth of supply of imports in the respective country. In this regard, the NAFTA influences the exports and imports between the United States and Mexico (Cervantes-Martínez et al., 2016).

The enactment of trade treaties is mandated by the government and Congress and administered by the U.S. trade representative (Kastner, 2020). The NAFTA is an official trade treaty led by the U.S. trade representative and is distinct from being a global trade member belonging to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (Lemieux, 2018). A free trade treaty is an advanced trade treaty that could facilitate the exchange of goods and services of a country at competitive prices, not including tariffs and limited regulations (Kastner, 2020). Trade treaties, such as NAFTA, provide market access for SME owners requiring the elimination of tariffs to establish successful strategies to increase exports of home textiles to Mexico to increase profits. The focus of this study was to identify successful strategies used by SME owners to export to Mexico in compliance with NAFTA regulations.

Problem Statement

The exports of home textiles from the United States by SME owners have failed to increase since January 1, 1994, and owners are not using successful strategies to comply with the NAFTA (Vargas-Hernández et al., 2019). Research of textile exports not

increasing is potentially of concern because the number of net exports from the United States to Mexico decreased by 22.5% from 2017 to 2018, which is equivalent to \$89 billion (Desilus, 2020, p. 5). The general business problem was the decline in SME exports of home textiles have resulted in a decrease in SME profitability. The specific business problem was that some U.S., home textile, SME owners lack successful strategies to export to Mexico in compliance with NAFTA regulations.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore successful strategies used by some U.S., home textile, SME owners to export to Mexico in compliance with NAFTA export regulations. The target population consisted of four owners of home textiles SMEs located in the United States with successful strategies to comply with NAFTA regulations to export home textiles to Mexico to increase profits. The implications for social change might include an increase in profits for U.S. home textiles, SME exporters, benefiting their communities through increased employment and a larger tax base, resulting in an improvement in the quality of life for both families and communities.

Nature of the Study

The three research method options are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Saunders et al., 2015). I selected the qualitative method to use open-ended interview questions and explore “how” and “why” a phenomenon exists (see Barnham, 2015; Fusch et al., 2018). Qualitative researchers use open-ended interview questions to discover what is occurring or has occurred (Steiner et al., 2017). In contrast, quantitative

researchers use closed-ended questions to test hypotheses about variables' characteristics or relationships (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Mixed-method research includes both a qualitative element and a quantitative element (Izgar & Akturk, 2018). I used the qualitative approach to explore successful strategies to export home textiles to Mexico to increase profits. I did not test a hypothesis about the characteristics or relationships of variables, which is a necessary part of a quantitative study or the quantitative portion of a mixed-methods study.

I considered four qualitative research designs for this study: (a) ethnography, (b) phenomenology, (c) narrative, and (d) case study (see Saunders et al., 2015). Researchers use the ethnographic design to describe a cultural group's patterns in which the researchers participate in to understand the phenomenon and the participants' social value commitments (Raman & Balakrishnan, 2020). I did not use an ethnographic design because I did not describe a cultural group's patterns. Within a phenomenological study, researchers are generally interested in the lived experiences of a group of individuals who have all experienced the same or similar distressing event (Moustakas, 1994). I did not use a phenomenological design because the participants' lived experiences were not the focus of this study because they would not have helped me address the research question. A narrative design was not appropriate because, as Saunders et al. (2015) explained, the narrative design entails approaches focusing on experiences of individuals as told through their own life stories in the form of written or spoken information.

I selected a multiple case study design, which involves research through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (see Thompson, 2018).

When a study includes more than one case, a multiple case study is appropriate (Saunders et al., 2017). Use of the multiple case study design can provide a qualitative, exploratory approach to provide a clear objective answer to the research questions (Steiner et al., 2017). Using the qualitative multiple case study, as explained by Steiner et al. (2017), should facilitate exploring a phenomenon through a variety of data types and resources. The multiple case study approach was the most appropriate design to enable in-depth research and identification of similarities and differences among the cases.

Research Question

What successful strategies do home textile SME owners use to export to Mexico in compliance with NAFTA regulations?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies do you use to ensure a managerial framework for available resources to comply with NAFTA export regulations?
2. What can you tell me about the development and implementation of your organization's successful strategies used to comply with Mexico's NAFTA regulations?
3. What successful strategies have you used to comply with NAFTA regulations related to the inclusion of a mistake-free, Spanish invoice with all export shipments to Mexico?
4. What successful strategies have you used to avoid export delays when NAFTA regulations are not complied with at the Mexican port of entry?

5. What successful strategies have you used to communicate effectively with Mexican customers to avoid logistic regulation errors?
6. What successful strategies have you used to comply with NAFTA Mexican product labeling regulations?
7. What successful strategies have you used to comply with mandated Spanish labels in metric form?
8. What successful strategies have you used when attempting to comply with the certificate of origin regulation?
9. What else can you share with me about your organization's strategies used to export to Mexico that are in compliance with NAFTA regulations?

Conceptual Framework

I used the resource-based view (RBV) theory as the conceptual framework of this study. Wernerfelt published the RBV theory in 1984 and defined a resource as a business strength or weakness (Izgar & Akturk, 2018). Wernerfelt (2014) later explained the value of specific resources that are valuable, difficult to imitate, rare, and cannot be substituted. Proponents of the RBV theory have explained how the firm establishes a managerial framework to enable SME owners to use its available resources to establish successful strategies to export home textiles to Mexico in a profitable fashion (Wernerfelt, 2014). Wernerfelt explained the firm's ability to perform is heavily based on its available resources and obtaining the required resources can enable firms to establish successful strategies to understand and comply with NAFTA regulations and increase exports and profitability.

Utilizing the RBV theory as the conceptual framework allowed for the incorporation of a multiple case study design, including fieldwork, observation, and interviews (see Izgar & Akturk, 2018). The RBV theory model developed by Bergsten (2017) allows SME owners to view resources as key to achieving superior firm performance. The key concepts of the theory include resources providing an organization with a competitive advantage and new opportunities over its rivals. I, therefore, expected the RBV theory to assist in understanding SME owners' strategies and processes for identifying and using key resources to comply with NAFTA regulations to export home textiles to Mexico and increase profits.

Operational Definitions

Average total cost (ATC): The total cost of production divided by output and the sum of average fixed cost and average variable cost (Woldu et al., 2018).

Marginal cost (MC): The additional cost incurred from producing additional products (Woldu et al., 2018).

NAFTA: The free trade treaty between the United States, Mexico, and Canada, that was signed and became law on January 1, 1994 (Cervantes-Martínez et al., 2016).

RBV theory: A theory that can be used by practitioners to assume resources are rare, difficult to imitate, and cannot be substituted, and identify a company's strengths based on its available resources (Wernerfelt, 2014).

SMEs: Organizations or firms smaller than an oligopoly, competing in a capitalist economy for increased market share (Hakobyan & McLaren, 2016).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

I made the following assumptions in this study:

- The participants would answer the interview questions truthfully.
- SME owners in the home textile industry were presently exporting or anticipating profitable exports to Mexico.
- The participants understood NAFTA regulations.
- The participants viewed NAFTA as a problem hindering SME owners from exporting to Mexico to increase profits.

Limitations

Limitations are weaknesses a researcher must be aware of and address in their study that can affect the validity of the research (Cypress, 2017). A small sample size and participants who are not knowledgeable about the issues in the current study could create biases within the quality of information and affect the validity of the study. Since a small sample is appropriate in qualitative research, the quality of information is dependent on the selected sample to research (Giumelli & van Roozendaal, 2017). Accordingly, I conducted interviews with four knowledgeable SME owners in the home textile industry currently exporting to Mexico and experiencing success in understanding NAFTA regulations to increase profits. Another limitation might have occurred if any of the participants were not as knowledgeable and successful as I thought when selecting them as participants. To better deal with these limitations, the interviews consisted of open-

ended questions and the participants' responses were verified for accuracy with member checking.

Delimitations

Delimitations define the scope of the research and establish the boundaries of the study (Saunders et al., 2015). The delimitations of this study were SME owners establishing effective strategies to understand export regulations to Mexico established by NAFTA since 1994. The results of this study might not apply to owners of large, home textile companies exporting to Mexico. A qualitative study can be negatively affected by the dishonesty of the participants, which I had no control over as the researcher. My intention with the study was to include SME participants in the home textile industry who have successfully exported to Mexico from 1994 to the present.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study could help SME owners to establish successful strategies to comply with NAFTA regulations to export home textiles to Mexico to increase profits. The increased domestic competition in the home textile industry justifies the need for additional exports to Mexico. The U.S., SME, home textiles owners who apply the recommended approaches or successful strategies derived from the results of this study could increase their ability to comply with NAFTA regulations and increase profits. By conducting research like this study, critical areas pertaining to NAFTA regulations can be uncovered.

The findings of the study could bring positive social change to the SME owners in the U.S. home textile industry by increasing their profits due to exports to Mexico. This

increase in profits can help owners grow the U.S. home textile industry. The increased growth of the U.S. home textile industry can, in turn, increase the owner's employment rate and improve the quality of life of their labor force as well as area families and communities.

Contribution to Business Practice

In this qualitative study, I focused on participants' experiences to understand the need for U.S. SME owners to use successful strategies to increase exports to Mexico. To increase exports and revenue and minimize costly export mistakes, SME owners need to implement successful strategies to comply with Mexico's regulations (Cervantes-Martínez et al., 2016). SME owners can use the findings to increase their profitable exports by better understanding and complying with NAFTA regulations and Mexico's business environment as well as having increased cultural awareness. The business participants' implementation of successful strategies can be used as examples to increase profitable exports to Mexico and employment as well as improve the standard of living for their communities.

Implications for Social Change

I designed this study to assist SME owners in establishing successful strategies to comply with NAFTA regulations to increase profitable exports to Mexico. The findings and recommendations of this study have implications for SME owners exporting home textiles to Mexico. SME owners can benefit by increasing their profits and growing the U.S. home textile industry. The increased growth of the U.S. home textile industry can

help owners increase their employment rates and improve the quality of life of their labor force and area families and communities.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore successful strategies used by U.S. home textile SME owners to export to Mexico in compliance with NAFTA export regulations. My goal was to identify knowledge gaps, provide a foundation to legitimize the research question, and justify the current study and research objectives (see Azungah, 2018). Using Wernerfelt's (2014) RBV theory as the conceptual framework, I explored the managerial framework enabling owners of U.S. SMEs to use their available resources to establish successful strategies to export home textiles to Mexico to increase profits.

In this literature review, I explored a broad range of subjects, including the conceptual framework, NAFTA regulations, government involvement, cultural diversity, NAFTA restructure, and positive and negative points related to NAFTA and the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), also referred to as NAFTA 2.0.

I used several academic research databases to locate literature pertinent to the research question in this study. The Walden University Library was used to access the following databases: ProQuest, Google Scholar, Business Source Complete, and Emerald Management Journals. The keyword search terms used were *average total cost*, *marginal cost*, *North American Free Trade Agreement*, *resource-based view*, *small-to-medium enterprises*, *cultural diversity*, *socialism*, *capitalism*, and *government regulations*. To ensure each reference was peer reviewed, I used Ulrich's Global Series Directory.

The review of the literature (see Table 1) included 60 peer-reviewed references, out of which seven references (12%) were published prior to 2017. The remaining 53 (88%) were published between 2017 through 2021. The doctoral study as a whole included 117 peer-reviewed references, out of which 28 references (24%) were published prior to 2017. A total of 89 references (76%) were published between 2017 and 2021.

Table 1

Sources of Data for Literature Review and Doctoral Study

	Literature Review References Published prior 2017	Literature Review References Published on or after 2017	Total Literature Review References	References prior to 2017 of Sections 1, 2 and 3	References on or after 2017 of Sections 1, 2, and 3	Total References of Sections 1, 2 and 3	Total Doctoral References
Books	2	0	2	2	5	7	9
Peer-reviewed references	7	53	60	21	36	57	117
Non-peer-reviewed references	0	0	0	0	2	2	2
Total % of peer-reviewed references published on or after 2017	12%	88%	51%	24%	63%	76%	91%

Using the Walden University Library, I retrieved peer-reviewed, scholarly articles mostly published within the 2017–2021 period. From an objective point of view, I sought to investigate how the information gathered might help understand the challenges and opportunities SME owners could encounter when exporting to Mexico. The use of this

objective point of view could help SME owners to understand the need to establish successful strategies to increase profitable exports to Mexico.

Conceptual Framework: RBV Theory

The use of the RBV theory could increase SME owners' efficiency by enabling them to increase their competitive advantages using their resources. SME owners with a competitive advantage, as explained by Wernerfelt (2014), could generate increased exports, and retain more customers than the competition. Antonio and Perin (2019) found that to increase competitive advantage, SME owners needed to focus on the RBV theory to enable successful and profitable marketing. The RBV theory was determined to be meaningful in the international market, and through its use, SME owners can improve an organization's profit margin (Antonio & Perin, 2019). Antonio and Perin pointed out that the implementation of the RBV theory by SME owners in the global market can render different results based on the culture and comparative advantage of the developing country. While focusing on the need for SME owners in developing countries to use the RBV theory to increase efficiency and competitive advantage when participating in international trade, Antonio and Perin emphasized that the RBV theory can be used by SME owners to investigate the use of existing resources in new markets to create different resources. Moreover, the assumption is that different resources could satisfy different needs by SME owners producing diversified products. SME owners in developing countries tend to enhance the efficiency of production using new and useful machinery.

The integration of the RBV theory and economics could assist owners of international organizations in increasing efficiency in the global market. Peteraf and Barney (2003) focused on the RBV theory as a framework that integrates a management perspective with an economic perspective. The RBV theory, as explained by Peteraf and Barney to determine this integration's relevance, must represent a resource level and efficiency-oriented analytical tool. Peteraf and Barney explained that the connection between the RBV theory and the international demand structure of SME owners is the link to this economic logic. Owners of an organization with the appropriate resources available can increase their competitive advantage, increasing their effectiveness to satisfy the developing countries' needs (Peteraf & Barney, 2003). This increase in satisfaction of consumer needs can increase profits and exports for SME owners.

Wernerfelt (2014) identified resources as the primary factor of assisting company owners in achieving higher organizational performance and competitive advantage. Owners of organizations can position themselves strategically to use the RBV theory based on their resources and capabilities (Wernerfelt, 2014). The resources of SME owners can be both tangible and intangible. While the SME owners' tangible resources consist of the physical plant and equipment, the intangible resources consist of employer skills and a company's reputation (Wernerfelt, 2014). Strategic resources could provide SME owners with the foundation to develop a firm's capabilities. Wernerfelt explained that SME owners' use of the RBV theory could lead to superior performance over time.

The problems that SME owners struggle with when exporting to Mexico consist of understanding regulations, cultural diversity, Mexico's government involvement in

business activities, and environmental and labor laws (Lozano & Escrich, 2017). Lozano and Escrich (2017) explained that to help increase trade with Mexico, SME owners that use the RBV theory can increase their efficiency when producing and exporting products to Mexico.

The History and Evolution of the RBV Theory

The RBV theory has served as a form of a resource-based perspective and contributed to a fragmentary involvement in organizational business strategies since as early as 1930 (Barney, 2012). Other scholars have suggested that the RBV theory represents a new paradigm, and the sustainability of competitive advantage is based on the characteristics of individual resources (Pomegbe et al., 2020). During the 1990s, the RBV theory became the dominant paradigm in strategic planning (Pomegbe et al., 2020). The RBV theory has been used as a sustainable competitive advantage derived from developing superior capabilities and resources. In the 1990s, the RBV theory was also considered a strategy for achieving competitive advantage (Pomegbe et al., 2020). The RBV theory is focused on SME owners' strategic resources that can provide the foundation to develop a firm's capabilities that can lead to superior performance (Peteraf & Barney, 2003). Classical economists determined that the factors of production, land, labor, capital, and entrepreneur ability make up the framework of the RBV theory (Peteraf & Barney, 2003). Peteraf and Barney (2003) explained that land is evaluated on its location to resources, labor is evaluated by the availability of skilled labor, capital is evaluated by the innovative machinery available for production, and entrepreneurial ability is evaluated by the owner's expertise.

The SME owners that export globally can consider the RBV theory as a tool that could assist in conducting profitable exports (Peteraf & Barney, 2003). Since the inception of NAFTA on January 1, 1994, RBV theory researchers have considered firms' export performance as influenced by a proper combination of their own resources and capabilities (Peteraf & Barney, 2003). Increasing globalization and economic crises have made it necessary for SME owners to internationalize their products or services, exporting being the more extended entry mode (Peteraf & Barney, 2003). However, in the early years of NAFTA, SME owners had greater difficulty than larger firms accessing export resources and capabilities. Antonio and Perin (2019) explained that during 2018 to 2000, SME owners faced greater barriers to entry and experienced greater difficulty in achieving successful performance using the RBV theory in foreign markets. The export regulations mandated by NAFTA remain difficult to comply with and interpret. During the first few years of NAFTA, cooperation between firms could provide organizations with better resources to engage in internationalization activity. Consequently, the use of the RBV theory by SME owners was not as efficient as when used in the latter years of NAFTA (Cervantes-Martínez et al., 2016).

The method of obtaining resources through use of the RBV theory has changed in the last 2 decades. The need to extend the context of management accounting and control to sales and marketing functions is determined as essential along with greater integration with the marketing area (Badrinarayanan et al., 2019). Badrinarayanan et al. (2019) found that previous studies in the accounting literature have shown empirical evidence about the difference in the management control system and the information requested by managers

working in the distribution and marketing fields. The most updated view of the RBV theory is described that a sustainable competitive advantage could only be achievable when resources are simultaneously valuable, rare, imitable, and exploitable by the organizations (Badrinarayanan et al., 2019). Consequently, the use of the RBV theory could assist SME owners to compete against the pricing of Mexican products. By having a competitive edge, SME owners could increase profitable exports of home textiles to Mexico. The increase in profits by SME owners' exports could increase employment in the home textile industry and improve the quality of life for many Americans.

SME Owners and NAFTA: RBV Theory

As competition in the global economy grows, SME owners have struggled to maintain profits post-NAFTA (Cervantes-Martínez et al., 2016). Cervantes-Martínez et al. (2016) stated that international trade serves as a market for owners to regain revenue lost to domestic consumption. Antonio and Perin (2019) found that organizations can increase their profits by using the RBV theory. The enactment of NAFTA in 1994 immediately reduced the trade tariffs of home textiles made in the United States and exported to Mexico to zero (Vargas-Hernández et al., 2019). Even though exports to Mexico have increased since 1994, SME owners continue to struggle. Vargas-Hernández et al. (2019) found that owners of large organizations with financial means and the ability to offer growth opportunities have partnered with Mexican entrepreneurs to form joint ventures, subsidies, and franchises and dominate exports of soft goods to Mexico (Hakobyan & McLaren, 2016). The ability to partner with owners of Mexican organizations enhanced the use of the RBV theory to produce products in Mexico and

decrease the demand for exports to Mexico (Côté, 2018). Both the increased competition and the increased domestic production of U.S. SME owners and Mexican organizations in Mexico represented the use of the RBV theory by both countries (Antonio & Perin, 2019).

To increase their organizations' profitability, SME owners should understand NAFTA regulations, tariffs, and cultural diversity. SME owners increasing their knowledge of NAFTA and incorporating the RBV theory had an advantage of establishing successful strategies to increase their exports (Antonio & Perin, 2019).

Understanding NAFTA: RBV Theory

Production specialization in free trade is considered an essential aspect for the better use of available scarce resources (Cervantes-Martínez et al., 2016). If every individual exclusively produces products utilizing their comparative advantage, more production could be achieved. Through free trade, SME owners could obtain better quality goods and services from the country, experiencing a comparative advantage. If SME owners focus on using RBV theory to establish successful strategies to export what they produce at a lower cost or better fashion, Päril (2019) explained the need for their goods could absorb the added cost of the regulations imposed by NAFTA. Consequently, the tariffs would not matter as much due to the cost of imports leveraged by the low cost of imports or advanced fashion-differentiated products.

The study of NAFTA by Cervantes-Martínez et al. (2016) differentiated the product elasticity of demand in Mexico from U.S. SME owners' demand. The use of successful strategies could enhance SME owners' understanding of the decrease in

elasticity of demand for goods produced using the RBV theory. Hakobyan and McLaren (2016) explained that elasticity is the sensitivity of a product demand due to a change in the goods price. The negotiated NAFTA rules of origin benefited both the United States SME owners and Mexican owners and increased exports of merchandise from Mexico to the United States (Lemieux, 2018). Päril (2019) explained that Mexican SME owners utilized U.S. inputs and used the RBV theory to produce better quality and fashion goods; therefore, it is difficult for U.S. SME owners to sell goods to Mexican organizations. Cervantes-Martínez et al. explained that NAFTA regulations pertaining to textiles with rules of origin ensure Mexican textile producers wishing to have duty-free access to the U.S. market use U.S. yarn. Hassan and Nassar (2018) found NAFTA to have been a return to mercantilism rather than embracing globalization. Moreover, Hassan and Nassar concluded that the U.S. international laws and mandates internationalizes the production process for SME owners and gives Mexican producers a privileged position as output suppliers, but only on the condition, U.S. producers have a privileged position as input suppliers.

Since the enactment of NAFTA, direct investment and technology have spilled over to Mexico, and the use of the RBV theory has created a comparative advantage for Mexican business owners. Kurniawan et al. (2017) concluded Mexico's increased comparative advantage in producing selected home textiles has created difficulties for U.S. SME owners. Kurniawan et al. presented that owners of Mexican factories can produce almost every product in the home textile industry, and the decrease in the need for U.S. home textiles products can escalate the enactment of the established Mexican

regulations. As per McGuire (2018), NAFTA enabled Mexican business owners to grow economically due to the RBV theory and the increase in direct investment and technology.

The article by Armas and Rodríguez (2017) benefited my study due to the research on the impact NAFTA has on Mexico's SME owners' comparative advantage. Before NAFTA, SME owners in the home textile industry exported products to Mexico, which could not be manufactured by factory owners in Mexico. Armas and Rodríguez explained due to not using new technology and the RBV theory, organizations cannot produce efficiently. By having the required advanced technology, Mexican business owners can better compete with U.S. imports (Bergsten, 2017). Bergsten (2017) found that the Mexican government officials protect domestic production by imposing additional regulations to increase the tariff rate of U.S. product imports into Mexico. The home textile production in Mexico remains protected by the Mexican government.

The comparative advantage of business owners in developed countries at times overwhelms business owners of developing countries. Bergsten (2017) found that if the competing product being produced was not labor intensive, the advantage remains with the developed country. As per Bergsten, SME owners that lack successful strategies to comply with NAFTA regulations have experienced problems using the RBV theory. As discussed by Bergsten the country's government officials can impede trade by imposing regulations, tariffs, taxes, and currency manipulation. By devaluating their currency, a country's government official can increase their exports and reduce the need to increase regulations to protect their domestic production. Woldu et al. (2018) explained other

countries' currency devaluation can increase product demand due to the rise in purchasing power of the importing country. According to Bergsten, devaluations can decrease the need to use the RBV theory; however, government devaluations can be considered unfair trade practices because not all country's government officials have the power to devalue their currency without causing economic problems to their country. Since the inception of NAFTA, oil-producing business owners in states such as Texas have been affected economically. Texas is the largest oil-producing state in the United States and the world's eighth-largest oil producer (Bergsten, 2017). The relocation of U.S. SME owners to Mexico due to NAFTA and the RBV theory, as per Bergsten, could have reduced exports to Mexico.

Due to owners of textile companies in Texas shifting their production to Mexico since the inception of NAFTA, Bergsten (2017) found that SME owners experienced a reduction in production. As companies move south to produce a labor-intensive product, SME owners, as per Bergsten, have experienced reduced market share in Mexico due to the lack of use of the RBV theory and increased competition. This reduction in market share has put a strain on some SME owners, and exports to Mexico have declined (Bergsten, 2017). As globalization increased competition, SME owners are now entertaining the need to export to Mexico; however, regulation continues to be an obstacle.

To maintain trade laws along the United States and Mexico border, international law as per Côté (2018), relied on the International Centers for Settlements of Investment Disputes, which captured the absence of any direct legal relationship between the parties,

contrary to classical international commercial arbitration. Having the means of arbitration to settle international disputes could encourage SME owners to export to Mexico to increase profits. Having the security to resolve international disputes encouraged exports by SME owners to Mexico (Côté, 2018).

The re-naming of the NAFTA between the United States, Mexico, and Canada by the Trump administration, as per Côté (2018), reduced the risk of future investments being de-railed by any of the three NAFTA countries' political agendas. By not allowing political environments to intervene with owners' Côté proposed international trade investments by SME owners have encouraged using the RBV theory. As per Zhu (2017), in the absence of political influence, exports by U.S. SME owners to Mexico could have helped increase profits. Zhu explained that when the United States and Mexico have political disagreements, NAFTA's regulations, and SME owners not using the RBV theory could become a problem to increase exports.

Contrasting Theories: Knowledge-Based Theory and Multiple Resource Theory

The two contrasting theories relevant to my conceptual framework consist of the knowledge-based theory (KBT) and the multiple resource theory (MRT). The KBT is focused on the owner's knowledge as the most strategically significant firm's resource (Low & Ho, 2016). The advocates of the KBT argued that knowledge-based resources are usually difficult to imitate and socially complex heterogeneous knowledge bases and capabilities among firms are the major determinants of sustained competitive advantage and superior corporate performance (Low & Ho, 2016). The KBT advocates focused on business owners' knowledge and the conceptual framework of the phenomenon that

efficiently utilizes resources (Low & Ho, 2016). Even though human resources are part of both the RBV theory and KBT, the only resource in common is human resources. SME owners could benefit from having the proper resources (e.g., computers, fabric label printers, sewing machines, and molds). The KBT advocates argued that the firm's performance relies on specific capabilities for the owner's knowledge creation and the management of relationships for external knowledge transfer (Low & Ho, 2016). The owners' knowledge is essential when exporting to Mexico; however, using the RBV theory requires owners to export resources efficiently to Mexico.

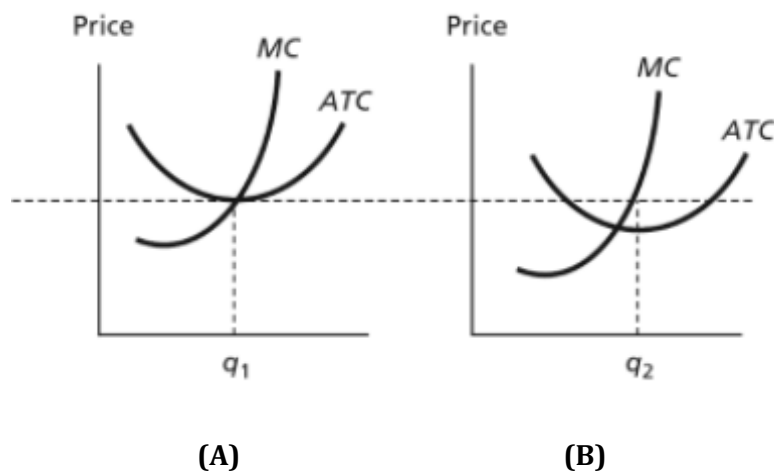
The MRT is not used as the conceptual framework for this study. The MRT model enables SME owners to view performance decrement as a shortage of different resources and implies that humans have limited capability for processing information (Lozano & Escrich, 2017). Low and Ho (2016) suggested the MRT model could be used to determine cognitive resources as a limited supply and demand problem that occurs when the owners of individual firms perform two or more tasks that require a single resource.

The relationship between workload and performance is complex and is difficult to measure (Woldu et al., 2018). As workloads increase, can cause a performance decrease, Lozano and Escrich (2017) explained that labor performance can be affected by the workload being too high or too low. The conceptual framework of my research study was not focused on SME owners increasing workload, which causes labor inefficiency in building successful strategies to increase profitable exports to Mexico. Instead, the RBV theory conceptual framework of the research study focused on SME owners using the

proper resources to increase exports to Mexico. The benefits of SME owners' efficient use of appropriate resources required to export to Mexico and increase profits are illustrated by the marginal and average total cost curve in Figure 1. In Graph (A), the (MC) curve intersects the (ATC) curve; at this point, the owners of the organizations maximize profits and are considered efficient; and the use of the RBV theory enables the organization owners to maximize profits due to utilizing the available required resources to export to Mexico. At Point (B), the MC curve exceeds the ATC curve, and the cost of producing additional goods exceeds the increases in revenue, and additional margins, decline. At Point (B), profits are not maximized by the owners of the organizations and considered inefficient due to the owners of organizations not using the adequate proper resources to export to Mexico. Ultimately, SME owners focus their conceptual framework on the RBV theory and utilize the appropriate resources to export to Mexico and increased profits.

Figure 1

Profit Maximization by the RBV Theory Utilization



Note. Efficiency of product export to Mexico. The graphs represent the efficiency level of potential profitable exports to Mexico. In graph A the intersection of Marginal Cost (MC) curve and Average Total Cost (ATC) curve represents efficiency. In graph B the intersection of MC and ATC represents inefficiency. Krugman, P. & Wells, R. (2012). *Economics (3rd ed.)*. New York: Worth Publishers.

Possible Themes: Related to the Conceptual Framework and the Review of the Literature

The use of the RBV theory could assist SME owners in establishing profitable export strategies to Mexico. The use of proper resources is a variable that enhanced the efficiency of SME owners when competing in a global market (Wernerfelt, 2014). The research of SME owners improving their export strategies by incorporating the proper machinery to produce and export competitive home textiles identifies three possible emerging themes. The use of MRT could bring a system improvement or degradation to SME owner's supply chain management.

Theme 1: Acquisition of Proper Machinery and Equipment

The first theme focuses on the acquisition of proper machinery and equipment. This theme focuses on having the proper equipment to remain competitive, including the proper labeling machine and computer programs. Since the enactment of NAFTA in 1994, the labeling requirements have increased in difficulty, and as per Ajibo (2018), these changes in requirements mandated SME owners to abide by special labeling programs used to make export labels. Having the proper computer programs for invoicing the exported product to Mexico can help SME owners avoid the exports being held up in customs (Cervantes-Martínez et al., 2016). The utilization of proper machinery could improve cultural competencies for SME owners and facilitate more effective

communication. The SME owner's use of improper equipment or machinery could decrease their supply chain efficiency.

Armas and Rodríguez (2017) suggested that direct investment and technology, which spilled over to Mexico, created a comparative advantage for Mexico's business owners. Mexico's increase in comparative advantage when producing selected home textiles could create additional difficulties for U.S. SME owners. Armas and Rodríguez pointed out that NAFTA enabled Mexican business owners to grow economically due to increased direct investment and technology.

The article by Armas and Rodríguez (2017) benefited my study due to the discussion of advanced research on the impact NAFTA has had on Mexican entrepreneurs' comparative advantage about acquisitions of proper machinery and equipment. Armas and Rodríguez explained that before NAFTA, SME owners in the home textile industry exported products to Mexico not manufactured by factories in Mexico due to the lack of technology. Mexico's factories can produce almost every product in the home textile industry. The decrease in the need for U.S. home textiles products can facilitate establishing regulations by Mexican government officials to impede imports. By having the required advanced technology, Mexican business owners competed with SME owners in the home textile industries (Armas & Rodríguez, 2017). Due to the U.S. SME owners competing with Mexico's home textiles producers, as per Armas and Rodríguez, the Mexican government officials protected their domestic production by imposing additional regulations to decrease the rate of imports into Mexico. As business owners compete globally, business owners in developing countries

tend to participate in unfair trade practices. The comparative advantage of SME owners in developed countries, at times, overwhelms SME owners in developing countries. Armas and Rodríguez explained if the competing product being produced is not labor-intensive, the advantage remains with the SME owners of the developed country. As per Bergsten (2017), business owners that lacked successful strategies to understand regulation imposed by NAFTA could have experienced problems exporting to Mexico. Bergsten explained that a country's government officials can impede trade by imposing regulations, tariffs, taxes, and currency manipulation. Armas and Rodríguez explained that business owners can increase their exports and reduce the need to increase regulations to protect their domestic production by devaluating a country's currency. Other countries' product demand by consumers increases due to the rise in importing countries' consumer purchasing power (Bergsten, 2017). According to Bergsten, this can be considered unfair trade practice because not all country's government officials can devalue their currency without causing economic problems to their country.

Theme 2: Improved Understanding of Mexico's Culture

The second theme focuses on using the RBV theory by SME owners to improve the understanding of Mexican customers to better target the needed products and improve distribution. The acquisition of up-dated learning material to improve the understanding of the Mexican culture could assist SME owners in training managers to establish successful strategies to export to Mexico. Having a Spanish-speaking manager can promote better-targeted products for SME owners and improve distribution (Beugelsdijk et al., 2017). Having updated learning materials and a Spanish-speaking manager could

improve cultural competencies and facilitate more effective communication of SME owners with Mexican customers. Using these proper resources improved SME owner's supply chain efficiency (Beugelsdijk et al., 2017). In the absence of up-dated learning material for managers and employing a Spanish-speaking manager, the U.S. SME owners could experience problems collaborating and communicating with all stakeholders.

Theme 3: The Use of Understanding Pertinent NAFTA Regulations

The third theme focuses on SME owners understanding the pertinent NAFTA regulations to export to Mexico. The research study by Vargas-Hernández et al. (2019) addresses the main concerns for SME owners of NAFTA are provisions, renegotiations, and its impact on challenges and opportunities. To establish successful strategies, the SME owners referenced the NAFTA book to comply with existing regulations (Vargas-Hernández et al., 2019). SME owners need to have the proper material to accurately convert measurements using the metric system. Having these resources available can assist the SME owners in complying with NAFTA regulations. As per Vargas-Hernández et al., by complying with export regulation, SME owners increased their exports to Mexico and improved profitability. By not using these resources, SME owners can experience compliance problems with NAFTA, and exports can decrease.

As per Côté (2018), using the RBV theory benefited SME owners and increased profitable exports. Consequently, not using the RBV theory could keep SME owners from increasing profitable exports to Mexico. In the absence of using the RBV theory, the SME owners experienced system degradation to supply chain distribution channel efficiencies (Côté, 2018).

Innovation and Knowledge

Silva et al. (2017) elaborated on the ineffective use of innovations by SME owners due to the lack of knowledge. This lack of knowledge can keep SME owners' exportation from utilizing effective strategies to increase profits. Silva et al. explored the role of international assignments sharing knowledge across multinational enterprises (MNEs) by evaluating how international managers shared knowledge and the impact of knowledge flow across MNEs. Silva et al. found the utility of knowledge pertaining to interpersonal networks could closely relate to the SME owners lacking effective strategies to understand NAFTA. Silva et al. explained the importance of SME owners to understand the need for knowledge of interpersonal networks between and within units of an organization.

Cultural Diversity Adds to the Ambiguity of Understanding NAFTA

The acknowledgment of the need to understand cultural diversity by SME owners could increase the owner's market share and productivity. The owners of U.S. SMEs recognize the need to communicate effectively with Mexican entrepreneurs while establishing their strategies to export to Mexico and increase profits. Ajmal et al. (2017) pointed out that owners must understand the importing country's cultural diversity to increase market share and increase profits. Ajmal et al. focused on how people communicated and how national cultures affected customers' behaviors and perceptions. Consequently, SME owners' behaviors and perceptions could often be misinterpreted and cause unnecessary delays of imports by owners of home textiles to Mexico. The lack of

SME owners understanding Mexican culture delayed exports and created scrutiny and doubt, decreasing the urgency to import Mexico's products (Runfola et al., 2017).

The rate of sale of U.S. exports into Mexico has increased by owners complying with packaging and advertising regulations (Allen, 2018). The SME owners understanding cultural diversities between the United States and Mexico, as per Auer et al. (2020), have experienced with an open mind fewer regulation mistakes than owners not understanding the cultural diversity between the United States and Mexico. As per Auer et al., SME owners' mistakes consisted of wrong product labeling in Spanish and advertising in Mexico, not following NAFTA regulations. As per Auer et al., NAFTA regulations require Spanish labels in a special format on Mexico's imported products.

Global business ensures owners of organizations maintain a competitive edge and recognize how keeping ahead of the competition requires an understanding of a diverse workforce (Koponen & Julkunen, 2017). The establishment of a diverse workforce could assist owners of organizations in establishing effective strategies. As per Koponen and Julkunen (2017), a competent workforce must explain diversity as a wide range of people who are different in terms of ethnicity, gender, religion, socioeconomic background, race, political beliefs, ideologies, sexual orientation, and disability. Koponen and Julkunen implied there is no room for discrimination and people should avoid inferior and superior classification.

SME owners that attempted to penetrate the Mexican market, Sarvimaki (2017) concluded they have encountered challenges establishing effective strategies to export to Mexico. Due to SME owners not establishing joint ventures, they could experience

problems controlling Mexico's cultural diversities. As explained by Sarvimaki, understanding the diversity in Mexico enhanced owners' efficiency and improved SME owner's supply chain management.

The Cultural and Organization Diversity Evaluation model is aimed to assess global partners' cultural fit (Sarvimaki, 2017). Sarvimaki (2017), the author of the model, sought to gain insights into cultural differences and increased understanding of human dynamics, influencing the success of a global relationship. Cultural diversity knowledge continues to be part of a successful, established strategy. The SME owners continue to support and increase workers' participation on both sides of the border. As per Lozano and ESCRICH (2017), diversity acknowledgment is beneficial to SME owners and has revealed the importance of organizations' involvement in global business to improve their communications.

Rüschepöhler and Markic (2019) recognized a management style conceptualized as a trait that focuses on behavior from a cultural movement perspective. Rüschepöhler and Markic explained global research leaders recognized company owner's ethics operate through an ongoing discussion of ethical choices on the changeable, abstract, and subjective context of managerial behavior. As per Auer et al. (2020), SME owners attempted to export to Mexico, and they experienced a change in ethics and values. The change in ethics and values could prevent SME owners from establishing effective strategies to increase profits when exporting to Mexico. SME owners recognize cultural diversity could be an obstacle. Thompson (2018) found SME owners have not actualized adhering to cultural diversity mandates, which can cause organizational problems

complying with NAFTA regulations. As per Auer et al., owners of organizations attempting to increase profits need to understand NAFTA and cultural diversity to establish effective strategies. Auer et al. explained managers with Oneida Limited, an American tableware manufacturer in Mexico, related to the need to understand Mexico's cultural diversity. Most multinational company owners do not understand Mexico's cultural diversity. Stahl et al. (2017) explained the SME owners could encounter problems causing delays in shipments and disrupt continuous business. Kurniawan et al. (2017) discussed SME owners' importance in understanding the country's culture, increasing communication, and promoting efficient growth.

In today's global environment, SME owners lack effective export strategies and an understanding of NAFTA. As per Kurniawan et al. (2017), a supply chains' culture issue is among the most pressing concerns owners of firms have faced. Kurniawan et al. explored the relationship between vulnerability, mitigation strategies, and supply chain effectiveness with security culture as a moderator. The study by Kurniawan et al. included a survey of 209 owners of Indonesian manufacturing firms, and the findings of the data were analyzed using partial least squares techniques in this quantitative study. Kurniawan et al. determined risk culture to be positively related to the effects of supply chain effectiveness, which incorporates the need for business owners to understand and comply with export regulations.

By understanding the cultural diversity between the United States and Mexico, SME owners can reduce export problems. Shaukat et al. (2017) pointed out that increased cultural diversity knowledge of business owners can effectively enhance effective

leadership of owners of the importing organization. Ajmal et al. (2017) focused on the growing international trade, globalization, and increasing cultural diversity of the modern workforce. SME owners that have exported to Mexico should deal with a freight forwarder managed by a Mexican national (Ajmal et al., 2017). Consequently, it is essential SME owners consider cultural diversity when establishing effective strategies to export to Mexico and increase profits. By understanding the Mexican culture, SME owners can reduce mistakes and reduce the cost of exports.

Lozano and Escrich (2017) explored the relationship between cultural diversity and supply chain management. Lozano and Escrich focused on studying the role cultural diversity can play in improving owners' knowledge management capabilities and logistics performance. Lozano and Escrich's research study utilized data from 448 managers to assess how knowledge management has a significant positive relationship with learning the culture and human capital. Today's business owners can build collective knowledge and competencies, improving a firm's performance and profitability. Lozano and Escrich relied on the competence-based theory to suggest that SME owners' resources and capabilities differentiate them from their rivals. An increase in owner efficiency when exporting to other countries, as per Lozano and Escrich, could be increased by investing in human capital to implement cultural diversity awareness and avoid supply chain management delays.

As Lozano and Escrich (2017) mentioned, cultural diversity is important, and it affects the social and political harmony of SME owners. The social and political harmony of SME owners can affect the cohesion and efficiency of the organization. The act of

employees and owners not working in harmony and together can cause inefficiency to an organization. Lozano and Escrich explained that managing cultural diversity in an organization is essential for owners because it involves harmonizing different values, beliefs, and customs.

Lozano and Escrich's (2017) research study benefited my phenomenon because the authors discussed how the understanding by owners of cultural diversity affects the importing country's social and political harmony when participating in global trade. Consequently, SME owners not understanding cultural diversity, as per Päril (2019) have confronted problems due to not understanding the foreign country's culture. The limitations of this study include SME owners not differentiating between inner and outer cultural diversity.

As per Richter (2017), international business owners can be affected by economies of scale, cultural diversity, and decentralization. The research study by Richter included a data set of owners of top manufacturers over a 7-year period (1994 to 2001). During the 7 years, the author of the research study analyzed the effect of economies of scales, multinationalism, and international organizational decentralization on internal information cost. In this research study, Richter indicated international information cost declines due to economies of scale, and the SME owners could be affected by the degree of host market diversity. A growing cultural diversity could increase internal information costs per unit. Richter recognized the importance of SME owners considering and acknowledging cultural diversity when establishing strategies to understand NAFTA. According to Richter, the research study benefited SME owners' trade due to its

emphasis on understanding culturalism and the importance of multicultural organizations enjoying economies of scale to increase profits.

Ajmal et al. (2017) article dealt with conceptualizing trust with a cultural perspective in international business operations. Ajmal et al. elaborated on the significance of multiculturalism and its challenges to the owners of international businesses. Ajmal et al. focused on how to rationalize how trust-building within SME owners affected the global business environment. Understanding the importance of trust is one of the main reasons SME owners have lacked effective strategies to increase profits when exporting (Mazerolle & Eason, 2018). Ajmal's et al.'s research study, findings demonstrated trust as essential for owners to implement strategies when exporting to Mexico. Ajmal et al. elaborated on culture being a significant factor in building trust among global project stakeholders. To implement effective export strategies, SME owners need to understand the culture of Mexico. According to Patten (2019), trust is a form of social relations and processes facilitating the coordination of exchanges.

The study by Lozano and Escrich (2017) elaborated on the different social sustainability supply chain practices. The author's research focused more on environmental sustainability practice rather than social supply chain practices. The study by Lozano and Escrich explored the ability and requirements of owners of a multinational company to maintain the impact of cultural diversity at a controllable level. Lozano and Escrich's research study included the need for owners of organizations to have an orientation of the countries' culture used while conducting trade. Lozano and Escrich

focused on owners improved cultural attributes in the organization. The issue of SME owner's cultural sustainability has emerged as an essential topic in supply chain management over the past decade and could continue to be one of the main obstacles to understanding trade strategies to increase profits.

Koponen and Julkunen (2017) focused on cultural diversity among business students to better understand cultural diversity issues. Koponen and Julkunen's study is relevant to my research, which consists of SME owners establishing effective strategies to export to Mexico. To establish successful export strategies, sellers need to form and develop customer relationships with people from various cultural backgrounds (Koponen & Julkunen, 2017). Consequently, business students need to understand some effects of culture on the customer-seller relationship. Koponen and Julkunen explained how important it is to become aware of someone's own national culture and different stereotypes related to national cultures. Koponen and Julkunen's study further explained the importance of understanding national culture, industrial culture, organizational culture, and individual behavior; other cultural effects can impact business and customer-seller relationships.

Mexican Government Involvement in NAFTA

As per Dawar (2016), some have considered Mexico a socialist country due to its government involvement in business activity. Consequently, when SME owners export goods to Mexico, the involvement of the Mexican government in imported products takes away from the competitive domestic product demand. This decrease in domestic demand experienced by Mexican owners Dawar created unemployment, and the Secretary of

Commerce looked at implementing NAFTA regulations to impede imports into Mexico. Dawar identified markets where the government is a producer of goods and can significantly influence how the market operates.

Dawar (2016) explained the importance of the GATT, which has served as an international governing body protecting trade among a nation's business owners and mandated fair trade. Both the United States and Mexican governments measure imports to both countries utilizing an eight-digit harmonized tariff code, which describes the product being exported or imported (Dawar, 2016). As per Hakobyan and McLaren (2016), industries are protected by both governments depending on comparative advantages. Consequently, SME owners should keep themselves informed of existing Mexico's comparative advantage and focus on exporting the products Mexico needs. As per Hakobyan and McLaren et al., exports from the United States to Mexico decreased considerably from 2015 to 2016. This decrease in exports could be due to new government regulations; as per Desilus (2020), in 2012, the government officials of Mexico activated regulations, which mandated the fumigating of pallets for all products. The added regulations brought a cost increase to SME owners exporting to Mexico, which could force an increase in the price of U.S. goods in Mexico.

The labor laws in the United States upheld by the Teamsters and the American Federation of labor through NAFTA presented by Côté (2018) have transferred into Mexico. The U.S. labor laws are mandated to business owners in Mexico, the United States, and Canada by the North American Labor Organization since the initiation of NAFTA (Côté, 2018). As per the research study by Giumelli and van Roozendaal (2017),

business owners of the United States, Mexico, and Canada under NAFTA are committed to promoting the freedom of association and protecting the right to organize labor.

Giumelli and van Roozendaal mentioned collective bargaining, the prohibition of forced labor, the right to strike provisions on the protection of children, the prohibition of discrimination, and equal pay for men and women as all mandates of NAFTA. The SME owners can benefit by understanding Mexico's labor laws, which are mandated by the Mexican government. Giumelli and van Roozendaal explained the lack of understanding of Mexico's labor laws can cause SME owners difficulty producing or warehouse goods in Mexico.

Giumelli and van Roozendaal (2017) discussed the advancement of principles of international investment law. Giumelli and van Roozendaal examined the contributions of the NAFTA Chapter 11 dispute settlement framework. The study by Giumelli and van Roozendaal consists of six parts; the first part is the introduction, followed by the regional characteristics of the regional courts, which is the second part. The third part evaluates the specific laws, which are the contributions of the NAFTA Chapter 11 dispute settlement framework and their impacts on the growth of international investment law principles. The fourth part assesses the contributions of the European Convention on Human Rights. The fifth part investigates the future role of regional courts, while the sixth part offers concluding remarks. Ajibo's (2018) study contributed to SME owners establishing effective strategies to export to Mexico and increase profits. Ajibo explained that SME owners need to expand their business to Mexico and warehouse the exported products for distribution.

The Need to Understand NAFTA to Maintain Profits

As international business grows, Zhang and Shi (2017) explained SME owners became more dependent on increasing their profits by exporting to Mexico. Due to supply exceeding demand domestically, U.S. SME owners find the need to export to Mexico to sell their excess supply. Zhang and Shi explained selling existing inventory remains essential for SME owners to liquidate their assets, invest in new products, and implement innovations to increase exports to Mexico. When exporting into Mexico, the exporter should understand cultural diversity. As per Zhang and Shi, the reasoning and importance of understanding culture diversity focused on the owner's negotiations as part of successful strategies because culture becomes a determining factor when dealing with NAFTA. Zhang and Shi indicated that indigenous language is considered part of a culture. When SME owners export to Mexico and a Spanish-speaking agent or associate negotiates the sale of goods and logistics, Zhang and Shi found that exports can flow smoother. Zhang and Shi concluded that cultural diversity is not a problem for owners when vague language is not used, when politeness principles are followed, and face-to-face interactions take place in conversations.

Vague language pertaining to Spanish could be knowing a few words in the foreign language and is indicative of the need for an interpreter who speaks Spanish fluently. By being polite and conducting face-to-face transactions, the cultural diversity between both country's business owners can be less of a problem. Zhang and Shi (2017) emphasized different negotiations should be part of successful strategies and should be used by owners due to cultural differences when dealing with a foreign country. As per

Zhang and Shi, culture in Mexico is considered by many individuals as *laid back*. If the U.S. SME agent is too aggressive and requires quick results, the Mexican buyer has been known to reject a sale and not deal with the SME agent.

SMEs NAFTA Renegotiations and Variables

The Presidents of the United States, Canada, and Mexico signed NAFTA to increase profitable trade and benefit from the participating countries' comparative advantage (Côté, 2018). The U.S. trade deficit with Mexico is a continuous occurrence since the inception of NAFTA in January 1994 (Côté, 2018). SME owners in the countries involved in the NAFTA treaty tend to benefit from each other's trade specialization. As per Côté (2018), free trade through specialization benefited business owners of all countries, promoting economic efficiency and growth. NAFTA's renegotiations enable SME owners of the countries involved to investigate and analyze the issues helping and harming the trade treaty. Vargas-Hernández et al. (2019) addressed the main concerns of NAFTA, which are provisions, renegotiations, and its impact on SME owners making a critical analysis of recent developments in strategic terms of challenges and opportunities. Renegotiations to make for a more efficient and effective NAFTA are amicable and economical; however, changes can cause confusion. Zhang and Shi (2017) explained that changes cause additional confusion making it difficult to understand the changes. Making changes to regulations can cause difficulty for SME owners to understand and establish successful strategies to increase profitable exports to Mexico.

Zhang and Shi (2017) focused on trade to analyze, contribute, invite, and promote dialogue supporting researchers, practitioners, negotiators, and SME owners to arrive at new insights about the impacts of their day-to-day actions of trade. The imbalance of trade between the United States and Mexico seemed to continue to bring concerns to researchers focusing on NAFTA's present structure. Moreover, a thorough understanding of NAFTA regulations can continue to be a cumbersome endeavor for some SME owners, which could be a reason for not establishing successful strategies to export to Mexico. Most SME owners' export strategies have been aimed to enhance or decrease the country's exports of the host country's businesses (Côté, 2018). Zhang and Shi found the owners that comprise the U.S. export industry are dependent on technology and labor, while in some cases, Mexican owners, due to low wages are dependent on labor more than technology. In the absence of confusing regulations, U.S. SME owners' exports to Mexico could increase significantly. Products can be produced in both countries with fewer problems; Zhang and Shi explained the export-import regulations for the Toyota Tundra are not as confusing, and the large corporations increased profitable exports. As per Bergsten (2017), NAFTA has significantly benefited the motor vehicle industry.

The NAFTA renegotiations offer a unique opportunity for economic analysts. Zhang and Shi (2017) decided to investigate, analyze, and contrast the issues related to SME owners motivating the economic integration process in the United States and Mexico trade. The SME owners trading with Mexico have an interest in NAFTA renegotiations since they have exported a significant market share of products and services to Mexico (Bergsten, 2017). The renegotiations of NAFTA opened new doors

for SME owners, assessing cross-border conditions and evaluating the existing confusion of export regulations. Also, NAFTA's renegotiations provided an opportunity to modernize and simplify issues related to SME owners' exports (Hakobyan & McLaren, 2016). The NAFTA renegotiations created new opportunities for investment and trade for SME owners in North America and, as per Vargas-Hernández et al. (2019), created a social benefit of increased employment, which benefited the U.S. quality of life. Vargas-Hernández et al. explained the Mexican government's anti-corruption could have lessened trade regulations confusion and enabled successful strategies by SME owners to increase profitable export to Mexico.

Trade Variables and Their Effect on Trade with Mexico

NAFTA could be affected by trade inducing variables, such as exchange rates, tariffs, per capita incomes, and relative prices. Vargas-Hernández et al. (2019) specified because of a country's comparative advantage, trade among SME owners in countries with zero tariffs, quotas, or other non-tariff barriers is beneficial to all countries. As per Hakobyan and McLaren (2016), all SME owners belonging to trade treaties remained closer to equilibrium due to increased trade in the absence of trade barriers. The United States and Mexico's ability to trade with fewer barriers could enhance SME owners of each country's ability to capitalize on its comparative advantage to increase trade.

The Environment and Labor Laws in Mexico Effect SME Distribution

Allen (2018) pointed out the concerns over the adequacy of NAFTA's policies to protect the environment. These policies have repeatedly surfaced over the years with accompanying calls to renegotiate or strengthen the environmental provisions. The

Trump administration took a much stronger position on NAFTA overall and threatened to abrogate the trade agreement entirely but subsequently agreed to renegotiations (Allen, 2018). Allen pointed out that the environmental laws were weak and needed reinforcement to allow for effective environmental laws. Allen suggested the study was relevant because the warehousing of products for distribution within Mexico needs to adhere to environmental laws and regulations. The U.S. owners of multinational subsidiaries discarding waste must adhere to Mexican environmental laws and regulations (Allen, 2018). The SME owners exporting to Mexico need to adhere to Mexican environmental laws and regulations to increase profitable exports to Mexico.

NAFTA to NAFTA 2.0

On November 30, 2019, the NAFTA trade treaty included renegotiations by the Presidents of the United States, Mexico, and Canada. The three countries' renegotiated NAFTA 2.0 trade treaty which was effective July 1, 2020 (Watts, 2019). The new NAFTA is a trade treaty that includes the USMCA or NAFTA 2.0 (Watts, 2019). Watts (2019) pointed out that Mexico's political leaders felt NAFTA initiated political safeguards to effectively enforce regulations to protect workers, consumers, the environment, and their economic development. The Mexican government's enforced import regulations caused SME owners to lose interest in establishing successful export strategies to Mexico (Watts, 2019). The President of Mexico, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, expressed a negative view of NAFTA (Watts, 2019). Welch (2018) explained the President of Mexico, having a negative view of NAFTA, could initiate new

regulations increasing the difficulty of SME owners to establish successful strategies to export to Mexico.

Labonté et al. (2020) pointed out the USMCA is needed to protect U.S. innovations, such as digital information. Prior to the year 1994, it was difficult for U.S. business owners to trade digital products with Mexico (Makholm, 2018). The inclusion of the country of origin of digital products could have increased the import tariffs levied on business owners (Watts, 2019). Some owners in the home textile industry utilize digital thermostats on electric blankets and mattress covers for export. Watts (2019) recognized innovations in digital product categories could be classified as wrong for export by SME owners and incur unnecessary costs to U.S. product exports. Watts pointed out that in 2019 the United States imported approximately \$34 billion in products and services from Mexico, while Mexico has imported approximately \$25 billion in similar products and services from the U.S. The inclusion of product innovation to the classification list of export products to Mexico can add to the complexity of product labeling and rules for U.S. SME owners pertaining to the country of origin. The additional regulations due to product innovation and new product classification of home textiles could add to SME owners' difficulty establishing successful export strategies to Mexico. Labonté pointed out U.S. participation in the USMCA decreased the reliance on exports to Mexico and increased the U.S. trade participation with the rest of Latin America. The decrease in dependence on trading with Mexican owners could increase the regulations of exports to Mexico. Labonté's study is relevant to my research due to new additional regulations, that has increased the difficulty of understanding NAFTA by U.S. SME owners. The

increase in regulations due to product innovation could cause problems and confusion for SME owners in the home textile industry and make it difficult to establish successful export strategies to Mexico.

The initiation of NAFTA, characterized by integrating the production of U.S. goods in both countries, continues to pose challenges for SME owners. The production of U.S. goods in both countries has made the owners of U.S. firms more competitive against the European and Japanese producers (Liss, 2019b). The study by Liss (2019b) was relevant to my research study because the purpose of NAFTA is outdated by the emergence of China as a powerful competitor to North America. The original NAFTA negotiations served as a reminder; that regionalism was the industrial strategy for the 1990s. Proceeding the original NAFTA signed in 1994, the U.S. exports to Mexico have been less than the imports to the United States (Liss, 2019a). This decrease in net exports to Mexico from the United States caused concern by the U.S. government. As per Liss (2019a), the U.S. net exports to Mexico continued to decrease during the first 15 years of NAFTA. Even though the United States experienced a trade deficit, Mexico focused on imposing strict regulations on U.S. imports (Liss, 2019a). The increased regulations could deter U.S. imports due to the zero 15-year tariff phase-out ending in 2009 of U.S. products into Mexico (Liss, 2019a). The study by Liss identified the original purpose of the NAFTA agreement. While the U.S. purpose of the NAFTA agreement focuses on improving competition globally in the production of the finished products, Mexico's focus is different. As per Liss, México focused on increasing its foreign direct investment (FDI). While the Mexican government continued to implement NAFTA regulations, U.S.

imports by SME owners continues to decrease (Welch, 2018). This decrease in U.S. imports from Mexico could be attributed to not establishing successful export strategies to Mexico.

Liss (2019a) explained the opportunity for business growth began to favor the country of Mexico, and opposition by many to NAFTA emerged in the United States. President Trump introduced a bill focused on the renegotiation of NAFTA (Compa, 2019). As per Welch (2018), the country's historical supply and demand for labor created a dependency of the U.S. economy on Mexican laborers and correspondingly higher labor wage rates of documented and undocumented immigration. The research study by Welch benefits my study because higher wages in the United States increased the landed prices of U.S. products exported to Mexico. Welch explained the increase in the landed cost of U.S. products into Mexico decreases the demand for U.S. product imports to Mexico and reduces the regulations of imports to Mexico. As the regulation of U.S. imports to Mexico decreases, Main (2020) recognized SME owners have an incentive to invest in establishing successful strategies. As per Welch, it is imperative, future NAFTA negotiations consider the immigration-related benefits or repercussions, as parties have previously failed to accomplish. Marki and Russo (2019) concluded the United States benefits from the implementation of NAFTA. The study by Welch supported the need to strengthen U.S. exports to Mexico. As owners of U.S. SMEs established an increase in successful export strategies to Mexico, the U.S. trade deficit should decrease (Marki & Russo, 2019).

The NAFTA document outlined the elimination of tariffs and other import restrictions between the United States, Mexico, and Canada (Adekola, 2020). The 1994 NAFTA document contains more than 500 pages of tariffs and regulations. The NAFTA phase-out tariff reductions consisted of a 15-year phase-out schedule, which caused confusion and dismay among U.S. SME owners (Adekola, 2020). The NAFTA tariffs and regulations continue to confuse the owners of U.S. SMEs. The confusion caused by changing tariffs and regulations could create difficulty for SME owners to establish successful strategies to increase profitable exports to Mexico. The article by Kastner (2020) addressed the confusion of Mexico's imposed trade regulations. Kastner pointed out the USMCA marks the beginning of a new chapter for NAFTA. The new agreement, USMCA, supports a more balanced reciprocal trade and leads to a free market (Beaulieu & Klemen, 2020). As per Kastner, the USMCA contains significant improvement and includes modernized approaches to rules of origin, intellectual property, and financial services. Kastner's research benefited my study because it reduced the confusion of the rules of origin and discussed protecting intellectual rights for SME owners. As per Kastner, the less confusion of export regulations to Mexico, the greater the new growth of exports for both workers and SME owners.

As SME owners export to Mexico, they exercise property rights to protect product patterns and designs. Mexico's intellectual property rights of product exports to Mexico have been difficult for SME owners to protect (Ramírez Sánchez et al., 2018). The U.S. SME owners' leaders in the home textiles fashion industry are subject to have product styles duplicated by Mexican business owners. When Mexican entrepreneurs infringed on

U.S. copyrights, the U.S. companies faced a reduction in market share due to high-cost production (Kastner, 2020). The decrease in Mexican labor production cost of the copied product increased Mexico's domestic demand and reduced U.S. exports to Mexico (West, 2018). As per Buiey (2020), NAFTA 2.0 officials recognized the international trade agreement explicitly protects intellectual property rights. The article is relevant to my study because Kastner (2020) pointed out that if a creator has an explicit right to take legal action against an infringer, the financial damage would be minimal, or a case of copying would be difficult to prove. The lack of action by the U.S. SME owners is relevant to my study because the infringement of property rights could make it difficult for SME owners to establish successful export strategies to Mexico.

Positive and Negative Points of NAFTA and NAFTA 2.0

Most organizations view the USMCA as a balanced and modern trade agreement (Compa, 2019). The USMCA is estimated to add 1.2 percent to the U.S. gross domestic product and create new U.S. jobs (Compa, 2019). The NAFTA trade treaty signed in January 1994 included free trade between the United States, Mexico, and Canada. The NAFTA trade treaty included a 15-year tariff phase-out schedule, which was confusing for most SME owners (Kastner, 2020). The governments of all three countries intended to increase trade among them. Unfortunately, per Compa (2019), the trade outcome did not favor the United States as much as Mexico. As per Compa, the NAFTA trade treaty rewards outsourcing. The USMCA was viewed by most as a fair and reciprocal trade deal that has increased U.S. jobs and wealth. NAFTA was the original trade agreement; it encouraged outsourcing by business owners to take advantage of both the U.S. and

Mexico's comparative advantage (Kastner, 2020). As per Compa, the USMCA or NAFTA 2.0 preserves NAFTA and allows for updates and an improved, modernized trade treaty. Compa's study complements my study because it emphasized the USMCA which focused on changes affecting the auto industry, American steel, and aluminum. The USMCA contains new elements regarding stringent, enforceable, and binding labor and environmental elements in the agreement (Compa, 2019).

The home textile industry remains unaffected by the USMCA, and the NAFTA provisions remain unchanged (Compa, 2019). The NAFTA 2.0 document consists of 2,080 pages compared to 600 pages of the NAFTA document (Compa, 2019). Having a document easy to understand should be beneficial to SME owners for establishing successful export strategies to Mexico. Lemieux's (2018) study pointed out that prohibition on currency depreciation is a critical positive change in NAFTA 2.0. The devaluation of the peso has been known to cause problems for SME owners that export to Mexico (Desilus, 2020). One of the problems a depreciated peso can cause includes the Mexican retailer experiencing hardship paying the invoices on 30 to 60-day terms for SME owners (Lemieux, 2018). Lemieux explained when owners of Mexican organizations experience hardship, they tend to levy the cost of regulatory compliance to U.S. SME owners. The additional cost of exporting due to regulations could have disrupted SME owners establishing successful strategies to export to Mexico. As per Lemieux, the argument for whether NAFTA 2.0 is more effective than NAFTA remains unanswered by many Americans.

The article by Năstase (2017) was relevant to my study because it presented the relationship between the United States and Mexico pertaining to their NAFTA membership. As per Lemieux (2018), President Trump believes NAFTA has never been a great advantage. President Trump believes the U.S. citizens lost millions of jobs to Mexicans due to cheaper labor (Lemieux, 2018). The citizens in the State of Texas, since 1994, along the Texas border, have lost thousands of home textile jobs to Mexican nationals due to cheaper labor (Lemieux, 2018). The study by Năstase presented data explaining Mexico's trade advantage over the United States under NAFTA. Moreover, since 1994 the United States has experienced a trade deficit with Mexico through 2019 (Lemieux, 2018). The data presented in the study by Năstase explained how trade between the two countries has favored Mexico. Năstase explained how foreign investments have favored Mexico. According to data presented, the U.S. FDI to Mexico has increased from \$17 billion in 1994 to over \$92 billion in 2015 (Năstase, 2017). The FDI from Mexico to the United States has gone from \$17 billion in 1994 to slightly over \$17 billion in 2014. The study by Năstase pointed out the U.S. was at a disadvantage under NAFTA. Besides the lopsided trade deficit and FDI deficit, the U.S. lost clothing and textile factories to Mexico due to cheaper labor costs (Lemieux, 2018). SMEs owners have been disadvantaged under NAFTA, and NAFTA 2.0 has brought new opportunities for Mexico SME owners.

Ramírez Sánchez et al. (2018) study pointed out both the United States and Mexico have an anti-NAFTA population in their respective countries. On the Mexican side, criticism focused on the characteristics of an agreement between developed and

developing economies running the risk of an increase in a maquila-dominated economy (Ramírez Sánchez et al., 2018). Having a Maquila-dominated economy could decrease the demand for exports to Mexico.

The revised trade agreement NAFTA 2.0 offers opportunities for SME owners (Năstase, 2017). The first opportunity for SME owners deals with duty-free access remaining in place. The second opportunity for SME owners consists of enhanced customs and trade facilitation, including a single-window approach for efficiency. The third opportunity consists of customs expedited release of expressed shipments. The fourth opportunity includes no formal entry procedures for products at a level of less than \$117, up from \$50. The fifth opportunity consists of all three countries agreeing to abide by enhanced labor and environmental protections. The sixth opportunity consists of improvements to protect the enforced intellectual property rights. The positive renegotiations of property rights could improve trade with Mexico. SME owners should be better protected from copyright infringement. The seventh opportunity consists of regulatory cooperation with small and medium enterprises. The last opportunity is to create a committee comprised of government representatives from the United States, Canada, and Mexico to discuss export issues. The committee is scheduled to meet yearly and identify ways to help SME owners realize the trade agreement's benefits (Năstase, 2017). Under NAFTA 2.0, the United States, Mexico, and Canada will meet after 6 years to decide whether to renew the treaty for another 16 years (Năstase, 2017). The study by Năstase (2017) benefits my study by explaining the problems and opportunities of both the United States and Mexico. The opportunities of NAFTA 2.0 could provide SME

owners with additional documentation for establishing successful strategies to export to Mexico.

Challenges of SMEs

As SME owners continue to rely on knowledge pertaining to tariffs and environmental laws, they continue to focus on the theory of knowledge to guide their success in establishing successful strategies to export to Mexico. Vargas-Hernández et al. (2019) explored SME owners' key challenge of connecting to appropriate knowledge, partners, and networks. SME owners' success depends on their strategic resources such as education and training, innovation, and infrastructure. Any disruption to NAFTA's economic relationships could have adverse economic effects for SME owners, increased productivity, competitiveness, employment, and investments.

Trade representatives from the U.S. government renegotiated NAFTA, which intended to slap tariffs on imported goods from Mexico (Liss, 2019a). These increased tariffs caused increased pricing and the Mexican government to impose additional tariffs on U.S. products (Năstase, 2017). This situation led to a decrease in exports to Mexico, increasing the U.S. trade deficit. The main challenge that faced SME owners in the NAFTA renegotiations, as per Patten (2019), was to reach an agreement with clear and stable regulations supporting the free trade agreement. As per Liss (2019a), a little more than half of the SME owners were aware that trade discussions could lead to NAFTA's successful renegotiation. Liss (2019b) pointed out that the increase in tariffs could cause SME owners' products to be priced higher than the domestic product price. When tariff

wars occur, the developing country's government could increase regulation to even out the playing field.

Transition

Section 1 includes the complete background of the problem and the academic literature review, which explores the body of knowledge and establishes the basis of the study on decision-making strategies. Section 2 includes the purpose statement, role of the researcher, participants, research method, research design, description of the population, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection technique, data organization technique, data analysis, and reliability and validity of the research. Section 3 includes the introduction, presentation of the findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, reflections, and conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

This section includes a discussion of the purpose statement, role of the researcher, participants, research method, research design, description of the population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection technique, data organization technique, data analysis, and reliability and validity of the research. Semistructured phone interviews were the primary method of collecting data from participants. I also reviewed organizational documents and data from the participants' businesses. The data analysis focused on the data collected, the literature review findings, and changes to current export regulations.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore successful strategies used by some U.S., home textile, SME owners to export to Mexico in compliance with NAFTA export regulations. The target population consisted of four owners of home textiles SMEs located in the United States who have used successful strategies to comply with NAFTA regulations to export home textiles to Mexico to increase profits. The implications for social change might include an increase in profits for U.S., home textiles, SME exporters, benefiting their communities through increased employment and a larger tax base, which can be used to improve the quality of life for both families and communities.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative studies, the researcher collects and analyzes pertinent data to develop and identify themes and strategies to help address the research question (Yin,

2018). I conducted the interviews, reviewed organizational documentation, and analyzed data to formulate strategies to answer the research question. Moser and Korstjens (2018) stated that qualitative researchers are the primary instrument in the collection of data. Researchers typically use semistructured interviews with open-ended questions in qualitative studies to guide the conversation to encourage the participants to describe the phenomenon (Farrugia, 2019).

As the researcher, my relationship with the topic and research area includes having previous experience exporting home textiles to Mexico, which could help complement my observations and interpretations in the study. My expertise consists of 31 years of exporting home textiles to Mexico. I also speak fluent Spanish and English as well as work as a consultant in the textile industry. I previously worked as a consultant for SME owners lacking successful strategies to export to Mexico. Consequently, my work experience significantly contributed to identifying SME owners using successful export strategies to Mexico. Having experience exporting to Mexico contributed to effective communication with the participants and helped develop valid interview questions.

Throughout this study, I adhered to guiding ethical principles outlined in the *Belmont Report* and used their applications to conduct research. The *Belmont Report's* principles include *beneficence*, *justice*, and *respect for persons* (Millum, 2020). Millum (2020) explained that beneficence is treating people ethically and minimizing their risk as participants. Respect for persons involves protecting people and treating them with courtesy and respect while allowing for informed consent. Providing justice to

participants involves actualizing who receives the research benefits and who should bear the burden. To minimize risk, ensure respect for persons, and provide for justice, I ethically conducted interviews while following the interview procedures, consisting of interview questions, required consent, and confidentiality procedures with research participants. Additionally, I respected the participants and their autonomy, did no harm, abided by justice, obtained informed consent, and was ethical in all interactions and communications with the participants in this study. Researchers have been encouraged to follow the *Belmont Report's* three principles in conducting their studies to protect the participants and maintain privacy (Ibrahim & Sidani, 2014).

The role of the researcher is to identify and mitigate bias by recording interviews and methodological notes before and after interviews and avoid viewing data through a personal lens or perspective (Saunders et al., 2015). The measures I took to ensure rigor and mitigate bias in the data collection process were interviewing four SME owners of whom I had no affiliation within my previous export work to Mexico. When conducting research, it is essential to mitigate bias to reveal the participant's true feelings without distortion (Cypress, 2018). To mitigate bias, I reviewed the transcripts, conducted bracketing and member checking, formulated a table of possible themes and strategies developed from the literature review, and engaged in reflective thinking to double check for any instances of possible biases.

To enable consistency and inform the participants about their rights, I followed the interview protocol (see Appendix A) to conduct the interviews in the same fashion with all the participants. The interview procedures consisted of using the same interview

questions for all the participants, obtaining informed consent, and following confidentiality procedures with the research participants in a qualitative study. Castillo-Montoya (2016) explained an interview protocol regulates the interview procedure and allows the researcher to maintain control. The interviews were audio recorded upon receiving consent from the participants to do so. I shall also safeguard all the data connected with this study and discard them after keeping them safe and secure for at least 5 years after completing my research.

Participants

Saunders et al. (2015) indicated that qualitative researchers need to establish eligibility requirements to ensure their participants are knowledgeable and experienced in the topic under study. The eligibility requirements for participants in this study consisted of being SME owners with at least 5 years of experience exporting to Mexico and running a successful and profitable business in compliance with NAFTA regulations. The exports of home textiles include shipping to mom-and-pop stores, wholesalers, distributors, mass merchants, and department stores. The number of participants depends on the characteristics of the population from which they were chosen (Saunders & Townsend, 2016). I searched *Home Textiles Today*, a trade magazine of the textile industry, to identify businesses that publish advertisements on exporting to Mexico to obtain the contact information of possible participants. I either called these telephone numbers or searched their websites to obtain the names and email addresses of the SME owners of these businesses. I then emailed the owners to see if they wanted to participate in an interview. Sovacool et al. (2018) explained that researchers should use their

experience and knowledge of a topic to establish a working relationship with the participants.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

Each researcher brings a personal history and manner of thinking into their research process; consequently, Yin (2018) explained, that the research choices made reveal their ontological, epistemological, and methodological stance. I established a working relationship with the participants (see Malterud et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). To enable them to feel comfortable, the participants were emailed to schedule an interview at their convenience. I used my work experience and knowledge of the export industry and NAFTA regulations to establish a working relationship with the SME owners (Richter, 2017).

The three research methods most used by researchers are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method (Yin, 2018). PärI (2019) explained that a researcher's philosophical beliefs follow the individual's constructivist assumptions based on their prior knowledge and experiences. I selected the qualitative method to use open-ended, interview questions. Qualitative researchers use semistructured interviews with open-ended interview questions to discuss what is occurring or has occurred (Steiner et al., 2017).

The qualitative researcher uses a conceptual framework or lens through which to explore the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Because researchers approach a phenomenon with different conceptual frameworks, the various qualitative designs, including grounded theory, ethnography, narrative, historical case studies, and phenomenology, can be used

to address the research question (Lenger, 2019). Lenger (2019) stated that qualitative research aims to provide an explicit rendering of the structure, order, and broad patterns found in perceptions and thinking from a group of participants. The researcher focuses on “why” and “how” a phenomenon may occur rather than how often (Kalman, 2019). The researcher explicitly interprets the data with the subsequent results, revealing a story told in the qualitative research tradition.

In comparison, a quantitative researcher looks at methods to uncover trends, articulate facts, and reveal research patterns and is more objective, scientific (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). The quantitative research method is used to describe the measurement and analysis of relationships between variables, while the qualitative approach is used to determine the meaning of *rich data* and *thick descriptions* (Türkoğlu, 2019). The quantitative researcher is usually looking to quantify the degree to which something occurs and accentuate objective measurements through questionnaires and surveys (Johnson & Shoulders, 2019). I did not use the quantitative method or a mixed method for this study because I did not intend to use any numerical or correlational data to address the research question (Johnson & Shoulders, 2019). Researchers use mixed-method research when their research question is answered by an integration of both qualitative and quantitative research rather than either approach alone (House, 2018; Saunders et al., 2015).

The qualitative researcher is more concerned with investigating meaning, interpretations, symbols, processes, and relations (Cavalcanti, 2017). In a qualitative study of a business problem, the researcher gathers research to answer why and how a

phenomenon may occur rather than how often (Cavalcanti, 2017). I conducted semistructured interviews and used open-ended questions to gain insights into people's thoughts and beliefs around certain behaviors and systems that I then used to address the research question (see Carlin & Kim, 2019).

Research Design

Researchers use a research design to describe their intentions for developing the study and describe the inquiry strategy (Placek et al., 2019). Qualitative research includes the case study, narrative, phenomenology, ethnography, and other basic or generic qualitative designs (Kalman, 2019). Generic qualitative designs include a qualitative description and interpretive description approaches (Kalman, 2019). Päril (2019) defined case studies as in-depth investigations of a single individual, group, or event to explore the causes of underlying principles. Carlin and Kim (2019) indicated that a case study is exceptional for finding a real-life application of a theoretical concept or solution in a bounded system.

Carlin and Kim (2019) explained that using a multiple case study allows researchers to study cases in different locations and compare the similarities and the differences between them. Using a multiple case study design, I explored different strategies SME owners used to successfully export to Mexico.

Using a qualitative multiple case study approach was appropriate for this study because I focused on identifying the successful strategies of multiple SME owners in the home textile industry to increase profitable exports to Mexico. In this study, I interviewed four SME owners who had successfully exported to Mexico and related the

characteristics of their successful strategies to those SME owners struggling with not having successful strategies to export to Mexico. The qualitative researcher employs small samples to address the issue's complexity by focusing on participants with relevant knowledge (Lenger, 2019). The qualitative researcher also searches for data saturation regarding the concept representing the phenomenon of interest (Masui & Ogino, 2020). Saturation is reached when additional interviews do not provide new concepts or new information (Kalman, 2019).

Using a qualitative multiple case study design was appropriate for this study because I interviewed four SME owners with different ideologies. The multiple case study approach ensured that the study stayed focused on the collection of qualitative data, using methods like interviews and reviews as well as publicly available information from company websites and press releases. I also considered using an ethnographic design for this study which Raman and Balakrishnan (2020) described as a study of a cultural group's patterns in which the researcher participates in the group to understand the phenomenon and the participants' social value commitments.

The other qualitative research designs (i.e., narrative and phenomenology) were not suitable for this study. Phenomenology is concerned about a less known lived experience of participants (Saunders et al., 2015), whereas a case study focuses on a phenomenon studied in its environment (Tobi & Kampen, 2017). Dalpiaz et al. (2017) argued that the narrative design is appropriate for studies of entrepreneurs' behaviors. However, a narrative approach requires a significant investment of time from the

researcher and the participants (Dalpiaz et al., 2017). Therefore, neither the phenomenological nor the narrative design was suitable for the current study.

Population and Sampling

The researcher in a qualitative study gathers in-depth information about the phenomenon from the study participants, which in this study consisted of four SME owners presently implementing successful strategies to export home textiles to Mexico in compliance with NAFTA regulations to increase profits. The samples in a qualitative research study are small because they deal with specific research, while the samples required for a quantitative study are large to accommodate a general research study (Saunders et al., 2015). Quantitative research requires a sampling frame, or a list identifying the people that fit the study's target population (Farrugia, 2019).

Use of a small sample size is possible because Walden University (2019) allows doctoral students to use few participants. A small sample size of four participants was appropriate to address the research question because as Cakmak et al. (2015) explained, the focus is on the sampling process, not the number of potential participants.

In this research, I used the purposive sampling design recommended by Tobi and Kampen (2017) to identify participants based on the eligibility criteria to participate in this study. For studies that require participants to have a specific knowledge base, purposive sampling can be used to gather participants who have the requisite experience (Sovacool et al., 2018). Using purposive sampling provides researchers with the opportunity to select individuals who fit the criteria and are knowledgeable on the topic of research (Yin, 2018). The participants were knowledgeable and experienced using

strategies to enhance trade with Mexico in compliance with NAFTA regulations. The depth and richness of the data will determine if data saturation has been reached when no more new information has been forthcoming from the interviews and not solely the population's sample size (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Once I selected potential participants and assured that they met the eligibility criteria, I asked them if they would be willing to participate. I then explained the study to them, so they could be well informed before deciding whether to participate. Once the participants decided that they would like to participate, they were asked to take part in an interview, and I began the scheduling process to find a time for the interviews.

The setting for the interviews were by phone. The interviews will take place at the participants' offices since they will be interviewed by phone interviews. This study would not be practical to utilize a sampling frame due to several U.S. home textile SME owners conducting trade with Mexico. Using a sample frame is not recommended for a qualitative study as per Farrugia (2019) because, in a sample frame, the list may include individuals, households, or institutions. Therefore, the researcher will use exploratory qualitative research with limited resources, explained by Moser and Korstjens (2018), where a small number of cases can explain the phenomenon because of the eligibility requirements I shall be using to select my participants. While selecting SME owners exporting home textiles to Mexico to increase profits, several SME owners export to Mexico; however, many do not increase profits. This sampling plan developed by the researcher is to make certain that the SME owners who participate in this study are both

experienced and knowledgeable about the textile trade to Mexico and are operating successful and profitable businesses in compliance with NAFTA regulations.

Ethical Research

To ensure participants ethical research I followed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) regulations. I obtained approval from the IRB at Walden University prior to interviewing participants. The Walden University IRB approval number for this study, 07-07-21-0749155 expires July 6, 2022. I put my IRB number on the IRB consent form. When conducting research, the researcher adheres to ethical principles to protect the dignity, rights, and welfare of research participants (Yin, 2018). Research ethics focuses on the moral principles' researchers follow in their respective research (Saunders et al., 2015). Walden University students must comply with U.S. federal regulations and the university's ethical standards Walden University (2019) and comply with the informed consent process. Before conducting research, the participants received a consent form, which they indicated "I consent" by return email and returned to the researcher. Consent is a combination of the consent document and communication with the participants before the research is undertaken (Wall & Pentz, 2016). The participants were informed of the consent form's purpose, content, and intent before obtaining the signed consent. The consent forms were sent and collected through email. The consent form helped explain the purpose of the research, risk, benefits, privacy, and confidentiality to the participants (Saunders et al., 2015). As a form of appreciation, the participants received a copy of the findings.

To ensure ethical practices, I sent all my potential participants a consent form. The information sent to them described the study elaborating on the interview confidentiality. The consent agreement's delivery was emailed to the participants and encouraged to call the researcher back if they have any questions about the purpose of this research and the freedom to withdraw from the research study. Even though I asked the participants to sign the consent form explained by Saunders et al. (2015), the researcher shall ensure that participants understand they may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Each of the four participants were selected based on their characteristics meeting the eligibility requirements and aligning with my overarching research question: What successful strategies do home textile SME owners use in compliance with NAFTA's export regulations to Mexico? Qualitative researchers who establish and use eligibility requirements to ensure their participants are knowledgeable and experienced shall be successful in helping themselves address the research question (Saunders et al., 2015).

The participants were notified in the consent form that there are no incentives for participating in the study. I used confidentiality procedures to protect the participants and maintain their privacy by following the principles of the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects and Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The principles of the Belmont Report include beneficence, justice, and respect for persons (Millum, 2020). As per Millum (2020), beneficence is ethically treating people and minimizing risks. Respect for persons involves protecting people and treating them with courtesy and respect while allowing for informed consent (Millum,

2020). Providing justice to participants involves actualizing who receives the research benefits and who should bear the burden (Millum, 2020). To minimize risk, ensure respect for persons, and provide for justice, I conducted interviews ethically while following the interview procedure, consisting of interview questions, required consent, and confidentiality procedures with research participants. Researchers have been encouraged to follow these three principles in conducting their studies to protect the participants and maintain privacy (Ibrahim & Sidani, 2014).

To ensure adherence to the ethical standards, I obtained approval from Walden University's IRB. I put my IRB number on the IRB consent form and include my IRB approval number in my final Walden doctoral study. My CITI certification is attached (see appendix B). While conducting research, I ensured confidentiality of the names of individuals and organizations by assigning an alpha-numeric label to the transcribed recorded information and assign codes such as P1 and P2 to participants to ensure participant privacy and confidentiality. To ensure ethical practices, I sent all my potential participants a consent form. I conducted phone interviews by following the interview protocol and questions (see Appendix A). The information sent to them described the study elaborating on the interview confidentiality. The consent agreement form has been emailed to the participants and they were encouraged to call the researcher if they have any questions about its purpose.

The data was stored in a flash drive and kept in my home office in a locked desk drawer for 5 years following the completion of my research to protect the confidentiality of all data and information gathered from participants. After 5 years following the

completion of my research, the data will be destroyed, including the recording files and any documents related to my research. As per Ennever et al. (2019), I will not use the participants' names, organization names, or any identifiable information to ensure confidentiality as a best practice.

Data Collection Instruments

As the researcher for this study, I assumed the role of the primary researcher in this qualitative multiple case study. I did not use a standardized instrument to collect the data for this study. The concepts measured by my interview questions focused on how resources can provide an organization with a competitive advantage and new opportunities over its rivals. The data collection process consisted of gathering data from individuals using semistructured, open-ended questions developed from the ideas in my conceptual framework, the RBV theory. The RBV theory was used to help me develop interview questions that would identify successful strategies used to export to Mexico. As per Yin (2018), the researcher conducts interviews by collecting evidence within the case study. The interview is a common qualitative research technique entailing using prepared interview questions (Yin, 2018). The interview questions focused on SME owners' strategies to export to Mexico to help me address my research question.

In a qualitative study, processes need to be in place to assess reliability and validity to eliminate bias that could negatively affect the honesty, transparency, and objective of a study (Shaw & Satalkar, 2018). Qualitative researchers must begin to be reflexive and consider their methodology's ethicality (Thurairajah, 2019). While doing the research, I focused on the research question and interview questions along with

member checking, bracketing, and triangulation of publicly available information to avoid and minimize any bias that might affect the outcomes of this study.

In this study, I conducted interviews by phone using open-ended questions because of the COVID-19 virus precautions that need to be taken. The interview process started by explaining the study's background and objective and remind the participants about the ability to withdraw as defined in the protocol. The interview protocol (see Appendix A) was used to conduct interviews to ensure I used the same procedures with all participants. As per Sarvimaki (2017), open-ended questions are necessary to ensure the participants can answer the questions comprehensively to address the research question.

The interview is the primary source of data collection (Yin, 2018). As per Montenegro (2020), data are collected through semistructured interviews and open-ended questions to allow participants to describe and reflect on their own experiences regarding the phenomenon under study. For reliability and validity, my interview questions have been reviewed and approved by my chair, committee members, and the IRB of Walden University. I recorded the interviews using a reputable recorder, used my cell phone as a backup copy, and saved the files in Word document format. I arranged to transcribe with a reputable service provider and a confidentiality agreement to produce the written files.

Saunders et al. (2017) indicated that researchers could enhance the reliability and validity of the data collection instrument/process through member checking, review of the transcripts, and triangulation with other publicly available information. The interpretations and the transcripts were shared with the participants to confirm the

accuracy and enhance validity by achieving data saturation. Data saturation was achieved when no new information is forthcoming from the participants, and the study's findings can be used to replicate the study in terms of methods used by me. I conducted member checking follow-up interviews or email correspondences, edit the transcripts and interpretations accordingly, to achieve data saturation.

Besides conducting semistructured, open-ended interviews, I thoroughly reviewed the required export regulations, such as Spanish product labels, product certificates of origin, and the required format of Spanish invoices. The analysis of the organization's documents is common in qualitative studies (Yin, 2018). The analysis of documents required by existing regulations assists in developing convergent avenues of inquiry (Yin, 2018).

To further ensure reliability and validity, the researcher needs to reflect on the data and be consistent (Saunders et al., 2015). Researchers validate their findings through cross-checking and evaluating emerging themes and strategies to enhance findings (Candela, 2019). The member checking and review of the transcripts process also allows the participants to confirm the data's accuracy (Candela, 2019). Interview protocol procedures also need to be followed with all the participants consisting of interview questions, member checking, required consent, and confidentiality procedures to be followed with research participants in a qualitative study (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

I conducted interviews with at least four SME owners who export to Mexico successfully. The interviews were conducted by phone due to COVID-19 restrictions. While conducting this qualitative exploratory study, I gathered varied, rich data and thick

descriptions from the participants through semistructured, open-ended questions to identify the different themes and strategies to address my research question. I used member checking and review of transcripts as my strategies with my participants to ensure data saturation and accuracy, threats to validity, and internal consistency of the interview process and answers from the participants. I documented any adjustments or revisions to the data collection process and adhered to my IRB approved form C Ethics Self-Check Application for my study.

Data Collection Technique

As a researcher, I collected the data using open-ended questions in semistructured interviews. The data collection technique is a step-by-step fashion that included collecting data from several publicly available sources such as news releases and company websites to increase the findings' credibility and validity. Yin (2018) identified four data collection steps to ensure high-quality case studies: use multiple sources of evidence, a case study database, maintain a chain of evidence, and exercise care using electronic sources of evidence for security and confidentiality purposes. I used the data collection technique as phone recorded interviews guided by the interview protocol (see Appendix A). The interview equipment included a recording audio device (Sony ICD-PX476 BX digital voice recorder), which could provide a crisp and clear audio that allows for effective phone meetings. All data and paper files related to this study were kept locked and secured safely in my place of residency for 5 years. A pilot study was not used because I did not collect data as essential precursors of clinical trials since I did not conduct these in my study (Kistin & Silverstein, 2015).

The interview questions focused on the research question. The research question focused on successful and profitable export strategies SME owners use to comply with NAFTA's regulations. The qualitative multiple case study consisted of quality semistructured, open-ended questions focused on SME owners in the home textile industry, who did not experience problems understanding export regulations to Mexico. An advantage of semistructured interviews is having the opportunity for new to emerge (O'Keeffe et al., 2016). Using a semistructured, open-ended questions interview is an advantage of using this type of data collection technique. Being fluent in Spanish could enable the questions and member checking to be done in Spanish. Establishing face-to-face interviews will not be possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

After receiving IRB approval, I used the purposive sampling design recommended by Tobi and Kampen (2017) to focus on a particular phenomenon to identify participants based on my eligibility criteria to participate in this study. I called the participants at a predetermined time to conduct interviews. I shared the informed consent form, reviewed the form's content, and requested a confirmation email to verify the willingness to participate in the study. To enable consistency, maintain order, and ensure the participants understand their rights, I used the interview protocol as a guide (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The interviews focused on U.S. SME owners exporting home textiles successfully to Mexico after NAFTA's inception, January 1, 1994. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) suggested a qualitative researcher gathers as much data as possible from different collection modes to promote an effective collection of data. Member checking and follow-up member checking interviews can also assist in reaching data saturation

(Yin, 2018). I included my assumptions and biases identified in my reflective journal during the transcription of the interviews, intending to surface any additional questions or clarifications to pursue as a part of follow-up interviews. The interviews consisted of quality semistructured, open-ended questions via phone with multiple U.S. home textile SMEs owners.

The interviews were scheduled to accommodate the owners' available time to conduct the interviews to encourage rendering additional data, which might be difficult to gather via emails. Ghafouri and Ofoghi (2016) suggested the researcher should establish rapport with participants. While conducting phone interviews, the interviews have been recorded using built-in phone devices. Proceeding with the phone interviews, I encouraged a question-and-answer session via emails with any participants interested in doing this to help establish a better working relationship with the participants. I provided a recap of the interviews to invite feedback and promote the study's validity to ensure the efficiency of establishing a successful working relationship with the participants. The participants will be asked to review and analyze documents and reports about export regulations. Methodological triangulation compiles and comparing numerous information types to analyze if various data can support similar findings (Yin, 2018).

Data Organization Technique

I utilized various central data repositories systems to keep track of data to emerge understandings such as research logs, reflective journals, and cataloging/labeling systems in protective files. Broman and Woo (2018) encouraged researchers to use a single common value for the studied participants. This raw data and information shall be stored

in a password-protected flash drive for 5 years and then destroyed following the completion of my research (Fusch et al., 2018). I used AtlasTi software to organize the collected data and maintain a list of codes and keywords. I used a research log to track all the data collected and maintain a chain of evidence. To ensure confidentiality and protect the participants from harm, I did not use the participants' names as recommended by Ennever et al. (2019).

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is essential in the research process because it enables the researcher to identify patterns and relationships from collected data and determine its relation to the studied phenomenon (Gaus, 2017). I developed an analytical process to retain only the verification from more than two sources to gather meaningful data. Triangulation is the means of using more than one method to collect data on the same topic (Sarvimaki, 2017).

The person conducting the research has four options to select the appropriate form of triangulation, and the options consist of data triangulation, theoretical triangulation, investigator triangulation, and methodological triangulation (Yin, 2018). I used methodological triangulation and gathered data using interviews, observations, and documents. I used a methodological triangulation to review business documents, as Denzin and Lincoln (2018) explained, to determine their effective use of simplifying and complying with export regulations and enabling more than one research method such as interviews, observations, and documents to study the phenomenon. Data triangulation involves using different sources of information to increase the study's validity (Chiu et

al., 2016). Investigator triangulation involves using several different investigations in the analysis process (Yin, 2018). Theoretical triangulation consists in using multiple perspectives and disciplines to interpret a single data set (Yin, 2018). The appropriate form of triangulation for my study was methodological triangulation, which involves using multiple qualitative methods to study the phenomenon.

Data analysis in a qualitative study is defined as the process of searching and arranging the interview, sorting, and coding the data to develop appropriate themes (Yin, 2018). To successfully analyze data for a qualitative study, the researcher, as per Yin (2018), suggests using five phases: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding. In the compiling phase, I completed the data analysis to develop groupings. The second phase included disassembling the data to reduce and eliminate invariant themes of the phenomenon. The third phase consisted of reassembling the data and establishing cluster core themes. The fourth phase included analyzing patterns against the interview transcripts and documents to interpret the data's meaning. The last phase consisted of summarizing the data into an individual structure description of the experiences.

I used AtlasTi software to ensure not to develop a biased view of the phenomenon. I used AtlasTi software to compile, disassemble, reassemble, interpret, and conclude the findings. I coded and analyzed the participants' interviews pertaining to exporting to Mexico to explore if the multiple interview methods' conclusions lead to the same conclusion (Robins & Eisen, 2017). I reviewed transcribed recordings of the

interviews to identify patterns and themes to categorize themes and strategies regarding successful export strategies to Mexico.

As the study's conceptual framework, the RBV theory can help SME owners understand themes, strategies, and processes for identifying and using essential resources to comply with NAFTA's regulations to export home textiles to Mexico and increase profits. In my review of the literature, Wernerfelt (2014) suggested that the RBV theory was used as a framework when resources are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, non-substitutable, and can help owners' position a firm's goals for long term success. Strategic resources can provide SME owners with the foundation to develop a firm's capabilities leading to superior performance over time. The SME owners, not having updated any new machinery (e.g., computers for labeling, sewing machines, inventory machinery, and proper molds), could struggle in their competition against corporations such as Cannon Mills and West Point Pepperell (Hakobyan & McLaren, 2016). Due to SME owners not having the appropriate machinery and equipment to produce at a lower cost, profits could dwindle as owners export to Mexico to increase sales and profits (Hakobyan & McLaren, 2016).

The modernized equipment explained by Antonio and Perin (2019) could help SME owners increase their export efficiency to increase profits. As per Bhandari et al. (2020), the RBV theory alone at times might not be sufficient for SME owners to increase competition. Using efficient logistics could help owners avoid costly shipping errors related to regulatory compliance when filling out export documents properly. An

organization's owners must focus on creating, developing, and choosing internal resources to create business value (Bachoo, 2019).

In the review of my research there were several themes that have been identified by previous researchers which include (Antonio & Perin, 2019; Bachoo, 2019; Cervantes-Martínez et al., 2016; Dawar, 2016; Lozano & ESCRICH, 2017) that may have relevancy for my study. The first theme focuses on the acquisition of proper machinery and equipment by SME owners to remain competitive in the home textile industry. An example of the proper machinery is SME owners using the appropriate product labeling machines to sew labels on exported products to Mexico. The focus of constructing an efficient organization's internal resources is essential to building its export documentation and labeling process. The conceptual framework of my study focused on SME owners acquiring the proper machinery and equipment to help abide by NAFTA mandated regulations. Bachoo (2019) explained owners of organizations should better understand their internal resources, which gives them the ability to innovate and envisage products customers need but have not yet imagined.

The second theme focuses on Mexico's culture being essential to understand SME owners to increase exports to Mexico. As Lozano and ESCRICH (2017) discussed, it is essential for owners to understand the importing country's cultural diversity to increase market share and increase profits. Having a diverse workforce is a factor of production, as explained by Bachoo (2019), that allows SME owners to improve Mexican organizations' communication. This diverse workforce assists SME owners to communicate when using new equipment to explain the labeling process to Mexican

customers. The diverse workforce can improve Mexican employees' communication with U.S. SME owners reference labeling and invoicing laws. Employing Spanish-speaking people as international sales managers, as explained by Cervantes-Martínez et al. (2016), could influence the use of the RBV theory to enhance profitable business negotiations and increase exports to Mexico.

The final theme that I have found in my review of the literature involves understanding how the Mexican government import regulations could hinder SME owners from complying with mandates and avoid custom charges, labor lawsuits, noncompliance with newly mandated regulations, and shipment delays. Antonio and Perin (2019) explained that the RBV theory could allow for the use of modern equipment to effectively communicate with Mexican customs about regulation. The delays of SME owner's export due to not having the proper computers, cell phones, and radios to communicate with custom brokers, forwarding agents, and Mexican customs can increase the cost of exports. Dawar (2016) pointed out, markets, where the government is a producer of goods, can significantly influence how the markets operate. Owners having a relationship with Mexican customs personal can improve communication and allow non-adhered to regulations to be fixed at the border instead of being refused (Lozano & Escrich, 2017).

As per Allen (2018), NAFTA mandates business owners to adhere to the environmental policies and laws of the North American Agreement Environmental Cooperation. SME owners aspiring to form a joint venture or a subsidiary in Mexico should understand and adhere to environmental policies to avoid delays and costly fines

by the Mexican government. The Mexican environmental laws in place are weak and need reinforcement to allow for efficiency (Allen, 2018). By adhering to the Mexican environmental laws, SME owners can warehouse finished products in Mexico to increase market share (Lozano & Escrich, 2017).

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity within qualitative methods are different from quantitative methods, but it is just as important (Bell et al., 2018). Reliability and validity are related to a qualitative study's trustworthiness, which is similarly a measure of the *credibility*, *dependability*, *confirmability*, and *transferability* of the data produced by a study to achieve homogenous and consistent results (Ghauri et al., 2020). The actual strategies for ensuring reliability and validity within qualitative research act as checks of authenticity and bias throughout the research process (Ghauri et al., 2020). In this way, these strategies can reasonably confirm all results truly reflect the phenomena under investigation.

Reliability

Reliability refers to replication or repeatability to achieve consistent findings (Yin, 2018). Reliability also refers to the reliability of instruments, processes, and to the study itself. Since the researcher is the primary instrument using semistructured, open-ended questions from their research protocol, this will help to ensure the consistency of participant answers throughout the study (Bell et al., 2018). Researchers are then better able to fully comprehend participants' experiences, which allows them to produce, comprehend, and analyze data more reliably (Ghauri et al., 2020). I used the interview

protocol (see Appendix A) to ensure dependability, repeatability, and consistency during data collection and administered the same protocol to all participants. When interviewing, I used a bracketing process to control bias throughout the research process (Ennever et al., 2019). The interview process included an initial discussion with the participants to ensure that they understand the purpose of a research study and ask any questions they might have about a particular research study (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The interviews focused on asking all participants the same questions to ensure consistency within the interviews and the research study. Utilizing notes from recordings of phone interviews and the coding of the interview transcripts allowed for the participants' interviews to be analyzed and identified in an accurate and trustworthy fashion.

Dependability

Dependability is the consistent nature of the analytical procedures (Noble & Smith, 2015). Dependability enables other scholars to replicate the process of the research project (Leung, 2015). The other scholars include addressing personal research bias or other factors that may have altered the findings (Noble & Smith, 2015). I took multiple steps to ensure dependability. I listed and accounted for any biases. Also, there was in-depth recordkeeping to show a clear data trail. Triangulation was utilized to show a streamlined thought process throughout the data analysis and interpretation phase (Leung, 2015; Yin, 2018). I reviewed and verified the data collection process, used bracketing in my data analysis then used member checking to help ensure and support that the participant is satisfied with their answers and achieved data saturation to ensure dependability.

Validity

The research process was rigorous and ensured the study was thorough, consistent, and honest. Validity could be either external or internal (Ghauri et al., 2020). Internal validity refers to the degree of confidence that the causal relationship tested is trustworthy and not influenced by other factors or variables. External validity refers to how results from a study can be applied (generalized) to other situations, groups, or events. The RBV theory application formed the conceptual framework and strengthened this study's validity (Wernerfelt, 2014). I used a coding process to ensure statements from participants were recorded properly and transcribed accurately. To enhance stability, I promoted validity to the research by documenting a well-audited trail of the findings (Walden University, 2019). Reaching data saturation helped assure credibility, transferability, and confirmability in a qualitative research study (Yin, 2018). I used semistructured interviews, organizational documentation, and a review of academic literature as the data sources for the research study. I connected the reoccurring themes to triangulate the data to increase the study's credibility. Triangulation is a process of authenticating information using multiple sources of data or methods concerning the same phenomenon to decrease bias and increase the study's validity (Fusch et al., 2018). I used both triangulation and member checking as methods to reach data saturation. Data saturation occurs when there is no new information of themes, and the information can be used to replace the study, making it capable of generalization (Saunders et al., 2017). I reviewed organizational documentation as well as the interviews to increase the validity of the study. The research included member checking to improve the subject's reliability,

validity, accuracy, and credibility by reflecting on the accuracy and precision of the findings based on collecting data (Walden University, 2019).

Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which qualitative research results are credible and believable (Venkatesh et al., 2016). Researchers use member checking to increase the research's credibility because participants are part of the study and the researcher (Iivari, 2018). Qualitative researchers may maximize credibility by engaging in the study for a prolonged period, sharing data and interpretations with participants through member checking. Researchers using the qualitative methodology must use various sources and triangulate them to increase credibility (Varpio et al., 2017). Researchers use triangulation and data saturation to establish credibility (Mazerolle & Eason, 2018). I ensured the study's trustworthiness through methodological triangulation and performing member checking of the interpreted data.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the study findings can apply to other situations or groups concerning future research (Elo et al., 2014; Thurairajah, 2019). Transferability is the degree of use for research findings in future research (Moon et al., 2016). Cavalcanti (2017) recommended prolonged engagement, persistent observation, or collecting as much data as possible to enhance the study's transferability. The researcher should avoid a one-time phenomenon that could decrease the study results' validity and transferability (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Researchers use triangulation to increase the transferability of qualitative research because researchers use multiple sources to view

outcomes (Fusch et al., 2018). To ensure validity, I interviewed business owners who successfully implemented successful export strategies to Mexico. Using descriptive data can help readers determine the extent to which the study supports their investigation (Thurairajah, 2019). Therefore, I used descriptive data to ensure other researchers can make an objective determination of transferability.

Confirmability

Confirmability is other researchers' ability to replicate the study (Alonso-Díaz & Yuste-Tosina, 2015; Moon et al., 2016). Researchers use confirmability and triangulation to reduce bias and ensure a replicable research study (Abdalla et al., 2017).

Confirmability refers to objectivity and allows for potential congruence between two or more autonomous reviewers regarding data accuracy, significance, or meaning (Elo et al., 2014). Confirmability is present after establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, evidence, and study results are reproducible by another researcher (Yin, 2018). I ensured confirmability by validating the research findings derived from the study findings rather than individual bias (Koponen & Julkunen, 2017). I ensured the data's confirmability by comparing data with results to ensure the research findings come from the study rather than my personal bias. To ensure confirmability, assumptions, and bias from my scheduled reflective journal, during the transcription of the interviews, I strived to surface questions to enable follow-up interviews with my participants. I shared the interview transcripts and interpretations with participants to confirm the accuracy of the transcription. I maintained detailed handwritten notes and document introspection to help facilitate objectivity and researcher bias. I used triangulation to ensure confirmability.

Data Saturation

Credibility, transferability, and confirmability are all elements of quality qualitative research (Moon et al., 2016). Data saturation has been met when the researcher finds no new information or themes (Fusch & Ness, 2015). When the researcher has met data saturation, and the study is credible, transferable, and confirmable, they have met the criteria for a valid research study (Yin, 2018). While analyzing data, I derived themes to ensure that no new information emerges, thus reaching the point of saturation. I conducted interviews until no new information emerged to achieve data saturation (Shaw & Satalkar, 2018). Researchers achieve data saturation when no further emerging information addresses the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). I used methodological triangulation, such as in-depth semistructured interviews and document analysis, to achieve data saturation.

Transition and Summary

In Section 1, I discussed the foundation of the study; the background of the problem; problem statement; purpose statement; nature of the study; research question; interview questions; conceptual framework; operational definitions; assumptions, limitation, and delimitations; the significance of the study; and literature review. In Section 2, I discussed the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, participants, research method, research design, description of the population, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection technique, data organization technique, data analysis, and reliability and validity of the research study. In Section 3, I included an introduction, the presentation of findings, applications to professional practice,

implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, reflections, and a conclusion.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore successful strategies used by some U.S., home textile, SME owners to export to Mexico in compliance with NAFTA export regulations. I used the RBV theory as the conceptual framework to help explain how the firm establishes a managerial framework to enable SME owners to use its available resources to establish successful strategies to export home textiles to Mexico in a profitable fashion. Phone interviews were conducted with four home textiles, SME owners that had more than 5 years of experience in successfully exporting to Mexico. Analysis of the interviews and publicly available organization documents resulted in the following three main themes: (a) acquisition of proper machinery, equipment, and human resources; (b) improved understanding of Mexico's culture; and (c) the use of understanding pertinent NAFTA regulations.

Section 3 includes the presentation of the findings, applications for professional practice, and implications for social change. I also provide recommendations for action and future research, my reflections, and the conclusion.

Presentation of the Findings

The data collection process for this study involved using open-ended questions in semistructured interviews. I also collected data from several publicly available sources, such as news releases and company websites, to identify export strategies to Mexico. Before data collection began, the participants were emailed a consent form to be signed and emailed back to me agreeing to participate in the study with the words, "I consent." Once I received their consent, I scheduled interviews with the participants. Before each

interview began, I asked all participants for their consent to record the interviews using the recording devices. All interviews lasted between 30–40 minutes. I followed the interview protocol (see Appendix A) when conducting each interview. In addition to the eight interview questions, the participants were asked follow-up questions.

To ensure confidentiality while conducting the study, I assigned an alphanumeric label to the transcribed, recorded data and assigned the participants codes, such as P1, P2, etc. All the interview transcripts were entered into AtlasTi to allow for coding and identifying themes.

To ensure data saturation and accuracy, I conducted member checking and reviewed the transcripts closely. After my fourth interview, data saturation was achieved, indicating that additional interviews were not needed. Following the interviews, I transcribed the participants' interview responses and emailed each participant a copy of the transcriptions. The participants were also provided with an interpretation of the interview transcripts for their approval. All participants approved the interview transcripts and my interpretations. I then thanked the participants for their time spent taking part in the study.

After analysis, I used a word cloud (see Figure 2) as a visual representation of word frequency appearing in the interview transcripts. The word cloud showed the keywords of example, regulation, cultural, and resources. All my three themes connect to my research question. Data analysis resulted in three key themes (see Table 2).

the labeling requirements have been a problem for U.S. SME owners to abide by. Using strategies, like having the proper computer program for invoicing the exported product, can help SME owners avoid exports being held up at the border (Cervantes-Martínez et al., 2016). The strategy of the acquiring the proper machinery and equipment aligns with the RBV theory. The RBV theory model developed by Bergsten (2017) allows SME owners to view resources as key to achieving superior performance. Wernerfelt (2014) published the RBV theory in 1994 and defined a resource as a business strength or weakness. In the interviews, all participants mentioned the importance of using the proper resources to remain competitive when exporting to Mexico. The interview data supported the need for SME owners to use the proper resources to establish successful strategies to comply with NAFTA regulations to export home textiles to Mexico and increase profits. The proper machinery can include computers and printers that are equipped with an updated product label program and computers that translates Spanish to English to facilitate invoicing and product labeling in Spanish. To remain competitive and reduce costs, SME owners should use the newest and most efficient machinery to export to Mexico and increase profits (Labonté et al, 2020). P1 and P2 stated that it is essential for SME owners to use all available resources to successfully export to Mexico.

P1 stated:

I deal with the metric system very often since we ship to several countries. Today, I must deal with the conversion to the metric system, not only in Mexico, but with Europe and Canada. My company uses the proper human resources and invests in a graphic designer and printer to help print labels with the correct conversions.

Also, by manufacturing in volume, the company is better able to sew on Spanish labels in China instead of having to deal with the regulation problem in the United States.

P2 stated:

Again, we have been exporting to several other countries for years and clearly understand the metric conversion. Not only do we understand, but my employees and staff have a system that involves having all documents reviewed more than once for any possible mistakes. After the metric conversion as I mentioned, the label needs to be approved by the buyer and the sales agent. To accommodate the conversion to the metric system and proper Spanish labels, we rely on the agent and the freight forwarder to make the labels.

Having the proper machinery and the right people at work can promote efficiency, and SME owners can participate in complying to the set regulations. Wernerfelt (2014) explained the value of resources to achieve superior performance. The firm that uses all available resources can successfully establish profitable export strategies and increase trade.

SME Owners Benefit by Using the RBV Theory

Post-NAFTA, SME owners have struggled to maintain profits (Cervantes-Martínez et al., 2016). The enactment of NAFTA in 1994 immediately reduced the trade tariffs of home textiles made in the United States and exported to Mexico to zero (Vargas-Hernández et al., 2019). P1, P2, P3, and P4 shared that SME owners could struggle to compete when the necessary resources were not used to export to Mexico. The most

updated view of the RBV theory describes a sustainable competitive advantage could only be achievable when resources are simultaneously valuable, rare, imitable, and exploitable by organizations (Badrinarayanan et al., 2019).

P1 stated:

The use of innovative and proper resources can help SME owners promote their product in Mexico at a competitive price. The strategy of having a competitive edge in pricing can enable SME owners to increase their profitable exports to Mexico in compliance with NAFTA regulations. This increase in export profits could increase employment in the home textile industry and improve the lives of many Americans. I use an experienced agent to guide our managers on any logistics regulations. I use a skilled agent and hire people to manufacture and pack and ship the merchandise. Our staff and employees are trained and understand the required logistics and regulations. My employees are trained to pay attention to export shipments to avoid problems. The company also has Spanish-speaking employees that work with the customers forwarding agent at the border, which helps to avoid logistics regulations errors. As I mentioned, the agent that we contract should speak Spanish as well.

Pomegbe et al. (2020) explained that the RBV theory incorporates dealing with the SME owner that realizes investments in the proper equipment and human capital is essential to establishing successful export strategies. The proper equipment will allow SME owners to print the proper stick-on or sewn-on label for the product. Hiring or

contracting an experienced agent can help determine what to include on the set regulation and provide the proper format to comply with the regulation.

Understanding NAFTA Can Increase the Efficiency of the Use of Proper Machinery and Resources

The findings from the interviews align with the needs to understand NAFTA and use the proper machinery and resources. Production specialization is considered an essential aspect in free trade for the better use of available, scarce resources (Cervantes-Martínez et al., 2016). By SME owners specializing and producing products where they have a comparative advantage, they can increase their efficiency and profitable exports. Understanding NAFTA includes knowing that at times, Mexico's resources are used to produce what could be exported to Mexico; therefore, U.S. SME owners need to export products that do not require Mexican raw material to remain competitive with Mexican companies. Consequently, all participants suggested that SME owners should focus on exporting to Mexico what is rare and difficult to imitate.

Findings Related to the Literature Review

The findings from the interviews align with the need to acquire proper machinery and equipment prior to manufacturing the products. Peteraf and Barney (2003) reported that since the inception of NAFTA, researchers have considered a firms' export performance as influenced by a combination of their own resources and capabilities. Consequently, the ownership of available resources by SME owners can determine their ability to establish successful strategies to export to Mexico.

P4 stated:

I am not an expert on cultural diversity; consequently, we rely on representatives and distributors to guide us on what to say and do prior to doing anything. So, we as a company make sure we have an experienced export agent contracted prior to manufacturing the products ordered by the customer. As mentioned, our in-house employees and staff are trained on exporting to Mexico, and we do not deal with exports to Mexico unless we are dealing with an experienced sales agent. By doing this, the Mexican customer can communicate with the contracted agent that can better understand all logistic regulation that needs to be adhered to. We recognize that we need to invest in satisfying the required regulation that is mandated by NAFTA.

The findings from the interviews also align with the need to understand NAFTA to establish successful strategies to export to Mexico. Päril (2019) explained that Mexican SME owners utilized U.S. inputs and used the RBV theory to produce better quality and fashion goods; therefore, it is difficult for U.S. SME owners to sell products to Mexican organizations. By using the U.S. raw material, the Mexican SME owners can use their low-cost labor to produce similar products and sell them domestically. Consequently, U.S. SME owners cannot produce similar products to export to Mexico and compete with the Mexican SME owners.

P2 stated:

I realize that complying to the cultural diversity of the importing country is important and that having a Spanish-speaking staff to communicate with the

authorities, buying office, and export agent can facilitate the export process. Also, all required regulation needs to be approved first, and effective communication is necessary to help comply with logistic regulation, which can include invoicing correctly, including a bill of lading and a packing list... our employees know that the packing list must coordinate with the invoice and the bill of lading.

Findings Related to the Conceptual Framework

The findings from the interviews align with the RBV theory. Wernerfelt (2014) explained the firm's ability to perform is heavily based on its available resources and obtaining the required resources can enable firms to increase their productivity. Therefore, the RBV theory seems to be the key for U.S. SME owners producing product that competes with developing countries low-cost labor which allows for low-cost production of home textiles. Gani and Scrimgeour (2019) explained the RBV theory coincides with SME owners using the proper resources to produce and export product.

P3 stated:

As the owner I am comfortable doing business the correct way and will work at accommodating everyone equally. What do you mean by that? A good attitude can eliminate cultural diversity problems and recognizing that I need to contract an experienced agent to guide us in dealing with the mandated regulation to increase my exports to Mexico. Also, my employees and staff recognize the need to accommodate the customers' needs so that regulation can be adhered to. We recognize the need to provide an accurate invoice, packing list and bill of lading.

Theme 2: Improved Understanding of Mexican Culture

The second theme that emerged from the interviews was the need to improve the understanding of the Mexican culture to improve communication and facilitate establishing successful export strategies to Mexico. The understanding of the Mexican culture could assist SME owners to establish successful strategies to export to Mexico (Beugelsdijk et al., 2017). By implementing the strategy of understanding the culture, the SME owners can reduce their mistakes related to Spanish product labeling, certificate of origin, Spanish invoicing, and ineffective communication. Therefore, SME owners' behaviors and perceptions could be misinterpreted and cause unnecessary delays of imports by SME home textile owners to Mexico. Also, implementing a strategy to understanding the regulation like Spanish labeling and filling out the certificate of origin can facilitate the export of product to Mexico. Establishing a diverse workforce can assist SME owners in establishing successful strategies to export to Mexico (Koponen & Julkunen, 2017). Also, implementing the strategy of acquiring updated learning materials and a Spanish-speaking manager can promote better-targeted products for SME owners and improve distribution (Beugelsdijk et al., 2017). Having a diverse workforce can enable having Spanish speaking employees, which can improve communication and reduce mistakes complying with the export regulation.

P1 stated:

I use an agent that is familiar with NAFTA regulations. Prior to contracting the agent, I make sure that he understands the Mexican culture. I believe it is cheaper to contract an export agent that knows the ins and outs of NAFTA. I contract an

international sales agent to let us know what is needed and guide us through the process of filling-out the documents. The export process is more efficient when we use people that know the regulation, so we pay an agent commission instead of having to deal with all the regulation and cultural diversity.

P2 stated:

The export delays are eliminated by doing all the right things. As a company we recognize the importance of understanding the Mexican culture. Understanding the cultural diversity of Mexico is essential to eliminate any hold-up of shipments at the border. Due to our employees understanding the culture of Mexico the company can better comply with the compliance of regulation. Example, by understanding that Mexico's culture requires that business transactions are somewhat informal to allow for their respect for each other while complying with regulation can allow for customs to better deal with you while complying to the required regulation.

P3 stated:

I work on making the customer happy and work on understanding the customer's culture. I need to be up front and honest with my customer and establish a comfort zone. By being up front with my customer I can receive the pertinent information required to comply with NAFTA regulation. I believe that being honest complements the Mexican culture and you can avoid delays at the Mexican border. The Mexican culture is inviting to honesty and my being up front and my company's willingness to work with Mexico can be an asset.

By understanding Mexico's cultural diversity, the SME owner can get closer to maximizing business potential and eliminate most costly problems derived by the SME owner trying to comply with regulation (Raithel et al., 2021). Also, understanding the Mexican culture can promote long run business because the owner has an increased awareness of how to treat and communicate with people. The SME owner that understands and accommodates to the diversity could potentially experience business growth as Walmart Mexico did, in the first few years of building stores in Mexico. Walmart successfully opened over 36 stores in the first 5 years of doing business in Mexico (Martínez Henao, 2020). Understanding the diversity Walmart started a joint venture, which allowed for the venture with Aurrera stores in Mexico. The established joint venture allowed for Aurrera the Mexican chain of stores to negotiate with Mexican businesses to include Walmart stores in most malls. Establishing a subsidiary would not have allowed the same growth due to not having a Mexican partner that understands the culture.

Cultural Diversity Reduces the Ambiguity of Doing Business and Understanding NAFTA

SME owners recognize the need to understand and cater to cultural diversity to reduce the ambiguity of understanding NAFTA. Ajmal et al. (2017) focused on how people communicate and how national cultures affected customers' behavior and perceptions. Example, a Mexican buyer will not tell you he does not like the merchandise that you are trying to sell; instead, he might suggest that your merchandise has appeal and could sell; however, his merchandize mix does not allow for that look, Consequently, he

lets you down kindly. In the United States the buyer most of the time simply tells you if he likes or dislikes the merchandise you are trying to sell him. Runfola et al. (2017) pointed out that the lack of SME owners understanding Mexican culture delayed exports and created scrutiny and doubt, decreasing the urgency to import U.S. products. SME owner behaviors and perceptions could often be misinterpreted and cause unnecessary delays of imports by owners of home textile companies in Mexico. For example, the Mexican buyer to pay cash before delivery might ask for a formal bank document to verify the routing and account number, while the U.S. business owner simply provides that information through email. These different interpretations could cause delays in getting the order paid and shipped, which can cause not having the merchandise on the shelves in Mexican stores to meet sales goals.

Findings Related to the Literature Review

The findings from the interviews align with the need to have an improved understanding of Mexican culture. Having a better understanding of the Mexican culture can help target the needed products and improve distribution. Beugelsdijk et al. (2017) pointed out that having updated learning materials and a Spanish-speaking manager could improve cultural competencies and facilitate more effective communication of SME owners with Mexican customers. Providing cultural diversity training classes to SME management by U.S. SME owners could improve the effective distribution of products to the Mexican customer and improve market share.

P4 stated:

To avoid running in to problems with regulations and the making of a Spanish invoice we make sure that our staff and employees are trained in all export requirement of NAFTA. An example is our Spanish speaking staff that understands the cultural diversity in Mexico and speak fluent Spanish. By understanding and speaking fluent Spanish, we as a company can provide a better service to our customer. Also, by knowing and understanding the cultural diversity the company can identify and make corrections when needed.

Finding Related to the Conceptual Framework

The findings from the interviews align with improving the understanding of cultural diversity to improve establishing successful strategies to export to Mexico. (Wernerfelt 2014) explained the firm's availability to perform is heavily based on its available resources and obtaining the required resources can enable firms to succeed and increase profits. The RBV theory includes having the human resources who are skilled, knowledgeable, and culturally fit for dealing with the Mexican culture. Consequently, it is essential for SME owners to employ management that understands the cultural diversity of Mexico.

P2 stated:

The company does not deal directly with Spanish invoices; however, most of the time the customers warehouse take care of making a Spanish invoice. Also, the customers freight forwarding warehouse has been able to take care of all regulations that we have not addressed. In the absence of all this, we contract a

sales agent to guide us in shipping to Mexico and complying with the required Spanish invoice. We as a company understand that all export documentation when it comes to NAFTA must be exact. Also, we practice hiring a diverse work force to help us deal with all our exports to various countries. Unlike other companies we recognize the importance of complying with NAFTA regulations and we understand that we must invest in this exporting process.

P4 stated:

When the company runs into a problem, they call the export agent to fix any problem they encounter at the Laredo border. We make sure our export agent lives close to the border city where the product is exported. It has been our experience that an export delay most of the time happens at the border.

I asked P1 if export delays occurred due to mistakes made prior to shipping the merchandise.

P1 stated:

Yes, they can however we as a company make sure that does not happen.

Investing in the proper human resources is costly but that extra cost is a good investment.

Theme 3: The Use of Understanding Pertinent NAFTA Regulation

The third theme that emerged during the interviews was the use of understanding pertinent NAFTA regulation. As per Vargas-Hernández et al. (2019), SME owners increased their exports to Mexico and improved profitability by complying with export regulation. By using a strategy of complying with export regulation, the SME owners can

evade returned freight and export penalties. Having returned freight can incur additional cost for the SME owners and can result in unprofitable exports. Consequently, to increase profitable exports to Mexico, SME owners should review and learn NAFTA regulation. The original NAFTA book has over 600 pages of regulation compared to 2,080 in the (USMCA). To understand the NAFTA regulation the SME owner must implement the strategy of acquiring and reading the NAFTA 2.0 book. The additional regulation in NAFTA 2.0 has not affected the exports of home textiles to Mexico (Buiey, 2020). As per Compa (2019), the USMCA or NAFTA 2.0 preserves NAFTA and allows for updates and an improved, modernized trade treaty. The enactment of NAFTA 2.0 benefits SME home textile owners by duty free access remaining in place, customs and trade facilitation, customs expedited release of expressed shipments, enhanced labor, and environmental protection, and most importantly improvements to protect the enforced intellectual property rights. Understanding NAFTA regulation can be a tool that can facilitate establishing successful strategies to increase profitable exports to Mexico.

P1 stated:

First, I found that when trying to comply with regulation, the labeling process is complicated. I will never, never ship to Mexico without hiring an agent that knows about what is needed to make a label. So, I work with an agent that knows the regulation and most importantly speaks Spanish and understands the cultural of Mexico. It is easier to set up a distributor in other countries to avoid having to deal with all these problems. I manufacture very little in the United States, I use to

but today it is a lot cheaper to manufacture something in China. NAFTA affect exports even though most of our production is from China.

My follow-up question was, did you know that NAFTA mandates that a product manufactured in another Country that is exported to Mexico needs to be accompanied by a conventional certificate of origin?

P1 stated:

Really, I did not know that. I thought NAFTA dealt with product that has been manufactured in the United States and Canada.

P1 stated:

Today most product is manufactured in China, consequently the customer can have the sewn on or stick-on label sewn on in China while being manufactured.

P2 stated:

We have been dealing with the regulation of the need for the product label to include the fabric content of the product to be exported and the need to include the country of origin on the label as well for years. We export to several countries and are very familiar with export requirements.

What specific strategies do you use to comply with NAFTA regulation?

P1 stated:

We rely on our contracted agent to advise on what to do when complying with NAFTA regulation. My company allows for investment in human resources as well as required machinery to help us comply with the required regulation. Our employees and staff are trained in preparing and complying with export

regulation. We prefer to export to Mexico having an experienced agent guiding us. My company has dealt with exports for over 40 years.

P3 stated:

The company does what is needed to satisfy the customer. Whether it is a certificate of origin or product labels, we do what we can do to help the customer.

We have been exporting to Mexico for more than 30 years successfully. Prior to NAFTA, the exporting to Mexico was not as cumbersome; however, we paid tariffs. NAFTA in most cases eliminated some tariffs; however, added regulation.

My company has always been pro-export and we are committed to doing what we must in order to increase our exports. Most our product is now produced in China.

Did you know that even though your product is manufactured in China NAFTA still requires that a decreased tariff is paid, and the product must be labeled in Spanish?

P3 stated:

Yes, I understand however a NAFTA certificate of origin is not required.

P4 stated:

I make sure to ask questions to avoid having problems with NAFTA regulations the exporter must ask questions to understand what and how to comply with regulation.

I asked P4 to please provide an example.

P4 stated:

I make sure I speak to the buyer and export supervisor to make sure the expected regulation is met. For example, if the customer is not willing to label the

merchandise themselves at their forwarding warehouse and requires, we do that, I need to have complete instructions. Also, my company makes sure that the required regulation is approved prior to complying with the required regulation. We as a company known to be exact and not to allow for mistakes.

The NAFTA book has increased in pages from approximately 600 pages to 2080 pages, and along with this growth regulations increased. SME owners need to understand the key regulations to successfully export to Mexico. Knowing about the key NAFTA regulations, can allow the SME owner to contract the right NAFTA expert to coach the company on the correct way to comply with regulation.

Mexican Government Involvement in NAFTA

Developing countries can use regulation to even-out the playing field, when dealing with exports (Desilus, 2020). Consequently, when SME owners export goods to Mexico, the involvement of the Mexican government in imported products takes away from the competitive domestic product demand. Wernerfelt (2014) explained that SME owners using the RBV theory can acquire a competitive advantage, which can increase exports and retain more customers than the competition. Therefore, the use of new and modern resources can assist SME owners in keeping-up with Mexico's political changes and government conditions which can alert SME owners of any possible new export regulation.

P1 stated:

To have success in Mexico one must abide with the Mexican rules and resources to avoid not complying with NAFTA regulations. Not complying with NAFTA regulation can incur an additional cost to the product.

Findings Related to the Literature Review

The findings from the reviews align with the use of understanding pertinent NAFTA regulation. As per Vargas-Hernández et al. (2019) by complying with export regulation, SME owners increased their exports to Mexico and improved profitability. The SME owners can avoid delays and fines by complying with NAFTA regulation. As per Hakobyan and McLaren (2016), industries in both the United States and Mexico are protected by government. Consequently, SME owners should keep themselves informed of existing Mexico's comparative advantage and focus on exporting the products Mexico needs to avoid increased regulation.

Applications to Professional Practice

When SME owners export to Mexico without successful strategies they incur additional cost of exports and increase the landed price of the exported product. The results of the study could help increase home textile SME owners' profitable exports to Mexico. The three themes that emerged from data collection were (a) acquisition of proper machinery and equipment (b) improved understanding of Mexico's culture, and (c) the use of understanding pertinent NAFTA regulation. SME owners could use these three themes to establish successful strategies to export to Mexico.

In this study, the participants discussed how establishing successful strategies could increase profitable exports to Mexico. SME owners can successfully export to Mexico by complying with existing regulation, cultural diversity and using the RBV theory. Based on the interviews and analyzing publicly available data, SME owners lacking an understanding of NAFTA regulation can contract an experienced export agent to guide them through the export process. The SME owners that contract an experienced export agent can increase their chances to successfully export to Mexico. The SME owners that recognize the need to utilize the RBV theory and contract an experienced export agent to guide them on existing export regulation can successfully export to Mexico (Wernerfelt, 2014). The SME owners recognizing their lack of knowledge of NAFTA regulation can eliminate mistakes and increase their chances to successfully export to Mexico.

Implications for Social Change

The results of this study can positively impact social change by helping SME owners establish successful strategies to export to Mexico. Contracting an experienced export agent can improve SME owners' ability to comply with regulations and establish successful strategies to export profitably. Improving the exports of home textile SME owners, can help the U.S. textile industry remain competitive globally, increase their market share in Mexico, and increase employment and the quality of life for employees in the home textile industry. Understanding the cultural diversity in Mexico can reduce the inability for some SME owners to export successfully to Mexico. The understanding of the Mexican culture can help to better understand the existing regulations and their

intentions. Having a Spanish speaking agent can facilitate complying with the regulation, because the regulation requires Spanish information on product labels and invoices. The SME owners that use the RBV theory can benefit by utilizing the latest equipment, employing Spanish speaking people, and contracting experienced export agents. By SME owners increasing their exports to Mexico, the domestic job market will increase and ultimately create a better quality of life for the community that depends on the production of home textiles in the United States.

Recommendations for Action

Scott (2020) indicated that the United States hit a record high in terms of trade deficits in 2020. The U.S. Census Bureau reported that the U.S. goods trade deficit reached a \$915.8 billion in 2020, an increase of \$51.5 billion, which is a 6% increase from the previous year (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). The U.S. goods trade deficit in 2020 was the largest on record, and the goods and services deficit was the largest since 2008.

We should not forget that the rapid growth of U.S. trade deficits reflects the combined effects of the COVID-19 crisis, which caused U.S. exports to fall by (\$217.7 billion) more than imports (\$166.2 billion), and by the persistent failure of U.S. trade and exchange rate policies over the past two decades (Scott, 2020). However, Scott (2020) also pointed out that the single most important cause of large and growing trade deficits has been persistent overvaluation of the U.S. dollar, which makes imports artificially cheap and U.S. exports less competitive.

The U.S. goods trade deficit is increasingly dominated by trade in manufactured products, which reached record highs of \$897.7 billion—98% of the total U.S. goods trade

deficit—and 4.3% of U.S. GDP in 2020 (Scott, 2020). Primarily due to these rapidly growing manufacturing trade deficits, the U.S. Census Bureau reported the U.S. lost nearly 582 million manufacturing jobs and 91,000 manufacturing plants between 1997 and 2018 alone. These numbers underscore the importance of this study in terms of dealing with the trade deficit between the United States and Mexico.

The results of this study can help SME owners understand the need to comply with regulation, cultural diversity, and the need to use the RBV theory when exporting to Mexico. Based on my findings for this study, I have three recommendations for action. The first recommendations I propose is for SME owners to get to know the export regulations to Mexico. SME owners can better establish successful export strategies if they understand the existing export regulation to Mexico. The SME owners can successfully comply with export regulation and avoid penalties and delays of exports.

A second recommendation I suggest is for SME owners to understand Mexico's cultural diversity to increase profitable exports to Mexico. By the SME owners understanding the cultural diversity in Mexico, the exports of home textiles can increase with little error and avoid additional cost of exports due to the lack of communication and making corrections to documents or relabeling the product prior to export. The understanding of Mexico's culture can streamline the export process due to effective communication. By streamlining the export process the SME owners can save on export cost and increase margins.

The third recommendation consist of SME owners using the RBV theory to establish successful strategies to increase profitable export to Mexico. SME owners need

to consider using the latest technology to print the required Spanish product labels and to prepare the required Spanish invoice. The SME owners also need to consider the human resources, which is included in the RBV theory. The participants unanimously agreed that an expert export agent can help the SME owners reduce export mistakes and improve export margins. Also, continuous in-house personal training can help SME owners understand and comply with the NAFTA 2.0 book which includes 3 times as much regulation.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to help SME owners establish successful export strategies to Mexico. In this study, I interviewed four SME owners that establish successful strategies to export to Mexico in a profitable manner. A recommendation for future research is to interview a larger sample size. The larger sample size could emphasize the need to contract an export expert who understands the regulation, cultural diversity, and the need to use of the RBV theory. The extensive study could reflect that most SME owners need to hire a person familiar with exporting to Mexico. Future research should consider increasing the number of participants and maintain the limitations of conducting interviews with SME owners currently exporting successfully to Mexico.

Additionally, future research can help determine using a quantitative study focusing on the significance of the extra dollar spent on contracting an export expert agent to help export successfully to Mexico. The study could enable SME owners in the textile industry to measure the advantages and disadvantage of investing in experienced

human resources, the latest technology, and the understanding of Mexico's culture. Having the option to decide on future investment in establishing successful strategies to export to Mexico can increase the efficiencies of export to Mexico and increase the United States exports to Mexico.

Reflections

The Doctorate in Business Administration journey was long and difficult but challenging. The United States has experienced a trade deficit with Mexico since the inception of NAFTA (Cervantes-Martínez et al., 2016). Ever since I was pursuing my bachelor's degree, I knew that I would be one to make a difference in increasing the U.S. exports to Mexico. While pursuing my degree in economics I recognized the need to increase the U.S. merchandise exports to help offset the normalcy of export deficits recorded in the U.S. balance of payment account. I always knew that one of these days I would be involved or do a study on this phenomenon. I hold myself to high standards and expectations and achieving a Doctorate in Business Administration has allowed me to achieve my dreams of giving back to society. After working in the exports of home textiles to Mexico, I noticed SME owners were having difficulty establishing successful strategies to export to Mexico. Being in the business of exporting home textile to Mexico, I took interest in SME owners not realizing what has led to some SME owner's inability to establish successful strategies to export to Mexico.

Working in the home textile industry for 30 years has better prepared me to conduct this study and give back to society and help increase the home textile exports to Mexico to help reduce the U.S. ongoing trade deficit with Mexico. All the hours spent on

research has allowed me to complete this study and help SME owners trade with Mexico. I feel that SME owners are now able to better understand the need for successful export strategies to Mexico to increase profits. Giving back to society in the form of research has been rewarding and has helped me realize that hard work pays off. I abided by Walden University's standards to ensure I did not incorporate personal bias in my research process. I feel that my study has opened interest in pursuing this research topic.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore successful strategies used by some U.S. home textile SME owners to export to Mexico in compliance with NAFTA export regulations. I used the resource-based view RBV theory by Wernerfelt (2014) as my conceptual framework to help understand what successful strategies SME owners use to export to Mexico. The use of the RBV theory helped understand the need to use all available resources to export to Mexico.

I identified three main themes in this study. The three themes were (a) acquisition of proper machinery and equipment, (b) improved understanding of Mexico's culture, and (c) the use of understanding pertinent NAFTA regulation. The themes align with the conceptual framework and review of the professional and academic literature. The findings of this study can positively influence social change by increasing profits for U.S. home textiles SME exporters benefiting their communities through increased employment and a larger tax base, which can improve the quality of life for both families and communities. Increasing profitable exports of home textiles to Mexico can influence more SME owners to export to Mexico and grow the U.S. textile industry. Increasing

exports to Mexico can help increase the production of home textiles and reduce the cost of production per unit due to economies of scale. Understanding the need for successful export strategies can help SME owners distinguish the leadership required to successfully export to Mexico. SME owners that use successful export strategies should be able to export to Mexico and increase profits.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview: U.S. home textile SME owners using successful and profitable export strategies in compliance with NAFTA's regulations.

1. I shall hold the interview using the phone at a time convenient to the participants.
2. Before the interviews I shall call the participants and answer any questions they might have about the scheduled interview.
3. The interviews will begin with a brief introduction and an overview of the research.
4. I shall present my appreciation to the participants for attending the interview and demonstrate my concern about the sensitivity of their time.
5. I shall remind the participants that the interview will remain confidential.
6. I shall inform the participants that the interview will be recorded for accuracy and reliability purposes.
7. During the interview, I shall observe the participant's body language and ask them follow-up questions as needed to get more in-depth with the answer they provided.
8. I shall thank the participants at the end of the interviews and explain the next step, which is member checking and schedule a follow-up date and time with them.
9. After I have concluded the study, transcribed, and recorded findings, I shall share a brief synthesis of the individual questions.
10. I shall bring probing questions related to other information that I may have found noting the information related to adhering to IRB approval.

11. I shall look through each question, read the interpretation, ask the participants if I missed anything, and invite any additions they might have.
12. At the conclusion of the study, I shall provide the participants with a summary of the study findings.

Appendix B: CITI Certification



Completion Date	22-Aug -2019
Expiration Date	N/A
Record ID	32877579

This is to certify that:

Daniel CHAVEZ

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Student's
(Curriculum Group)
Doctoral Student Researchers
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Walden University

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w61de0b74-3c28-4407-ad26-985c50113e8f-3287757

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