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## Strategies for Sustaining Leisure and Hospitality Small Businesses

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# Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Kip K. Cheruiyot

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2023

Abstract

Strategies for Sustaining Leisure and Hospitality Small Businesses

by

Kip K. Cheruiyot

MS, Liberty University, 2017

BS, Campbell University, 2014

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

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April 2023

## Abstract

Disruptive events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, impact leisure and hospitality businesses by disrupting customer patronage and business operations. Small business owners in the leisure and hospitality industry risk revenue loss and business failure when they cannot remain operational during disruptive events. Grounded in the blue ocean theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies leisure and hospitality small business owners used to sustain their businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants comprised five leisure and hospitality small business owners in the central region of Texas who had successful business operations before the COVID-19 pandemic in May 2019 and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and a review of peer-reviewed studies. Three themes emerged from the thematic analysis: resources, customer service, and communication. The recommendations are for business owners to reconfigure resources and reduce costs, ensure customer service and responsiveness, and convey information about business operations, products, and services. The implication for positive social change includes the potential for leisure and hospitality small business owners to sustain their businesses. With sustained businesses, the community may benefit through additional employment opportunities, improved economic growth, and increased tax revenues.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this study to my wife, Margaret Cheruiyot, and our children, Dylan and Danabelle Cheruiyot, for their encouragement and support throughout my academic journey.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Crises affect business survival and success. Leisure and hospitality small business owners have a role in identifying market risks and instability that have a financial impact on the community and the business. Successful business owners have effective strategies that help minimize a long-lasting crisis's negative impact (Iuliia et al., 2022). Martinette and Adam (2021) provided a study to assess the influence of COVID-19 on the travel and tourism industry and suggested business owners must plan and implement strategies to recover and remain attractive and competitive in the market are paramount. Additionally, business owners must maintain organizational resilience by being alert to intra-organizational processes and external environments such as crises, disruptions, and disasters (Bell, 2019). By maintaining organizational resilience, leisure and hospitality small business owners can ensure the reliability of internal business processes to cope with disruptions, crises, or disasters. In this qualitative research study, I explored the strategies five leisure and hospitality small business owners in the central region of Texas used to sustain their business from the beginning stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in May 2020.

### **Background of the Problem**

Though leisure and hospitality small business owners employ many people in the community, employment declined rapidly during long-lasting crises compared to other industries (Khan et al., 2021). Khan et al. (2021) and Pappas and Brown (2021) found that the leisure and hospitality industry was affected by extreme events compared to other industries. An example in the research shows leisure and hospitality declined more in

employment during the COVID-19 pandemic than other industries, as evidenced by a 50% decline in job postings in February and April 2020 (Bartik et al., 2020). Crises in 2003, 2007-2009, and 2015 also affected leisure and hospitality severely. During the 2007 and 2009 recession, the leisure and hospitality industry job losses were severe and prolonged (Davila, 2011). Other crises that have affected the leisure and hospitality industry include the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2003 and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) outbreak in 2015 (Martinette & Adam, 2021, p. 1048). The data from the world bank on travel and leisure indicate a decline in tourist arrivals to the United States from approximately 165 million visitors in 2019 to 45 million visitors in 2020 (World Bank Group, 2022). Based on the evidence from past and present research, it was evident that the leisure and hospitality industries are one of the first industries to be affected by crises. Leisure and hospitality industry owners might benefit from the recommendations to improve strategies for sustaining leisure and hospitality small businesses during long-lasting crises.

### **Problem and Purpose**

The private sector is critical to economic growth and job creation because small business owners have employed an average of 66 % of the United States workforce for the last 25 years (Wilmoth, 2022, p. 1). In May 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, the leisure and hospitality industry accounted for 13% of all small business employment. In May 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, employment in the leisure and hospitality industry dropped by 41% (Wilmoth, 2020, p. 1). The general business problem is that many leisure and hospitality industry small business owners failed to succeed during the

COVID-19 pandemic from May 2020. The specific problem is that some leisure and hospitality industry small business owners lacked survival and resilience strategies to sustain their businesses from the beginning stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in May 2020.

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that leisure and hospitality small business owners used to sustain their business during the COVID-19 pandemic from May 2020. The target population for this study consisted of five leisure and hospitality small business owners in the central region of Texas who had successful business operations before the COVID-19 pandemic in May 2019 and during the COVID-19 pandemic from May 2020. The implication for positive social change included the potential to increase the number of sustained leisure and hospitality small businesses. Sustained businesses may benefit the community by providing more employment opportunities, improving economic growth, and increasing tax revenues.

### **Population and Sampling**

I collected data from five purposefully sampled leisure and hospitality business owners who operated their businesses before, during, and after the high of the COVID-19 pandemic in the central region of Texas. After recruitment and selection, I scheduled and interviewed the participants at their business offices using a semi-structured interview to elicit their survival and resilience strategies to sustain their business during the COVID-19 pandemic from May 2020 and analyzed the data. A helpful saturation index helps researchers improve the transparency and rigor of data analysis. I measured saturation by constructing a saturation table and using codes to identify themes (Lowe et al., 2018).

### **Nature of the Study**

The three types of research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method approaches. The research method proposed for use in my study was qualitative. Researchers used qualitative studies to identify and explore participants' subjective interpretation of phenomena by sharing experiences or views (Swords et al., 2021). The qualitative method was appropriate for this study because the participants shared their interpretations and experiences about their organizations' sustainability strategies. In contrast, researchers used the quantitative method to generate numerical statistical data to examine the relationship between the criterion and predictor variables (Saunders et al., 2015). The quantitative method was not appropriate for addressing the research question because neither numerical data to analyze using statistical analysis nor variable relationships were examined. The third kind of research method is the mixed method, which is used to combine the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study to improve the research quality (Paoletti et al., 2021; Strijker et al., 2020; Yang L., 2022). The mixed-method was not appropriate for my study because the quantitative method was not necessary to address my study's purpose.

I considered three research designs for my study: case study, phenomenology, and ethnography. Researchers use a case study design to collect comprehensive participant experience and perspective data (Yin, 2018). A researcher uses a single case study to explore one organization rather than multiple organizations (Yin, 2018). A single case study was not appropriate for my study because I did not study different departmental managers in one leisure and hospitality small business. The leisure and hospitality small



businesses are not operated by people that meet the participant criteria for the population as the departmental managers because of the business size. In contrast, researchers used multiple case studies to explore similar cases on more than one site (Teubner, 2019). The multiple case study design was appropriate for my study because I collected data from multiple business owners. Multiple business owners met the participant criteria for the population as decision-makers.

A phenomenological design is used when the researcher explores the personal meaning of lived human experiences (Leigh-Osroosh, 2021). A phenomenological design was not appropriate for my research because it requires multiple rounds of interviews covering one specific event at a time, therefore requiring extended time to complete (Nigar, 2020). Ethnographic design is used when the researcher seeks to understand a participant's culture (Dobbins et al., 2021). The ethnographic design was not appropriate because I did not seek an understanding of the business owner's culture.

### **Research Question**

What strategies did leisure and hospitality industry small business owners use to sustain their business during the COVID-19 pandemic?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What strategies to sustain your business during the COVID-19 pandemic did you implement?
2. What were the key barriers to implementing strategies to sustain your business during the COVID-19 pandemic?

3. How did you address the key barriers to implementing strategies to sustain your business during the COVID-19 pandemic?
4. How did you pursue low-cost to achieve value innovation when implementing strategies to sustain your business during the COVID-19 pandemic?
5. How did you increase buyer value to achieve value innovation when implementing strategies to sustain your business during the COVID-19 pandemic?
6. Give an example or two where you achieved value innovation for your customers.
7. Give an example or two where you achieved value innovation for your business.
8. What additional information would you like to include about strategies to sustain your business during the COVID-19 pandemic?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this qualitative study was the blue ocean theory, developed by Chan and Mauborgne (2005a). Blue ocean refers to value innovation for customers and business owners, opening uncontested market space (Leavy, 2005). Chan and Mauborgne suggested that business leaders who prioritize the advantages of value innovation over the competition will have long-term sustainability (Chan & Mauborgne, 2005a). Business owners can create blue oceans by making products and services easy to use, reliable, and affordable. Therefore, most untapped market segment customers can access them (Chan & Mauborgne, 2005b). The value innovation strategy in the blue

ocean theory can make competition-based strategies irrelevant. The theorists suggested leaders can create a new value proposition that can create uncontested market space instead of competing over existing demand in existing market space (Leavy, 2005). There are three components in theory: value innovation, cost, and buyer value. Innovative business owners can implement strategies to provide business solutions, create extraordinary customer experiences, and reduce costs through new products, services, and delivery platforms (Mohammed et al., 2021). Business owners incorporating value innovation, low prices for products and services, and increased buyer value in their business strategies will help increase buyer value for customers, profitability, and competitive advantage for business owners.

### **Operational Definitions**

The operational definition section contains definitions of terms referenced in this doctoral study.

*Blue Ocean:* Blue Ocean is a framework that business owners use to identify uncontested market spaces (Priilaid et al., 2020).

*Business survival:* Business survival is the business that is operating at a reduced capacity (Marshall & Schrank, 2020).

*Competitive advantage:* Competitive advantage is a business owner's comparative positional superiority that enables performance better than competitors (Chinomona & Bikissa-Macongue, 2021).

*Competitive strategy:* Competitive strategy is determining the business's position within a chosen sector (Kurt & Yazıcıoğlu, 2021).

*Decision support system:* Decision support system is an information system that supports business or organizational decision-making activities (Wang & Wang, 2022).

*Market orientation:* Market orientation is developing a long-term relationship between an organization and the customer leading to value creation, sales growth, and profits (Luu, 2019).

*Red Ocean:* Red Ocean is framework business owners use to identify a well-established competitive market (Smodila & Peric, 2019).

*Small business:* A small business is a firm with fewer than 500 employees (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2022, p. 4).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

In this multiple case study, I considered applicable assumptions, limitations, and delimitations that researchers acknowledge are obstacles to gathering and interpreting findings. Assumptions are facts deemed to be correct but are not verified. Limitations refer to the potential weaknesses of the study. Delimitations refer to the bounds or scope of the study.

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are statements out of my control but necessary to make my study relevant. According to Zientek et al. (2016), met assumptions lead to accurate analysis, which can be used to provide suitable business interventions. Therefore, qualitative researchers make assumptions to conduct their research. I made the following assumptions in my study: leisure and hospitality small business sustainability during the COVID-19 pandemic was a result of specific strategies by the business owners;

sustainability would continue to be essential for leisure and hospitality small businesses; a sample of five leisure and hospitality small businesses were representative of all leisure and hospitality small businesses in the central region of Texas; study participants answered truthfully to the interview questions; multiple case study was the most suitable design to explore leisure and hospitality small business owners' strategies to sustain their business during the COVID-19 pandemic; and the participants understood the three components of the blue ocean theory, which include cost reduction, buyer value, and value innovation. Assumptions have risks that can affect the research outcome and should be mitigated. Yin (2018) found assumptions can lead to misrepresentation. To prevent the risks associated with assumptions, I justified each assumption as follows: the identity of the participants remained anonymous and confidential, and the participants volunteered and could withdraw from the study anytime.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are potential weaknesses that can affect the outcome of the research. Kirkwood and Price (2013) posited researchers should acknowledge their research limits to interpret research findings appropriately. My limitations included participant availability and potential bias. Data collection depended on participant availability and willingness to answer interview questions within the scheduled time. The study was limited to the Central region of Texas, requiring further research to replicate the findings.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations refer to control characteristics that limit the scope and define study boundaries. According to Venkatesh et al. (2016), delimitations set the boundaries of a

research project. The delimitations in my study included: the choice of sustainability business problem, using the blue ocean theory as a lens to view the business problem, collecting data from leisure and hospitality small business owners who developed and implemented survival and resilience strategies before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, and limiting the scope of the study to a geographic location of the central region of Texas.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Leisure and hospitality small business owners may be able to use these findings to increase their business survival during a long-lasting crisis. Tawakol and Ibrahim (2021) found that implementing strategies to change business operations helped business owners cope with the challenges of long-term crises. Additionally, implementing strategies to introduce innovative practices helped business owners find alternative markets, support the use of technology to deliver products and services, and effectively train employees to respond to crisis challenges (Tawakol & Ibrahim, 2021). Therefore, business owners who implement structural changes and innovate can identify new business models to survive a crisis and maintain a competitive edge.

#### **Implications for Social Change**

The social change implications of this study include leisure and hospitality small business sustainability, contributing to improved economic growth, job creation, and income distribution. The benefits to the community include reduced poverty, steady employment, stable income, improved well-being and health, reduced reliance on

government welfare programs, and the ability to give back to the community through investments.

### **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

I used the qualitative multiple case study to explore leisure and hospitality small business owners' strategies to sustain their business during the COVID-19 pandemic. A professional and academic literature review demonstrates that the researcher is well-informed and knowledgeable in the research topic by analyzing and presenting the current literature. Additionally, the review enables the readers to understand the research topic and view the research as credible. Badenhorst (2019) noted that literature reviews are used to persuade, present an argument, and convince readers to accept the research work. Researchers conduct literature reviews to acquire evidence to answer specific research questions on the research topic (Briner & Denyer, 2012; Burgers et al., 2019; Han et al., 2020).

I followed a sequence in reviewing my literature as follows: systematically explored blue ocean theory as the conceptual framework for the study, reviewed supporting theories and contrasting theories to my study, reviewed the literature on the various definitions of small business, reviewed the literature on the social and economic importance of small businesses, reviewed the literature on business success strategy and potential themes and phenomena identified in the purpose statement, and reviewed the literature on the points of view and the study's relationship to previous research. The literature review included all peer-reviewed and reliable government sources. I chose sources relevant to leisure and hospitality small businesses and sustainable strategies.

This study's critical analysis comprised peer-reviewed journals, government sources, books, and articles on business sustainability. I researched Walden University databases to find relevant literature for this doctoral study. The databases included ABI/INFORM Global (ProQuest), Emerald Management, Telecommunications (ProQuest), Health & Medical Collection (ProQuest), ABI/INFORM Collection (ProQuest), Accounting, Tax & Banking Collection (ProQuest), and ProQuest Central (ProQuest). I also used Google Scholar to search for relevant literature for my study. I used keywords such as *Blue Ocean theory*, *chaos theory*, *game theory*, *value innovation*, *untapped market*, *small business*, *small business successes*, *small business failures*, *social change*, *competition and competitive advantage*, *underserved market*, *business demand and supply*, *supply chain management*, *supply chain strategy*, *business opportunities*, *differentiation and diversification*, *marketing and market strategy*, *resources and capabilities*, *Information Technology*, and *leisure and hospitality*.

I reviewed and analyzed 368 sources. Of the 368 selected sources, 356 were peer-reviewed articles, seven were textbooks, and five were national publications. Additionally, to ensure compliance with Walden University's Doctor of Business Administration program requirements, at least 85% of peer-reviewed articles were published between 2018 and 2022.

### **Blue Ocean Theory**

The objective of the literature review was to explore research on the strategies leisure and hospitality small business owners used to sustain their business using the blue ocean theory as a lens. According to Chan & Mauborgne (2005b), the blue ocean is



defined by untapped market space and value innovation, leading to demand creation and profitable growth opportunities. I chose Kim and Mauborgne's (2005) blue ocean theory as the conceptual framework for this study because business owners can use four analytic tools to reduce cost and increase buyer value leading to value innovation. The strategy canvas is a framework a business owner can use to understand how the industry works. The strategy canvas demonstrated the initial factors the company competes and invests in and the associated offering levels. Also, it showed the factors and related offering levels after applying blue ocean strategies. Because of a good understanding of the industry, the business owner can eliminate or reduce unnecessary elements from the attributes of the products and services, therefore reducing the cost and passing on the benefits of reduced cost to customers by offering products and services at affordable prices (Papazov & Mihaylova, 2016). In addition to cost reduction, the business owner can pursue differentiation by raising or creating specific attributes in products and services (Kunz et al., 2021). Therefore, ensuring the factors competed on and invested in helps the business owners reduce costs and value innovate for buyers.

Business owners can also use the four actions framework as an analytical tool to reconstruct the buyer value element and plan new value curves by breaking the trade-off between buyer value and cost. Instead of the four actions framework, business owners can use the "eliminate-reduce-raise-create grid" to identify elements the business owner can eliminate, reduce below business standards, raise above business standards, and create to reduce cost and increase buyer value. Finally, the six paths framework is another analytical model that small business owners can use to develop a blue ocean strategy. The

characteristics of each path are described in table 1. In examining the six paths and their characteristics, business owners can clearly understand how to break away from the competition in the red oceans and find blue oceans (Papazov & Mihaylova, 2016).

**Table 1**

*Six Path Framework Characteristics*

Paths	Characteristics
Looking across alternative products and services and not focusing on rivals within the industry.	Focus on what potential buyers value, differentiating and low cost.
Looking across strategic groups within industries and not focusing on competitive positions within a strategic group.	Identify the decisive value and cost outline that separate distinct strategic groups.
Looking across the chain of buyers and not focusing on better serving a specific buyer group.	Focus on utility and cost and offer a leap in innovative value to the untargeted buyer group.
Looking across complementary products and services and not focusing on maximizing the value of product and service offerings within the industry.	Understanding solution buyers seek to achieve value innovation.
Looking across functional or emotional appeal to buyers and not focusing on improving price performance within the functional-emotional orientation of the industry.	Shifting or blending the products and services appeal to achieve a new value-cost frontier.
Looking across time and not focusing on adapting to external trends as they occur.	Focus on how trends will change what customers value.

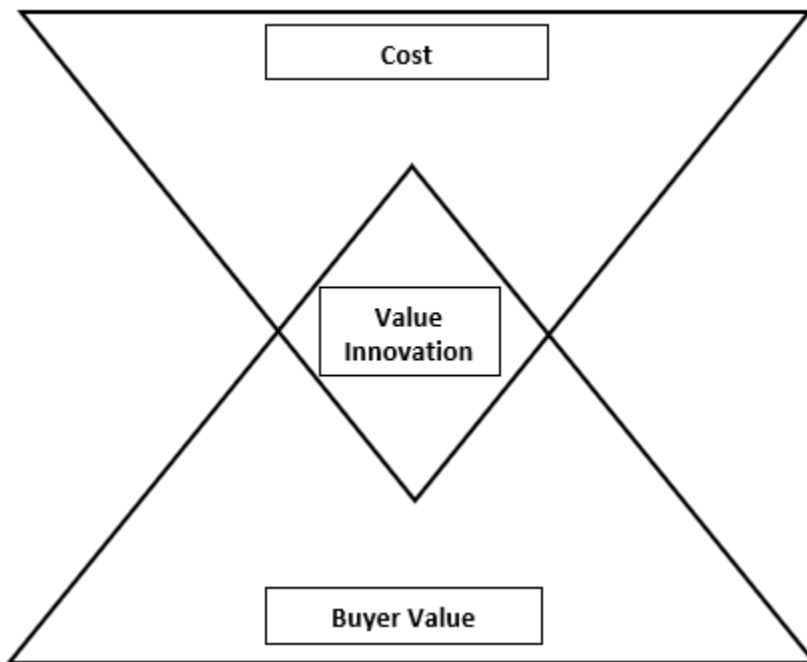
*Note.* This table describes the characteristics of the six paths framework (Kim & Mauborgne, 2017; Kim & Mauborgne, 2020).

Innovation converts a novel concept into a product, process, or business model that generates revenue and profits (Dyer et al., 2016). To ensure success in a competitive environment, business owners must focus on innovation (Aksoy, 2017; Kanwal et al., 2021). Innovative business owners focus on simple, easy, and less hierarchical structures to ensure task allocation, coordination, and supervision to achieve goals (Makhmoor & Rajesh, 2019). Cristobal et al. (2018) further noted managers who facilitate the use of business structures such as division of labor, systems, personnel, style, and culture help employees perform specific tasks to achieve established business goals. Innovative business owners explore by investigating knowledge, experimentation, variation, risks, demand, and market from previous innovation activities. Also, business owners exploit innovative activities by using existing knowledge, efficiency, risk-neutral, and refinement to focus on future and further innovation (Lee & Seo, 2018). Woo et al. (2021) found that implementing innovative initiatives, such as creative ideas, new inspirations, and new product and service development, increased business performance. Value innovation increases buyer value by raising and creating elements not previously offered by business owners. Papazov and Mihaylova (2016) suggested business owners achieve value innovation by reducing costs or eliminating or reducing outdated factors that the business owners take for granted. Further, Pandapotan et al. (2020) posited the price, quality, and

brand image of products and services affect customer value. As business environments evolve, so does value innovation and the need to continue knowledge generation and sharing (Chaurasia et al., 2020). In implementing value innovation, the business owner can create new market space and demand instead of competition. A blue ocean theory connecting reduced cost and buyer value is depicted in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Value Innovation*



*Note.* This figure demonstrates the cost reduction and the buyer value increase that leads to value innovation.

Chan and Mauborgne (2004) discussed the ability of the blue ocean theory to connect market space with profits and growth. Furthermore, Chan and Mauborgne

(2005b) found that strategic moves that create and capture blue oceans support business sustainability. High performance is achieved when business owners understand the pattern of creating and capturing the blue oceans (Chan & Mauborgne, 2005b). Business owners can strategically create a blue ocean by making products and services easy to use, reliable, and affordable, increasing market share. Loyalty affects the customer base, which affects market share. To ensure customers' loyalty, business owners must focus on easy use and switching products and services (Dyer et al., 2016). Additionally, successful business owners maintain customer loyalty through service quality, competitive prices, and customer satisfaction (Romdonny et al., 2019). Providing easy-to-use and differentiated products and services help keep old customers and attract new ones. To remain profitable, business owners must implement strategic moves that create new market space to capture many customers. Therefore, rendering competition irrelevant (Chan & Mauborgne, 2005b). Any willing business owner can create blue oceans, making it profitable for new and old business owners (Chan & Mauborgne, 2005b). Industry researchers have used the blue ocean theory to revise the industry's strategic logic and business model to innovate products and services whose profile breaks from the competition (Chan & Mauborgne, 2005b). Using the same approach, business owners must revise business activities to capture the customers' attention and diverge from the competition.

Existing and start-up business owners used the Blue Ocean theory to identify the value curve for their businesses. Bretcu (2018) explored the blue ocean in recent research analyzing how small business owners understood the competition in the market and how

they developed their enterprises. In understanding market competition, business owners can diverge their business activities from the red ocean into the blue ocean. In another study, Leavy (2018) used the blue ocean theory to analyze different companies that purposefully offered less to maximize customer satisfaction. Understanding what the customers need is paramount because other customers have different preferences and tastes. In earlier research, Kim et al. (2008) and Saldanha et al. (2021) used the blue ocean theory to evaluate how a small logistical company gained a competitive advantage through innovative information technology. A well-designed information and communication technology platform enables collaboration, communication, and innovation (Saldanha et al., 2021). Innovative technology is not enough to create a blue ocean; therefore, innovative technology must result in value innovation for buyers. Papazov and Mihaylova (2016) used the blue ocean theory to rethink small business strategy alternatives and found small business owners can use the approach not to focus on rivals within the industry but to make informed business decisions regarding other options.

Researchers shed some light on the importance of the blue ocean strategy in implementing sustainable business strategies. A recent study by Monteiro Vieira and Ferreira (2018) found that business owners who differentiate their products attract new customers and that using the blue ocean strategies enables business owners to rethink and adjust strategies to meet customers' needs in a changing market. Bindu and Vasant (2019) posited that successful business owners who pivoted away from their current competitive state and created a strong position in the market understood their current competitive

market, sorted reliable sources of supply, motivated employees, and won new customers. The business owner developed products and services that appealed to the customers. Priilaid et al. (2020) in their study contributed to the importance of the blue ocean during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using the blue ocean strategy, business owners can prepare for disruptive events by ensuring business owners can transition as the market changes. Priilaid et al. (2020) found successful business owners retained customers by using the blue ocean strategy to shift to processes that directly serve the needs and desires of the customers. Implementing the blue ocean strategy can replace traditional competitive strategies. The blue ocean strategy implementation can help business owners minimize the impact of a disruptive event and quick recovery.

### **Supporting Theories**

#### ***Chaos Theory***

Edward Norton Lorenz developed chaos theory to show that small changes in the initial conditions cause significant changes in long-term outcomes (Carbajal-Gomez et al., 2019). Tejus (2020) defined chaos theory as "a mathematical study of dynamic systems that exhibit disorder" (p. 402). Dynamic systems are sensitive to changes with significant outcomes (Kar, 2021; Silvestre et al., 2018; Tejus, 2020). It is also essential to understand that different systems behave differently based on initial conditions (Weitkamp, 2021), and the same applies to the market as a system in business (Kar, 2021). Because the market environment and trends keep changing, researchers suggested that business owners must keep pace and adapt to such changes to survive (Monferrer et al., 2021). The theory is based on the premise that business owners implement successful

strategies by considering multiple factors that affect their decisions. Therefore, using chaos theory as a lens, business owners can develop and implement strategies to sustain their business and keep their current position as a reference point while focusing on the next business approach. Chaos theory is about the environment and business. To understand the business environment, owners need to acknowledge the relationship between a business and its external and internal environment. The external business environment includes rival competitors, profitability, customer needs, and prices. Fundamental changes in the market environment hint at a possible shift in business (Dyer et al., 2016), which can help the business owner adapt by seeking alternative business strategies and aligning business processes (Hussain et al., 2018). Mitsuhashi and Alcantara (2021) posited that understanding the business shift and activities helps develop an effective business strategy to respond adequately. Sozuer et al. (2020) suggested business owners must focus beyond the current market conditions to maintain a competitive advantage. Business owners who fail to structure their business strategy will not enhance responsiveness to change to withstand external environmental pressure (Hogevold et al., 2021). On the contrary, the internal business environment comprises resources and capabilities (Dyer et al., 2016). In understanding the internal environment, a business can prioritize and allocate the resources and capabilities to serve better and achieve the business goals. The overall relationship will help understand the flow of business activities, such as competitors, suppliers, and customers, which is instrumental in achieving success (Abeltina & Rizhamadze, 2021). Business owners who adapt to the changing market environment will sustain their businesses. Rimita et al. (2020)



emphasized that business owners who need to achieve positive social change in a changing market must identify environmental indicators for change, be agile, and enhance their recovery mechanisms.

Fuller et al. (2022) used chaos theory to understand and respond to crisis dynamics which is unexpected, unpredictable, and involves rapid shift. Because systems are interconnected, leaders use chaos theory to develop and implement crisis management solutions (Fuller et al., 2022). Successful business owners who understand the pre-crisis state of their business and with adequate preparedness will respond better, mitigating the impact of a disruptive event. Altinay and Arici (2022) suggested that business owners can use chaos theory to develop and implement crisis management strategies to respond to the changes in the hospitality and tourism industry, such as the new normal, requirements for transformative marketing structure, and guidance for transformative actions. Business owners in leisure and hospitality small businesses can use such an approach as a model for developing and implementing survival and resilient strategies to sustain their business during a future disruptive event.

Crews (2017) posited that the future is unpredictable based on the chaos theory concept of sensitive dependence. Because of unpredictability, business owners use scenarios to understand how trends affect each other and how it shapes the future market. By using scenarios, business owners can develop and implement strategies for risk management, innovation, and inspiration (Crews, 2017). With such knowledge, small business owners can develop and implement survival and resilience strategies to sustain their businesses in an unpredictable market. Speakman and Sharpley (2012) used chaos

theory to develop and implement crisis and disaster management in the tourism industry to respond to the 2009 AH1N1 influenza. With such insights, business owners in leisure and hospitality can model responses that can be used to counter the negative consequences associated with future disruptive events.

### **Contrasting Theories**

#### ***Game Theory***

Game theory, like the red ocean theory, is a decision tool researchers use to select optimal strategies in conflicting situations involving competitors in a well-defined market (Abedian et al., 2020). Von Neuman and Morgenstern proposed the game theory in 1944. The theory was meant to help understand and explain how a competitor will respond to changes in the market and how the rival competitor will respond (Nguyen & Kim, 2020). Song et al. (2020) noted that researchers use game theory to study business activities' decision-making process, and participants in the game theory are rational and understand the game. Pirozmand et al. (2020) found that business leaders use game theory to optimize decision-making when encountering competing or interacting factors. Business owners use game theory to outperform competitors and maximize profits because they focus on current customers to maximize their business outcomes. Because the business owners did not use the game theory to incorporate value innovation, low prices for products and services, and increased buyer value in their business strategies, the theory was not appropriate for my study.

## **Small Business**

The definition of a small business is different for different settings. U.S. Small Business Administration (2018, p. 1) defined a small business as an independent business of fewer than 500 employees and earning less than \$10 million in average annual income. The definition in other parts of the world is different. Based on World Bank standards, a small business is an independent business with more than 10 but less than 50 employees with more than \$100,000 and less than \$3 million in total assets. In addition to the number of employees and total assets, the business owners make more than \$100,000 but less than \$3 million in annual sales (Sarmiento et al.,2019). In Texas, a small business is defined as a firm with fewer than 500 employees (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2022, p. 4).

## **Social and Economic Importance of Small Business**

Small business owners play an important social and economic role in the community. Kaufman (2018) noted that business owners must “work together to solve social problems and create social capital” (p. 53) because they play an essential role in the country's national economy regarding job creation and added value (Rekkas, 2021). Lorincova et al. (2022) found that small business owners help contribute to innovative activities, new products and services development, and job creation. Because of the economic and social impact aspects, business owners and customers must have a shared understanding to create economic and social cohesion. Successful business owners ensure the creation of shared values to improve business competitiveness and enhance the community's economic and social conditions (Han & Shelen, 2017). Maletic et al. (2016)

suggested business owners pursuing competitiveness and sustainable practices influence performance dimensions. Performance dimensions include financial, quality, innovation, environmental, and social performance (Maletic et al., 2016). Business owners focusing on achieving and maintaining social responsibility ensure business goals and social needs are met because paying attention only to market sustainability negatively impacts social and environmental sustainability (Pedersen et al., 2018). Therefore to achieve social needs, successful business owners build, manage, and improve interpersonal relationships with customers (Chengwu, 2020). Kollat and Farache (2017) suggested that business owners focusing on social responsibility must continuously communicate their position and policies. Equally important, small business owners' market activities increase competition and new customer requirements forcing value innovation and increasing customer satisfaction. Reksten (2018) suggested business owners can promote social change by innovating products and services in response to customer demands. In doing so, business owners can socially embed in the community, therefore, maximizing social change initiatives.

Small businesses can easily be integrated into a regional economic network, leading to community development and increased employment. Successful business owners contribute to positive social change in the community by creating employment and providing additional income to the communities (Dianu et al., 2021). Improved income in the community dictates purchasing power, which helps shape the economic environment (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Agyapong et al. (2021) suggested small business owners create middle-class income earners that help maintain and distribute economic

power. Although business owners are responsible for value innovation, the income of the people living in the community plays a role. Cambra-Fierro et al. (2017) found that business owners consider the customers' income in value innovation because customers have divergent views and perceptions regarding satisfaction. By collecting data from customers' divergent views, the business owner using a decision-making process converges to decide to innovate and satisfy the customers within the income bracket. In addition to the benefits of income on innovation, people with a steady income in the community help business owners in the community to remain competitive and sustainable (Gerhardt et al., 2014). Though the focus of a business is to maximize profits, models that provide tools for the social entrepreneur and innovation are paramount in addressing societal problems and challenges, building capacity, and sustainment (Lauri, 2021; Socci et al., 2020). By understanding their social and economic contributions, small business owners can implement strategies to benefit the community socially and economically.

### **Business Success Strategies**

A strategy is a plan on how business owners or leaders can gain and maintain a competitive advantage over rivals by predicting opportunities, creating a unique value, and having an operational plan (Dyer et al., 2016). Azaddin (2020) identified the loss of meaning regarding the concept of strategy and suggested new definitions of strategy to avoid confusion. Strategy is a rule for making business decisions based on product, service, market scope, growth, competitive advantage, and synergy (Azaddin, 2020). Galpin (2019) identified the gap between management theory and practice in developing

an approach to being competitive in the market and explored the reasons and ways business owners can diversify. Small business owners use business unit strategies to gain and maintain a competitive advantage by reducing prices, improving products, diversifying products, and offering better customer service (Galpin, 2019). Park et al. (2021) explored the effect of service quality on profitability to understand the cost increase and service quality. Service quality and solutions investments are necessary to maintain profitability (Park et al., 2021). For example, Nguyen et al. (2019) identified the need for retailers to consider different delivery attributes to reach more customers. Some customers characterize a product and service in terms of sales price, guaranteed delivery time, and service level (Nguyen et al., 2019). Liwei et al. (2021) investigated face-to-face and virtual service as channels for customer relationship management systems to achieve customer satisfaction. Successful business owners focus on the voice of the customer through customer service to ensure the appropriate reaction to customers ever changing expectations (Liwei et al., 2021). Also, Lawrence et al. (2019) identified the lack of communication between the seller and the buyer as impacting sales and profits. Mutual understanding between the customer and the seller helps business owners identify and fulfill customer needs (Lawrence et al., 2019). Investing in customer service and solutions helps to understand the customers' needs, therefore retaining customers and improving financial performance. Successful business owners develop and implement strategies to achieve the following benefits: maintain a competitive edge, enter the underserved market, increase demand and maintain a reliable supply system, exploit opportunities, differentiate and diversify products and services, develop and implement a

marketing plan, optimize the use of resources and capabilities, and implement an overall strategic plan.

### ***Competitive Edge***

Competition is defined as "an essential feature of a market economy that reflects rivalry and dispute between economic agents to produce and sell similar or substitutable goods under the most advantageous conditions for them; struggle and rivalry" (Bretcu, 2018, p. 18). Prince (2019) studied competitiveness using a resource-based view.

Competition is typical in the market environment; business owners compete against each other to increase market share (Prince, 2019). Mudeer and Mohsin (2021) explored the effects of excessive competition on business instability. Increased competition reduces small business profit margins, increasing the chances of business failures (Mudeer & Mohsin, 2021). In a different study, Reksten (2018) investigated the intersection between corporate social responsibility and the stakeholders' theory. Businesses are socially embedded creations, and owners respond to outside information to maintain a competitive edge (Reksten, 2018). Collecting information about the customers helps business owners adjust business activities to suit customer needs. In addition to unsatisfied customers, other factors contribute to business failures. Amankwah-Amoah (2019) explored business failures around the world. Organizations fail because of financial losses, mismanagement, and competition (Amankwah-Amoah, 2019). Gerhardt et al. (2014) explored the levels of marketing at McDonald's restaurants. Business owners experience financial losses because of unsteady income, decreasing competitive edge, and sustainability (Gerhardt et al., 2014). Hussain et al. (2018) explored measurement

scales business owners can use to evaluate performance using a ten-item scale that included fairness and transparency, effectiveness, command and control, trustfulness, competence, initiating, harmony, aggressiveness, corruption-free, and effectiveness. Well-managing business owners can sustain their businesses to maintain the economy in the community, be resilient to adapt to changes and withstand market challenges (Hussain et al., 2018). Blichfeldt and Faullant (2021) explored the relationship between innovation and technology adoption. Management focusing on invaluable insights and continued competitive advantage understands technology adoption's importance (Blichfeldt & Faullant, 2021).

Additionally, Obeidat et al. (2021) explored the relationship between e-marketing and competitive advantage. Business owners adopting the technology will have information on customer needs and priorities and build strong customer relationships (Obeidat et al., 2021). Also, Shen et al. (2022) examine the interaction between the information technology user and technology and how it impacts operations and overall competitive advantage. A business owner with the correct information can strategically align the business to its environment by analyzing market data, improving performance, survival, and growth maintenance and, therefore, gaining a competitive advantage over competitors (Shen et al., 2022). Iwu-James et al. (2020) explored competitive intelligence strategies to ensure the sustainability of libraries. To ensure the continuity of competitive advantage, business owners must adequately identify, assess, and counter the rivals' strategies. Also, business growth and profit must align with the business objectives (Iwu-



James et al., 2020). One way to ensure a business owner sustains the business is to achieve strategic business alignment.

Hussain and Jwameer (2021) examined the relationship between leadership and competitive advantage sustainability. Business owners who focus on improving organizational efficiency, market share, reputation, and intrinsic ability, increase sustainable competitive advantage (Hussain & Jwameer, 2021). Hunt (2019) investigated and evaluated the ethics of branding. Business owners acquiring and developing high-equity brands are more likely to gain a competitive advantage (Hunt, 2019). Ki et al. (2020) investigated social media's influence on its users. Successful business owners increase brand awareness through social media marketing, increasing purchase behavior, satisfying unmet demands, and developing the market (Ki et al., 2020). In addition to brand equity, Bozbay and Baslar (2020) investigated the relationships between brand trust, brand effect, and loyalty. New brands allow the business owner to enjoy retail and financial strength and a loyal customer base; therefore, the ability to effectively survive, grow, and sustain businesses in a competitive environment. By focusing the brands on the customers, business owners can enhance brand awareness and reputation, increase customer retention and loyalty, increase revenue, and boost competitive advantage.

Not maintaining a competitive edge places the business owner in the middle of the competition. Though competition is a way for business owners to improve products and services, Krol et al. (2018), in a study to explore passenger rail competition in Poland, noted that competition could decrease prices, reducing the overall revenue and, therefore, long-term business sustainability. To balance low prices and revenue, Jacobs

and Chase (2017), in a study on operations and supply chain management, suggested that business owners prioritize expanding the customer base by offering quality products at a lower cost. Continued loss of business revenue leads to business failures resulting in loss of revenue for the business owners, unemployment in the community, and a lack of products and services to satisfy immediate needs in the community. Business failures have other broader adverse effects on the community. Bernstein et al. (2019) explored the impact of bankruptcy on other business owners in a local economy. Business failures resulting from bankruptcies in a geographic location led to financial distress, business liquidation, employment loss, and discouraging customers from reaching other businesses around the affected area. Another aspect contributing to business failure is the inability to enter a market successfully. Andrei (2019) provided a study to compare different competition theories. Entry barriers to the market contribute to reduced profits for potential business owners. Also, Juan et al. (2018) analyzed how competitive strategy, resources and capabilities, technology, and management affect business performance. Business owners addressing entry barriers can identify their weaknesses and strengths in the market (Juan et al., 2018). By addressing the entry barriers, business owners can distribute resources and capabilities, implement a competitive strategy, and improve business performance.

Miocevic and Morgan (2018) investigated the relationship between operational capabilities and opportunities that can lead to business growth. Business owners could counter competition by conducting market sensing to actively monitor the customers, competition, technology, and the general environment (Miocevic & Morgan, 2018).

Suppatvech et al. (2019) explored the impact of technology on different business models. Competitive business owners must understand the operational and strategic roles technology plays as it shapes the nature of the business (Suppatvech et al., 2019). Further, Suqin et al. (2019) examined the relationship between leadership patterns and innovative business model and, using a questionnaire, showed technology change as the business environment change (Suqin et al., 2019) and keeping pace with technology help in engaging business owners and customers and improving products and services (Zhang et al., 2018). Kogut et al. (2021) explored determinants of business environment attractiveness. Business is inversely related to its environment; therefore, business owners need to base decision-making on such relationships to achieve efficiency and competitiveness in the market (Kogut et al., 2021). The business owner will ensure utility, price, cost, and buy-in are achieved by paying attention to the environment and information collected.

During and after the pandemic, business owners needed to focus on strategies that increase competitive advantage and keep them in business. Successful business owners respond well to long-term crises by reconfiguring resources for short-term survival and redesigning business models for long-term survival. Resources are constraints for business owners and are even more noticeable during long-lasting crises. Tian et al. (2021) examined resource constraints as a challenge facing small business owners. Small business owners, as opposed to large business owners, have more resource constraints, therefore the need to be creative and innovative.

Further, Caglyan et al. (2022) studied the relationship between innovativeness and business performance, while Pratono (2021) studied trust and risk-taking in promoting innovation. Strategies geared towards creating innovation and, therefore, new product development help achieve a competitive advantage and increase customer value and long-term business performance during and after a long-lasting crisis (Caglyan et al., 2022; Pratono, 2021). Regarding resources, Zulfikar et al. (2021) explored the effects of competitive advantage and organizational culture on business sustainability. Business owners conducting environmental-based business activities help reduce cost and waste and increase differentiation, thus creating a competitive advantage (Zulfikar et al., 2021). In doing so, business owners can reduce costs and improve productivity, brand recognition, and competitiveness with scarce resources. Bhattacharyya and Thakre (2021) explored the impact of the Coronavirus crisis on businesses and owners' responses using resource-based and dynamic capabilities. Business owners' adjustments to increase competitive advantage included working remotely, adjusting the supply network, and minimizing the use of resources (Bhattacharyya & Thakre, 2021). By making the adjustments, business owners can build and retain strong and talented employees, get their products and services to the market faster, efficiently, and economically, and sustain competitive advantage. Business owners can also maintain a competitive advantage by assessing the efficiencies of current strategies and changing them to suit the prevailing market conditions. Chorna et al. (2021) provided a study to explore forming and evaluating business efficiency using goal achievement, performance, and resource cost factors. Successful business owners who understand the importance of efficiency in

running a successful business and achieving a competitive advantage in a competitive market would assess current business activities, the customer, the competitor, and the supplier (Chorna et al., 2021). Successful businesses change business strategies to adapt to constant and rapid changes in the world, which, if not addressed, will lead to declining financial performance. Khudair and Khalil (2021) explored the deficiencies of traditional methods in measuring and evaluating business performance. Successful strategic change is planned, and the considerations will include experts or agents, degree of change, period of change, the relationship of change to worker's aspects such as culture or habits, and assessment and measure of change (Khudair & Khalil, 2021). Successful business owners use education and communication, participation and engagement with workers, facilitation and workers' support, negotiation and reaching an agreement, and attempting and making an effort to influence others to effect change (Khudair & Khalil, 2021). In doing so, business owners can adjust their activities as needed to meet those of customers and employees.

Regarding reconstructing the market boundary, it is essential for business owners to understand how customers shape the market boundaries. Diaz and Makkar (2021) investigated ways consumers can shape market boundaries. Customers can shape the market through product and service familiarity that business owners can use to create new products, activism through a directed effort to influence, and creative consumption through collaborative efforts (Diaz & Makkar, 2021). Therefore, business owners who understand customers' behavior can use market shaping to their benefit. The focus or the big picture for businesses in long-lasting crises is to reduce the impact and recover

quickly. Popescu et al. (2021) analyzed the manufacturing sector's performance after the global crisis in 2007 through 2009. Successful business owners build resilience in the organization to overcome the pandemic crisis (Popescu et al., 2021). Building resilience will prepare business owners to advance past the current business state.

### ***Underserved Market***

An underserved market is defined as "a market segment that has promising growth potential but remains underexploited" (Amankwah - Amoah, 2014, p. 317). Jain and Koch (2020) explored ways business owners can craft new markets for products and services. Products and services offered in the market should increase the community's living standards (Jain & Koch, 2020). Kimiagari et al. (2021) provided a study to explore the development of market segmentation and profiling framework. Market segmentation helps business owners develop target marketing programs and products based on customer characteristics (Kimiagari et al., 2021). By understanding customers' needs, business owners get products and services to the market segment that will ensure satisfaction and loyalty. Cassey and Xin (2017) explored foreign markets that lacked trade model predictions. Identifying underserved markets enable business owners to expand their business and create economic benefits (Cassey & Xin, 2017). Identifying underserved markets is not enough, and business owners must understand the issues in the market that cause them. The underserved market can result from logistical matters or a lack of customer demand from preferences available (Cassey & Xin, 2017). Dmuchowski (2021) examined methods to measure logistics efficiency. Understanding logistics and supply chain management will ensure the flow of goods and information in

a market (Dmuchowski, 2021). Business owners often use supply chain management to improve demand and increase the profitability of their businesses. Senol et al. (2021) explored supply chain performance metrics in relation to supply chain operations using predictive analysis and forecasting accuracy. To ensure effective supply management, business owners must plan, manage, and control the flow of materials, information, and money (Senol et al., 2021). Afy-Shararah and Rich (2018) tested a new performance measure to examine the effectiveness of the flow of the operations. Taking advantage of supply chain management can increase profits, cash flow, product cycle times, and communication, thus improving business performance (Afy-Shararah & Rich, 2018). Attaran (2020) explored ways technology can improve the performance of the digital supply chain by examining different digital technology enablers. Business owners focusing on supply chain management ensure collaborative processes, on-time delivery, cost reduction, and increased performance, leading to improved short and long-term outcomes (Attaran, 2020). Pekgun et al. (2019) investigated the relationship between supply allocation and forecast accuracy using mean forecast error, mean absolute forecast error, mean forecast inflation, and base forecast inflation. When operating a business, owners need to employ collaborative buyer-managed forecasting because it helps improve supplier service, efficient demand management, improved demand responsiveness, and availability of products and services (Pekgun et al., 2019). Additionally, Lapide (2014) explored the importance of professional management in improving sales and operational planning teams using surveys over the years. To achieve credible forecasts, business owners must detect the change and address demand

uncertainties using risk management techniques (Lapide, 2014). By integrating sound risk management techniques into forecasts, business owners can improve their ability to forecast future needs and plan accordingly.

Business owners focusing on business performance and sustainability must explore and exploit the opportunities in underserved markets. To do so, business owners will require commitment, persistence, resources, and capabilities (Amankwah-Amoah, 2014). Turner and Endres (2017) explored ways business owners can achieve networking, business plan effectiveness, and market differentiation. On the other hand, Warren and Szostek (2017) studied the importance of networking, passion, knowledge, and financial management. Networking and business venues are critical in acquiring a new market and a growing customer base. To add to networking, Miller et al. (2021) explored the importance of networking in relation to business goals and objectives. A business as a network of structure, functional connectivity, and an active dynamic pattern will achieve business goals when adequately managed. Further, through networking, business owners can collaborate with other business owners, benefiting both parties involved by offering and receiving assistance (Miller et al., 2021).

The market is dynamic, and when existing products and services do not meet demand in the market, it is a sign of business owners' opportunity to identify the problem and develop a business solution. Yeung and Kerr (2021) explored the resiliency of a food supply chain during the COVID-19 pandemic. The market environment could create underserved markets, allowing business owners to access such potential markets (Yeung & Kerr, 2021). Business owners will introduce valuable products and services that satisfy



the customers' needs in providing a business solution. Business owners must assess business activities to offer better solutions as problems arise. Hussain et al. (2018) explored measurements business owners can use to assess and evaluate performance. The assessment that business owners can perform in underserved markets and reposition to gain and maintain a competitive advantage includes strategy, process implementation, sustainability, financial, innovation, and human capital (Hussain et al., 2018). By continuously assessing the position of their products and services brand, business owners can change offerings to appeal to the market. Oswald and Quiel (2020) provided a study on upgrades required on a building structure using analysis and design guidelines. When products and services are not upgraded or replaced, the market remains untapped until satisfying products and services are introduced (Oswald & Quiel, 2020). Assessing performance and creating high-quality, affordable products and services help introduce valuable products and services. In a dynamic market, business owners using the limiting concept will have a limited range of products, leading to customers' unmet needs and decreasing market share. Hassan and Sengupta (2019) explored the customer's perception of halal products and how products create value.

Entering and introducing products and services in an untapped market help sustain the business by increasing the market share (Hassan & Sengupta, 2019). Introducing new products and services allows business owners to satisfy customers' needs and expand their market share. The makeup of the market is diverse, and therefore it frequently changes. Ton Nu Hai and Speelman (2020) explored sustainability challenges and prospects of marine lobster aquaculture. Sabaruddin (2018), on the other hand,

explored Indonesia's export market destinations. The market has several players, and business owners need to adequately respond to market changes by exploring them as soon as possible (Ton Nu Hai & Speelman, 2020; Sabaruddin, 2018). By exploring and reacting quickly and adequately to market changes, business owners can keep up with market trends, make informed business decisions, and maintain a competitive advantage.

### ***Demand and Supply***

Demand and supply in the market affect small businesses. Supply refers to products and services available for sale, while demand refers to potential customers (Zhang & Ghanem, 2020). Demand is unique to individual locations. Baraldi and Ratajczak-Mrozek (2019) explored factors that transformed into the center of excellence in IKEA. Lu et al. (2018) studied integrated regional logistics focusing on time-phased demand. Zajko and Bradac (2019) explored the demand for reusable products. Zhang and Ghanem (2020) explored supply and demand in relation to business performance. Business owners prefer setting up businesses in areas of high demand to sell products and services (Baraldi & Ratajczak-Mrozek, 2019; Lu et al., 2018; Zajko & Bradac, 2019; Zhang & Ghanem, 2020). A great business location will allow the business owner to access a large customer base which helps increase sales and boost long-term performance. A fixed supply of products and services in the market and a stable economy in the community can maintain the demand. The supply rate needs to be proportional to the customer buying rate; therefore, a high supply rate is associated with high-demand fulfillment (Zhang & Ghanem, 2020). By maintaining a reliable and stable supply system, the business owners can have flexibility and control over the flow of materials

and reduced costs that can benefit the people in the community in terms of satisfaction at a lower cost. There are risks associated with both demand and supply. Prakash et al. (2021) explored changes in the supply chain by introducing alternate products by analyzing demand risks. Risks associated with demand are loss of customers because of the inability to maintain reliable supply, loss of reputation and credibility because of the inability to fill orders and commitment, and loss of revenue because of the opportunity cost of a sale forgone (Prakash et al., 2021). Internal and external market environments affect demand. Additionally, Perdiguero and Borrell (2019) explored how to measure the size of the gasoline market in a geographic location. The decline in the demand for products and services can be caused by the entry of rivals and the rise in prices (Zhang & Ghanem, 2020), who enter the market and offer alternative products and services at a lower price (Perdiguero & Borrell, 2019). Dewanta (2019) explored the effect of export policy on demand. Additionally, Bos et al. (2020) explored the characteristics of emerging businesses in relation to growth factors. Customers would substitute expensive products and services for cheaper ones Dewanta (2019) because low prices for products and services will provide customers with increased purchasing power (Bos et al., 2020). Zhao et al. (2018) studied pricing determination in relation to costs and customer demands. Because of the relationship between price and customer demand, business owners must study product prices thoroughly to ensure sales and profit (Zhao et al., 2018). By understanding customer needs and studying the prices, business owners will understand the response of customer purchasing to price change and adjust as needed. Market disruptions affect demand. Pedauga et al. (2022) explored the impact of COVID-

19 on small businesses. Small business disruption leads to a decline in demand, impacting the local economy (Pedauga et al., 2022). Schmude et al. (2021) explored the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Bavarian tourist sector. On the other hand, Yang et al. (2020) analyzed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on restaurant demand using demand analysis. Pandemics such as COVID-19 led to a drop in demand because of movement restrictions (Schmude et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2020). Further, Razavi et al. (2022) explored the effects of COVID-19 on the oil and gas industry. The decline from reduced physical contact, restricted mobility, and closure of businesses during the pandemic caused a decline in business activities (Razavi et al., 2022). Movement restrictions affected the customers' income, the price of products and services, and the number of customers in the market, affecting demand. The risks associated with supply are loss of production because of increased overheads, stock delays because of increased wait time, increased working capital because of delayed stocks, and increased cost of holding stocks because of the inability to optimize orders (Prakash et al., 2021). The sources of supply risks are internal or operational risks, including information, capacity, customer demand, and quality issues. Shahbaz et al. (2019) explored the supply chain risks and noted external risks such as competition, economic issues, political instability, natural disasters, and terrorist attacks (Shahbaz et al., 2019). Disruptions caused by pandemics such as COVID-19 impact supply. Kumar and Sharma (2021) explored business owners' decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Supply and customer demand changes, uncertainties, and logistics restrictions disrupt supply. Best practices within the supply chain help reduce its vulnerability. Ivanov and Dolgui (2021) explored

the management of supply chain risks during a disruptive event. Better visualization, early warning, and real-time monitoring systems lead to efficient supply chain disruption risk management (Ivanov & Dolgui, 2021). On the contrary, uncertainties can result from management strategy issues. Wang (2018) examined the effects of supply chain risks on logistical performance. Though managers understand the risks of supply chain uncertainties, half respond appropriately, negatively impacting business performance. In earlier research, Arend and Wisner (2005) explored the vulnerability of relying on supply chain management partners using a survey of managers. Small business owners do not implement supply chain management appropriately to mitigate supply chain uncertainties (Arend & Wisner, 2005). In integrating efficient risk management, business owners can identify the risk, analyze, evaluate, prioritize, make a business decision, and continue monitoring the risks. The inability to supply needed products and services affects the optimal level of product availability. Avlijas et al. (2018) studied the drivers of stock out and ways to overcome them. Stock-out events or the inability of customers to acquire products or services lead to declining sales, profits, loyalty, and loss of customers. Business owners experiencing the stock-out event as a result of supply disruptions will likely lose store loyalty and the likelihood of customers switching to competitors. Additionally, Kumar et al. (2018) analyzed the competitor's procurement cost versus price and total supplies. Supply disruptions could lead to declining assets, inability to compete, and loss of profits. A reliable distribution network can help alleviate supply problems (Kumar et al., 2018). Business owners can use a secure transportation mode to balance time and cost. Also, Jamili et al. (2022) studied the benefits of sharing resources

in a warehouse by analyzing the cost advantage of consolidating resources. Warehouses could help minimize declining sales, control holding costs, and improve customer demand responsiveness (Jamili et al., 2022). Oh and Jeong (2019) investigated profit and lead time tradeoffs using a smart manufacturing supply chain. Reducing supply lead time helps increase profits (Jamili et al., 2022). Another method business owners can manage supply is standardization, making alternative sources possible. According to Van Hoek and Dobrzykowski (2021), after exploring business owners' supply chain reshoring decisions, noted successful business owners can switch among vendors by neutralizing supplier power using flexible and multiple suppliers. Lozada-Contreras et al. (2021) examined the resilience strategies used by companies during and after Hurricane Maria. Cooperative supply chain relationships between business owners can also be used to effectively perform during a disruptive event or a dynamic market (Lozada-Contreras et al., 2021). Disney et al. (2021) explored supply chain dynamics. Dependency on particular vendors will help ensure the availability of products and services. Customers switch brand choices when alternative products become available (Disney et al., 2021). Alternative products and services offer choices to customers making purchase decisions. Conducting risk analysis may help business owners mitigate the risks associated with supply disruptions. Jaiganesh and Sudhahar (2020) explored supply chain risks and information support to ensure quality system procedures. Business owners who have a risk analysis on incidences affecting supply are prepared to make informed decisions on supply chain risk management (Jaiganesh & Sudhahar, 2020). Successful business owners' decisions include keeping emergency stocks, reserving backup capacity, and

using dual or multiple sourcing to spread the supply risks (Huma et al., 2020) and risk mitigation inventory (Lucker et al., 2019). Mwesiumo et al. (2021) explored various supply risk mitigation models. Implementing a specific supply strategy depends on the business environment; therefore, it helps in business performance when adequately implemented. Gebhardt et al. (2022) explored approaches to long-term resilience to disruptions. Keeping optimum supplies can be challenging, but understanding strategies can be key to overcoming supply challenges. Supply chain strategies such as buffering and bridging are mediums small business owners can use to protect the supply chain and the business from disruptions (Gebhardt et al., 2022). Scala and Lindsay (2021) explored healthcare resiliency during the pandemic. A fully implemented flexible and collaborative supplier network helps build resilience during supply disruption (Scala & Lindsay, 2021). Such long-term and collaborative supplier networks include forecasting types such as long-term time series analysis covering more than two years (Jacobs & Chase, 2017). Such a forecast and efforts to recover quickly from disruptions help reduce the impact.

### ***Opportunity***

Opportunities are defined as "situations in which goods, services, raw materials, markets, and organizing methods can be introduced through the formation of new means, ends, or means-ends relationship" (Jafari-Sadeghi, 2020, p. 281). The formations or changes in products, services, processes, marketing approaches, and business models are driven by sustainability. And to effectively take advantage of emerging opportunities, Gloet and Samson (2022), in their study on knowledge and innovation management in

relation to innovation and sustainability, found that business owners must implement innovation management to capture value from innovation within the business (Gloet & Samson, 2022). Business owners who take advantage of the market opportunities, such as unmet customer needs, may satisfy their financial goals and customers' needs.

Opportunities such as customer attitudes toward products and services can help business owners make changes through improved research, development, and marketing, making it difficult for competitors to imitate (Dyer et al., 2016). Embracing research and development also helps stimulate the stakeholders further to exploit opportunities.

Eskerod et al. (2018) explored opportunities to increase project value and benefits.

Taking time to research and develop, business owners can introduce and market new brands that are difficult to imitate and gain a competitive advantage (Eskerod et al., 2018). Since the market is dynamic and the demand for products and services also changes, business owners, must continue to identify ways to satisfy customers' unmet needs (Ton Nu Hai & Speelman, 2020).

Yang and Zhang (2018) examined the importance of orienting customers to new product development performance. Business owners must be customer-oriented in providing new and innovative products and services that satisfy customer needs (Yang & Zhang, 2018). This fulfillment is achieved by understanding the customers' behavioral patterns and identifying the right places to position the business (Ferreira et al., 2019) because customers consider the information from various sources before buying products or services (Dangi et al., 2020). Gringarten (2018) explored customer brand equity in relation to price and business image. Business owners who understand the customer's



favorable or positive impression of products and services, the business owners are presented with an opportunity to position themselves and develop viable and successful brands (Gringarten, 2018). Opportunities are necessary for business owners to start or sustain an existing business. A relationship between opportunities, business owners' actions, and profitability must exist to identify and exploit opportunities to benefit the business successfully.

On the contrary, Alvarez et al. (2017), in their study on business owner opportunities, found that business owners can identify opportunities but fail to exploit them to improve their businesses (Alvarez et al., 2017). To avoid missing a business opportunity, business owners can create business opportunities through Customer Relations Management (CRM). Bapuji et al. (2021) examined customer relationship management and its functionality in small businesses. Successful business owners use technologies to implement a CRM strategy that focuses on the quality of service, customer satisfaction, investing in people, building long-term relationships, goal setting and performance evaluation, and relation-based interfaces (Bapuji et al., 2021). Business owners will have customer information and use the knowledge gained to build mutually beneficial relationships.

Ambrogio et al. (2022) analyzed the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the workforce and supply chain resiliency. Business owners use opportunities of diversified risks to solve supply problems by sourcing supplies from different geographical regions, which helps reduce the lead time and supply responsiveness (Ambrogio et al., 2022). Though a business can be adversely affected by a pandemic, Suk and Kim (2021) in their

research provided insight into business crisis management and resilience during a disruptive event. A crisis could be transformed into an opportunity by interested parties working collectively to create solutions to problems and ensure a sustainable recovery (Suk & Kim, 2021). Berbes-Blazquez et al. (2022) explored resilience principles during the COVID-19 pandemic. By working collectively to find business solutions, business owners and employees get an opportunity to observe and assess the response to the crisis, helping to develop and implement coping and adaptation strategies (Berbes-Blazquez et al., 2022). When crises arise, business owners must change business activities for quick recovery and sustainability. O'Shea et al. (2022) explored problems experienced by hospitality and tourism business owners during the COVID-19 pandemic. Uncertainties caused by the pandemic motivated business owners to change their resilience and sustainability strategies. These strategies included those that helped anticipate the crises, minimize the effects of the crises, or exploit opportunities during the crises (O'Shea et al., 2022). In implementing resilience and sustainability or responsive strategies, Pedersen and Ritter (2022), in their study on opportunities to shape the market during a crisis, posited that business owners are presented with proactive market opportunities that help reconstruct market boundaries (Pedersen & Ritter, 2022).

Reconstructed market boundaries ensure demand expands and business performance is improved during and sustained after the pandemic. Maintaining a business during and after a disruptive event help achieve the social benefits of employment and satisfaction in the community. Even though small businesses have scarce resources compared to large companies, small business owners must remain proactive because

small businesses are vital to society. Small business owners can bring positive results by understanding the business direction and reason and adding value to the community (Kaufman, 2018). Adding value to the community will add value to the business because as the business environment changes, the business owners need to adapt to give a reason for customers to come back (Kaufman, 2018).

For this reason, small business owners must explore new business opportunities to adapt to market changes. Small business owners can identify and explore opportunities by creating opportunities and cross-cultural knowledge. It is also essential for business owners to differentiate between business ideas and business opportunities. Sungjin et al. (2020) explored ways business owners can identify new business opportunities. Ideas lead to a strategy that the business owners pass on to the employees to implement because involving the employees will help attract and retain customers and increase profits (Sungjin et al., 2020). Whereas a business idea is subjective and difficult to share with others, the business opportunity is based on the concept focusing on the product, service, and target market. In that case, novel knowledge is necessary to identify new business opportunities (Sungjin et al., 2020). Suh (2017) investigated knowledge creation, diffusion, and standardization. Successful business owners gain knowledge from internal and external environments, a source of opportunity identification and competitive advantage (Suh, 2017). To continue competitiveness in the market, Vrabcova et al. (2022), in a study on factors that help transfer knowledge, posited that business owners must ensure active internal transfer of knowledge among employees (Vrabcova et al., 2022). Shared learning will help maintain improvement and value innovation.

### ***Differentiation and Diversification***

Differentiation or branding endows products and services with the power of the brand (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Byrne and Gallagher (2015) explored ways to create and manage brands using ten steps to develop, refine, and introduce brands. Successful business owners identify and develop ways to help customers to make choices, identify distribution channels, and establish and maintain a continuous network. Additionally, business owners will continue innovating, share customer experiences with the employees, implement the process over time, and evaluate how the customers respond (Byrne & Gallagher, 2015). Rebane (2018) examined the relationship between product innovation, marketing innovation, and customer cooperation. A relationship between the three attributes exists based on customer satisfaction and feedback after product and service brand consumption. Lin et al. (2022) investigated the role of community identification and trust in knowledge sharing. Successful business owners use social networking to interpret market trends and take an innovative approach to gain business value (Lin et al., 2022). In addition to networking and innovation, Zhang (2022), in a study on organization, collaboration, and management of teams regarding knowledge transfer, revealed collaboration allows business owners to acquire knowledge and ideas which can be combined to achieve collaborative innovation (Zhang A, 2022). Gressgard et al. (2014) studied employee-driven innovation. Business owners focusing on exploiting new sources of knowledge to improve products and services use Information Communication Technology (ICT) to manage the knowledge flow by gathering, sharing, distributing, and communicating (Gressgard et al., 2014). Corte-Real et al. (2017)

evaluated the effects of big data analytics. Business owners investing in big data analytics allow for internal and external knowledge management. This knowledge management leads to agility through sensing opportunities and threats, entering untapped markets, and adapting to technological environments (Corte-Real et al., 2017). Also, a study by Tian and Zhai (2019) on the effects of employee participative decision-making on business performance found the accumulated knowledge of business owners and employees helps generate new ideas to improve business performance (Tian & Zhai, 2019). One way of accumulating knowledge is forming an employee advisory board to help bring business owners and employees together to share ideas and solve business problems (Dyer et al., 2016). Makhmoor and Rajesh (2019) examined the relationship between business model innovation, strategy, competitive advantage, and business performance. Encouraging new ideas and change through open communication and the information flow of acquired knowledge and ideas increases business performance (Makhmoor & Rajesh, 2019). Dellino et al. (2018) explored the decision support system for business owners' supply chains. Business owners can also use decision support systems (DSS) to combine sales and planning tools to ensure the availability of value-added brands to meet customers' needs (Dellino et al., 2018). To continue adding value to products and services, Fengchun et al. (2017), in a study to explore the effects of using internal auditors, posited business owners must consider using consultancy services to recommend business solutions (Fengchun et al. 2017). Small business owners can use strategic innovation to introduce new products and services. Scuotto et al. (2020) explored innovative strategies business owners can use to gain a path to the market. Small business owners could rapidly find an

optimum position in the market, adapt to change, and have the flexibility necessary to innovate (Scuotto et al., 2020). Miocevic and Morgan (2018), in their study on the relationship between operational capabilities and business opportunities, noted market sensing and adaptive and innovative capabilities enable business owners to recognize and exploit new ventures to maintain sustainable growth (Miocevic & Morgan, 2018). In addition to strategic innovation, an effective business plan is essential in identifying and addressing potential challenges in the market. Small business owners, who identify potential products and services that contribute to customer satisfaction, improve businesses' survival and success because unique products or brands help achieve market differentiation (Turner & Endres, 2017). Business owners who maintain brand equity that reflects the consumers' favorable, reliable, and unique attitudes towards the products and services will maintain brand differentiation (Gorbatov et al., 2021) and have greater customer loyalty even during crises and price changes (Llopis-Amoros et al., 2018). Based on the explanation given in the previous statement, it is evident that differentiation provides market power. Further, Montgomery (1985) studied the relationship between diversification, market structure, and business performance. Diversification had a cost-efficiency advantage, increasing business performance (Montgomery, 1985). Business owners who need to diversify focus on identifying and implementing various products and services and increasing market share. Galpin (2019) explored the reasons and ways business owners can diversify products and services and identified two types of diversification. The first is related diversification which helps introduce the same products or services to a new market or introduce new products or services to an existing

market. The second is unrelated conglomerate diversification which helps to offer unique products or services in the new market (Galpin, 2019). The owners can assess the risks and decide on the approach with a robust return on investment with the two options. Oloko (2018) explored the benefits of portfolio diversification. Business owners with high performance understand the importance of diversifying products and services to offset unsystematic risks, enhancing efficiency, liquidity, and risk-pooling (Oloko, 2018). Hill et al. (2017) examined the relationship between business strategy and performance objectives. The employee-customer relationship helps understand customers' needs and new ways to develop quality products and services (Hill et al., 2017). With such relationships, Luu (2019), in a study to explore the contribution of corporate social responsibility in creating customer value, posited employees can orient the customers to the market, which leads to value innovation, sales growth, and profit increase (Luu, 2019). Rasi et al. (2019) provided a study to examine the relationship between supplier innovation, uncertain market environment, and agile supply chain. A business orientation responsive to the market, customer needs, and opportunities increases competitive advantage and outperforms its competitors (Rasi et al., 2019). Also, Poulston and Pernecky (2017), in a study on the relationship between business owners' expectations and customers' lifestyles, interests, and values, found that relationships help small business owners and employees to conceptualize customers as an important market segment of their future business (Poulston & Pernecky, 2017). Establishing a long-term relationship with the customers helps increase customer loyalty, sales, profit, and market share.

During and after the pandemic, business owners focused on differentiation to reduce the impact or to recover quickly. Business owners who effectively coped with the pandemic focused on differentiation by improving existing services and innovating (Kristina and Tore (2021), which helped differentiate innovative business owners from the local competition (Curtis & Slocum, 2021). Weinstein (2020) explored business models and found successful business owners assess the successfulness of resiliency strategies in relation to differentiation by observing the market conditions and therefore adjust their business models and value propositions (Weinstein, 2020). Based on the assessment and the need to innovate and achieve differentiation, Egfjord and Sund (2020) examined different perceptions of business trends, innovators, employees, and experts. Stakeholders in successful businesses have a common understanding of the market trends and solutions to exploit the opportunities (Egfjord & Sund, 2020). With differentiated products and services, Affandi et al. (2020), in a study exploring small business owners' empowerment in dealing with the competition during a disruptive event, found that business owners can exploit the opportunities of reconstructing the market during a pandemic by using digital marketing (Affandi et al., 2020). Itzhak (2020) examined the relationship between big data and future business strategy. Business owners focusing on the big business picture understand the market and the customers and use differentiation to value innovate over future competitors (Itzhak, 2020). In doing so, business owners have a chance of high potential growth in the future.



## *Marketing*

Marketing is an integrated function of any business concerned with developing, distributing, and satisfying customer needs (Barksdale & Darden, 1971). Du et al. (2021) explored the use of market data in understanding customers and competitors and found that marketing development is essential to business growth. Successful marketing development is possible with a successful marketing strategy. Business owners with successful marketing strategies focus on understanding the market, targeting needs-based segments, and making specific offers to each segment. As studied by McDonald (2021) regarding interactive marketing before and after COVID-19, it is also helpful to incorporate differentiation, business positioning, and branding (McDonald, 2021). Strategy is not enough to bring about business success. Business owners use marketing communication to provide meaningful information about the products and services and connect to the customers (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Shahrzad et al., 2020). In doing so, the business owners will provide awareness for the new customers and maintain the current customer base by reinforcing purchase behaviors.

Shahrzad et al. (2020) explored the factors to consider in planning digital content marketing to achieve marketing objectives and identified three marketing pillars. The first pillar is content. Valuable information will help build customer relationships (Shahrzad et al., 2020). Additionally, Mancini et al. (2017) studied the attributes affecting purchase behavior and found that customers seek information to understand product offerings regarding quality and brands (Mancini et al., 2017). You et al. (2020) explored what to communicate to customers to restore product or service satisfaction. Baseline knowledge

from customer inquiries or complaints helps business owners recognize the shortfall and provide unified customer service (You et al., 2020). Varadarajan (2020), in a study on the relationship between customer information-based resources, market strategy, and performance, found a close association between knowledge, skills, and business performance. In paying attention to customer inquiries, business owners will understand the customers' needs and use such information to innovate.

The second is engagement. Such engagement can be as simple as getting involved in the community, placing banners outside, maintaining the quality of products and services, affordable prices, and cleanliness (Gerhardt et al., 2014). Advertising is another way the business owner can engage the customers. Advertising can be informational, persuasive, reminders, and reinforcement (Kotler & Keller, 2016). It can also be by word of mouth (Nandini, 2014). Asto and Sudarmawan (2018) examined the impact of advertisements on brand selection. Advertising helps business owners understand the customers' attitudes and offer the right brand (Asto & Sudarmawan, 2018). Gringarten (2018), in a study on the relationship between brand equity, price, and business image, posited business owners used perception advertising to shape customer purchasing tendencies (Gringarten, 2018). Successful advertising has been attributed to age-specific media advertisement. In a study to test movie tie-in premiums accompanying unhealthy and healthy food, Dixon et al. (2017) found that business owners who aimed media advertisements at different age groups achieved successful publicity. Promotion is another way business owners can engage and encourage customers to make frequent purchases (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Li and Zhang (2021) examined the relationship

between customer requirements and customer satisfaction to understand customer preferences. Social media and online customer reviews reveal product attributes, customer requirements, and shopping experiences, which can be used in designing and developing new products (Li & Zhang, 2021). Also, in their study, Mizelle and Beck (2018) explored how to use Pinterest in a classroom. Modern applications are helpful for young, creative, and active online customers and therefore have shifted as a model for teaching and learning by sharing ideas and experiences (Mizelle & Beck, 2018).

Moreover, in a study, Akman and Mishra (2017) explored the factors affecting the implementation of social commerce, while Ul Islam and Rahman (2017) explored online community motivation. Business owners use social media to identify the selling potential of products and services and ways to retain customers (Akman & Mishra, 2017; Ul Islam & Rahman, 2017). Customers will seek out brands with information that are relevant, engaging, educative, and entertaining (Shahrzad et al., 2020). Shobeiri et al. (2018) provided a study exploring the role of customer culture in online and site offerings. Business owners engaging customers enables them to buy products and services from a brand, experience the brand, and encourage repeat shopping (Shobeiri et al., 2018). Also, a study by Chu et al. (2021) exploring the use of visual cues in products and services advertisements found repeat shopping is because of excellent evaluation of a brand forms in customers' minds leading to appeal, connectedness, and intentions to purchase (Chu et al., 2021). Additionally, Krishnamurthy and Kumar (2018), in their study to explore the use of electronic word of mouth in forming brand expectations, found customers create a favorable or unfavorable image of a brand through posts of other users, affecting buying

behavior (Krishnamurthy & Kumar, 2018). Through feedback, business owners and employees can improve business activities, building more profound and trusting relationships.

The third pillar is the goal. The marketing goals of business owners include brand awareness, customer acquisition, increased sales, and customer retention (Shahrzad et al., 2020). To achieve goals, business owners need to have passion for the industry and survivability (Warren & Szostek, 2017) and the ability to identify the level of marketing effectiveness necessary for implementing a plan to improve (Payne, 1988). To add to the concept of passion, Jacob et al. (2019), in a study to explore business formal and informal status as it relates to business growth, posited that positive pre-startup activities, such as initial market entry and technical skills, lead to the growth momentum of the business. In line with passion, employee and business owners' initiative helps increase business performance (Jacob et al., 2019). To meet business goals, business owners must increase sales which can be achieved by ensuring fair prices for products and services. Samunderu and Farrugia (2022) explored the behavior of business and leisure travelers in relation to price. Price is essential in marketing as a purchasing driver and contributes to sustainable development growth (Samunderu & Farrugia, 2022). Customers will purchase products or services based on the impression of the price and the business's image (Gringarten, 2018). Business growth requires marketing skills. Through marketing, Jung et al. (2020), in their study to explore sustainable marketing activities and market performance, noted that business owners who achieve business growth satisfy their customers socially and ethically (Jung et al., 2020). Marketing ensures brand elements such as memorability,

meaningfulness, likeability, and defensiveness, increasing brand awareness (Kotler & Keller, 2016). As a result, business owners improve their brand image, trust, customer satisfaction, and brand loyalty (Jung et al., 2020). Jaiswal et al. (2018) studied the relationship between trust, acquisition, the length of the relationship, product return experience, and the type of purchase. Improved confidence motivates customers to buy more and remain loyal to the business owner (Jaiswal et al., 2018). Loyal customers help business owners improve, achieve business goals, and sustain their businesses.

### ***Resources and Capabilities***

Business resources are forms of the internal business environment (Dyer et al., 2016) and are essential for economic growth (Orzechowski, 2020). Ardaneswari et al. (2020) explored the effects of resources and capabilities on competitive strategies. Resources such as finance, assets, capital, and human positively affect business competitiveness (Ardaneswari et al., 2020). Small business owners must develop resources and capabilities to ensure a competitive advantage. In their study, Ming and Hsin-Feng (2020) explored the impact of resources and capabilities on business performance to develop and deploy resources and gain market competitiveness. Business owners must implement effective strategic business management to break resource constraints (Hsian-Ming & Hsin-Feng, 2020). The availability of resources will enable small business owners to innovate and make a successful business venture (Dyer et al., 2016) while deploying the resources impacts the strategy process (Suqin et al., 2019). In deciding to deploy resources, business owners must plan and implement the functional strategy while paying attention to the following: keeping the cost low to maintain a

competitive advantage and profitability, investing in information technology intended to lower cost, and sustaining a buying power allowing acquisition of supplies for less and therefore sell for less than the rivals (Dyer et al., 2016). In addition to information technology, Ocloo et al. (2020), examining the relationship between technology, business, and market environment in adopting e-commerce, found competitive pressure as the driver of e-business value. Further, Qosasi et al. (2019), in a study to investigate the impact of information and communication technology on business competitiveness, found that using information and communication technology improved the business owner's competitiveness and ability to survive in the market (Qosasi et al., 2019). Barbazzeni et al. (2022) provided a study to explore technology in relation to the business future. Information technology changes the business's structure, hints at new ways to reduce cost, increase value proposition, and expand or generate opportunities (Barbazzeni et al., 2022). Florin and Bogdana (2021) explored business strategic orientation and innovations and posited that the innovative application of information technology helps the business owner create solutions to business problems (Florin & Bogdana, 2021). The benefits of information technology take time to be realized, and business owners need to anticipate prolonged use Ruivo et al. (2014) because of the time it takes to incorporate expertise, customer, and supplier electronic readiness (Yang et al., 2015). And also, digital platform users differ in age, gender, occupation, education, background, and interest (Matassi et al., 2022). Flink and Chen (2021) examined the relationship between management, financial resources, and business performance. Successful business owners invest in technology and ensure actual usage to improve business processes and

performance Flink and Chen (2021) by understanding the strategic business value of data instead of the amount of data invested (Grover et al., 2018). Management achieves specific outcomes by implementing different information technology configurations Raymond et al. (2018) and ensuring friendly digital platforms to boost profitability, brand loyalty, and retention (Hasan & Morris, 2017). Business owners' understanding of the benefits and risks of using technology ensures quick adaptation to differentiate, expand the market boundaries, and increase market share (Das et al., 2020). Business owners with contingency responses to digital disruptions will continue to have a competitive edge even during a crisis. Orzechowski (2020) examined the relationship between small business lending programs and employment resource availability, deployment, and innovation. Resources are critical for developing new products and services, leading to new economic growth patterns (Orzechowski, 2020). Finance as a resource is important to business growth, and business owners need to plan accordingly. Sandalgaard and Nielsen (2018) studied the use of budget in evaluating business performance. Business owners who emphasize budget will effectively plan for the business and be successful in the long run (Sandalgaard & Nielsen, 2018). Further, the study by Pelz (2019) on the benefit of management accounting on small business owners found that finances and budgets are essential for business planning, ensuring future performance (Pelz, 2019). Small business owners must anticipate short-term and long-term cash requirements. To ensure the physical and financial assets of the business, small business owners must have a meaningful business mission that positively impacts the business's ability to secure funds (Al Hussaini, 2019), including securing funds through different government

assistance programs (Orzechowski, 2020). In addition to finances, a brand is a resource when it contributes to the business owner's ability to provide a value market offering. Business owners focus on the brand's resourcefulness by considering using an established brand to introduce a new brand (Gerhardt et al., 2018; Kotler & Keller, 2016). Human resource is another important resource for the business, which must align with the business strategy (Dyer et al., 2016). Carme et al. (2019) analyzed staffing policies in relation to professional partnerships and managed professional businesses. Human resource management uses human capital's economic value to acquire and place the right people in the right positions (Carme et al., 2019). Business owners who focus on maintaining a competitive advantage ensure fairness and low labor cost while implementing a human resource management strategy (Dyer et al., 2016). Nowak (2020) examined the relationship between understanding strategic business objectives, culture, and performance. A fair and positive business culture encourages employees to create value for customers and achieve strategic business goals (Nowak, 2020). Ensuring alignment help to motivate employees to participate in organizational change.

Because of limited internal resources, small business owners can maintain their businesses through strategic alliances. Strasek et al. (2020) evaluated the relationship between business alliances, innovation, and business performance and noted benefits of strategic alliances include creating, maintaining, and increasing market competitiveness (Strasek et al., 2020). Small business owners' competitive advantage results from increased differentiation, brand awareness, market share, profit, and reduced cost. Tyll et al. (2020) explored the impact of strategic alliances on business performance. Business



owners achieve specific business opportunities by forming alliances, reducing the cost of running individual businesses and liability (Tyll et al., 2020). Further, the partnership helps business owners access the market, which would otherwise not be possible because of limited capabilities and resources (Tyll et al., 2020). In doing so, business owners will have the resources to innovate and increase demand and business growth.

### ***Approach to Strategic Plan***

A strategic plan is a way business owners can use to make decisions to accomplish business goals. Omer (2019) studied the role of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in business strategic planning. A successful strategic plan that meets the business mission requires strategic analysis of the business environment and the business (Omer, 2019). Business owners can use strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis to conduct strategic analysis. Additionally, Phadermrod et al. (2019) explored the importance-performance analysis based on SWOT analysis. Analyzing the strengths and weaknesses can help business owners achieve their goals, while opportunities and threats can be used as enablers in fulfilling a business goal (Phadermrod et al., 2019). Practical SWOT analysis helps analyze strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats and helps the business owner implement a successful strategic plan. It is essential to understand the shortfalls of a SWOT analysis to make the right business decisions. Documented research indicates SWOT analysis as a simple, qualitative tool, subjective, non-measurable, business performance ranking, business reference evaluations, and non-customer input (Phadermrod et al., 2019). To strategically plan and implement, business owners must focus on customers. The

importance-performance analysis is a strategy focusing on customer satisfaction (Phadermrod et al., 2019). The focus needs to shift to customer satisfaction when SWOT analysis is inefficient. Employees also play a role in ensuring the implementation of a strategic plan. Business leaders must focus on maintaining adequate quantity and quality of the labor force through attraction and retention to provide a positive impact and outstanding performance (Carme et al., 2019). In addition to attracting and retaining employees, managers must ensure a management structure that reduces cost and enable employees to make decisions (Dyer et al., 2016) through participative decision-making (Tian & Zhai, 2019). Ambrose et al. (2018) examined the relationship between superordinate identity, sales, and operations planning. Business owners can encourage participative decision-making by bringing together different staff to agree on the implementation of a business strategy, therefore, increasing collaboration and effectiveness (Ambrose et al., 2018). Kornelakis (2018) explored the impact of stakeholder reward and employee voice on workplace innovation to ensure employees' inclusion in business decision-making. Business owners must consider innovative reward strategies through performance-related pay (Kornelakis, 2018). Allowing employees to take ownership and make informed business decisions helps to improve overall business performance.

Additionally, Mayer et al. (2020), in a study to examine the relationship between clear business goals, learning, and performance, posited that business owners motivating stakeholders have a higher chance of executing a business strategy (Mayer et al., 2020). Successful business owners generally communicate effectively in implementing strategic

planning to convey the business mission. Research shows that communicating a clear and meaningful business mission increases market opportunities, motivates employees, and encourages teamwork and innovations (Al Hussaini, 2019). Also, Mayfield and Mayfield (2022), in a study, explored business communication during the COVID-19 pandemic. Communication provides transparency and clarity, which helps business owners adapt, improve business practices, and make business success manageable (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2022).

Further, Kollat and Farache (2017) explored how customers respond to corporate social responsibilities on social media. In sharing information, the owners or leaders increase trustworthiness, favorability, purchase intentions, performance, and positive reputation and evaluation (Kollat & Farache, 2017). Effective communication help shape the stakeholders' motivation and help the business owner implement a strategic plan. Strategies can have positive and negative consequences for a business. Tetiana et al. (2017) explored strategic planning and management decision-making. Considering market conditions and economic stability is the right approach to strategic planning and implementation (Tetiana et al., 2017). Carefully considered strategies can improve business performance. Business owners have a role in performing economic analysis and making a business commitment before engaging in a commercial project Puiu et al., (2022) and strategically managing the risks Setiawan et al., (2021), ensuring that the strategies compliments long-term goals (Fulgoni, 2018). Also, Saxena and Dhar (2021), in a study to explore strategies for building brand image, found that business owners need to focus on identifying unexploited benefits and implementing a robust brand strategy to

achieve a brand image, ensuring business value (Saxena & Dhar, 2021). Successful business owners conduct market research by (a) defining the business problem and setting objectives, (b) developing the plan, (c) collecting the information, (d) analyzing the information, and (e) making a business decision (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Recent strategic planning includes (a) defining the scope, parameters, and models for analysis; (b) using models to investigate improvement, stability, and declining competitive advantage; (c) studying situations and strategies for models to determine position-keeping or exit strategy which at times is costly; (d) selecting the right strategy; and (e) implementing and adjusting strategy (Dyer et al., 2016). To complement the five stages of market research, the business owner can analyze cost impact and payoff and implement the plan using responsibility charts and project management techniques (Jacobs & Chase, 2017). Straker et al. (2021) explored the understanding of business solutions using market research and customer input. Business owners who use correctly done market research to make strategic moves, innovate products and services, and promote sales (Straker et al., 2021). An example of a business owner's strategic move is the branding strategy by identifying and choosing brand elements across products and services sold (Kotler & Keller, 2016). A study by Purwati et al. (2020) on the impact of quality and service on customer satisfaction and loyalty and Hussain et al. (2018) on a measurement scale for performance evaluation found products and services innovation will increase customer loyalty Purwati et al. (2020), business well-being, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability (Hussain et al., 2018). Loyal customers will make repeated purchases, buy other products from the same business owner, recommend them to

friends, and are not likely to switch to rival products (Purwati et al., 2020). Another strategic move explored and published in literature is the effect of forecasting business activities. Jacobs and Chase (2017) posited that business owners use forecasting to plan budgets, develop new products, make decisions, and control costs. Technology is critical to market strategy. Cuevas-Vargas et al. (2021) provided a study to explore the impact of resources and capacities on business performance and competitive advantage. Business owners showing early acknowledgment and visionary anticipation of potential technology shifts have a chance to strategically plan and implement marketing innovation, improve competitiveness, respond to threats, and improve business performance (Cuevas-Vargas et al., 2021). The business owners' quick response help to minimize the impacts associated with disruptive events.

Other strategic business decision approaches include low-cost production, diversification, and expansion. Reducing the cost of production increases profits. To achieve the price goal and sell more than the competitors, the business owner, and the stakeholders must agree on the quality, price, and timing (Jacobs & Chase, 2017). Additionally, changes that create a low-cost base for a small business owner make it difficult for competitors to imitate. Spicer and Hyatt (2017) explored strategic processes to sell sustainable products and services. Competitors can also imitate the business activities of successful business owners without incurring costs. Therefore, business owners must understand the importance of implementing low-cost and countering imitation, increasing the market share (Hill et al., 2017). Nebus et al. (2021) examined constructs on imitation and commercialization barriers. Business owners can create

barriers against imitation through decreased knowledge spillover and product imitability by product design (Nebus et al., 2021). Such barriers help business owners perform above their competitors.

### **Transition**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that leisure and hospitality small business owners used to sustain their business during the COVID-19 pandemic from May 2020. In section 1, I laid out the foundation of the study to address; the background of the problem; the problem statement; the purpose statement; the nature of the study; the research question; the interview questions; the conceptual framework; operational definitions; assumptions, limitations, and delimitations, and significance of the study. The literature review focused on the following themes: conceptual theory, supporting theory, contrasting theory, the social and economic importance of small businesses, and business success strategies to explore the business strategies used by the participants in my study. The leisure and hospitality small business owners can achieve business model innovation using the blue ocean theory. Business model innovation being part of a business strategy will help small business owners sustain their business during disruptive events. In section 2, the role of the researcher, participants, research method, design, population and sampling, and ethical research. I used the blue ocean theory as a lens to explore the research. I also discussed data collection instruments, techniques, and analysis. Finally, I addressed reliability and validity. In section 3, I presented the findings, discussed the application to professional

practice, expressed implications for social change, discussed recommendations, reflected on the study, and concluded.

## Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I discuss the role of the researcher, participants, research method, design, population and sampling, and ethical research. I used the blue ocean theory as a lens to explore the research. I also discuss data collection instruments, techniques, and analysis.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that leisure and hospitality small business owners used to sustain their business during the COVID-19 pandemic from May 2020. The target population for this study consisted of five leisure and hospitality small business owners in the central region of Texas who had successful business operations before the COVID-19 pandemic in May 2019 and during the COVID-19 pandemic from May 2020. The implication for positive social change includes the potential to increase the number of sustained leisure and hospitality small businesses. Sustained businesses may benefit the community by providing more employment opportunities, improving economic growth, and increasing tax revenues.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I was the primary data collection instrument and recorder. According to Henderson (2018), researchers have the role of collecting data using similar questions in multiple interviews, transcribing, and analyzing. Collins and Stockton (2022) explored the interplay of the interviewer as a character and the researcher as an actor. Researchers, as instruments, have a role in creating space for participants to convey ideas freely (Collins & Stockton, 2022). A successful researcher must have the technical skills to



engage participants and interpret data (Cluley et al., 2020). Additionally, I was responsible for choosing the suitable research method and design, target population, and location. As a researcher, I also ensured reliability and validity were achieved. The researcher collects data ethically, as described in the Belmont Report's ethical principles, which include respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. I complied with the professional expectation of this research as outlined in the Belmont Report by acquiring informed consent, assessing the risks and benefits, and selecting suitable subjects (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979).

The researcher has the role of mitigating biases. Before interviewing the participants, researchers can limit bias by introducing the study and establishing rapport (Bergen & Labonte, 2020). Researchers can build rapport by approaching the interviewee with openness and curiosity and presenting the research project before the interview (McGrath et al., 2019). Another strategy to mitigate bias is using the interview protocol. According to Castillo-Montoya (2016), interview protocol strengthens reliability and ensures data quality. Additionally, I incorporated personal journals to mitigate bias. The interview protocol ensured the interview questions aligned with the research questions and that the transition to the next question was also logical (Tine & Ellis, 2022). Member checking is also valuable for mitigating bias because a researcher can validate participants' responses, ensuring credibility and trustworthiness (Motulsky, 2021). As a researcher, I ensured I achieved data saturation to mitigate bias. I measured saturation by constructing a saturation table and using codes to identify themes (Lowe et al., 2018).

## **Participants**

I used participants as a source of research for the study based on their business experience. I interviewed a purposeful sample of leisure and hospitality small business owners in the central region of Texas. The specific job title of the participants is a small business owner. All participants owned and operated a leisure and hospitality business where they implemented survival and resilience strategies to sustain their businesses from the beginning stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in May 2020. To conduct successful research, a researcher must identify a suitable and committed participant that can be interviewed and observed (Wright, 2020). I verified the eligibility criteria alignment by reviewing potential participants through the Killeen chamber of commerce, internet search, and social media. I gained access by sending a participant email and requesting possible participation on social media, as shown in Appendix B and C, respectively, and visiting and introducing my study and myself to the leisure and hospitality business owners. Establishing a working relationship is essential to achieving successful research. Successful researchers ensure trustworthiness, professionalism, compassion, and positive interactions before participants consent to participate in the study (Kraft et al., 2020). Building rapport provides a comfortable environment ensuring participants' willingness to participate in the research (Gidron et al., 2020). I established a professional working relationship with potential participants by providing constant communication, convenient interview locations and time, and maintaining privacy and confidentiality.

## **Research Method and Design**

### **Research Method**

A qualitative method was used for the study. The qualitative approach allowed me to explore five leisure and hospitality small business owners' strategies to sustain their business during the COVID-19 pandemic from May 2020. Researchers use the qualitative method to collect and analyze diverse data, and it can be used to explore little-known phenomena (Kohler et al., 2022). Because of its diversity, flexibility, and applicability, the qualitative method can be applied to business management in different situations (Balachandran, 2021). This method was appropriate because I sought the business owners' input regarding their strategies to sustain business in a disruptive event. Qualitative researchers rely on qualitative data. According to Bansal et al. (2018), qualitative data include nonreducible text, words, and visuals. This method was reliable because I relied on interviews and observation. In the quantitative research method, the researchers use numerical variables to describe findings (Kolkova et al., 2022). Additionally, quantitative studies are based on classification, measurement, and analysis schemes (Zyphur & Pierides, 2020). This method was not appropriate for my research because I did not use any numerical data. Researchers use the mixed method when both qualitative and quantitative data are required. Researchers can use a qualitative case study, and the data collected can be standardized or reduced into quantitative data (Gilad, 2021).

## **Research Design**

The multiple case study design was used for this qualitative study. Case studies allow the researcher to use already developed theoretical propositions to guide design, data collection, and analysis. With multiple sources of evidence available, the researcher can converge data by triangulation. Also, I used a case study because I could pose a research question and interview questions that seek to explain who, what, where, how, and why (Yin, 2018). The case study was also ideal because it allowed the researcher to explore similar individual cases in real life and for an extended period (Harwati, 2019). Therefore, I used a case study to study multiple leisure and hospitality small business owners.

I also considered other research designs, such as phenomenological and ethnographic. Researchers use phenomenological design to study participants' subjective experiences (Dienes et al., 2022). Researchers focusing on learning participants' personal meanings, such as their understandings, experiences, and sense-making, will use a phenomenological design (Larkin et al., 2019). Also, phenomenological design is used to describe the meaning of a consciously lived experience (Arnout et al., 2020). I did not use phenomenological design because exploring small business owners' survival and resilience strategies will not require studying their personal lived experiences. Researchers use ethnographic research design to understand participants' social and cultural meanings, such as their values, beliefs, and language (Kassan et al., 2020).

Additionally, the participants must be fully enculturated with a specific culture (Kamid et al., 2021). Also, researchers participating in and observing social groups will

use an ethnographic research design (Argyriadis, 2021). I did not use an ethnographic research design because exploring small business owners' survival and resilience strategies did not require studying their social or cultural meanings. Data saturation in qualitative research ensures the validity of the study. The data saturation point was reached when satisfactory data was achieved (Mthuli et al., 2021). I asked multiple small business owners the same questions and reviewed data continuously during the interview. I measured saturation by constructing a saturation table and used codes to identify themes (Lowe et al., 2018). Using the measure, I ensured no new data, themes, or coding.

### **Population and Sampling**

I used a purposeful sampling method for this qualitative research study. The participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview to elicit their survival and resilience strategies to sustain their business during the COVID-19 pandemic from May 2020. Researchers use purposeful sampling by carefully profiling participants to achieve rich and representative data (Hjertstrand et al., 2021). Researchers focusing on the following characteristics of the proposed study will need a smaller sample: a narrow scope of the research question, an obvious topic, richer data, a limited aim of the study, specific participant characteristics in relation to the aim of the study, more developed theoretical background, richer interviews, and in-depth analysis of few participants (Sim et al., 2018). Guest et al. (2020) explored the assessment and reporting of data saturation. Five to six interviews provided rich data with little new information from additional data collection (Guest et al., 2020). Because of the nature of my study, a sample of five leisure and hospitality small business owners would be appropriate. Lowe et al. (2018) studied

measuring thematic saturation using a statistical model. A helpful saturation index helps researchers improve the transparency and rigor of data analysis. I measured saturation by constructing a saturation table and using codes to identify themes (Lowe et al., 2018). After recruitment and selection, I scheduled an interview with the participants at their business offices.

### **Ethical Research**

Researchers are required to follow a set of ethical standards required for conducting research. To ensure ethical conduct, researchers must understand core ethical considerations such as the study's risks, benefits, vulnerability, confidentiality, and privacy because of ethical implications, outcomes, and consequences to the community (Kaewkungwal & Adams, 2019). Considering the core ethical conduct, the researcher will have a reason for choosing a specific population for study (Saunders et al., 2015). Informed consent was obtained from the participants before conducting the interviews. Obtaining informed consent helps with decision-making authority and the process of approaching the participants (Kaewkungwal & Adams, 2019). Participants must be informed and allowed to withdraw at any time. The recommendation for researchers is not to start research with a more significant potential for participant withdrawals. Successful researchers also ensured the selection of reliable participants, informed consent, fewer restrictions, incentives, and the ability to withdraw at any time (Fernandez Lynch, 2020). A properly executed consent process will allow participants to refuse or accept study participation (Gogtay et al., 2021). In addition to building rapport with the

participants, I ensured a properly informed consent process allowing the participants to decide whether to participate in the study.

Though Hysong and McGuire (2022) proposed participation compensation, participation in my study was voluntary and did not offer any financial incentives to participants. Researchers must ensure that the ethical protection of participants is adequate. To ensure ethical research, researchers must seek ethics approval from the institutions' Ethics Committee and obtain informed consent before starting the interview process (Favaretto et al., 2020). Additionally, proper recruitment, an informed consent process, and the right to participate or withdraw (Gonzalez-Saldivar, et al., 2019). To ensure ethical conduct, I established rapport by providing information about the study and allowing participants to ask questions before signing the consent form. Participants were allowed to withdraw at any time without penalty. I will safely maintain participants' data for 5 years to protect their rights. Also, the final doctoral manuscript included the Walden IRB approval number. Researchers must protect participants' privacy and confidentiality. Successful researchers protect participants' data by de-identification before publishing research work (Maritsch et al., 2022). To preserve privacy and ensure confidentiality, I removed all identifiable information and assigned the participants as T100, T200, T300, T400, and T500.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

I was the primary data collection instrument. Researchers use semi-structured interviews to allow the conversation to take its course and let an interviewee share a narrative about a given topic (Hanson et al., 2017). Therefore, I conducted face-to-face

and phone-recorded interviews using similar semi-structured questions on each interviewee to facilitate dialogue and gain insight. I implemented instrumentation rigor through deliberate planning and communication with the participants regarding the study to enable interaction and communication and extract valuable data to achieve reliability. To achieve instrumentation rigor, researchers prepared adequately in advance, remained flexible, stayed humble, ensured teamwork, and used open-ended questions (Chenail, 2011).

Additionally, to achieve rigor, Saunders et al. (2015) suggested using the “five Ps,” which are prior, planning, prevent, poor, and performance. Using the “five Ps,” researchers acquired the knowledge needed for the research, developed the interview themes, shared with the interviewee before the interview, selected an appropriate location for the interview, and ensured thorough discussion and participation (Saunders et al., 2015). Before commencing my research, I prepared and contacted the interviewees to confirm the scheduled interview. The location of the interview was the business owner’s office. I ensured I used open-ended research and interview questions and made the interview session as interactive as possible. Successful researchers implemented an interview protocol by ensuring the interview questions aligned with the research question, constructed an inquiry-based conversation, and received feedback (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Additionally, successful researchers use interview protocol to manage the time, the questions, and the participants (Bronnimann, 2022). I used the interview protocol, as shown in Appendix A, during my interview with the participants to strengthen reliability and improve the quality of the data collected. Researchers minimized bias by



acknowledging their mental discomfort, preparing enough ahead of time, and conducting appropriate interviews (Chenail, 2011). I mitigated bias through multiple sources and member checking to ensure I remained objective and transparent in the interpretation of data.

Researchers also minimize bias by listening carefully to assimilate and follow the meaning of a large amount of information (Yin, 2018). I chose a quiet location with minimal disruption, which helped me to hear and understand the information.

Researchers achieved validity by implementing clarity in collecting and interpreting data and presenting a transparent and methodological process, therefore minimizing distortion (Teusner, 2016). According to Chenail (2011), triangulating data helped researchers increase validity. Researchers ensure validity and research quality by saturating data (Lowe et al., 2018). I used multiple sources and cross-checked my sources to ensure the depth and quality of the data. Researchers conduct member checking to validate participants and explore credibility (Motulsky, 2021). After my interview, I conducted member checking to increase the trustworthiness of my study.

### **Data Collection Technique**

Qualitative researchers use interviews, documentation, and observation as data collection techniques. Researchers use qualitative interviews to explore participants' experiences and perceptions (McGrath et al., 2019). In addition to interviews, other forms of data collection in a case study include documentation review and observation (Thelwall & Nevill, 2021). I used in-depth semi-structured questions (Appendix A) for face-to-face and phone-recorded interviews to collect data from multiple participants. To

prepare and ensure a step-by-step procedure for asking the interview questions, Tine and Ellis (2022) recommended that researchers use interview protocol to transition from one question to the other (Tine & Ellis, 2022). I used an interview protocol in Appendix A as a guide during the interview process. I scheduled the interview meeting for 30-45 minutes and silenced the cell phones to ensure an uninterrupted meeting. Interviews have advantages and disadvantages. Some of the interview advantages are as follows: the suitability to reveal mental processes and, therefore, rich verbal and non-verbal data; the ability to be conducted in person or electronically; the use of interview protocol which ensures consistency and, hence neutrality and validity; and ability to clarify responses and generate additional details (Dolczewski, 2022). Some disadvantages of interviews are subjectiveness and hidden meaning, which can be misinterpreted (Gavin, 2022). Further, Dolczewski (2022) posited obtaining data through interviews requires complex analysis.

Qualitative researchers use member checking to mitigate the disadvantages associated with interview data collection. Researchers use member checking to verify the accuracy of the data collected (Motulsky, 2021; Naidu & Prose, 2018). Further, researchers use member checking to allow participants to make additional contributions and amendments to collected data (Brear, 2019). Furthermore, researchers use member checking to ensure the rigor and credibility of the research (De Loyola Gonzalez-Salgado et al., 2022). After completing the data collection, I sent the transcription to the participants for review as part of the member-checking process and included any additional information as needed.

### **Data Organization Technique**

Organized and managed data are readily available and accessible to researchers when ready for analysis and future access (Ismail et al., 2022). I audio-recorded the interviews following the interview protocol (Appendix A) and used Microsoft Excel to organize the data. I used a notebook and a pen to document interview notes and observations of the participant. After the interviews, I used Microsoft Word to transcribe data and provide the interpretation to the participants for member checking. I also used Microsoft Excel to document participant information and coding. Organizing data in such a manner allowed easy access and sense-making. I will destroy all raw data after five years by shredding excel spreadsheets and the notebook. I will destroy the electronic recorder by deleting all the information related to the research.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a critical process in the research process. Researchers use data analysis to reduce and display data, making it possible to interpret and verify (Mattimoe et al., 2021). Qualitative researchers use content, narrative, discourse, thematic, grounded theory, and interpretive phenomenological as data analysis methods. Researchers use content analysis to summarize, classify, compare, and numerically express findings (Kilic, 2022). Researchers use narrative analysis to analyze personal, interpersonal, positional, and ideological data (Jannesari et al., 2022). Researchers also use discourse analysis by combining language and social theories to analyze data regarding power and inequalities (Leotti et al., 2022). Additionally, researchers use thematic analysis to identify patterns, similarities, and themes (Robinson, 2022). Nowell et al. (2017) added

that researchers use thematic analysis to identify, organize, describe, and report themes found during the data collection process. Further, researchers use grounded theory analysis to create a new theory from original data that can be used to analyze the existing problem (Lin et al., 2022). Furthermore, researchers use interpretive phenomenological analysis to explore participants' personal experiences, considering the connection between the participant's narrative and emotions (Dabengwa et al., 2020).

Based on the previous definition of various data analysis methods, I used thematic analysis for this qualitative study. Methodological and data triangulation help strengthen a study. Successful researchers with different points of view using multiple sources achieve triangulation and therefore ensure the credibility of their research (Collins & O'Riordan, 2022; Jentoft & Olsen, 2019). Heesen et al. (2019) recommended that methodological triangulation strengthens a study because of the convergence of multiple methods supporting one conclusion. I used data triangulation and thematic analysis to achieve credibility in my research by comparing the findings after the interview with peer-reviewed studies before the final study and new peer-reviewed studies on themes identified in the study. Researchers can choose to use either manual or technological approaches in data analysis. I used a manual approach for data analysis. I transcribed recorded collected data into a word document while incorporating notes that I took. After member checking, I transferred data into Microsoft Excel and began identifying patterns and similarities in the data. With all the similarities and patterns identified, I coded and created labels for the themes generated with the color-coding system. After completing the coding and theme identifications, I searched for keywords and phrases in the literature

review and other new sources for correlation. I also correlated the blue ocean theory with the themes identified. Researchers using technical methods such as NVivo achieve better organization, storage, software compatibility with most research designs, compatibility with thematic analysis, effective and efficient coding to identify themes, time saver, and efficient retrieval of relevant information (Mattimoe et al., 2021). I did not use NVivo because of being located in a secure government building that prohibited internet connection.

### **Reliability and Validity**

#### **Reliability**

Reliability refers to replication and consistency, in which reasonable researchers could conduct a similar research project and produce the same findings, observations, or conclusions (Saunders et al., 2015). Researchers minimize research errors and biases by conducting reliable research (Yin, 2018). To achieve consistency, Sevilmis and Yildiz (2021) recommended data coding, identifying themes, and using other persuasive evidence to compare different viewpoints, similarities, and differences. I formed themes and codes to ensure consistency for this research. According to Singh et al. (2021), dependability is maintaining the consistency of data collection and analysis methods. Researchers use member checking to ensure the researcher and the participants get a chance to review and discuss the research data and make necessary adjustments (Caretta & Perez, 2019). Additionally, transcript review allows the researcher and the participant to review and amend research data (Rowlands, 2021). I used interviews, interview protocol (Appendix A), thematic analysis, and member checking to ensure dependability.

**Validity**

Validity refers to the appropriateness of the measure used, the results' accuracy, and the findings' generalizability (Saunders et al., 2015). Research validity helps to ensure truthfulness (Teusner, 2016). Researchers use triangulation during data collection to ensure credibility because using multiple sources helps confirm validity (Saunders et al., 2015). To ensure triangulation, I used various data sources in the research. DeCino and Waalkes (2019) suggested member checks with the participants and, in some cases, peers to help strengthen credibility. Additionally, Madill and Sullivan (2018) noted researchers must ensure validity by cross-checking sources for in-depth and quality data collection. I provided the participants with a summary and interpretation of the collected data and requested their review and feedback. Transferable research work allows a new researcher to apply the original study's results to the new setting (Singh et al., 2021). Confirmability ensures the interpretation of the findings is found in the data collected (Makel et al., 2022; Tuval-Mashiach, 2021). I ensured confirmability by using participants' responses, and detailed notes taken during the interview process to write up findings. Data saturation is another validation process. Researchers reach saturation point when little or no information is achieved about the phenomena (Kausar, 2020). To achieve data saturation, I coded the data and identified themes and meanings to the point of saturation.

**Transition and Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore strategies that leisure and hospitality small business owners used to sustain their business during the

COVID-19 pandemic from May 2020. In Section 2, I described the role of the researcher and participants, identified the research method and design, and described and justified the population and sampling. Also, I discussed the ethical research, identified the data collection instruments, described the data collection technique, the data organization technique, and the data analysis. I concluded the section by identifying how to address reliability and validity. In section 3, I presented the findings, discussed the results' applicability to professional practice, expressed the implications of social change, discussed recommendations, reflected on the study, and concluded the study.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that leisure and hospitality small business owners used to sustain their business during the COVID-19 pandemic from May 2020. I collected data from open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews of five leisure and hospitality small business owners who implemented survival and resilience strategies to sustain their businesses from the beginning stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in May 2020. Participation was voluntary, and participants signed a consent form before the interviews. I conducted four interviews in person and one interview over the phone because the participant was on a business trip and could not be available in person.

After the interview, I interpreted and transcribed each interview data into a word document and emailed it to participants for member checking. All the participants agreed with their transcription content. Using thematic analysis, I analyzed data using Microsoft Excel to code and identify themes. I completed data analysis by linking identified themes to the overarching research question, searching for keywords and phrases in the literature review and other new sources for correlation, and correlating the blue ocean theory with the themes identified. I used data triangulation to compare all transcribed interview data regarding successful leisure and hospitality small business owners' strategies to sustain their business during the COVID-19 pandemic from May 2020.



## **Presentation of the Findings**

The overarching research question for this qualitative multiple case study was: What strategies did leisure and hospitality industry small business owners use to sustain their business during the COVID-19 pandemic? During the interview, three themes emerged: resources, customer service, and communication. I used T100, T200, T300, T400, and T500 codes instead of actual names to protect the participants' identities.

### **Theme 1: Resources**

Participants found resources the most significant theme to emerge because of the frequency used in their responses. Business owners prioritize the use of resources to keep their businesses open. T100 and T400 mentioned cutting costs on other services, introducing single-sized items, and downsizing staff were viable actions for business owners because of low business during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. In implementing the cuts mentioned, the business owner could reduce the service cost to attract customers and provide value for their money. T200 expressed personnel and budget as essential resources that kept the business open. A healthy team helped the owner divide and separate the groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. T200 mentioned that, despite no downsizing, the operation hours shifted when some staff called in sick to reduce pressure on the remaining staff. T300 and T500 said prioritizing resources by downsizing, opening for to-go only, and reducing employee salaries to keep the business open. T300 also mentioned using multiple suppliers to reduce costs.

This finding confirmed knowledge of resources in peer-reviewed studies from the literature review. A business owner's strategic management can help business owners or

managers break resource constraints (Hsian-Ming & Hsin-Feng, 2020). Additionally, Dyer et al. (2016) found business owners or managers use available resources to create value for customers and businesses. In tying the resource aspect to the conceptual framework, Rahmat et al. (2019) examined strategic planning from a resource-based perspective. Business owners can implement a cost reduction strategy by implementing a functional capability of operations, research, and design, which can help effectively utilize resources and value creation for products and services. The importance of resources in business is supported by new existing literature. Villafanez et al. (2020) examined resources and project prioritization and suggested business owners managing business processes with a constrained budget can allocate resources based on priorities. As mentioned by the participants, cutting or reducing costs is proportional to lean process improvement. Gyorgy (2020), examining the efficiency improvement methods, suggested business owners or managers must determine and set the value of products and services based on customer perspective and willingness to pay therefore fulfilling the element of increasing the buyer value in the blue ocean theory. Additionally, as expressed by the participants, downsizing is associated with business value. Alnahedh and Alrashdan (2021), examining the relationship between downsizing and long-term business value, found downsizing improved productivity efficiency by reconfiguring resources and reducing costs.

## **Theme 2: Customer Service**

Customer Service was the second most significant theme to emerge during the interviews. Though resources are essential in ensuring the businesses stay open, T100

expressed the importance of customer service dedicated staff provide to help address the barriers or challenges business owners, or managers go through. T200 added that effective customer service allowed employees to give the customers the products or services required by the customer. Additionally, T500 mentioned improved customer service after every customer visit increased repeat purchases. This finding confirmed knowledge of customer service in peer-reviewed studies from the literature review.

Galpin (2019), exploring business strategy, found business owners or managers emphasizing vital customer service and responsiveness to customer needs can compete effectively in the market. Also, Liwei et al. (2021) examined employee customer service and found customer service was important in understanding and meeting customers changing needs. Pham et al. (2022) examined customer co-creation behaviors by tying the customer service aspect to the conceptual framework. Interaction between employees and customers helps shape the customer experience and facilitate value creation.

Effective customer service in business is also supported in the new existing literature. Anwer et al. (2020) examined business purchase decisions. Dedicated staff can provide the necessary customer service and improve performance; therefore, employees and the organization must have congruency in their values. Additionally, business owners and employees considering customer or buyer value in decision-making will understand how to position products and services to improve sales (Anwer et al., 2020). Yaacob (2013) suggested that customer-oriented service starting from planning, designing, and service, helped enhance the value and reduce cost because customer feedback can be used to improve products and services and reduce waste.

### **Theme 3: Communication**

Communication was the third most significant theme to emerge during the interviews. T100 mentioned communicating price adjustments for their units, while T200 and T300 shared the deals on selected products with their customers. All the participants communicated with customers and suppliers about their operations during the COVID-19 pandemic period, emphasizing the safety precautions. T100 mentioned communication as an element enabling business owners to take care of staff who value and support the business goals. T200 emphasized that communication helped the employees remain healthy by remaining grouped in assigned teams and shifts and communicating changes in their health. T300 ensured communication through direct conversation and signs being used in addressing some of the barriers regarding safety noncompliance by some customers.

This finding confirmed knowledge of communication in peer-reviewed studies from the literature review. Khudair and Khalil (2021), investigating change strategies, suggested that communication helps business owners or managers educate stakeholders on the advantages and benefits of the change process. Communication was important during COVID-19 pandemic because of the need for change it brought to the organizations, employees, suppliers, and customers. Lawrence et al. (2019), examining strategies for managing profitability, found frequent effective communication helps business owners and employees meet customer needs and empower the customers continuously take advantage of products and services offered for sale. Additionally, Kotler and Keller (2016) and Shahrzad et al. (2020) suggested business owners and

employees use communication to convey meaningful information about their products and services. During the COVID-19 pandemic, participants communicated with suppliers, employees, and customers to keep their business operations and efforts to remain open. In tying the communication aspect to the conceptual framework, Hossain and Gilbert (2021), exploring the role of communication and value creation, found that seller-buyer interaction leads to increased satisfaction and support value. The new existing literature also supported communication effectiveness in business. Gesell et al. (2021) recommended that business owners and employees provide high-quality information to improve customer satisfaction and business performance in a study to examine the relationship between communication and performance.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

Based on the findings of this study, resources, customer service, and communication are effective strategies that leisure and hospitality small business owners or managers can use to sustain their businesses in future disruptive events. Business owners or managers using the findings of this study may: effectively utilize resources by reconfiguring resources and reducing costs, effectively navigate a disrupted market because of strong customer service and responsiveness to customer needs, and convey meaningful information about their products and services through effective communication. Overall, the business owners or managers using the findings may increase their business's resiliency and survival rates during a disruptive event.

To effectively utilize resources, business owners or managers may reconfigure resources and reduce costs. Dolbec et al. (2022), who explored resource reconfiguration

and market adaptation, expressed business owners or managers reconfigure resources to manage competing requirements and terminate the use of resources that pose high risks of not meeting the business goals. Additionally, in a study to examine resource management and product innovation, Tieng et al. (2020) found that although innovation was achieved through internal and external collaboration, due to limited resources, small businesses or managers achieve innovativeness by reconfiguring and utilizing existing resources.

Business owners or managers may use customer service to meet customer needs effectively. Swallehe (2021), examining service delivery and customer satisfaction, suggested business owners, managers, and employees provide quality service to improve business image, performance, and resource management. Additionally, Mashru et al. (2021) studied service quality and customer satisfaction. Responsiveness in relation to quality customer service entails maintenance of speed and quality of service, immediate service, and addressing special requests.

Communication is a strategy that business owners, managers, and employees may use to inform customers about their operations, products, and services. Globocnik et al. (2022) studied to determine the effects of negative messaging and found negative messaging can negatively affect the relationship between business owners or managers and the stakeholders. On the other hand, business owners or managers using educated communication can send positive messages and successfully manage their businesses (Globocnik et al., 2022).

### **Implications for Social Change**

The implications for positive change include tangible strategies for leisure and hospitality small business owners or managers to sustain their businesses, contributing to improved economic growth, job creation, and income distribution. The benefits to the community include reduced poverty, steady employment, stable income, improved well-being and health, reduced reliance on government welfare programs, and the ability to give back to the community through investments. Giuliani et al. (2021) in a study to explore shared value in small businesses found that economic growth is a priority for business owners or managers. Business owners can achieve economic growth by implementing strategies to increase productivity and prosperity (Giuliani et al., 2021).

Additionally, Dianu et al. (2021) studied the role of entrepreneurship on economic development. Resilient and strategic small business owners increase profitability, adding value to their businesses (Dianu et al., 2021). The more business owners sustain their businesses, the more they retain and create new employment opportunities for the people in the community (Giuliani et al., 2021; Rekkas, 2021). To further expand on the benefits of small businesses in the community, Joseph et al. (2021) studied the role of local businesses in the community. Small business owners who keep their businesses open create employment opportunities for families, contributing to the local economy (Joseph et al., 2021). Also, in a study on the relationship between small businesses and poverty, Belitski et al. (2021) posited an increase in the number of small business owners sustaining their businesses to help reduce poverty in communities. Bansal and Singh (2020) in a study examined other ways small business owners can eliminate poverty.

Small business owners in the community can empower the underprivileged by providing resources to start their businesses, generate income, and uplift the standard of living for the new entrepreneurs and their communities (Bansal & Singh, 2020).

### **Recommendations for Action**

The first recommendation is for small leisure and hospitality business owners to prioritize, reconfigure resources, and reduce costs to utilize resources to be profitable. Business owners and managers must pay attention to the business's internal environment, which includes the resources and capabilities (Dyer et al., 2016). Business owners or managers might get support from employees on resource utilization and effect change through education, communication, participation, and engagement (Khudair & Khalil, 2021).

The second recommendation is to ensure all employees provide exceptional customer service to retain and attract customers. Business owners, managers, and employees must invest in customer service as a strategy to be profitable (Park et al. 2021). Further, customer service helps business owners maintain a competitive advantage (Galpin, 2019). Business owners or managers may use the shortfalls based on customer inquiries or complaints to set the baseline for their employees to improve customer service (You et al., 2020). Knowing what the customers are looking for may result in employees enhancing the quality of service.

The third recommendation is to establish a robust business relationship through communication. Communication between business stakeholders helps identify and meet customer needs, leading to improved sales and profits (Lawrence et al., 2019).



Additionally, communication helps manage the knowledge flow among the stakeholders (Gressgard et al., 2014). The flow of knowledge and ideas help the stakeholders improve business performance (Makhmoor & Rajesh, 2019). Business owners may establish a reliable information and communication platform where collaboration, communication, and innovation can be achieved (Saldanha et al., 2021). Therefore, having a reliable means of conveying meaningful information and openness of all stakeholders might benefit the business owners. The findings about resources, customer service, and communication could be used as a literature review in future studies and disseminated through training and conferences on implementing successful small business sustainability studies.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study aimed to explore the strategies leisure and hospitality small business owners in the central region of Texas used to sustain their business from the beginning stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in May 2020. Future researchers can apply a qualitative approach in another industry to help business owners improve business practices. This study was limited geographically. With the limitation, I only collected data from five leisure and hospitality small business owners in the central region of Texas. To ensure generalizability, future researchers might consider expanding the research area and increasing the sample size to replicate the findings of this study. Other limitations were participant availability and potential bias. The interviews were conducted within a scheduled time, and participants could adjust based on availability. I

used multiple sources and member checking to address potential bias and ensure objectivity and transparency.

### **Reflections**

My experience within the DBA Doctoral Study process has been challenging and rewarding at the same time. I have learned to utilize class cafes, academic skills support, and support resources to succeed academically. As a military leader aspiring to own a business in the future after retiring from military service and living in the community where these businesses operate, I had personal bias and preconceived ideas about business owners' successes. My personal themes included business owners' great ideas equating to great business, customer availability, and business owners' long-term experience. After completing the interviews one at a time, it became clear that the themes: of resources, customer service, and communication were significant for business owners in remaining resilient and able to keep their businesses open during the pandemic. Future leisure and hospitality small business owners may be able to use these findings to increase their business survival during a long-lasting crisis.

### **Conclusion**

A lack of survival and resilience strategies to sustain small businesses during a disruptive event can lead to business failures. Leisure and hospitality small business owners may benefit from implementing successful sustainability strategies to improve economic growth, job creation, and income distribution. The findings from this study included how leisure and hospitality business owners can remain resilient and sustainable

during a disruptive event by implementing strategies such as effective utilization of resources, customer service, and communication.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

The interview session will be conducted within 30-45 minutes.

1. Introduce and briefly explain the overview of the study.
2. Confirm the receipt of the informed consent form and the interview questions.
3. Provide the participant with a copy of the signed consent form.
4. Discuss measures to be taken for the privacy and confidentiality of the data to be collected.
5. Turn on the voice recording device.
6. Turn on the backup voice recording device.
7. Introduce the participant with the identification code, date, and time.
8. Present the interview questions in detail, starting with Question 1 in order to the last question.
  1. What strategies to sustain your business during the COVID-19 pandemic did you implement?
  2. What were the key barriers to implementing strategies to sustain your business during the COVID-19 pandemic?
  3. How did you address the key barriers to implementing strategies to sustain your business during the COVID-19 pandemic?

4. How did you pursue low-cost to achieve value innovation when implementing strategies to sustain your business during the COVID-19 pandemic?
  5. How did you increase buyer value to achieve value innovation when implementing strategies to sustain your business during the COVID-19 pandemic?
  7. Give an example or two where you achieved value innovation for your customers?
  8. Give an example or two where you achieved value innovation for your business?
  9. What additional information would you like to include about strategies to sustain your business during the COVID-19 pandemic?
9. Ask probing questions.
  10. Conclude the interview process and discuss the transcript review and member checking during a follow-up appointment that will be 5-15 minutes.

I informed the participant of the following during the transcript review and member-checking follow-up:

- a. I interpreted and synthesized the interview transcripts using paragraph format for each question.
- b. I provided a printed copy of the synthesis to the participant.
- c. I asked probing questions related to other information conforming to IRB approval.

d. I asked the participant if the synthesis was accurate or required an amendment.

11. Schedule transcript review and member checking interview.

12. Thank the participant for the interview opportunity, consideration, and participation in the study.

13. Turn off the voice recording device.

14. Turn off the backup voice recording device.

15. Affirm contact information for follow-up questions from the participant.

16. End the interview protocol.

## Appendix B: Participant Recruitment E-mail Invitation

Please Share Your Experience as a Leisure and Hospitality Small Business Owner

Dear Sir/Ma'am,

My name is Kip Cheruiyot, and I am a doctoral candidate for a Doctor of Business Administration at Walden University. As a requirement for completing the program, I request your participation in a research study on strategies for sustaining leisure and hospitality small businesses. The research study aims to explore strategies that leisure and hospitality small business owners used to sustain their business during the COVID-19 pandemic from May 2020. You meet the criteria for the study because you are a leisure and hospitality industry small business owner in the central region of Texas who might have implemented survival and resilience strategies to sustain your businesses from the beginning stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in May 2020.

Participation in the study is voluntary and confidential. Participation will involve a face-to-face or video conferencing initial interview and transcript review. Finally, I sent a link to the study upon its completion.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please don't hesitate to contact me by phone.

Very Respectfully,

Kip Cheruiyot

Doctoral Candidate

Walden University

### Appendix C: Social Media Post

#### Seeking Research Participants in the Leisure and Hospitality Industry

Looking for leisure and hospitality small business owners in the central region of Texas to participate in dissertation research to explore the survival and resilience strategies owners used to sustain businesses from the beginning stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in May 2020.

Participation in the study will allow you to positively contribute to the potential success of the local leisure and hospitality business owners and take an active role in establishing success standards for the leisure and hospitality industry. Additionally, your participation will contribute to positive social change by reducing the leisure and hospitality business failure rate, increasing employment opportunities, and increasing revenue for the local community.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please don't hesitate to contact me by phone.