

2022

## Sustainability Strategies of Small Nigerian Restaurants

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University

2022

Abstract

Sustainability Strategies of Small Nigerian Restaurants

by

Omotayo Adeniyi

MS, Walden University, 2013

BA, Kean University, 2011

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

March 2022

## Abstract

Fewer than half of small restaurants remain in the market after the first 5 years of operation. Small business leaders and policymakers are concerned with business failure due to the negative economic impacts on their employees and the local community. Grounded in the entrepreneurship theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies small restaurant owners use to sustain their operations beyond at least 5 years. Participants included four owners of small Nigerian restaurants who successfully operated their restaurants for more than 5 years. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and a review of internal documents. Using Yin's five-step thematic analysis process, three themes emerged, including (a) persistence in the face of failure, (b) positive energy and engagement, and (c) strategic finance and inventory management. A key recommendation is that business owners remain persistent, develop contingency plans to tolerate failure, and remain optimistic during complex economic challenges. Potential implications for positive social change include the potential of small restaurant owners to create more employment opportunities and improve people's living standards in communities served by successful restaurants.

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## Dedication

I would like to thank and dedicate this doctoral study to my number-one supporter: God, Jesus Christ. God has never forsaken me as He given me strength, knowledge, courage, and power. He sustains me by giving me an uplifting spirit. If not for Him, I would not be here today to continue and complete this journey He prepared for me.

To all the warriors who fought with me, my mother Adefunke Adeniyi and my grandmother Rose Aromolaran, I would not be here without their consistently deep prayers, motivation, and unconditional love. I also want to thank my mentors Anna Stathis and her husband Kenneth First, both of whom inspired me at the age of 11. From early on, I wanted to emulate their contributions as lawyer and accountant and like them become a role model for future generations. God has really blessed me with a supportive group of friends who are like family to me. To my best friend Latoya Inverary, who treats me like a sister, I thank you and appreciate you sticking with me through the good and bad times. When I was feeling discouraged at times and heading toward the dark side, you helped me see the light. To my best friend my better half, Moses O Chukwuebuka, thank you for coming into my life at the right time when I felt empty inside. Thank you for encouraging me and being patient with me throughout the difficult times.

Special thanks to Pastor Dr. Veronica P. Palmer for the consistent prayers and counseling on balancing life and trying to sustain my doctoral journey. Last but not least, I want to thank my three main supporters who played a major part in my success: J.P., T.A., and my big cousin, Kemi Adesida.

## Acknowledgments

I want to take this moment to express my gratitude to Dr. Mayer. I am honored, grateful, and fortunate to have had your assistance throughout this process. As my chair, mentor, and great leader, you have been a most consistent force and extremely patient with me through this long process. Dr. Mayer was not only a great help to me but also a source of support when I was going through turmoil with my finances and health condition, both of which forced me to take time off from the program. During such times, Dr. Mayer would comfort me saying, “Make sure you get better first before anything,” and “Your success is my success.” Those words gave me the motivation to be focused and persistent. Moreover, Dr. Mayer was knowledgeable about my health condition, one which, because of its link to certain ethnicities, is not well known by the general population. Without his support, dedication, and hard work, I would certainly not have been able to earn my degree.

I also want to acknowledge some important members of the committee who played a vital role in my journey and helped ameliorate the frustration and discouragement that I felt at times. These leaders, whom I highly respect and honor because of their encouraging words, always treated me as a friend. They helped me along the way, whether with a word of encouragement, a piece of advice, or assistance with proofreading my work. I thank you so much Dr. Freda Turner, Dr. Fred Walker, Dr. Paul Y. Lai, Dr. Reginald Taylor, Dr. Denise G., Dr. Yvonne Doll, and Dr. Ify, my university research reviewer.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Small restaurants have a notable positive impact on the economy by generating significant revenue and employment. In 2017, the U.S. restaurant industry generated \$800 billion and employed over 10% of the total U.S. workforce (Dixon et al., 2018). Researchers continue to raise concerns regarding restaurants' rising failure rate (Healy & Iomaire, 2019). For example, Irish food and drinks restaurants fail at a rate of 15% after 1 year of business, 37.6% after 3 years, and 53% after 5 years. Small businesses' failure rate is over 50% after 5 years (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2019). Restaurant failures imply a loss of tax revenue and local employment. In addition, the role of restaurants in fulfilling the human need to connect and interact socially is affected negatively (Jin et al., 2016). Restaurant failures affect the structure of modern cities; which business establishments often define.

### **Background of the Problem**

Sustainability challenges continue to plague small restaurants. Researchers have investigated the potential causes of failure in small restaurants extensively (Aynalem et al., 2016; Choi et al., 2018; Ishaque et al., 2016). Ishaque et al. (2016) believed that the inability to maintain quality customer service impacts small restaurants' sustainability. Service failure occurs when the expectations of consumers about the services provided by a restaurant are unmet. The disparity between expectations and actual service rendered tends to cause consumers to seek services elsewhere. The severity of service failure can range from trivial matters such as order delays to weighty concerns such as ineffective customer relations. Food safety is also a threat to restaurant sustainability as associated

adverse incidences cause clients to distrust an establishment (Seabra et al., 2018). The hedonic value and quality of food provided by small restaurants can affect consumers' perceptions and promote or inhibit business (Hsu et al., 2018). Menu innovation and high cooking standards are also critical to small restaurant sustainability.

Inadequate financial management is a threat to small restaurant sustainability as the industry experiences heightened cash flow sensitivity. Choi et al. (2018) contextualized financial management challenges as resource scarcity and risk-sharing characteristics. Labor concerns, including a reduction in labor supply, insufficient training of employees, and increases in the minimum wage, also influence small restaurant owners' capacity to sustain business operations (Aynalem et al., 2016; Yam et al., 2018). Thus, restaurant owners need to develop business strategies to overcome challenges to sustainability.

### **Problem Statement**

Owners of small restaurants have a high failure rate, a fact attributed to lack of business expertise (BLS, 2019). According to Yonk et al. (2017), 43% of all small businesses in the United States fail within the first 5 years. The general business challenge was that most restaurant owners start a business without understanding how to operate a successful business. The specific business problem is that some owners of small Nigerian restaurants lack the business strategies needed to sustain their operations beyond 5 years.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore business strategies that some owners of small Nigerian restaurants use to sustain their operations beyond 5 years. The target population for this study consisted of four owners and managers of three Nigerian restaurants located in Union, New Jersey, who have developed successful business strategies and have survived for at least 5 years. By developing successful strategies that sustain employment and contribute to local communities' economic success, successful business owners drive positive social change.

### **Nature of the Study**

Primary research methods include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed. Qualitative researchers explore the contextual awareness of research participants' thoughts and feelings (Karagiozis, 2018). A quantitative researcher examines relationships or differences among given variables and outcomes (Albers, 2017). A mixed-methods researcher combines quantitative and qualitative research methods (Karagiozis, 2018). Researchers using a mixed method or quantitative approach do not have the freedom to fully explore research participants' insights (Albers, 2017). I rejected both quantitative and mixed methods because I intend to explore a phenomenon and not examine relationships among variables. A qualitative method was the most appropriate method to explore the research question in my study.

Available qualitative research designs include phenomenology, ethnography, case study, grounded theory, and narrative research. Phenomenological researchers concentrate on the meanings of lived experiences of participants (Nigar, 2020).

Ethnographic researchers explore the culture of a group of people (Cardoso et al., 2017). Narrative researchers focus on finding meaning from the experiences of participants who lived and told stories (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2020). Grounded theory researchers use this research approach when they seek to develop a theory to describe a phenomenon (Regnault et al., 2018). I rejected both ethnography and phenomenology designs because the purpose of this study was to explore neither the meanings of participants' lived experiences nor a group's culture. Based on the study's purpose, grounded theory and narrative research were also inappropriate approaches. Researchers use a case study design to explore a bounded system with multiple data sources (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Because I intended to explore successful business strategies small Nigerian restaurant business owners use, a case study design was the most appropriate research design for this study.

### **Research Question**

What business strategies have some owners of small Nigerian restaurants used to sustain their operations beyond at least 5 years?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What business strategies do you use to sustain your operations?
2. What risk-taking strategies do you implement to sustain your operations?
3. How do you determine the success of your strategies in sustaining your operations?
4. What barriers have you encountered while implementing your strategies?
5. How do you overcome barriers to implementing your strategy?

6. Is there anything else you would like to share about what you do to sustain your operations?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Researchers use a conceptual framework to combine related concepts to clarify a research phenomenon (Collins & Stockton, 2018). As developed by Cantillon (1755), entrepreneurship theory served as the conceptual framework for this study. Key constructs and the proposition underlying the entrepreneurship framework include: (a) education, (b) work- and industry-specific experience, (c) knowledge, (d) cognitive ability, (e) competence or expertise, (f) motivation, and (g) creativity (Baptista et al., 2014; Chen & Chang, 2013; Ployhart et al., 2014). Cantillon (1755) described the entrepreneur as someone exercising good judgment and innovation despite uncertainty to achieve profitability and sustainability. Determinants that lead to success for small businesses are not easily discernible (Hatton, 2014). However, the basis of entrepreneurship theory is that there are identifiable determinants of success (Hatton, 2014). Management of entrepreneurship success strategies can lead to business success (Hatton, 2014). Cantillon's entrepreneurship theory provided a framework for understanding strategies that owners of small Nigerian restaurants use to sustain their operations for 5 years.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Consumer engagement:* Techniques used by owners of small businesses to build relationships with buyers and improve brand loyalty through individualized communication in multiple channels (Rajagopal, 2020).



*Entrepreneurship*: The processes involved in the initiation of small businesses, including designing, launching, and managing despite associated risks (Fritsch & Wyrwich, 2017; Głodowska, 2019).

*Knowledge management (KM)*: A system of creating, sharing, usage, and managing information about a business (Rahimi et al., 2017; Seyedyousefi et al., 2016).

*Sustainability*: The ability to maintain small restaurants' growth and performance depends on restauranters' unique circumstances and objectives (Cantele & Zardini, 2018).

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

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions refer to ideas formulated without evidence (Joshi et al., 2016). Assumptions are necessary for qualitative research to describe phenomena (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Wolgemuth et al. (2017) affirmed the pervasiveness of social, historical, and cultural assumptions in the methods researchers use to formulate research phenomena, conduct literature reviews, and define research questions. Thus, recognizing the presence and influence of assumptions is critical to ensuring the generation of reliable data, I assumed study participants would be honest and would possess a thorough knowledge of the strategies necessary to sustain small businesses. I also assumed a case-study design was an appropriate design to explore the phenomena related to this study.

#### **Limitations**

Limitations refer to study elements beyond the control of a researcher (Joshi et al., 2016). The generalizability of this study's results could be limited by time, financial, and

age of data constraints. Besides interviews, data I collected included some secondary sources such as internal reports. One limitation anticipated was the paucity of data maintained by the owners of these restaurants. If records are not current or if events beyond the business owner's control have compromised recordkeeping, data collection could present problems. A restaurant's sustainability may be affected by unforeseen conditions beyond the restaurant owner's control. As a result, the findings might fail to represent small Nigerian restaurant owners' success strategies.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are constraints defined by a researcher (Joshi et al., 2016). In this study, I restricted my focus to evaluating strategies used by restaurateurs and managers of small Nigerian restaurants in New Jersey. The delimitations are evident in the population, research design, and conceptual framework, thereby excluding other research designs, restaurants of other origins and themes, and potential conceptual frameworks. Time was also a limitation, as this study was conducted within 3 weeks. Also, to prevent escalated costs related to data collection and analysis, the engagement of a large number of participants was not possible. Thus, there was necessarily a limitation related to the size of the sample. I interviewed four participants from three small Nigerian restaurants in New Jersey. The limited number of participants was owing to time and resource restrictions for the current study

### **Significance of the Study**

The purpose of this research was to provide small business owners with possible strategies for business sustainability. Understanding effective entrepreneurial strategies

are fundamental to business success (Madu & Bakari, 2016), restaurant owners and society alike could benefit from the results of this study. Specifically, I intended to identify Nigerian small business restaurant owners' strategies to sustain businesses for more than 5 years. The contribution to positive social change lies in improving the quality of life and economic development for small business owners and impacted stakeholders.

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Small business owners could benefit from the results of this study. Knowledge of business strategies used by successful small business restaurant owners is essential because most small businesses fail within 5 years (Cagurangan, 2018). Madu and Bakari (2016) found that implementing effective entrepreneurial strategies results in positive business outcomes. The results from this study could benefit small Nigerian restaurant business owners and the communities being served. The study's findings might contribute to the knowledge of small business owners in northeast New Jersey and empower owners to develop effective strategies. As Schneider et al. (2016) stated, the ability to cope with environmental complexities is a recipe for success. Thus, applications of the findings can offer business owners the opportunity to accelerate business growth while overcoming economic hardships caused by business failure.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Society could benefit from the results of this study. Implications for social change include support for other productive industries and sustaining demand for goods and services from other small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The contribution of

small businesses surpasses the provision of employment opportunities as employees contribute to the advancement of households. Small business owners' collective endeavor to grow promotes innovation within communities and improves individuals' readiness to embrace change (Ribeiro-Soriano, 2017). Small businesses' success could also lead to employment growth and support for others that conduct business transactions with the restaurants.

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

In this section, I review relevant research articles, explain the conceptual framework and methodology of my research, and identify limitations and future research recommendations. The literature review will include in-depth analysis and discussion of studies relevant to my research. A literature review comprises research studies about the research question to provide insight and a fundamental basis for a research study (Winchester & Salji, 2016). The focus of this research concerned the strategic factors that could foster the success and growth of small businesses. This review also includes academic research highlighting challenges faced by small business owners of particular qualities or backgrounds. Literature reviews are an avenue to explore theoretical frameworks related to a study and identify gaps in the literature (Baker, 2016). The databases used to obtain peer-reviewed literature included Google Scholar, EBSCO Host, ProQuest, ABI/INFORM Complete, annual government reports, Science Direct, books, SBA, and LexisNexis Business. A significant proportion of the stated databases were retrieved from the Walden University online library. Additionally, I explored knowledge management, innovation, systems theory, and quality management.

Keywords used to locate and narrow existing studies include *small business, sustainability, business failure, small and medium-sized enterprises, SMEs, entrepreneurship, growth, restaurant, leadership, survival, knowledge management, quality management, management, qualitative case studies, business strategy, food service, social responsibility, Small Business Administration, SBA, small business failure, small business success, and leader personal characteristics*. A comprehensive search was necessary, and I used a multidisciplinary approach of search strategies. Over 95% of the search results were published within 5 years of my anticipated graduation date. The older references include seminal research.

Prior research offers insights into the strategies and practices used to sustain small businesses and reduce restaurant business failures. Inadequate KM and unstructured business strategies threaten business success (Nicholson & Rao-Graham, 2016). Using the entrepreneurship theory as my conceptual framework, I explored academic literature related to small businesses' successes and failures. The literature review includes 167 sources. There were a total of 235 sources. Of these sources, 94% were peer-reviewed. See Table 1 for a review of sources used in the study.

**Table 1***Sources Used in Study*

Sources	Published before 2018	Published 2018 or later	Total	Percentage of total
Peer-reviewed articles	66	172	238	94%
Non-peer-reviewed articles	3	6	9	4%
Books	1	4	5	2%
Total	70	182	252	100%
Percentage of total	28%	72%	100%	

In the literature review, I begin with a review of entrepreneurship theory. I then review two alternative theories that add to my insight into the research question: knowledge management theory and general systems theory. In the last two sections of the literature review, I focus on professional and academic literature related to small business success. The two primary topics I explore include research in small businesses and ethnic restaurant success.

### **Conceptual Framework: Entrepreneurship Theory**

As developed by Cantillon (1755), the entrepreneurship theory guided my current study and improved my understanding of restaurateurs' entrepreneurial behaviors and attitudes operating small Nigerian restaurants. Entrepreneurship theory is extensive, as numerous scholars have developed the concepts over time. Głodowska (2019) explained that entrepreneurship theory applies to the economic activity of individuals. According to

Cantillon, entrepreneurs' primary role in the economy is to enhance social and financial benefits to individuals, communities, and governments. Recent research has confirmed entrepreneurship as an effective method of boosting economic activity (Fritsch & Wyrwich, 2017). The entrepreneurship conceptual framework is appropriate for exploring strategies to sustain small Nigerian restaurants for more than 5 years. The theory frame dimensions the economic, psychological, sociological, anthropological, opportunity-based, and resource-based factors of the environments entrepreneurs operate in. I discuss each of the entrepreneurship theory elements related to small business sustainment below.

### ***Definition of Entrepreneurship***

Entrepreneurship theory perceives entrepreneurialism through multiple perspectives involving essential resources, risks, contribution to the economy, personality traits, culture, and opportunities. Głodowska (2019) recorded Cantillon's (1755) understanding of an entrepreneur as a self-employed individual who takes risks and buys goods for profitable sale in the future. Elements of Cantillon's definition are evident in recent entrepreneurship descriptions by other researchers outlining different aspects of entrepreneurship (Johansson et al., 2020). Researchers have depicted entrepreneurship as the conglomeration of personal action with new social, cultural, and economic aspects (Ribeiro-Soriano, 2017). The combination of the stated factors constituted the entrepreneurial ecosystems (Audretsch et al., 2019). Besides providing competition, entrepreneurs increase societal value by furnishing available resources, skills, and knowledge.

An analysis of entrepreneurial performance can help shed light on the drivers of successful entrepreneurial ventures. Other researchers have perceived entrepreneurship differently. An entrepreneur makes rational decisions and assumes the risk inherent in managing a specific business (Kier & McMullen, 2018). The stated definition aligns with the Schumpeterian entrepreneurship theory depicting innovation as central to economic development and the entrepreneur as the catalyst of innovation.

### *Economic Perspective*

The economic approach to entrepreneurship helps researchers explain the complexity of markets and entrepreneurship's role in driving the economy. Głodowska (2019) confirmed that entrepreneurship and the economy are intrinsically connected. Entrepreneurial activities are crucial to economic growth, industrial dynamics, and economic development (Fritsch & Wyrwich, 2017; Johansson et al., 2020; Ribeiro-Soriano, 2017). Entrepreneurs also drive significant wealth creation (Cantner et al., 2017; Fritsch & Wyrwich, 2017). Thus, entrepreneurs are salient contributors to local economies.

Economic theorists depict entrepreneurship as supportive of innovation, which enables entrepreneurs to create unique products. Innovation strengthens the competitive edge of small businesses (Vuong et al., 2016). Vuong et al. (2016) explored how entrepreneurs perceived innovation and creativity when starting their businesses. Vuong et al. defined creativity as both innovation and novel performance. The level of an entrepreneur's creativity determines the likelihood of starting a new business and individual perception of success. Vuong et al. argued that entrepreneurship growth



includes an essential pooling of talent and knowledge. In another study, Faggian et al. (2017) examined the type of talent required to grow an economy focused on human capital, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Faggian et al. found that measuring human capital by education achieves more significant employment growth than creativity. In other words, education was conducive to growth in the entrepreneurial sphere. Small businesses exist within imperfect market environments with heightened competition. Innovation ensures sustainment by providing consumers with relevant products depending on prevailing trends.

### ***Psychological Perspective***

The psychological perspective allows researchers to focus on the personal characteristics of entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurial theory posits that entrepreneurs exhibit a distinct set of personal characteristics (Hachana et al., 2018). For instance, entrepreneurs demonstrate a personal need for achievement, an affinity for risk, innovativeness, and heightened tolerance for ambiguity. The stated characteristics are instrumental in understanding the strategies used by small Nigerian restaurants to sustain businesses for over 5 years. Entrepreneur characteristics are associated with the personality traits theory (Murugesan & Jayavelu, 2017). According to personality traits theory, entrepreneurs tend to be driven by opportunities, be highly creative and innovative, and have improved business knowledge and skills. Entrepreneurs are also visionary and goal oriented (Kerr et al., 2018). A plausible conclusion based on the outlined characteristics is that people with high scores on each of the stated traits can sustain businesses for more extended periods than entrepreneurs with low scores.

The personality traits of entrepreneurs also affect entrepreneurial intention. Karabulut (2016) measured the relationship of need for achievement, entrepreneurship alertness, locus of control, and risk tolerance with entrepreneurial intentions. The results suggested that highly driven businesspeople remain vigilant of the internal and external environment for potential change. Karabulut also demonstrated an affinity for risk as a critical personality trait for enabling business ideas. Entrepreneurs with a high internal locus of control, risk tolerance, need for achievement, and entrepreneurial alertness demonstrated a need to prove themselves successful. Thus, Karabulut (2016) supported the concept that individual business traits are essential in a business's success.

### ***Sociological Perspective***

The sociological perspective focuses on the elements of society affecting entrepreneurship. The social factors include taboos, beliefs, values, customs, and religion. Entrepreneurship theorists posit that entrepreneurs are often required to conform to acceptable societal standards while operating small businesses. The sociological factors affecting entrepreneurship include four primary dimensions: (a) social networks, (b) life course stage, (c) ethnic identification, and (d) population ecology (Yokoyama & Birchley, 2019). Social networks are especially critical to entrepreneurship because entrepreneurs with wider social networks have access to extensive resources. Entrepreneurs can access better financial sources, maintain more robust relationships with consumers and other stakeholders, and obtain more accurate information regarding prevailing trends. A strategy of widening social networks often translates to improved access to skillful employees.

The sociological philosophy of entrepreneurship also perceives entrepreneurship as reliant on the life course stage, ethnic identification, and population ecology. The life course stage refers to the life situations of individuals who intend to become entrepreneurs. Different aspects characteristic of various points in life, such as age and experience, can influence entrepreneurship success. For instance, older individuals tend to have the financial and social resources necessary to succeed but often lack the motivation. Affinity to risk is significantly low in older persons (Gielnik et al., 2018). Individuals below the age of 45, on the other hand, have high motivation and affinity for risk compared to older individuals but tend to be inhibited by scarcity of resources and social networks. As a result, differing life course stages influence the ability to venture and succeed in entrepreneurship. Ethnic identification concerns the decisive “push” to venture into entrepreneurship and succeed. Persons originating from families of entrepreneurs tend to display an intrinsic motivation to succeed (Stoolman, 2018). Successful entrepreneurs also originate from disadvantaged families or communities driven by the need to disentangle themselves from poverty and make life better. A population’s ecology manifests through the political environment, government policy, employees, and competition (Matusik, 2016; Ozaralli & Rivenburgh, 2016). The factors outlined above were essential in analyzing small Nigerian restaurant owners’ strategies to sustain business past the first 5 years. The ecology of the population involved, life course stage of entrepreneurship, and ethnic identification can determine the methods restaurateurs use to pursue success.

### *Anthropological Perspective*

The anthropological perspective of entrepreneurship theory is used to examine cultural factors influencing business ventures. For an entrepreneur to succeed, society's social and cultural factors should be considered (Kottack, 2016). An entrepreneur's culture influences new ventures as particular cultural practices such as innovation foster a tendency to create businesses. Entrepreneurs can leverage the intrinsic ethnic value of goods and services to gain a competitive edge. Small businesses can rely on an information marketing strategy whereby products are sold primarily due to ethnic value.

An unethical approach to business can jeopardize consumer markets. Entrepreneurs can choose to focus on serving ethnic populations, thereby excluding other cultures (Nercissians, 2019). For small Nigerian restaurants, targeting particular ethnic communities can either inhibit or facilitate success (Lee et al., 2016). The anthropological view of entrepreneurship can also frame small Nigerian restaurant owners' value systems. Kottack (2016) found that particular cultures promote entrepreneurship, while others tend to inhibit. As Lee et al. (2016) underscored, the qualities necessary for restaurateurs to succeed past 5 years of operation were their level of entrepreneurial self-efficacy and use of business innovation across various activities, most notably in service and management.

The anthropological perspective frames small business owners' success strategies. Verver and Koning (2018) confirmed that businesses could use the values and practices common within a community to create culturally responsive products and services. Entrepreneurs can also formulate culturally appropriate methods of dealing with consumers, suppliers, competitors, and leaders from political and religious backgrounds.

Additional evidence indicates the potential applications of anthropological knowledge to influence relationships with employees, representing different age groups, communities, ethnic groups, and religious assemblies (Titus & Adiza, 2019). As a result, modern businesses like Google are increasingly hiring anthropologists to enhance cultural metrics to innovate products (Baer, 2014). Anthropology teams study the perceptions of consumers and interactions with products to generate valuable data. The information generated from anthropological studies can facilitate the sustainment of small businesses. Whether or not small Nigerian restaurants are founded on an entrepreneurship's anthropological model is likely to determine success or failure.

### ***Opportunity-Based Perspective***

The opportunity-based perspective perceives entrepreneurship as being driven by the availability of opportunities to either start or boost business. The central assumption is that contrary to the Schumpeterian approach, where entrepreneurs cause change, entrepreneurs take advantage of changes caused by technology and consumer preferences (Zwan et al., 2016). Entrepreneurs do not cause change but rather maximize changes to make profits. The opportunity-based approach aligns with the psychological perspective maintaining that entrepreneurs exhibit a definite set of personality traits. Characteristics such as entrepreneurial attentiveness help individuals identify environmental changes that may result in new product development. Entrepreneurs have an eye for change and develop solutions to problems created by change instead of identifying problems whose solutions initiate change (Sahasranamam & Sud, 2016). Applying the stated principles to

small Nigerian restaurants, entrepreneurs can sustain businesses by remaining alert for changes that cause problems, thereby requiring solutions.

Successful entrepreneurs can identify potential opportunities for growing business. Opportunity-based entrepreneurship contributes to the upsurge in the number of businesses within developing economies or in areas experiencing drastic population increases (Amorós et al., 2019). The availability of opportunities also drives small businesses to operate within informal structures. The informal setting, by itself, is an opportunity to generate profits with minimal costs and heightened flexibility. Sahasranamam and Sud (2016) confirmed that entrepreneurs could start a business out of necessity, such as lack of employment, then transform into opportunity-based when change provides an opportunity to resolve a societal problem.

The personal characteristics of an entrepreneur generate consequences for entrepreneurial opportunities. For instance, the opportunity and necessity to venture into a business are more prevalent among females than males driven by workplace discrimination, insufficient family incomes, and work schedules' inflexibility to accommodate family responsibilities (Sahasranamam & Sud, 2016). The entrepreneur's age also plays a significant role in a business's success, as older individuals have the life experience and expertise necessary to identify entrepreneurship opportunities (Jonsson, 2017). However, age also increases family embeddedness, which reduces entrepreneurial probability. Further, entrepreneurs who venture into a business opportunity to increase earnings after employment and those who start businesses for lack of other opportunities are likely to view and approach entrepreneurship differently. Prior employment

predisposes individuals to opportunities and related challenges leading to improved success than entrepreneurs without exposure to business processes (Sahasranamam & Sud, 2016). The summarized effect of opportunity-based entrepreneurship concerns the utilization of problems created by a change to make profits. The ability of restaurateurs operating small Nigerian restaurants to identify opportunities and necessities to increase value and revenue can determine sustainability.

### **Resource-Based Entrepreneurship**

Resource-based entrepreneurship claims that entrepreneurs are motivated by those resources available to maximize opportunities for profits (Frid et al., 2016). Resource-based entrepreneurship informs that entrepreneurs who can access resources in the form of finances, social support, and human capacities are more likely to start and sustain businesses than individuals with limited access (Bacq & Eddleston, 2018). Resource access affords entrepreneurs and easier access to opportunities (Bellavitis et al., 2017). Gaining access to critical resources is a critical component of the success of a business.

Access to financial resources is the key to success. New ventures are likely to be initiated by individuals with appropriate financial resources (Lee et al., 2016). Financial resources also increase access to information and knowledge such that entrepreneurs can identify suitable opportunities quickly. However, the lack of resources does not always prevent success. Research has confirmed the existence of successful entrepreneurs who began with little capital (Ngek, 2016). The primary assertion is that access to capital gives entrepreneurs an advantage when opportunities can be used efficiently and within shorter periods to maximize profits.

The resource-based approach also explains exposure and access to social resources. Entrepreneurs function within a broader social network determining opportunity structures. Once an individual identifies profit opportunities, social networks are needed to support implementation. Extensive social connections are instrumental in the execution of business ideas (Turkina, 2018). Social networks can be understood in terms of access to providers of resources within banks, licensing bodies, and policymakers. Entrepreneurs maintaining ties with resource providers are likely to seize opportunities and initiate businesses (Amodu & Ama, 2016). Once a business is operating, healthy relationships with vendors and customers are critical in ensuring sustainability.

Human resources are another critical aspect of entrepreneurship. The value of human capital to entrepreneurship increases education and experience (Marvel et al., 2016). Knowledge accumulation occurs through training, and experience facilitates an entrepreneur's ability to identify and exploit opportunities. Budding entrepreneurs often require training to enhance human resource capital and facilitate success (Ostergaard & Marinova, 2018). Social interactions improve access to experienced human capital for businesses. Inter-firm relationships can help identify complementary human resources (Marvel et al., 2016). The resources-based framework can help small Nigerian restaurant owners with diminished education and experience identify additional human resources with required functional skills.

A supportive family is another critical resource. The family is a primary source of significant resources required for business success (Powell & Eddleston, 2013). Powell



and Eddleston (2013) found that family business enrichment including skills and behaviors that transfer from the family to business success. The health of an entrepreneur and their spouse is a critical aspect of successful entrepreneurship. Hatak and Zhou (2019) noted that spousal health is an extension of entrepreneurs' human capital, with essential entrepreneurial outcomes. Successful ethnic restaurant owners can sustain the operation by tapping into the support structure of their families.

### **Fundamental Principles of the Entrepreneurship Conceptual Framework**

Entrepreneurial activities are crucial to economic growth, industrial dynamics, and economic development (Fritsch & Wyrwich, 2017; Johansson et al., 2020; Ribeiro-Soriano, 2017). Small businesses' sustainability depends on innovativeness and creativity (Faggian et al., 2017; Vuong et al., 2016). Personal characteristics such as tolerance for risk, innovativeness, creativity, and need for achievement influence individuals' ability to initiate and sustain the business (Hachana et al., 2018; Karabulut, 2016; Murugesan & Jayavelu, 2017). Successful small business owners can develop personal traits to enhance the success of their businesses.

Research shows that the beliefs, attitudes, and customs of entrepreneurs' backgrounds can influence a business's success (Gielnik et al., 2018). For example, Matusik (2016) explained that an entrepreneur's behaviors, as demonstrated in social network circles and throughout other social interaction phases, were influential to business sustainability. Sociological influences manifest through the targeted consumers, decisive "push" to innovate, and political and competitor forces (Matusik, 2016; Ozaralli & Rivenburgh, 2016; Stoolman, 2018). An entrepreneur's culture influences new

ventures as particular cultural practices such as innovation foster a tendency to create businesses (Nercissians, 2019; Titus & Adiza, 2019; Verver & Koning, 2018). Business success is a factor of the individual entrepreneur's drive for success (Matusik, 2016). The competence of small Nigerian restaurants to conduct business through the anthropological model of entrepreneurship can influence success.

Entrepreneurs are successful when they can capitalize on available opportunities (Amorós et al., 2019; Sahasranamam & Sud, 2016). For example, entrepreneurs who can identify and access resources in the form of finances, social support, and human capacities are more likely to succeed (Bacq & Eddleston, 2018; Frid et al., 2016). Access to resources gives entrepreneurs an advantage when opportunities can be used efficiently and within shorter periods to maximize profits. Small Nigerian restaurant entrepreneurs can sustain their business by remaining alert to opportunities.

### **Alternative Theories**

Alternative theories explaining entrepreneurship include KM and general system theories. Using the KM framework allows businesses to generate, reintroduce, or promote existing knowledge to increase productivity (Grimsdottir & Edvardsson, 2018). One's ability to create new content and knowledge is the primary source of production. KM strategies link to organizational culture and management tools (Seyedyousefi et al., 2016). The second alternative supporting theory is general systems theory.

### ***Knowledge Management Theory***

Knowledge refers to a collective resource of intellectual data, experiences, and information that can either be paired with an organization's goals or be used to provide

service to an organization. Knowledge has two facets, open and explicit, which can then be divided into hidden or tacit. Tacit knowledge is critical to organizational success (Seyedyousefi et al., 2016). KM concerns the creation, transfer, and attainment of knowledge, which in turn supports innovation. Also, KM processes include providing access to this knowledge and providing a resource for the organization.

Although different authors have defined KM differently, there remains a definition with a unanimous consensus. Organizations depend on access to knowledge to facilitate organizational learning and innovation (Stokvik et al., 2016). The acquisition and management of knowledge are crucial for organizational survival and the ability to motivate others. KM definitions vary from one organization to another, and KM activities are related to organizational objectives such as innovation, competitive advantage, lessons learned, and performance improvement (Orga et al., 2018). Orga et al. (2018) defined KM as the mobilization of human and material resources to achieve outlined objectives. Improvements in innovations and competitive advantage are among the goals of a majority of organizations.

KM can improve competitive advantage. Joshi et al. (2016) focused on a single organization to derive KM applications in competitive advantage and utilized data from existing literature. The results showed that KM was a key for new knowledge and new idea generation. KM is instrumental to the survival of organizations within highly competitive environments. Rabeea et al. (2019) demonstrated that KM is the primary method of developing sustainable competitive advantages. The stated development implies that knowledge has transformed into a critical organizational asset deserving of

tender care. According to Rabeea et al., the type and amount of knowledge developed by companies during operations determine the organization's direction in the future. Lee et al. (2016) also confirmed that competitive advantage occurs through KM. In the Lee et al. research, KM and competitive advantage are mediated by technology as organizational spending on KM corresponded to resources utilized in technological innovations. The study showed that small restaurants' success could be perceived as the type and amount of investment channeled into KM and technological innovations (Lee et al., 2016). Improved spending, especially on knowledge dissemination, often leads to a more decisive competitive advantage. Organizations' performance depends on available mechanisms for generating, transferring, and using KM for competitive advantage (Gonzalez & Martins, 2017). The increasing competitiveness of the contemporary business environment necessitates creativity and innovation (Aghion et al., 2018). Overall, varying KM definitions involve common factors such as competitive advantage, innovation, company goals, and new knowledge development.

Existing literature asserts the critical role of KM in increasing organizational performance. KM promotes business owners and employees' experience as a critical element of production besides labor, land, and capital (Mohajan, 2017). The experiences allow people to learn and share insights into things that may not otherwise be known. The insight helps individuals know more about themselves and how they work, and their consumers. For example, knowledge of market flow, products, services, consumers, stakeholders, competing organizations, and technology is critical to add value to any business's management. KM guides the use of organizational assets while also creating

new material for future management (Stephen et al., 2017). If entrepreneurs are to fulfill company objectives and goals, they must identify and analyze the knowledge required and available, to control business activities, and these two types are tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge.

Tacit knowledge, usually internalized, refers to the instinctive ability to know how a specific result is acquired. Tacit knowledge is achieved through lessons learned, best practices, dialogue, and storytelling. Tacit knowledge encompasses the complete understanding of company values and involves the insight, judgment, and intuition to use the information to benefit the organization (Astorga-Vargas et al., 2017; Mohajan, 2017). The sharing of tacit knowledge is critical to successful entrepreneurship. People with tacit knowledge tend to be experts in their field and rely on the organization for their input and guidance on specific projects. Tacit knowledge, as well, deals with wanting to know, knowing, and practical context (Stokvik et al., 2016). SMEs depend on tacit knowledge for their growth and survival. Tacit knowledge creation is also essential in SMEs' strategic processes to increase their competitiveness. Muthuveloo et al. (2017) confirmed that tacit knowledge involves four primary stages: socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization (SECI model). Among the SECI components, socialization and internalization appeared to play the most significant role in organizational performance. In small restaurants, tacit knowledge should be ingrained in usual business operations, including relations with clients and the processes involved in handling food in the kitchen. Overall, the effective development and utilization of tacit knowledge are essential components of small businesses.

### ***Innovation and Knowledge Management***

Innovation and creativity skills are valued by organizations, the federal government, and small businesses. Innovation is defined as technological change and commercialization. Innovation is the commercialization of new commodities and small businesses (Schachter, 2018). Innovation occurs in different categories, including production, processing, organization, or marketing. Innovation, thus, can involve technological and non-technological commodities. Rajapathirana and Hui (2018) connected the capacity of organizations to innovate to overall performance. Firms with the capacity to innovate continuously gain a competitive edge in the current business environment. Innovation is encouraged to support creating jobs and the maximization of societal benefits (Okumu et al., 2019). Okumu et al. also established governments' role in supporting the growth of employment opportunities through the formulation of policies that support innovation in small businesses. Innovation improved the opportunities businesses have to succeed in the future. For small restaurants, innovation is a critical determinant of success.

The development and implementation of innovations in business can be perceived using the stages of innovation. Louw et al. (2018) described the W-model as seven distinct stages of innovation applicable to innovative companies. The first stage involves goal setting, whereby the company identifies business goals concerning innovation. The viability of targeted innovations within the current and future business environments is analyzed in the second stage. The second stage involves identifying the market need and determining what the consumer liked, using feedback to build on new or existing ideas.

Further, the stage required technological demonstration through experimentation and assessment of the small business's market opportunities. The third stage concerns idea generation. Fourth, collected ideas are evaluated. Fifth, ideas are detailed to provide a clear perspective of the innovation at hand. Detailed ideas produce a concept that is evaluated in the sixth stage. The last phase of the innovation processes concerns the implementation of the concept. The stages of innovation described above focus on planning and techniques to increase innovation capacity. Based on the teachings of Lounsbury et al. (2019) regarding the inseparability of innovation and entrepreneurship, the stages confirm the central role of innovation in ensuring sustainable entrepreneurship.

KM provides companies with critical insights into the competition, customer needs and motivations, and new market areas. Rahimi et al. (2017) studied the essential role of KM in innovation by uncovering positive correlations between KM and innovation performance. The library of knowledge that companies possess must be developed and reviewed continuously to ensure that information is relevant and current. Regarding innovation in small businesses, Hottenrott and Lopes-Bento (2016) emphasized the need to foster external research and development (R&D) relationships and networks to develop better and faster innovations. R&Ds increase the probability of product innovations succeeding with target markets. KM in R&Ds enhanced the effectiveness of innovation.

The government plays a vital role in innovation. For example, government funding helps small businesses with loan offerings, investment programs, and the purchase of both products and services (Pavlykivska et al., 2020). The dissemination of

educational information to businesses through education and job skills programs is a vital government contribution to the creative space (Gilaninia & Liu, 2017). Governments support innovation through the funding of research and development initiatives. The enactment of laws and regulations to protect and support innovation and growth should be considered an essential asset (Okumu et al., 2019). Jorgensen (2018) confirmed that in contrast to previous years when the government assumed relatively passive roles, modern governing bodies ought to align with the digital age's needs. The failure of the government to support small businesses can potentially inhibit the sustainability of operations.

### ***General Systems Theory***

While some businesses use the traditional hierarchical structure, where everything flows from the top-down, Vargo et al. (2017) discussed the general theories as a potential model for defining business processes. The general theory focuses on interactions. Instead of having just one boss and a top-down structure, the theory guides businesses on creating different departments, each with their bosses and structures as needed, while still achieving the same goal (Jung, 2017). Understanding complex systems are vital to organizational evaluation, definition, and control.

Systems theorists view organizations as either open or closed systems. As changes in society occur, organizations also transform over time to respond to those changes. Organizations evolve alongside new technologies. Open systems comprise the consistent formation of outward interactions, between an organization and the environment, with the potential to affect economic, social, and political spheres (Jung, 2017). Open systems can



exchange feedback with the external environment through research, advertisement, promotions, or education. Turner and Baker (2019) confirmed that external open systems influence small businesses. The reactivity of open systems to the external environment implies an improved perception of impending changes regarding innovation.

In contrast with open systems that readily exchange information with the environment, closed systems generally focus on internal processes, accounting for behaviors at the individual, group, and organizational levels (Turner & Baker, 2019). Markedly, organizations prefer the closed model owing to ease of dealing with predictable internal factors. Focusing on internal processes increases the control of business owners compared to the open system.

The identification of open and closed models occurs through the distinct characteristics evident in each system, such as employees' behaviors. A notable characteristic concerns the individual differences of employees (Alawamleh et al., 2018). Each person is unique and will react to similar situations differently, suggesting that results will be different depending on the individual's attributes. Naturally, situations also cause people to act involuntarily. Open systems tend to boost employees' innovation and motivation since the inflows and outflows of information can be used to support business processes (Alawamleh et al., 2018). Businesspersons ought to eliminate homogeneous ways of designing and assigning tasks but instead use an individualized way of doing things through training protocols. People are part of the whole. Providing structure allows people to work in a fulfilling environment. Any modern organization would provide the vision, missions, and goals to help employees stay on course.

Another characteristic of separating open and closed systems is motivation. Organizational goals can be better achieved through motivated individuals (Alawamleh et al., 2018). Therefore, constant creativity is necessary to design tasks that stimulate employees. Motivation takes different forms in an organization, including rewards, appreciation, and even promotions (Al-Madi et al., 2017). The stated incentives help employees feel valued and motivate them to do more for the organization. Mutual interest was also identified as a characteristic whereby an individual can socialize with peers who share similar interests and workplace goals. Management can, therefore, devise suitable methods of motivating employees depending on capacity and needs to boost performance (Michael et al., 2016). A straightforward example is providing an employee lunchroom, where employees can socialize, meet new people, and foster new and deeper relationships. In such venues, employees learn to develop communication, time management, and people skills, all of which increase their commitment to the job (Sakarya et al., 2017). The benefit of such practices was borne out in the research by Cox and Mainiero (2017), who showed that communication skills related directly to job commitment and satisfaction levels.

Management needs flexibility to align employees' skills with expected contributions. When management is able to align jobs with employee skills, the result is an improvement in both job satisfaction and performance (Sabuhari et al., 2020). In addition, managers' communication skills impact the job satisfaction and commitment of employees (Sarıkaya & Kara, 2020; Van Vianen, 2018). Business owners work with

employees to best take advantage of their skills (Dachner et al., 2021). To benefit from the skills of employees, managers must develop strategies to work with employees.

Systems theory influences business operations in the entire organization. Business leaders have an opportunity to impact organizational performance positively by utilizing the basic concepts of systems theory. The systems theory framework improves knowledge, value, quality, and environment. The theory shows that organizations can produce unique knowledge and use the resources to develop employee skills, learn the competition, and promote innovation (Asrar-ul-Haq & Anwar, 2016). However, developing these skills requires extensive training for employees, training which involves networking and learning different ways of understanding business phenomena and models that will foster success. Assuredly, a company's value is created through research development, feedback, quality management, and internal auditing and asset improvements (Nisar et al., 2019). The systems approach involves building relationships while also learning new skills to help the organization, society, and team achieve goals (Basten & Haamann, 2018). The systems theory supports the outlined processes by demonstrating how organizations can create value by interacting positively with the environment.

### **Research in Small Business Entrepreneurship**

Small businesses are vital assets contributing to national output and community growth. The definition of a small business has varied over the years, depending on the regulations set forth. The definition of small businesses was first formulated by the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA) in 1981, in the SEC. The definition was based on

income, whereby firms or individuals (operating as sole proprietors) with assets worth less than \$2.5 million would be considered small businesses, while investment companies with assets totaling \$50 million or less should also be considered as such (p. 9). Over the years, several other definitions for small businesses have been proposed, including by the SBA. The SBA (2019) defined small businesses as an enterprise created to generate profit, with a limited number of employees depending on the industry, and an annual income of below a specified amount calculated through average annual receipts. As opposed to the RFA definition, SBA's definition provides distinct metrics for determining the actual size of a small business per industry.

Each industry uses a different set of metrics while defining small businesses. For instance, small businesses in chicken and egg production have an annual income of below \$16.5 million, while small businesses in fuels management can earn up to \$20.5 million (SBA, 2019). Small full-service restaurants and limited-service restaurants are considered small businesses when earning a maximum of \$8 and \$12 million a year, respectively. The SBA defines small businesses as enterprises with fewer than 500 employees and that are independently owned and operated. Sales volume, employee numbers, and investment are all factored into designations for small and medium enterprises (Kyung & Yoo, 2017). Whatever the precise definition of small businesses, they continue to be the main contributors to the economy, providing employment and tax revenues for local, state, and federal entities (Jonsson, 2017). Scholars with different backgrounds have tended to define small business success in various ways. A small business owner can be defined as possessing the freedom and independence to control their future.

Small businesses can be grouped based on specific attributes. The primary categories include sole proprietorships, local businesses serving consumers and other local businesses, suppliers, and other innovative, high-growth firms and fast-growing businesses (Fairlie et al., 2016; Houston & Reuschke, 2017; Murthy & Paul, 2016). Small and medium enterprises make up 45% of emerging market employment and 33% of the GDP (OECD, 2017). Obi et al. (2018) highlighted that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) played an essential role in multinational companies and large organizations' supply chains. Indeed, small businesses have become the backbone of the modern market, so much so that 80% of business can be traced to SMEs globally and 85% to U.S. businesses (Pett et al., 2016).

### **Factors Influencing Small Businesses**

Successful business owners have functional business skills. Research into small businesses' financial management has shown the lack of proper records as a potential reason for failure (Atsan, 2016; Bushe, 2019). Bushe (2019) included inadequate record-keeping as a critical component of the anatomy of business failure, mainly since business owners often utilize business resources for personal needs. Bushe also explained bookkeeping inefficiencies as a lack of personal commitment to ensure the business grows. Bush claimed that the owner should always install systems to manage the business finances, whenever practical. Lack of cash flow in a small business is likened to a human body without enough blood flow. The body will collapse and die eventually, similar to the failure that a small business is likely to experience when cash flow problems persist. Depending on memory, engaging in oral agreements and providing credit to close

associates provides additional explanations for poor financial management in small businesses (Atsan, 2016). The management of business finances is an essential factor in small business success.

Small businesses are sensitive to economic uncertainty. Lack of resources to battle economic downturns can affect success and even survival (Obi et al., 2018). Many small owners lack the support accessible to large corporations towards weathering financial crises. To ensure success, small business owners must continuously monitor their financial status. The owner's ability to connect with bankers with knowledge of economic cycles is crucial to ensuring effective business operations (Bourgeron, 2018). Maintaining relationships with debtors is vital to keeping balance sheets healthy. Monitoring key metrics helps owners understand where their business stands financially and determine what needs to be done to improve sales or profits. Owners must be able to connect with communities, manage financial books, retain customers, and build on prospects with continuous awareness of business goals and achievements (Gumel, 2019; Snyder & Davies, 2018). Business owners' self-efficacy aids in developing formal business planning activities, with education being a crucial factor. Although most businesses fail within the first 5 years, researchers emphasize that businesses with fewer than 250 employees power most of the economies in developing countries (Wang, 2016). The size of a firm can also determine its growth.

### ***Education***

Education levels of business owners influence experience level and performance. Schneider (2017) recommended training and education to improve the entrepreneurship

potential of women. The initial stage of entrepreneurship involving planning is the most affected. Training bridges the experience and performance gaps apparent between men and women entrepreneurs. Gender was also a critical factor that allowed access to financing and the overall success of the company. Most female businesses tend to be small scale and retail related as opposed to larger wholesale businesses. Women's businesses tend to be run by younger owners and fall under the sole-proprietorship category, whereas male-owned businesses are mostly corporations (Sims et al., 2017). Studies have also found that most of the traits used to describe entrepreneurs are stereotypically male traits, which implies that women's motivations and goals are typically not compatible with economic success (Yadav & Unni, 2016). Research has also indicated a dearth of literature regarding the leadership skills necessary for women and men leading small businesses (Bullough et al., 2015). For women, starting a new business is usually an act of faith based on authentic leadership. Sims et al. (2017) defined authentic leadership as a dynamic process that permitted leaders to influence followers' attitudes and behaviors through the critical psychological process.

When comparing the financial success of male and female small business owners, most women have the same ambitions as men yet generally do not explore as many opportunities as their male counterparts because of structural disadvantages both in and out of the business environment (Dean et al., 2019; Yadav & Unni, 2016). The effects of structures in the community and organizations tend to favor men over women. Researchers noted that men's collective social status and standard practices help them develop human capital and networks that are conducive to their success (Cabrera &

Mauricio, 2017). Women's education levels are generally lower in the general population compared to men, which tends to enable men to enact entrepreneurial intentions at a higher rate (Shinnar et al., 2018). Shinnar et al. found that women originating from entrepreneurial families enacted business intentions at an improved rate. Still, the educational gap can be addressed through entrepreneurship education and training (Giriuniene et al., 2016). Therefore, the abilities of entrepreneurs operating small Nigerian restaurants can be determined by gender and education levels.

### ***Gender***

The role of gender is critical when analyzing small businesses. In most cases, there is an underrepresentation of women in specific business areas. Women are often cited as generating lower sales and obtaining lower incomes than males. The number of women starting businesses has grown at an astonishing rate; women own and operate roughly 30% of businesses in the United States (Sims et al., 2017). Dean et al. (2019) challenged the metanarrative that women in entrepreneurship are underperformers compared to men. Dean et al. posited that as long as the hypothesis was correct that females tended to be less successful than their male counterparts as entrepreneurs, women were disadvantaged. The hypothesis acts as a starting point, thereby warping the perception of society and women. Associating women with underperformance has been a limiting factor. The role of gender in entrepreneurship is crucial when examining success and failure.

Additional research has established a link between gender and entrepreneurship. Compared to men, women experience challenges that Cabrera and Mauricio (2017)



classified into internal (individual), micro, meso, and macro environment categories. Individual factors include lower education levels and limited participation in the labor force. Macro factors were outlined as cultural beliefs and attitudes influencing women to choose small ventures, self-employment, or subsistence entrepreneurship. The environmental effects of gender in entrepreneurship are similar for both men and women. The meso environment emanates from the macro factors whereby culture assigns a specific value to men and women.

The microenvironment involves interpersonal contact among family and close associates to influence men or women's abilities to succeed in entrepreneurship. Interpersonal relations can affect women's capacity to identify opportunities, access resources, and feel motivated to venture into a business. Cabrera and Mauricio also found that men had an advantage concerning personal contact networks. The factors affect the entrepreneurship opportunities and successes of women. A study conducted on micro and small businesses in Ecuador concluded that 33% of the profit gap between male and female-owned businesses could be attributed to unpaid work, including childcare, household chores, and elderly care (Arráiz, 2017).

### *Age*

Age is also an essential variable in the evaluation of success and failure in small businesses. Age manifest through access to resources and experience. Aged individuals have acquired human, social, and financial capital over the years and have an advantage when initiating entrepreneurship ventures (Shinnar et al., 2018). Young individuals can fail to implement entrepreneurial intentions due to a lack of resources, whether social,

human, or financial. However, the nature of life is such that resources and motivation are not always proportional. Gielnik et al. (2018) found that resources and motivation are opposite forces that increase and decrease entrepreneurship prospects. Younger people without the necessary resource tend to have higher motivation compared to older persons with resources. Motivation and age follow an inverted pattern U shape. Azoulay et al. (2019) discovered that the mean age of entrepreneurs founding successful ventures in the country was 45 years. Prior experience in the industry that an entrepreneur ventured into increased the likelihood of success, thereby confirming the human resource advantage that older people have over younger persons. Despite challenges associated with age and immigrants' disconnection from economic planning in their local areas, they have become the driving force of economic growth in other regions (Halkias et al., 2017).

### ***Innovation***

Although often used interchangeably, innovation and entrepreneurship (I&E) denote different phenomena. Innovation focuses on new and altering existing products, services, and business models to create new value and revenue for an organization (DasGupta, 2017). The creation of income and new value, according to Głodowska (2019), depends on the openness of organizations to develop innovation, practice considerable risk-taking, and grow entrepreneurial leadership. While pursuing innovation, organizations are expected to experience hostility and technology, which are identified as conducive to the execution of entrepreneurial strategy in business (Yan & Li, 2017). Hostility and fast-changing technologies constitute the unpredictable entrepreneurship environment. Innovation is inseparable from entrepreneurship.

Hottenrott and Lopes-Bento (2016) asserted the importance of dedication and close monitoring among partners. Innovative minds must be nurtured, as they are required to help build a thriving organization and share skills with others.

The level of an entrepreneur's creativity is a determinant of success. Vuong et al. (2016) explored how entrepreneurs perceived innovation and creativity when starting their businesses. Vuong et al. analyzed how creativity affected entrepreneurial thinking and success by defining creativity as innovation and novel performance. The authors found that entrepreneurship growth to be an essential pooling of talent, creativity, and knowledge. Faggian et al. (2017) found that the type of talent required to grow a business must include understanding human capital, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Developing functional and creative skills is conducive to growth in the entrepreneurial sphere.

Additional research provided evidence depicting the correlation between innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth. Several factors positively affect innovation and entrepreneurship, including climate change, financial instability, and monetary policy (Dafermos et al., 2018). Being innovative requires having and developing new ideas to keep old customers and reach new ones. Innovation is the key to success in many organizations. To sustain a business, entrepreneurs ought to engage in "outside the box" and "inside the bubble" thinking (Goorha & Potts, 2016). Markedly, entrepreneurship had changed over time to include new technologies and perceptions. However, the basic ideas supporting entrepreneurial efforts have remained. The entrepreneurship theory continues to guide the successful business to date.

### *Consumer Engagement*

Although customer involvement is essential, diminished literature demonstrates the effect of consumer involvement in the co-creation of small and medium enterprises (Rajagopal, 2020). Attaining the goodwill and support of consumers can propel a small business forward. Marketing can endear a small business to consumers and improve commitment. Further, consumer engagement is essential in creating value, allowing customers to be involved in both the creation and co-creation process through reviews, surveys, information sharing, and advocacy (Eigenraam et al., 2018). Social media provided a practical tool for engaging consumer engagement (Voorveld et al., 2018). Small businesses can engage consumers through different channels to improve growth and revenues.

Active consumer participation involves information sharing, personal interactions, information seeking, and responsibility (Sarkum et al., 2017; Yoong & Lian, 2019). Consumer involvement is a vital contributor to the success of a business. Moreover, customer satisfaction is most evident when involved in the co-creation process (Chen & Wang, 2016). As more companies involve communities in their decision-making process and consider their impact instead of restricting consumer access, more consumers will feel a sense of association with that brand or company (Yan & Li, 2017). When consumers feel a sense of belonging to the brand, they will provide feedback, improving its products and services.

Social capital is a resource generated from friends, family, and associates. Researchers identify social capital as a value acquired through social networking

(Townsend et al., 2016). Social capital enables companies to build trust with consumers while upholding social norms. While some research found social capital as being beneficial for the whole community (Townsend et al., 2016), other studies have refuted the notion of community benefit and concluded that social capital is a personal asset that only benefits those with high status while excluding others (Loane & Webster, 2017; Meek et al., 2019). Indeed, any sort of exclusion in a community can negatively affect consumers. Involvement in building social capacity is essential to small businesses as a source of innovation, a sustainable way of accessing skills and services, new opportunities for competitive advantage, and building trust and compliance of contracts (Townsend et al., 2016). Meek et al. (2019) also asserted that exclusion could be eliminated by using online brand communities, which exhibit all social capital elements, including a shared vision, language, trust, and reciprocity. Entrepreneurs must understand and use social contacts to develop a competitive advantage.

The challenges of small businesses also prevail among immigrant business owners. Lack of access to financial capital among immigrant business owners contributed substantially to business failure within five years. A proportion of immigrant business owners resort to informal financing sources for funds than banks traditionally supply (Willie et al., 2017). Since there is a lack of data available solely on immigrant business owners, the researcher relies on broader information available on business formation and performance. Lee and Black (2017) examined how immigrants accessed loan capital to fund new businesses and improve established ones by identifying opportunities and obstacles associated with loan accessibility. The study also found that loan providers

reported that language barriers and trust issues created hindrances in dealing with immigrants (Lee & Black, 2017). Immigrants have unique issues when accessing loans, whether due to lack of knowledge of available resources, technical difficulties, or a reluctance to apply for loans from financial institutions.

### **Small Business Success Strategies**

Small businesses are among the primary drivers of job creation and economic growth (Wang, 2016). Motivations and objectives will vary depending on the business owner. Small businesses are tied to local communities and, therefore, can be affected by any changes therein. The majority of small businesses play major cultural roles for the residents in the neighborhoods where they are established (Meltzer, 2016). Over the years, researchers have identified life-cycle development models that can be used to understand small business growth. For example, Tam and Gray (2016) outlined five stages, starting with a peaceful growth period and ending in managerial crisis. In addition, small businesses experience evolutionary periods involving extended growth times and revolutionary periods characterized by crises, change, and problems. Tam and Gray (2016) asserted that while organizations can fail to undergo all the five stages linearly, any given organization will experience several of the stages at any given time. Understanding the necessary steps of growth that organizations are likely to experience and associated challenges can help small business owners and managers better prepare by developing appropriate skills and resources.

Besides the five stages of growth outlined above, small businesses can grow either organically or acquire another company. According to Achtenhagen et al. (2017),

growth by acquisition of other companies increases a small business's resources and increases the ability to concur new target markets. Small businesses are known to increase value and profit within short periods after acquiring companies with improved returns. Mwatsika et al. (2018) examined growth by acquisition strategy in Nigerian banks and generated valuable lessons for small Nigerian restaurants. Ntiedo et al. (2017) analyzed the intentions for mergers and success rates. The results indicated that small business owners should not pursue acquisitions out of desperation or necessity, which often fails. Instead, the merger processes should be evaluated keenly to secure the interests of the buyer and seller. Mwatsika et al. recommended that banks, similar to small businesses, should pursue growth through marketing and quality output to increase market share gradually before considering a merger. Organic growth involves increasing outputs and profits through internal mechanisms such as aggressive marketing, improved customer services, or launching new product lines (Dugguh et al., 2018). Organic growth allows companies to plan for available revenue by efficiently allocating resources to critical areas (Ioana-Simona & & Gheorghe, 2015). A service-oriented business owner can implement strategies to improve strategies crucial to sustainability (Ioana-Simona & Gheorghe, 2015). Similarly, small Nigerian restaurants' success past the first 5 years is likely to be affected by the existing growth strategy.

Current literature on performance measures in small businesses focuses on growth and profit as the main criteria for success (Weinberger et al., 2018). Performance measurement based on growth and profit takes focus away from the real impact, the actual reason for the company's existence. Besides the economic benefits that small

businesses generate for owners, deviating from the original intentions threatens sustainability. Weinberger et al. confirmed the need for small businesses to redefine business processes and rebrand to adapt to change in the external environment. However, such changes require effective planning to ensure that the company retains consumers presently attracted to the original intention even as the pursuit of new market segments continues. The primary concern regarding performance measurement is the employment of various techniques as opposed to relying primarily on growth and profits (Gerba & Viswanadham, 2016). Success can be measured by innovating new products and services, which ultimately leads to profitability (Weinberger et al., 2018). Longevity is also a potential indicator of business success (Yeganegi et al., 2018). The success of small Nigerian restaurants can be measured through a variety of tools besides growth and revenue.

### **Failure in Small Businesses**

Although many factors lead to small and medium businesses' success, there are also additional factors that lead to failure. Failure occurs due to owners' overestimation of their products or services (Atsan, 2016; Bushe, 2019). Small business owners are advised to establish demand for a service or product and determine viability. The alignment of operations with current trends is critical to ensuring that products suit customer needs (Al-Ghamri, 2016). Establishing the willingness of potential customers to spend money and the capacity of competitors is also vital. In restaurants, considerations for the type, quality, and taste of food and primary differences with competition can help



promote revenues (Jin et al., 2018). Jin et al. also advised restaurateurs to consider such factors as price, décor, quality of service, and advertising to their targeted consumers.

Small businesses struggle to survive. About 20% of small businesses fail in their first year of operations, while over 40% fail by their 5th year (Yonk et al., 2017). Some factors attributed to such failure include lack of education of the owners, complicated and expensive licensing systems, collapses in the local economy, and the high cost of living (Desjardins, 2017). More specifically, 29% of failures can be attributed to not having enough cash to run the business, 42% to no market demand for products or services, 82% to expansive cash flows, and 23% to not having the right resources or team in place (Desjardins, 2017). Such research was critical to help analyze the success factors that individual Nigerian restaurant owners displayed in order to be operational past 5 years.

The success of a small business has unpredicted effects on the communities and national economies. Although small businesses boost economies around the world, there has been little to no effect on Nigeria's economy because of the operations associates' challenges (Abioye et al., 2017). A small business in Nigeria has between 20-30 million Naira in revenues, approximately \$125,000 to \$193,000. Hyder and Lussier (2016) incorporated the Lussier model of business success and failure, identifying 143 small businesses in Pakistan and examining factors related to their business survival. The researcher concluded that proper staffing, adequate capital, planning, and partnerships were the most critical factors for success. Another study employed a qualitative method to interview business owners on the challenges affecting their operations. The study highlighted four challenges facing small businesses in Nigeria: lack of funding, poor

record-keeping and information management, lack of infrastructure, and the inability to differentiate business capital and personal money. The findings in this study aligned with the results of small business research in other countries.

Researchers have identified variables that lead to success. Wang provided evidence demonstrating the causes of failure in small businesses (2016). While analyzing the leather industry in Sri Lanka and the furniture and construction industry in Tanzania, Wang (2016) discovered three main constraints to SME success: access to finance, access to nonfinancial inputs, and high costs. Indeed, Wang pointed to the implications of financial constraints, using data from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and concluded that lack of financing in poorly developed markets complicated SME growth. Other researchers identified some factors influencing small business start-ups by comparing new business and nascent entrepreneurs and concluded that gender, previous employment, and recent redundancy all negatively affected business formation (Yadav & Unni, 2016). Restaurateurs in charge of small Nigerian restaurants can face the outlined challenges that lead to failure within the first five years of business.

### **Small Business Entrepreneurship and Financing**

New entrepreneurial financing processes are evolving around the more traditional debt and equity start-up financing, including microfinancing (Reverte & Badillo, 2019), crowdsourcing (Block et al., 2018), and peer-to-peer lending, among other innovations (Moeninghoff & Wieandt, 2013). Micro-finance evolved in many developing countries due to particular family structures and global organizations' absence (Khanam et al., 2018). Microfinance provides small loans to businesses lacking access to funds.

Assuredly, most entrepreneurs prefer to invest the money from savings to finance before exploring options with family and friends and other external options. This phenomenon is supported by Radianto et al. (2019), which indicated that perceptions influenced where and how entrepreneurs explored their sources of funding.

Since customers now pay more attention to environmental changes and the ethical and social factors that may affect them, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become a greater focus for many organizations (Kraus et al., 2018). CSR plays a significant role in business sustainment for strengthening social ties with consumers. Ansong and Nisar (2017) examined whether CSR's superior performance resulted in better access to financing and concluded that organizations with improved stakeholder relationships due to CSR experienced low constraint to funds access. Access to funds was partially driven by the environmental and social aspects of CSR.

Individuals' places of residence or communities and the location of a business can also factor in their ability to access resources, financing, training, and customers. Studies on the scarcity of funds for small businesses in inner-city, minority communities, and increased rates of loan rejections in those areas as compared to white-owned businesses indicated a need for further research (Bellavitis et al., 2017; Fairlie et al., 2016). Minority businesses tended to be more concentrated in minority communities, which in turn affected their access to financing because of either location or minority ownership, or both. Discrimination tends to limit credit availability to minority business owners. Municipalities within more developed locations tend to receive and invest more funds in improving entrepreneurial zones, thereby influencing entrepreneurs' access to critical

infrastructural resources (Pamic & Belullo, 2018). Additional studies that examined the perceptions of small business owner's ability to obtain financing concluded that access to funds was more difficult in deprived areas, owing to lack of collateral or access to mainstream banks (Frid et al., 2016). The ethnic background, residence, and economic resources of entrepreneurs play a critical role in determining access to external funds.

SMEs have a keen interest in creating profit based on the definition of entrepreneurship provided in the conceptual framework. Entrepreneurs are in the business of making profits (Głodowska, 2019). The attitude on profits is crucial for sustainability since incentives were found to be more important than the environment in which a business navigated (Burch, 2017). For a firm to make informed decisions on sustainability, there is a need to examine company revenue. Businesses use multifaceted strategies to ensure the successful sale of innovative products or services (Sattari & Mehrabi, 2016). In addition, businesses that research products of high margin avoided price competition and controlled costs tightly. A business's ability to survive an uncertain and changing environment depends on adaptation, survival, and sustainability goals (Dey, 2017). Research indicated a need for organizations to be prepared to face uncertain futures while having the resilience to remain sustainable in small and medium enterprises (Wickramasinghe, 2016). The change enables SMEs to account for the majority of employment in this country. The application of the strategies outlined above ensures sustainability strategies. SMEs can develop and execute sustainable management tools, regardless of size (Kraus et al., 2018). The management of small Nigerian restaurants

with a clear focus on profits and sustainability can effectively develop effective longevity methods.

### ***Location***

Restaurant survival is often based on location. Restaurants in metropolitan areas are more likely to survive than those located near residential areas (Sanghyeop et al., 2020). In addition, restaurants in low-to-middle-income areas operated by restaurateurs with higher education levels are more likely to succeed (Orga et al., 2018; Song et al., 2016). The location also determines the price of food and services (Hanaysha, 2016). Market-driven pricing, cost-controls, and loyal consumers were critical to success. A different study focused on the variable of restaurant location relative to crime rates (Sloan et al., 2016). Sloan et al. (2016) found that high crime rates tend to discourage the establishment of new restaurants in a neighborhood. Thus, the location of a restaurant is a significant determinant of sustainment.

Restaurants are places of dining designed to serve both a social and biological aspect of life. The establishments serve essential social needs (the dining market) as well as biological needs (the eating market) (Ramapuram & Batra, 2018). A study focused on restaurant work identified time management, strategizing, knowledge, skills, planning, and control as different ways of managing a restaurant. Furthermore, the study indicated that restaurant work tended to be time-consuming and conflicting, with vague planning that could ultimately negatively affect the restaurant's success (Wellton et al., 2016).

## *Marketing*

Marketing is another vital indicator of sustainment. While writing on behalf of the SBA, Lesonsky (2019) prompted small business investors to utilize a revenue percentage to determine an appropriate budget for marketing. The article contained estimations of marketing budgets for small businesses depending on the industry. For instance, retailers spend an average of 4%, web-based companies 7.9%, and BCB establishments 6.3%. Lesonsky recommended that small restaurants invest 1.93% of the revenue on marketing. Marketing is a strategy for small businesses to increase awareness and attract new consumers while retaining a loyal base. Still, business owners can consider marketing unnecessary and fail to allocate sufficient funds. In recent years, social media has been widely adopted by business owners looking to attract consumers who otherwise might be unaware of available products and services (Lepkowska-White, 2017). Strategies used in marketing differ based on the company.

Marketing strategies have migrated over the years, from print media to electronic media and now to the social media space. Mithun and Hawaldar (2018) conducted a study to investigate social media utilization as a marketing tool based on the attention, interest, desire, and action (AIDA) model. The model is used to formulate communication protocols to track products and transactions by individuals. A product first attracts a consumer's attention; interest develops followed by desire, then purchase action. The AIDA model was a valuable tool for strategizing social media use for small businesses looking to boost their marketing efforts (Mithun & Hawaldar, 2018). Hadiyati (2016) confirmed the effectiveness of the AIDA model in encouraging online purchases.

Other research showed social media to be an essential tool in building an image for small businesses and strengthening networks with other entrepreneurs, stakeholders, and consumers (Juntunena et al., 2019). The primary concern is ensuring that the audience receives regular and attractive content to retain attention and encourage sharing and purchases (Voorveld, 2019). However, entrepreneurs should pursue other means of communication, such as physical meetings, to increase trust as online interactions cultivated limited trust (Juntunena et al., 2019). Social media marketing is a vital tool in the marketing and sustainability of small Nigerian restaurants.

### **Ethnic Restaurant Success Strategies**

Ethnic restaurants offer unique varieties of foods and drinks compared to mainstream restaurants in the United States. Like Nigerian restaurants, which offer foods from the Nigerian culture, other ethnic restaurants specialize in foods of ethnicities such as Chinese, Korean, and Italian (Le & Needham, 2019). Ethnic restaurants are often independent and not a part of a franchise, which leads to heightened failure rates. Limitations precipitate increased failure rates regarding financial and human resources, organizational structures, brand awareness, and competitive locations (Parsa et al., 2015). The need to develop effective success strategies unique to ethnic restaurants is apparent.

Hard work, interest, and passion for work are among the success strategies identified for ethnic restaurant owners. Recent research by Le and Needham (2019) posited hard work as critical to the success of ethnic restaurants based on difficulties accessing the necessary resources. Small restaurant owners create a competitive advantage by relying on personal resources such as skills and social networks. Hard work

is necessary to use personal resources for the benefit of the restaurant business. Le and Needham (2019) also noted that ethnic restaurateurs need to create and sustain interpersonal relations with potential clients to ensure business sustenance.

Researchers emphasize the importance of passion and a willingness to think long-term and not be discouraged by temporary downturns. In addition to hard work, the success of ethnic restaurant owners depends on interest and passion for work. According to Le and Needham (2019), ethnic restaurant owners succeed when their love for their business increases. Interest and love generate commitment and motivation to ensure the realization of business goals. Notably, Gomezelj and Kušce (2015) confirmed that small businesses remain unprofitable during the first few years of operation). Owners of small ethnic restaurants need family support and a strategic location for sustainable success. Lack of passion and interest can cause small business owners to give up too soon when profits diminish or are non-existent.

Besides moral support, family members provide essential human resources often unavailable to owners of small restaurants. Family members can be hired at affordable salaries when they are young or called upon to help during a labor shortage. The provision of labor by family members is critical when accessing experienced workers due to resource limitations (Choi et al., 2018). Researchers have also confirmed that family support is needed for the provision of advice during critical decision-making (Agarwal & Dahm, 2015). In particular, owners of ethnic restaurants seek advice from spouses. The strategic location of ethnic restaurants increases the odds of realizing business goals (Agarwal & Dahm, 2015; Le & Needham, 2019). A strategic location for ethnic



restaurants includes ample parking spaces, proximity to dense foot traffic areas, and increased visibility required for onsite branding. In addition, ethnic restaurant owners should find locations in areas with a high population of targeted consumers (Parsa et al., 2015). The outlined factors associated with family support and strategic location increase the competitive advantage of ethnic restaurants.

Furthermore, the quality of food and services can also be used to increase the success rate of ethnic restaurants. Le and Needham (2019) established the need for ethnic restaurant owners to provide high-quality foods and services through an empirical analysis of messages posted on websites and social media sites such as Facebook by consumers. Other research by Agarwal and Dahm (2015) affirmed that clients rated ethnic restaurants highly when the food was tasty and employees attentive. Clients also indicated a heightened possibility of patronizing the restaurants again after providing high rates. Referrals to friends, family members, and colleagues were higher in clients who rated restaurants favorably compared to those who provided low rates. Ethnic restaurant owners are expected to ensure consistency in the quality of food and services to sustain customer loyalty.

Cultural intelligence and food safety also constitute essential strategies for the success of owners of small restaurant owners. Ethnic restaurant owners have been faulted for tolerating poor personal hygiene, diminished temperature control mechanisms while heating or cooling foods, and use of contaminated equipment (Kang et al., 2015). The outlined food handling behaviors contribute to food poisoning and, consequently, the failure of ethnic restaurants. Kang et al. (2015) demonstrated that culture is an essential

factor in employees' food handling behaviors. Owners of ethnic restaurants, thus, ought to consider the mechanisms used in the handling of food by employees as potential determinants of success. Lack of intercultural sensitivity can inhibit the provision of training and environments supporting the subordinates' culture (Parsa et al., 2015). Such a lack of sensitivity can degrade the general effectiveness of ethnic restaurants to succeed. To realize business objectives, owners of ethnic restaurants should create a food safety culture and ensure that employees are well-versed with cultural-sensitive communications styles (Harris, 2016). Also, ethnic restaurant owners can succeed when consequences for non-compliance are established, and employees are recognized for meeting expected standards.

Consumers' preferences and perceptions regarding ethnic restaurants also appear as an influential factor in the success of small ethnic restaurants. Consumers' perception of ethnic foods has increased significantly over time (Fanelli & Nocera, 2018). The demographic variables of consumers are crucial to sustainable performance, similar to financial factors. Demographic variables are also evident in the food preferences of consumers who are increasingly patronizing ethnic restaurants offering a variety of foods as opposed to establishments with limited food options (Mascarello et al., 2015). Travelers to foreign countries and the younger generation also tend to prefer restaurants with a variety of foods. Consumers are also gravitating toward healthier, low-calorie diets (Ingerson & Kim, 2016). Thus, successful ethnic restaurateurs ought to account for differing tastes in current consumers.

### **Transition**

This study contains three sections. In Section 1, I focused on essential information related to small business sustainability and success and reviewed the literature pertaining to small business characteristics based on my conceptual framework. In Section 2, I focused on research methods used, data collection, research design, study participants, and any ethical issues or biases considered during the research. Data collection processes, data analytics procedures, analytic tools used, and study reliability and validity are also discussed. Section 3 focused on study findings, the implications for social change, and how these can be applied in the professional sphere. This section also contains recommendations and study conclusions, as well as areas to explore in future research.

## Section 2: The Project

In the following section, I describe the methodology used and activities conducted to execute this study. Topics herein comprise the researcher's role, the selection method used to garner participants, the study design and methodology, the population and sampling determination, issues related to ethics, data collection and analysis procedures, and a discussion of study rigor and robustness in reliability and validity of the results. These elements guided me as I conducted the various steps to complete the research.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore business strategies that some owners of small Nigerian restaurants have used to sustain their operations beyond 5 years. The target population for this study comprised four owners and managers of three Nigerian restaurants located in New Jersey who have developed successful business strategies and have survived for at least 5 years. By developing successful strategies that sustain employment and contribute to local communities' economic success, successful business owners drive positive social change.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher includes performing and facilitating data collection, analysis, and presentation (Lamar et al., 2019). For this study, I maintained the role of researcher and assumed an etic role whereby participants were interviewed objectively from an outside perspective (Beals et al., 2020). The etic role enabled me to ask questions and achieve deep levels of conversation. Because I had no affiliation with the restaurant

population nor was I familiar with any potential participants, I maintained a high level of objectivity.

Motivated by the horrors encountered in the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, in which Alabama Black men afflicted with syphilis were left untreated, *The Belmont Report* set to tighten ethical standards attempts that were first evidenced with the Nuremberg Code and the Declaration of Helsinki (Adashi et al., 2018). *The Belmont Report* puts forward a principled analytical framework to resolve any ethical problems arising during research with human participants. *The Belmont Report's* fundamental principles include respect for all participants, ensuring that the study acknowledges participants' autonomy and protects those who might be of compromised abilities to decide for themselves (Adashi et al., 2018). I took additional measures as outlined in *The Belmont Report*, including beneficence and justice. Beneficence ensures that all participants are treated ethically during the study process. Justice guarantees they will not be unduly burdened by any of the study's facets (Parasidis et al., 2019).

Bias is an issue in any research study (Galdas, 2017). One way to address this issue is by remaining cognizant that a researcher's bias and other personal preferences are present in all social research, both intentionally and unintentionally (Hissa & Timulak, 2020). Bracketing helps minimize bias by taking a researcher's preconceptions out of the data-gathering process (Hissa & Timulak, 2020). By setting aside personal views of the phenomenon when performing tasks associated with data collection, a researcher can remain focused on the phenomenon without influencing any outcomes (Galdas, 2017). Consequently, the first line of defense toward mitigating bias would be to remain aware

of its presence. A second line used by researchers is a carefully constructed study that employs an appropriate personal lens, achieves data saturation, and employs triangulation to enhance reliability (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017; Fusch et al., 2018). I was mindful of creating clarity and guidance regarding the processes involved in collecting, analyzing, and presenting data, focusing my personal lens during the extraction of participants' perspectives through interviews.

Researchers are sensitized to assume an active role during qualitative research or constructivist paradigms by interacting with informants and generating findings through the interactive process (Polit & Beck, 2017). This constructivist approach helped provide a rich, in-depth profile of the phenomenon under consideration in this study, elucidating multiple dimensions of the restaurant-running process. However, researchers must keep personal feelings, attitudes, and opinions from corrupting the interactive process. Otherwise, the generalizability of results to other restaurant owners or those contemplating entering the space would be compromised. Researchers ensure objectivity by using a transparent methodology, supporting themes through relevant verbatim text and supplementing results using descriptive statistics.

Furthermore, interpretations of theoretical perspectives and research findings must be appropriately critical, accurate, and understandable. Interviews are one way for a study to reach data saturation, although the number necessary for a qualitative study to reach this measure is hard to quantify (Saunders et al., 2018; Vasileiou et al., 2018). Researchers must rely on other strategies to ensure their study has substantive and

informationally rich data, such as triangulation and data saturation (Abdalla et al., 2018; Polit & Beck, 2017).

I used an interview protocol to maintain consistency among interviews (See Appendix A). The use of an interview protocol allows researchers to extract spontaneous and detailed answers from participants (Kaliber, 2019). As Frost et al. (2020) noted, an appropriate interview protocol is a core to a quality study. Semistructured interviews permit a researcher to draw out in-depth, spontaneous answers from those involved in the study; furthermore, this format permits exploring insights culled from the participants' spontaneous responses (Kaliber, 2019). An interview comprising open-ended questions can extract meaningful, context-rich answers and facilitate open and honest communication (Frost et al., 2020).

### **Participants**

Researchers need to identify willing participants with an in-depth understanding of the research topic (Polit & Beck, 2017). The criteria for participating in this study included the following: (a) owner–managers of a Nigerian restaurant in central New Jersey classified as a small business by the SBA, (b) successfully operated the restaurant for at least 5 years, and (c) willing to participate. The goal was to identify participants who could provide rich, contextualized content that would cover the necessary themes relevant to my research question.

Through a preliminary search, I identified several Nigerian restaurants that met the criteria of being in business for 5 years in the desired location. Through initial contact with each of these restaurants, four owners expressed an interest in participating in the

study. Besides the 5-year criterion, the establishments had to meet the conditions for being classified as a small business, including having annual earnings of less than \$3.5 million (SBA, 2019). Critical to the study's success was the acquisition of quality data obtained through interviews with participants who met the criteria (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Using information-rich participants, I explored those business strategies used by owners of small Nigerian restaurants to sustain operations beyond 5 years through this multiple case research design.

To comply with Prior's (2017) suggestions regarding professional and ethical research, I visited the establishments personally and conducted all interviews only after having first established a cordial relationship with the owners. All interviews followed social distancing rules necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. I gave the option to each participant to do online interviews via Zoom software. Before conducting interviews, I established a relationship with participants by telephone conversation. I informed participants about the reason for collecting data, its ultimate use, and the process's details. When a researcher creates a comfortable environment, participants are more likely to be forthright and transparent (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Furthermore, adequate time was allotted to the interview process, and each participant had the option of determining when to meet. These measures helped me develop a dynamic relationship with participants based on trust and reciprocity.



## **Research Method and Design**

### **Research Method**

The research methodology includes the techniques researchers use to formulate a study and to gather and then analyze the data relevant to the research question (Polit & Beck, 2017). Primary research methods include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed. Whereas quantitative methods are most closely aligned with positivism, this latter area focuses on observation and empirical referents; qualitative methods are more closely associated with constructivist inquiry or phenomenology. Qualitative researchers explore contextual awareness and lived experiences through research participants' thoughts and feelings (Daher et al., 2017). A quantitative researcher examines relationships or differences among given variables and outcomes using numerical data (Albers, 2017). A mixed-methods research approach combines components from the previous two, employing both constructivist and positivist principles to aid such essential facets of research as validity and generalizability (Polit & Beck, 2017).

Although qualitative research aligns most closely with the constructivist paradigm and quantitative with positivist, this does not imply that qualitative researchers never cross to the positivist side or vice versa. Sometimes, the nature of the research problem requires a mixed-methods approach, merging each type of model's salient features. Despite the flexibility in a mixed-methods approach, researchers using a blended positivist–constructivist framework do not have the freedom to fully explore insights offered by research participants (Brierley, 2017; Su, 2018). In fact, the variegated aspects of reality are seen through multiple experiential constructs (Schoonenboom & Johnson,

2017). This reality is subjective and constructed by many persons who simultaneously shape and mold this world. Consequently, from the constructivist viewpoint, such subjective impressions are unavoidable and desirable (Su, 2018). Thus, a qualitative approach should be selected as a design when a researcher seeks to delve into the phenomenology of those business strategies that would assist owners in sustaining their establishments.

### **Research Design**

Available research designs include phenomenology, ethnography, case study, grounded theory, and narrative research (Polit & Beck, 2017). Whereas phenomenological researchers concentrate on participants' lived experiences (Rosenbaum et al., 2016), ethnographic researchers explore the culture of a group of people (Tickle, 2017). Narrative researchers focus on finding meaning from people's experiences, from their traditions, cultural habits, and written or oral stories (Bruce et al., 2016). Grounded theory was developed in the 1960s by two researchers, Glaser and Strauss (1967). As the name implies, the theory is grounded in reality. Researchers use this approach when there is no existing theory to describe a process.

With its roots in sociology, grounded theory research centers on participants' concerns rather than group patterns (Rosenbaum et al., 2016) and seeks to find a core variable central to explaining the observed results (Polit & Beck, 2017). Grounded theory is more suitable for sociological phenomena, thus it was not suited for this study. Furthermore, both ethnography and phenomenology fell short for this study because its central purpose was to explore neither participants' lived experiences nor group culture.

Also, I rejected a narrative research design because my study's focus was not related to people's traditions. Researchers use a case study design, which explores bounded systems with multiple data sources (Alpi & Evans, 2019; Yin, 2018). A case study fit well with my research to explore business strategies used by successful, small Nigerian restaurant owners.

Data saturation is used to identify when a researcher should stop collecting data (Saunders et al., 2018). Data saturation requires that researchers garner sufficient amounts of information to encompass the complete range of experiences without unnecessarily gathering repetitious material (Saunders et al., 2018). Saturation is important because it means a researcher can be reasonably assured that further data collection would only yield similar results, not adding to any emerging themes and conclusions that have already been established by the existing data already collected (Polit & Beck, 2017; Saunders et al., 2018). The primary way to attain data saturation in this study was through careful investigation and analysis of the participants' answers. When no new information emerged from more data collection, data saturation was deemed achieved, and I stopped my data collection.

### **Population and Sampling**

A researcher needs to consider an appropriate number of participants that meet the criteria for participation. Saunders et al. (2018) indicated that the number of participants needed to reach data saturation could be five or fewer for qualitative studies. The population for this multiple case study comprised four owners of small Nigerian restaurants, a number sufficient to achieve data saturation (Saunders et al., 2018). Aware

that such essential research results as replicability and generalizability can only come from strict adherence to established standards, I extended data collection until I reached data saturation.

The sampling method chosen by a researcher depends on the research design. Purposive sampling is a form of nonprobability sampling that involves researchers using their judgment to select participants for the study (Polit & Beck, 2017). The sampling method chosen for this study was purposive, partly because of the limited resources available for this study and the small number of such establishments. Although Nigerian cuisine is experiencing some novel growth, establishments are still rare. Thus, finding enough establishments and then aggregating appropriate and willing participants was challenging.

### **Ethical Research**

Researchers must ensure that all proper ethical procedures are followed and that participants are adequately protected. Polit and Beck (2017) indicated that qualitative researchers develop plans early in the research process that addresses ethical issues between the researcher and participants. Adherence to ethical standards as promulgated in *The Belmont Report* is critical. Thus, when conducting this research, standard protocols were followed. Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained (08-26-21-0323459).

The consent form was reviewed with each participant before the interview process. Before conducting each interview, I had the participant sign the consent form. This use of informed consent ensured that participants were aware that their participation

was entirely voluntary, they could withdraw at any time, and their privacy would be protected (Adashi et al., 2018; Polit & Beck, 2017). All data collected was stored electronically on a laptop computer in a password-protected folder for 5 years. After this time, the stored data will be destroyed using a data wiping process on the hard drive.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

As the primary data collection instrument, I conducted face-to-face semistructured interviews using open-ended questions (see Appendix B) as my primary data source. To supplement and triangulate the interview data, I also collected additional data through observations and a review of relevant documents. I gained access to participants by first identifying Nigerian restaurants within a 50-mile radius of my home. Once these establishments were identified, I called each restaurant to initiate contact with the owners or managers. Once a sufficient number of participants was identified, they were asked whether they would be willing to participate by engaging in a one-on-one interview during which they would be answering the questions developed for the study. This screening ensured that all participants aligned with the selection criteria. Their participation would lead to the exploration of the research question.

The interview is the cornerstone of qualitative research. An interview provides the give-and-take that permits an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon (Johnson et al., 2020). The semistructured interview format provides an opportunity for participants to express and describe details about their business dealings and lived experiences (Prior, 2017). To ensure the reliability and validity of data, I incorporated member checking. After each interview, I summarized my interpretation of key points from the interview

and allowed participants to review my summary. These follow-up interviews added to and amended my final interpretation of the data.

The data collection process in a qualitative study is progressive. This process will assume multiple facets, a natural result of the data being collected from multiple participants and multiple sources. Qualitative study data collection includes semistructured interviews, document analysis, and observation (Polit & Beck, 2017). The semistructured interviews, via their open-ended format, facilitated the measurement of the extracted textual data, personal experiences, and perspectives of the participants (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017).

Semistructured interviews and document analysis comprised the primary data collection techniques for this study. I used an interview protocol containing a list of six questions to be presented to each of the participants (see Appendix A). To ensure the collection of in-depth data representing the experiences of small Nigerian restaurant owners, I supplemented the questions with follow-up questions, as necessary. Follow-up questions probed the participants for additional information and data and sought to explain emerging issues during the interview processes. To triangulate interview data collected, I relied on information from records maintained by participating restaurants. Documentary analysis is a qualitative research method in which records are analyzed to extrapolate meaning about a research topic (Cardno et al., 2017). The analysis of restaurant records enriched and supported the data recorded from the semistructured interviews. Data generated from both instruments of data collection, semistructured interviews, and documentary analysis were analyzed.

An essential part of the face-to-face interviews involved taking research journal notes. These journal notes helped organize the data and facilitated the exchange's interpretation, focusing on body language, verbal inflections, and other gestures not captured in the verbal transcripts (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Journal notes added contextual richness to the data, promoted self-awareness, and opened the conduit to insights extracted from data (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). The note-taking process avoided influencing the participants' uninhibited expressions of thought (Cardno et al., 2017).

### **Data Collection Technique**

Qualitative research involves data collected through in-person interviews, phone calls, and note-taking in the presence of participants (Cardno et al., 2017). For this study, the primary data collection came through semistructured face-to-face interviews. Open-ended questions can elicit meaningful, contextually rich answers and facilitate open and honest communication (Frost et al., 2020). Epoché, or bracketing, was employed to minimize bias and personal assumptions, which Hissa and Timulak (2020) asserted would only undermine the original purpose of the research. As such, this predisposition was assumed before initiating the interviews and carried over throughout the investigative process.

When deciding to use semistructured face-to-face interviews, I considered the specific advantages and disadvantages of this data collection technique. Adhabi and Anozie (2017) identified the primary advantage that the structure allows the participant to get comfortable and articulate vivid comments related to the topic. A face-to-face

interview is a straightforward approach to gathering detailed, rich qualitative data (Barrett, & Twycross, 2018). A disadvantage of semistructured face-to-face interviews is the difficulties associated with precautions necessary during the COVID-19 pandemic (Shaban et al., 2020). The face-to-face interview limits the geographic area of data collection due to the cost and time associated with conducting interviews (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017).

In addition to recording each face-to-face interview, I took notes during the interview. My notes included a summary of key points from the participants' comments and observations of the surroundings. By using a specially designated research journal, I organized my notes after each interview. As emphasized by Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018), journal notes help organize and facilitate interpreting the environment not captured in the verbal transcripts. These journal notes added contextual richness to the data, promoted self-awareness, and facilitated the extraction of potentially otherwise overlooked insights extracted from data (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018).

The use of semistructured interviews formed the mainstay of the interview protocol. Such a protocol permits researchers to obtain spontaneous and context-rich answers from those interviewed (Kaliber, 2019). As Frost et al. (2020) underscored, a consistently applied interview protocol was fundamental to qualitative research. The semistructured interview creates a spontaneous, unrehearsed environment; participants can talk freely, as though they were among friends and family. Kaliber (2019) attributed semistructured interviews to extemporaneous insights culled from the process. Interviews



of the open-ended question type provided meaningful and frank answers from the participants and on a wide variety of topics (Frost et al., 2020).

So that the perspectives of study participants were accurately documented, member checking was employed. Member checking involves participants reading and commenting on a summary of their information throughout the interviews (Johnson et al., 2020). After each interview, I summarized my interpretation of key points from the interview and allowed participants to review my summary. Follow-up interviews with all participants facilitated this checkpoint. Member checking can help researchers identify inaccuracies and boost data validity and dependability (Johnson et al., 2020).

### **Data Organization Technique**

Data organization refers to the storage of information in electronic files and hard copy materials in a way that permits easy retrieval and subsequent analysis (Yin, 2018). The audio files were uploaded to Google Drive for storage and backed up immediately after the completion of each interview. Audio data from the interviews were transcribed verbatim for organization and analysis. I used a web-based transcription application to facilitate this process. All other data collected served to reinforce and corroborate extracted themes. Each participant was coded using alphanumeric criteria, for example, R1, for restaurant one, first-person interviewed. When there was only one person interviewed at the restaurant, the sequence stopped at the letter “a;”; otherwise, I continued with R1a, R2a, ... R4a, as there were a total of four participants. Coding participant responses allowed recording data without revealing private or personal

information (Polit & Beck, 2017). Coding participant identity ensured that appropriate ethical guidelines were followed (Adashi et al., 2018).

The interview transcripts were saved in a Microsoft Word document and then uploaded to NVivo 10.0. Interview notes were recorded in a specially designated research journal to improve the study's reliability and validity. Journals help researchers recognize and address any issues tied to the gathered data's interpretive flexibility (Harvey, 2011). Journal notes taken during the semistructured interviews were recorded and uploaded into a Microsoft Word document. Data was organized based on the answers to the interview questions outlined in the interview protocol. I stored data files in a password-protected secured Google Drive. Data analysis commenced using thematic analysis and triangulated data from the documentary analysis and semistructured interviews.

### **Data Analysis**

In qualitative research, data analysis involves the process of identifying themes, making inferences to collected data, and providing an explanation of findings (Nowell et al., 2017; Watkins, 2017). The data analysis process included methodological triangulation of interviews, field notes, and internal documents. Triangulation converges sources from primary and secondary data, enriches evidence of research, robust credibility, and adds value to the research quality (Natow, 2020). Yin (2018) noted that methodological data triangulation involves data collection using different methods. I used methodological triangulation by collecting data using different data collection methods. To supplement data collected through semistructured interviews, I collected data through casual observations during the interviews and observation of the restaurant operations

and the surrounding area. I also reviewed publicly available documents that provided a holistic understanding of the restaurant's business operation. To document my observations and document reviews, I used my journal to note highlights.

Yin's (2018) 5-step method facilitated analyzing the aggregated textual data, including compilation, disaggregation, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding. The five steps include the following: (a) data compilation, (b) data disaggregation, (c) data reassembly, (d) data interpretation, and (e) data conclusion (Yin, 2018). After I uploaded the data into NVivo, I compiled data into distinct groupings. Step two involved data disaggregation to remove superfluous themes and other redundant material. Step three required that the data be reaggregated and clustered into predominant themes. Step four involved pattern checking against interview transcripts, journal notes, and other documents to facilitate data interpretation. Finally, step five involved the synthesis of the themes by coding the data into a coherent whole that summarized the lived experiences extracted from the interviews. The review process and coding process required at least two rounds of coding. Finley et al. (2020) recommended conducting two rounds of review and coding to refine the themes. I followed the steps outlined by Yin two times.

I used NVivo to help thematically code categories and extract the themes that emerge from the semistructured interviews, journal notes, and other collected information. NVivo facilitated the organization, coding, and manipulation of text data and then displayed the emergent codes (Bonfim, 2020). NVivo 10.0 software facilitates the sorting of unstructured data and structure subject matter into emergent themes that undergird the collected answers to questions and other observed information (Maher et

al., 2018). Using NVivo helped me organize the data into hierarchies, track data by salient features, and create an event log. Theme searching and data pattern recognition was achieved by analyzing the NVivo 10 event logs stored safely for 5 years on an external drive stored in a fireproof safe. The NVivo 10 software helped me sort the unstructured data and develop emergent themes. As highlighted by Paulus et al. (2015), the use of NVivo bolsters the rigor of a qualitative study, permitting careful data analysis.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Considering that qualitative research is inherently subjective as the researcher explores a phenomenon through a personally subjective lens, the factors of rigor are more prone to suspicion, namely since the scientific rigor, the accuracy of purely quantitative numerical data, are unavailable to this research process (Forero et al., 2018; Maher et al., 2018). The generalizability and transferability of results to other similar and nonsimilar situations can be annihilated when reliability and validity are jeopardized. However, the inherent subjectivity of the qualitative approach presents challenges to reliability and validity.

#### **Reliability**

Whereas in quantitative analysis, reliability refers to replicability, in qualitative analysis, reliability refers to consistency (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To increase reliability, I remained cognizant of the possibility of personal bias considering the researcher will rely primarily on individual skills. As such, I deliberately excluded my personal opinions and perceptions from interfering with the research process by reporting data objectively. Meticulous recordkeeping was employed, and a journal was maintained

during all the interviews to ensure that the audio data collected during the interviews corroborate with journal notes (Nowell et al., 2017). Dependability refers to the consistency in the methodology.

The data's reliability in the final presentation was enhanced by including actual verbatim from the interviews into the results to support arguments. Supporting conclusions with respondents' actual utterances is identified as an effective reliability measure by Ronkainen and Ryba (2020). Also, member checking was used to ensure that the participants' perspectives were reflected accurately. During this process, I shared what member checking is and why it was being used with participants, clearly explaining that this process would help catch errors and inaccuracies in collected data. Through member checking, I had the study participants read the summaries of their interviews and verify their accuracy. This process lent dependability to the research and reduced bias while augmenting contextual understanding (Johnson et al., 2020). These strategies helped enhance the reliability of results from the study.

### **Validity**

Furthermore, validity implies using appropriate tools, processes, and data (Watkins, 2017). Thus, the research validity subsumes such factors as research question appropriateness, methodology choice, design-method compatibility, data analysis adequacy, valid results relevant to the study sample and context. Although all means were taken to ensure both reliability and validity, I was aware of the qualitative analysis's immanent phenomenological nature. Thus, human fallibility arising from overly subjective analysis or the oversight of one or two particulars that another researcher

might have caught during the interview process or the subsequent interpretative analysis was explicitly acknowledged. I used the four-component framework described by Korstjens and Moser (2018). The model helps develop trustworthiness in the research study. The four components, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability act as shields against the “looseness” of the research and confer rigidity. Credibility refers to the confidence placed in the data and the meanings extracted from them (Polit & Beck, 2017). Confirmability implies that another researcher would be able to establish the same meanings from the results. Finally, transferability refers to the research’s utility, that the results can aid future investigation (Polit & Beck, 2017).

### ***Credibility***

Credibility ensures that the participants’ experiences are accurately interpreted and represented in the analysis (Shufutinsky, 2020). Triangulation of the semistructured interviews bolstered credibility. The data sources comprised the interviews and recorded notes, observations, and document review. The primary data sources were semistructured face-to-face interviews and a review of internal and publicly available information. Triangulation converges sources from primary and secondary data, enriches research evidence, and adds value to the research quality (Natow, 2020). Yin (2018) emphasized that methodological data triangulation involved the detailed collection of information from various sources, so data convergence into emergent themes. Although time-consuming, triangulation was necessary to corroborate the stored data and ensure that the restaurant participants’ responses were indicative of the topic scope (Shufutinsky, 2020).

### ***Data Saturation***

In qualitative studies, data saturation may occur with five or fewer participant interviews (Saunders et al., 2018). Given the fewer number of participants that were available, based on a preliminary investigation, triangulation was used to support data saturation by approaching the research question with different data sources to extract rich content. This extracted data was then contextualized appropriately. As replicability and generalizability remained important constructs to maintain, strict adherence to established standards to produce thick data was followed (Polit & Beck, 2017).

### ***Confirmability***

As part of the four-component framework described by Korstjens and Moser (2018), confirmability occurs when the results can be duplicated by another researcher. If the themes extracted from the semistructured interviews are reliable and trustworthy, another study to investigate a similar phenomenon should produce similar outcomes (Polit & Beck, 2017). The confirmability of this study will ensure that the extracted interpretations were not invented haphazardly.

### ***Transferability***

Transferability of the results will permit the utility of the research. The research aims to explore a phenomenon. Transferability will enable other researchers investigating a similar cause to benefit from the applicability of this study to their own (Moon, 2019). This last component ensures that the results can be used to advance some purpose, enhance human endeavor, or enlighten previous unknown areas of inquiry (Polit & Beck, 2017). In a qualitative study, researchers achieve transferability through thick

descriptions supported with appropriate sampling and participant criteria strategy (Thomas, 2017). I included adequate information in my research to allow future researchers to compare my context to other possible contexts.

### **Transition and Summary**

A qualitative case study design was appropriate to address my research questions. To collect data, I identified participants based on established criteria. In Section 2, I discussed the role of the researcher, the sample population, sampling methods, and ethical principles. In this section, I also described strategies to increase the quality of research, including data saturation, triangulation, and member checking. I also identified how I would use these strategies throughout the study. In the data collection section, I described how journaling would be used to facilitate reflexivity and to constrain subjectivity, processes that add to overall research value.

In Section 3, I report the qualitative analysis of the data obtained by the previously discussed methods. Above all, the focus of the data analysis is to report good qualitative work that is descriptively sound, explicit, and interpretively rich and innovative. In this section, I review the major themes and their applicability to real-world business scenarios.



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

#### **Introduction**

The primary purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore business strategies that small Nigerian restaurant owners have used to sustain operations beyond 5 years. In this section, I analyze themes and patterns emerging from the data collected regarding strategies study participants use to sustain their businesses. I collected data from four owners of Nigerian restaurants located in New Jersey, by conducting semistructured interviews with open-ended and follow-up questions. Data analysis and observation methods were also employed to extract more themes. After recording the collected information in a journal, I engaged the four participants in a member-checking process to verify that the interpretation of their responses was accurate. The main themes related to sustainability strategies for small Nigerian restaurants included (a) persistence in the face of failure, (b) finance and inventory, and (c) positive energy and engagement. These findings revealed how some restaurant owners use optimism and perseverance to outperform others in the food service industry.

#### **Presentation of Findings**

The restaurant industry experienced some of the most notable changes during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The biggest change was the obligation to implement strict safety measures proposed by the national and local governments. For instance, all restaurant employees had to change gloves regularly, wipe each table with a fresh towel, and always wear masks (Yang et al., 2020). When the pandemic reached a peak between March and May 2020, the majority of the restaurants closed either due to

legal restrictions or as a way of avoiding expenses. COVID-19 also forced the government to restrict the movement of people and goods, thereby adversely affecting the industry. All four restaurant owner participants indicated the pandemic had affected them negatively. R2a and R3a closed their businesses for a while before the market conditions stabilized. R1a and R4a did not shut down the business, but they suffered expenses associated with the strict regulatory measures. These expenses were heightened by the fact that there were few customers. Overall, these restaurants suffered losses during the pandemic but employed robust management strategies to survive in the industry.

The overarching research question for this study was: What are the business strategies used by owners of small Nigerian restaurants to sustain operations beyond 5 years? I used this research question as the foundation for interviewing four restaurant owners who had employed successful strategies to sustain their firms for more than 5 years. A semistructured interview with six open-ended questions was used to obtain the data. I also analyzed the restaurants' records to confirm and supplement the data collected from interviews. The participants were coded using alphanumeric criteria for purposes of anonymous identity. The first participant was coded as R1a, referring to the first respondent in restaurant one. Because there was only one respondent per restaurant, the sequence stopped at the letter *a*. This unique and anonymous identification ensured the confidentiality of the participants. All the data collected were organized in a Microsoft Word file and a soft copy was stored in Google Drive. I also generated a hard copy for analysis, which yielded several themes. Table 2 shows the number of times each participant addressed the main themes.

**Table 2***Number of Comments for Each Theme*

	R1a	R2a	R3a	R4a
Persistence in the face of failure	21	19	24	18
Positive energy and engagement	19	22	16	21
Strategic finance and inventory management	11	22	29	15

**Persistence in the Face of Failure**

*Persistence* refers to the continued positive maintenance of entrepreneurial motivation and constant active engagement (Caliendo et al., 2020). Given the outbreak of the global pandemic, the attribute of persistence was a notable feature of the participants who all claimed this event made business operations extremely difficult. All participants took active measures to avert business failure, and the ones who fared well exhibited persistence. Entrepreneurs often decide to start new businesses at a point in time when social, political, economic, and environmental conditions seem favorable for the creation of the new venture. However, because market conditions are dynamic, as was clearly demonstrated from the pandemic, the venturing effort could prove costly, time consuming, and more complex than initially expected. Notably, during the pandemic, and still ongoing in regions of the country that have taken more aggressive approaches, these regulations have brought about changes to disfavor these businesses. Under such circumstances, the market is dictated by consumers who may be less interested in the

offered services, contrary to initial expectations. Such changes will always threaten business survival.

An analysis of the interviewees' responses shows that *persistence in the face of failure* was the most discernible theme. This theme was mentioned 82 times compared to the second and third themes mentioned 78 and 77 times, respectively (see Table 2). R1a and R3a repeatedly responded that persistence even in difficult times was the primary strategy for their restaurant's survival beyond 5 years. When asked about what made the business survive for more than 5 years, R1a stated:

We have done nothing much apart from persevering the most difficult situations. Everyone wants to be successful. However, failure is inevitable. For individuals to grow and learn, they must tolerate failure. I am glad that the management and I welcomed fail and learnt to pick up as fast as possible and carry on. Our tolerance has eventually paid off.

The other three participants had similar responses. For example, R3a stated:

Every business venture worth pursuing requires a high level of persistence. Giving up is not an ideal option when one wants to succeed in the long term. Imagine if you gave up on schooling the first time you failed exams in school. You would most probably not be here today. Even if you fail several times, you have to lift up yourself and try again. In the past 5 years, we have faced numerous challenges, including negative market dynamics resulting in huge financial losses, but we did not give up.

Similarly, R2a and R4a mentioned persistence and perseverance in difficult times in their responses to the question on sustainability strategies. Participant R2a commented, “The pandemic was challenging, but persistence got us through.” R4a stated emphatically, “All our staff knew survival was on the line; they had no choice but to be persistent and hang tough.” Overall, the four participants claimed that persistence in the face of failure was an integral ingredient in their survival for more than 5 years in the market.

The above findings correspond with scholarly evidence and literature on the importance of entrepreneurial importance. Several recent studies have linked high entrepreneurial persistence with increased chances of business survival and success in the long term. Caliendo et al. (2020) posited that persistence, on the individual level, facilitates personal growth, spiritual return, and goal realization. When small-scale entrepreneurs are faced with adversity or enticing alternatives, persistence helps them grow and learn (Caliendo et al., 2020). Adverse setbacks push such entrepreneurs to continually improve their knowledge and skills by summarizing their failures and strengthening their judgment of the market information. Therefore, persistence is a value that helps entrepreneurs realize their achievement needs and thereby plan effective strategies to attain those needs.

Persistence in the face of failure is a function of various predictors. Caliendo et al. (2020) suggested that entrepreneurial persistence is primarily a function of human capital personality and business-related determinants. *Human capital* refers to the knowledge and skills that entrepreneurs acquire through education, training, and experience (Caliendo et al., 2020). The skills and knowledge equip entrepreneurs with increased

cognitive abilities, leading to higher levels of persistence and productivity at work. Some studies have also shown that prior experience contributes to increased knowledge of the market opportunities available for a particular venture (Bird, 2019; Vaillant & Lafuente, 2019). Therefore, experience contributes to an increased likelihood of persistence in a new but similar venture. Participants' responses in this study corroborate with the above literature. R1a, R3a, and R4a had a master's degree in business and related fields (Table 3). R2a had an undergraduate degree in economics. R2a, R3a, and R4a had prior experience in a similar venture (Table 3). Thus, human capital has a significant influence on persistence as well as the long-term performance of a business. All participants had significant experience as an entrepreneur and restaurant management. Cantamessa et al. (2018) found that experience is a significant factor in the success of a business.

**Table 3**

*Participants' Experience and Education*

	Level of education	Years' experience as entrepreneur	Years' experience restaurant management
R1a	Master's degree	10	8
R2a	Bachelor's degree	8	8
R3a	Master's degree	12	9
R4a	Master's degree	14	12

Business-related determinants include factors such as financial resources available at startup. Previous research has proposed that the availability of a substantial amount of

resources during the establishment of a business increases survival chances by providing a buffer against unexpected losses caused by managerial mistakes or market downturns (Caliendo et al., 2020). This financial backing has a positive influence on an entrepreneur's persistence. All four participants in this study confessed they had more than enough financial capital before venturing into the food service industry. When asked why they persisted despite making significant losses in the first 2 years, R2a stated, "I had enough financial resources to at least pay my workers by then." Similarly, R4a stated that they relied on "significant financial base to be persistent in her venture." Therefore, enough financial resources are crucial in decision making on entrepreneurial persistence.

Another predictor for entrepreneurial persistence is an individual's personality. Crucial entrepreneurial personality traits include passion and self-motivation. According to Caliendo et al. (2020), entrepreneurs with passion for a particular entrepreneurial activity will be persistent in their efforts despite adversity and even failure. Similarly, the self-concordant model postulates that intrinsically motivated individuals will likely stick to their business goals and ventures for longer. In contrast, extrinsic motivation is easily washed away by adversity, negative feedback, or an attractive external alternative. All four participants in this study confessed they were self-motivated and passionate for their work. The theme of persistence links to the conceptual framework of entrepreneurship theory espoused by Cantillon (1755). Caliendo et al. (2020) made clear that persistence in entrepreneurial pursuits was indispensable to success. Furthermore, Głodowska (2019) noted that passion for business preempted frustration during rough times, largely by strengthening *stick-to-itiveness*.

### **Positive Energy and Engagement**

Positive energy and engagement was the second most discernible theme in this study. Developing positive energy involves anticipating good outcomes and believing that despite various obstacles and difficulties, all things will work out favorably in the end. In other words, positive energy is the ability to focus on the positive aspects despite several negativities showing up. Optimism at the workplace increases engagement. When individuals have a positive attitude towards their work or business ventures, they are likely to use most of their talents, passion, vigor, and dedication to achieve their objectives.

Positive energy and engagement are significant predictors of entrepreneurial persistence. This study's findings show that all four respondents were highly optimistic and engaged in their work. An analysis of the restaurants' records showed that the four owners spent significant business time on their ventures (see Table 4). Individuals often spend an average of 40 hours per week at their workplaces or businesses. The extra hours that this research's participants spent at their ventures indicates that they are high hardworking and dedicated to their work. Additionally, these restaurant owners were always happy and extended their positive energy spirit to their employees. When asked about the strategies he employed to overcome failure and other adverse events in his business, R1a responded:

First, I am proud that I chose to invest in a venture that I genuinely enjoy. If at any point an undesirable event occurs and I feel like giving up, I remember that I



like what I do and should be happy and should act positively if I want things to work my way.

R4a's response to the same question was, "I always stay positive and keep faith that things will eventually work my way." R2a stated, "Positivity is crucial to success in any venture," and R3a pronounced, "My positive attitude has served me well these past 5 years and especially during this pandemic."

**Table 4**

*Time Participants Spend at Their Restaurant*

Participant	Average hours per week spent at the restaurant
R1a	45
R2a	48
R3a	51
R4a	47

The above observations align with scholarly findings on the importance of positive energy and engagement for entrepreneurs. Kodden (2020) postulated that passion and enthusiasm of entrepreneurs are part and parcel of organizational success. Positively oriented entrepreneurs work harder, are more engaged, and focused (Kodden, 2020). Optimistic entrepreneurs are also very confident about their abilities, and they extend this value to their employees. What is more, hardworking and optimistic investors are not easily intimidated by challenges. These kinds of investors are capable of facing their fears and taking necessary actions to achieve their goals.

Laguna and Razmus (2018) investigated the relationship between positive orientation, work engagement, and entrepreneurial success. The researchers hypothesized that positive orientation is a personal resource for maintaining engagement in entrepreneurial activity, thereby facilitating success. Feeling successful leads to greater engagement and the building of more personal resources in the long term. The study's results showed that an entrepreneur's positive energy is directly related to work engagement and business success. The relationship between the three variables was found to be reciprocating. Positive energy fostered engagement which led to hard work and success. When entrepreneurs evaluated their firms and felt that they perform better than similar firms in the same sector, they gained a more positive orientation and became more engaged in their work. The relationship between positive energy, engagement and entrepreneurial success was a vicious cycle where one element leads to the other. The researchers observed that positive energy made entrepreneurs be more confident in themselves and have more positive expectations of their venture's future. This observation aligns with the postulates of the positive orientation theory which acknowledges the importance of a positive mindset in the success of an individual (Bernoster et al., 2018). Positive energy and engagement tie in with the entrepreneurship theory because these elements drive sustainability, as noted by Fritsch and Wyrwich (2017).

### **Strategic Finance and Inventory Management**

Most restaurants that lack a proper financial management system often fail within their first 2 years of operation. According to Jung (2017), most first-time restaurant

owners are so focused on starting capital that they forget about the working capital that will sustain them until they reach the break-even point and begin generating profits. Break-even point refers to the point when a restaurants' expenses match its sales (Jung, 2017). Breakeven represents the point where the firm's profit is zero, and the business is only running successfully enough to cover all of its costs (Jung, 2017). Reaching this point requires entrepreneurs to project the costs of running a business accurately and precisely before investing. An accurate prediction of the operating expenses ensures that the business reaches its break-even point in time (Jung, 2017).

Getting beyond a break-even point and gaining profits requires robust financial management strategies. According to participants R1a, R3a, and R4a, one of these strategies is budgeting for expenses which refers to the accurate prediction and planning about the firm's total fixed costs and total working costs. R3a stated that "budgeting enables my managers to separate the firm's assets from liabilities and know what to prioritize when it comes to income generation and cash payment."

Maintaining a cash flow statement is another method that this study's participants used to manage their finance. A cash flow statement informs investors about how the firm's routine activities impact the amount of cash and cash equivalents a business has (Jung, 2017). In other words, a cash statement will inform a business owner how much cash the business has at hand, how much is coming and how much would be released. While a budget informs and gives direction on what and how to spend, a cash flow statement shows how much the firm is spending and where the amount is being spent.

The study's participants also mentioned reducing labor costs and checking reports daily as essential financial management strategies. Regular checking of reports gives the owner an idea of the firm's daily sales and expenses (Jung, 2017). This strategy allows the owner to track the sales and expenses patterns and thereby plan how to improve this pattern positively (Jung, 2017). Keeping the labor cost under control is also a crucial financial management strategy. An exemplary way to keep the staffing level as low as possible is by outsourcing some services. For example, R1a and R2a said that their firms often outsource human resource services during recruitment. According to R1a, "We do not always need the services of a human resource manager because our firm hires only once or twice a year." Meanwhile R2a stated, "Restaurant concerns employ as many people as needed to keep productivity high while keeping costs minimized." As reported by R3a, "Whenever we need these services, we pay a small fee to external human resource managers to perform the task on our behalf." Finally, R4a said, "I believe staffing levels are important, and this was seen more than ever during the past 2 years."

### ***Inventory***

Inventory in the restaurant industry includes all physical items needed to provide services to customers. An inventory helps managers keep the right amount of food and ingredients so that there is enough food stock to serve customers. Proper inventory management allows restaurants to reduce food waste, decrease the overall cost of goods, and increase profitability while keeping customers happy (Blum, 2020). There are various influential inventory management strategies restaurants employ to improve their efficiency. The first strategy is using the same staff to do the inventory. If the same staff

is used to track the inventory, they will be more efficient and learn to track inconsistencies and improve on mistakes quickly (Blum, 2020). Three out of the four participants in this study confessed that they had maintained their inventory managers for over 5 years. R1a was the only restaurant owner with an inventory manager who had been in the organization for only six months. R1a said the former manager had asked for resignation due to personal reasons, and the firm had to hire a new one to keep the restaurant running, stating, “I had no choice but to do this.” However, the firm had an intention of keeping the new manager for as long as possible. This contrasted with R2a’s strategy, as this owner noted, “I’ve been able to do without a manager in this area because I’ve worn this hat.”

Tracking the inventory consistently and using the inventory for future buying decisions are also recommendable inventory management strategies. Restaurant managers should track their inventory regularly to see how quickly foods and ingredients are being used (Blum, 2020). Consistently taking inventory will help the owner precisely predict the consumption patterns and make appropriate future buying decisions so that the firm always keeps the right amount of stock. The restaurant owners who participated in this study used various methods to track and manage their inventory. An example is the first in first-out (FIFO) method. This method implies that the firms use the oldest foods and supplies before the rest (Lee et al., 2016). FIFO requires inventory managers to position the oldest items in more accessible areas. Another method is the ‘just in time inventory management.’ This strategy ensures that the firm keeps an inventory needed to fulfill the current and expected amount of items needed to cater to customers’ needs (Lee

et al., 2016). Just in time inventory management helps a firm to optimize its storage space and save on warehousing costs.

Safeguarding against mistakes and using technology to forecast demands are the other inventory management strategies this study's participants used to ensure the success of their businesses. R3a and R4a said that they considered putting two employees in charge of the inventory and each of these employees had to counter-check the partner's work to ensure there were no mistakes. R3a stated, "I had to juggle two people in the same role, and this was sometimes a challenge." On the other hand, R4a said, "The ability to use two staff, who complemented each other well, was a big help in this area." Another efficient inventory management strategy is using computer software to forecast demand based on previous trends and other preset conditions (Lee et al., 2016). All four participants in this study said that they used to predict demands using various computer software regularly.

The observations regarding inventory management correspond with the findings of Gołaś (2020) on the causative link between inventory performance and profitability. Gołaś (2020) study took place in the Polish food industry, where the researcher surveyed an inventory mix that included raw materials, work-in-progress goods, and finished products. The study's aim was to verify the direct relationship between inventory performance and profitability. The overall finding was that improving inventory management efficiency positively affects a firm's financial performance (Gołaś, 2020). Another tie-in to the entrepreneurship conceptual framework becomes evident from the

work of Johansson et al. (2020), who stressed that proper inventory management was a crucial aspect of the success of an enterprise, especially for family businesses.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

This study's findings apply to all small restaurant owners who wish to sustain their firms beyond 5 years in a highly dynamic and competitive business environment. Understanding what strategies are needed to outcompete rivals will help small restaurant owners develop feasible market survival plans (Głodowska, 2019; Johansson et al., 2020). The main strategies that this study has highlighted are persistence in the face of failure, positive energy and engagement and strategic management of finance and inventory. These strategies are also relevant to small business owners who intend to achieve long-term sustainability (Ribeiro-Soriano, 2017).

As noted by researchers, investors nurture persistence by embracing positive energy and avoiding negative thoughts (Głodowska, 2019; Ribeiro-Soriano, 2017). Despite the market ups and downs, young entrepreneurs should always find reasons to stay in the market by seeking counselling services and advice from established entrepreneurs (Fritsch & Wyrwich, 2017). This research has also established that surrounding oneself with positively minded people is an important way of being persistent and maintaining positive energy in a business. Investors who wish to survive in the dynamic market should surround themselves with individuals who will influence them positively.

Regarding finance and inventory management, investors should employ evidence-based approaches for optimum returns. This research has highlighted several finance and

inventory management strategies investors could employ to earn maximum returns. Examples of these strategies include consistent tracking of inventory and maintaining a cashflow statement to avoid snafus (Gołaś, 2020). By analyzing the direct relationship between inventory performance and profitability, Gołaś pointed out that restaurant stakeholders stood to benefit from inventory management efficiency, a factor that would positively affect financial performance (Gołaś, 2020).

### **Implications for Social Change**

Applying this study's findings in the real-life business environment may lower restaurant failure rates and increase the sustainability of small businesses. Consequently, there may be a positive social change through increased employment rates, reduced employee turnover, and improved living standards for the local community members (Ovens, 2018). The restaurant industry provides employment to more than 10% of the U.S. population (Dixon et al., 2018). Sustainability of more restaurant businesses could create even more job opportunities for the locals thereby improving living standards in the community.

Achieving long-term sustainability for small businesses may also increase local spending. An increased local expenditure will result in an additional source of government taxes that would be used in community improvement projects. These projects strengthen the local economy and the whole community (Ovens, 2018). Lastly, survival and success of small enterprises will likely motivate aspiring entrepreneurs who will invest in their ideas and multiply the above social benefits.



### **Recommendation for Action**

This study's primary purpose was to explore the strategies that small restaurant owners employ to sustain their businesses for more than 5 years. The main survival strategies that this study found out include being persistent in the face of failure and positive energy, and engagement. Based on these strategies, I have identified two recommendations for action for small business owners.

Small business entrepreneurs should be persistent even in the face of failure. Investors often decide to venture into a business at a point in time when social, political, and economic conditions seem favorable. However, these conditions often change and threaten a firm's survival. Firms that withstand these changes survive longer in the market. An essential factor that helps firms sustain harsh market conditions is the availability of enough financial resources to provide a buffer against unexpected financial resources (Caliendo et al., 2020). Therefore, small business investors should accumulate enough financial resources before venturing into their various enterprises. These resources will stand in for unexpected future losses and help the firm survive an unfavorable market condition.

Small restaurant entrepreneurs should be optimistic and highly engaged with their enterprises. This study found out that positive energy and engagement are directly related to entrepreneurial success. Therefore, small business entrepreneurs should be optimistic about their ventures and invest all their talents and abilities in the business. Investors should also be able to transfer positive energy to their employees through various employee motivation techniques such as appraisal, rewards, and bonuses.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study explored the sustainability strategies used by owners of small Nigerian restaurants. The target population comprised of four owners of Nigerian restaurants located in New Jersey. Recommendations for future research include expanding the study to a different geographical location. Strategies for business survival may differ in other places due to variations in demographics, social, cultural, and economic climates. Extending the research to a different geographical location will result in the discovery of additional strategies essential for a firm's long-term survival.

I also recommend research on the promotion strategies that small restaurant owners use to ensure long-term sustainability. This study's participants overlooked extensive production promotion as a crucial element in their firms' survival. Future research should determine how various promotion techniques such as social media marketing could potentially affect an enterprises' survival.

### **Reflection**

Using semistructured interviews with four owners of Nigerian restaurants, I collected data to understand how these business owners sustained their businesses for more than 5 years. During the data collection process, I gained a significant amount of knowledge on how small restaurants are operated and about the various difficulties that investors faced on their entrepreneurial journey. I did not have any preconceived ideas regarding restaurant ownership and operation. My entire data collection process depended on the study participants, their being honest, and their providing verifiable data. Luckily, all the four restaurant owners were more than willing to support this research.

The participants produced the relevant data verification documents supporting their responses. Overall, the data collection process was unique and enjoyable.

My journey started when I came to this country over 30 years ago. My family came to the United States without documentation because my parents wanted a better life and longer life for us in the land of opportunity. Indeed, my parents had to make the hardest decision ever, bringing me, their first born, and six other siblings to a new country. Unfortunately, I am the only of the six who suffers from an acute chronic condition known as sickle cell anemia. For me, most of my childhood was spent in the hospital because of this unpredictable condition. I was told by doctors and other healthcare professionals that I would not be able to sustain a normal life, such as having a job or having any education.

Despite these gloomy predictions, my educational journey started at the 2-year Essex County College, where I received an associate's degree in business management. I completed this degree in approximately three and a half years, mainly because of two things. For one, without documentation, I was classified as an international student and had to pay for my tuition out-of-pocket. Secondly, because of my illness, I spent most of my time in the hospital. At the age of 23, I finally completed the associate's degree. Then, shortly before I turned 24, I received my employment authorization documentation from immigration. At that moment, I felt that I had experienced the biggest accomplishment of my life, and I felt I needed to continue my education.

From there, I went to Kean University where I completed within 2 years my bachelor's degree in business science, all the while facing the same health challenges. At

this time, I received my green card from immigration. All this while, I had nothing but perseverance and a commitment to maintain the momentum that would compel me to pursue my master of science in management at Walden University in 2012, which was completed in 2013. Finally, in 2013, I began my doctoral study in business management with a concentration in healthcare management. This phase was fraught with struggles as I faced extreme financial stress while my health condition worsened which threw additional challenges into the mix. In 2017, I became a U.S. citizen, and I now look forward to completing my education goals.

### **Conclusion**

This research's purpose was to explore the strategies that owners of small Nigerian restaurants used to sustain their businesses for more than 5 years. Previous studies have pointed out the essence of small restaurants in this nation's economy. Despite the importance, most of these small restaurants do not survive for more than five years due to dynamic market conditions. This study presented practical solutions to this challenge. The data collected indicated that persistence in the face of failure and positive energy and engagement are the main sustainability strategies for small businesses. This study has contributed to academic research on small restaurants by filling a gap in the existing literature on what survival strategies small restaurant owners use to succeed.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

This study's interview protocol is formulated using four distinct steps based on the interview protocol refinement (IPR) framework by Frost et al. (2020).

### Ensuring Interview Questions Align with Research Questions

Evidence to resolve the research question, "What are the business strategies utilized by owners of thriving small Nigerian restaurants to sustain operations beyond five years?" will be generated through the six related interview questions outlined below.

### Interview Questions

What business strategies do you use to sustain your operations?

What risk-taking strategies do you implement to sustain your operations?

How do you determine the success of your strategies in sustaining your operations?

What barriers have you encountered while implementing your strategies?

How do you overcome barriers to implementing your strategy?

Is there anything else you would like to share about what you do to sustain your operations?

### Inquiry-based conversation

The interviewees will be oriented with the interview process before the interview commences. The respondents will be encouraged to answer the researcher's questions to avoid deviating from the research topic (Frost et al., 2020). Since the researcher will be conducting semistructured interviews, the respondents will respond to follow-up questions as necessary. Social rules for ordinary conversation will also be established whereby the informant and researcher will speak in turns and refrain from interrupting

dialogue unnecessarily. The researcher will still adhere to the interview questions outlined above and only supplement with relevant follow-up queries to ensure that the interviews generate the intended information within the acceptable time limit of 45-90 minutes.

#### Feedback on Interview Questions

The researcher will seek feedback on interview questions to determine whether the respondents will understand the questions and respond effectively by reading the interview questions aloud to one of the respondents before the interview process.

#### Close Reading of Interview Questions

The researcher will involve an independent party such as a colleague for feedback on the interview questions' suitability for the target individuals. The interview questions' length, structure, and comprehension will be examined (Frost et al., 2020). The necessary changes will be made to ensure success during the actual data collection exercise.

### Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What business strategies do you use to sustain your operations?
2. What risk-taking strategies do you implement to sustain your operations?
3. How do you determine the success of your strategies in sustaining your operations?
4. What barriers have you encountered while implementing your strategies?
5. How do you overcome barriers to implementing your strategy?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share about what you do to sustain your operations?