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Understanding Instructional Needs of Entrepreneurs Learning Social Media Marketing

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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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Kathryn Ann Tomlinson

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

Understanding Instructional Needs of Entrepreneurs Learning Social Media Marketing

by

Kathryn Ann Tomlinson

MS, Walden University, 2014

BA, University of Texas at Arlington, 1984

Dissertation Submitted in Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

May 2022

Abstract

Research has shown that early adoption of innovations often converges with the need for knowledge. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was understanding what types of instruction small business owners and their employees required to fill a gap in learning necessary skills to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns. The conceptual framework was based on the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology model, which originated from social cognitive theory, the technology acceptance model, diffusion of innovations theory, and other sentinel studies. Research questions explored the needs and experiences of entrepreneurs learning how to launch and maintain social media campaigns. Data were collected in open-ended interviews with 12 small business owners or their employees on a recorded phone line. Data analysis consisted of thematic analysis which showed instructional experiences and challenges small business owners and their employees had in learning social media marketing. Experiences they described helped define learner needs, whereas challenges aligned with strategies that could be transformed into instructional methodology. Education at a local level can impact citizens' ability to overcome poverty by increasing income for struggling small businesses in Arkansas, which has implications for positive social change.

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Dedication

This research study is dedicated to three people who made an impact on my life during the course of this study and beyond. They all understand how serious I was about completing this study, as well as sacrifices involved when you truly love one another. Angie Matuszewski, Coman Ray Nail, Grandmother Shines of Hope Orphanage Uganda; may you all rest peacefully in a better place.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

This basic qualitative study was intended to help understand what types of instruction small business owners and their employees needed to fill a gap in learning necessary skills to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns. The focus was on small business owners and their employees and how they learn to use social media to market their products and services. The field had much research on the effectiveness of social media marketing, however there was a gap in how entrepreneurs accessed, perceived, and received instruction in innovative marketing strategies. Research outcomes have shown that early adoption of innovations often converged with the need for knowledge (Bhimani et al., 2018; Ishak et al., 2018; Jumin et al., 2017; Sharma & Singla, 2017; Thakur & Hale, 2017). My study was intended to fill a need in understanding what types of instruction small business owners and their employees required to fill a gap in learning necessary skills to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns.

Data analysis showed instructional experiences and challenges small business owners and their employees had in learning social media marketing. Experiences they described helped define learner needs, while challenges aligned with strategies which could potentially be transformed into instructional methodology. Key findings helped to confirm a need for small business owners and their employees to face challenges they were confronted with in finding instructional resources that would help them adopt the innovation of social media marketing that could potentially make or break their digital marketing efforts, while greatly impacting their overall success.

The old adage that *necessity is the mother of invention* applies to the interpretation of the finding presented here. It became evident in the data collection stage that the need to learn social media marketing techniques provided a certain level of intrinsic motivation for individuals to find the means for instructional experiences in order for their company to survive and to find success in the ever-changing global economy. The advent of the internet and digital marketing possibilities prompted them to stretch old marketing mix methods to new lengths. Reflection on the information revealed some basic needs of small business owners and their employees who took on the challenge placed before them in this new media frontier, to build skills and confidence, and continuing to reach for new knowledge so that their marketing strategy would ultimately succeed and their business find success. Education at a local level could have a positive impact on the ability for citizens to overcome poverty by increasing income for struggling small business owners in Arkansas and has implications for social change.

In Chapter 1 the background regarding this innovation and potential need for instruction will be explored, problems related to the topic outlined, the purpose stated, research questions noted, the conceptual framework and the nature of this study are discussed. Terms that are specific to this domain are defined, thereafter any assumptions are made known. The scope and delimitations are considered, and limitations are disclosed. Finally, the significance of this study is clarified followed by a brief summary of Chapter 1.

Background

Using the internet to engage in social media networking has been expanding (Buratti et al., 2018). The importance of including technology innovation in business strategy underscores a need for training to remain current and competitive (Ilona et al., 2019). Though there are disparities in social media usage between various demographic populations for counties including cities, towns, and rural areas in the United States (Pick et al., 2019), this technological innovation can fill social, economic, demographic, and geographic gaps (Huang et al., 2017; Mukherjee & Hollenbaugh, 2019). Current studies focused on benefits to professional users indicated instruction to be a key factor (Huggins & Cunningham, 2019; Park et al., 2017). Small business owners and their employees are experiencing a new digital divide in learning social media marketing techniques and need instructional guidelines for digital marketing strategies (Huggins & Cunningham, 2019). For instance, lack of resources, such as funding, time constraints, and negative perceptions are barriers in technology adoption (Al-khinji et al., 2019). More research is also needed to define what kind of digital divide exists (Richmond et al., 2017; Sharma & Singla, 2017), which is related to knowledge-building resources to effectively launch and maintain successful social media campaigns.

Digital marketing practices and innovative and collaborative methods of learning are vital for small business survival (Huang et al., 2017; Park et al., 2017). Social media platforms have significantly developed entrepreneurship and increased visibility for small and medium enterprises (Morah & Omojola, 2018). But there is a degree of bandwidth or access issues as well as concern about the knowledge entrepreneurs have in digital

marketing strategy, including their ability to read analytics (Etlinger, 2017). This supports the need for more information and training resources that may help entrepreneurs who endeavored to compete in the global economy. There is a gap in knowledge of use, skill level, and access to instruction for small business owners and their employees attempting to create successful social media campaigns, which this study filled.

Problem Statement

Small business owners and their employees who need to know digital marketing techniques to compete in the business world may lack the skills necessary to implement such techniques, impeding the launching and maintaining of social media campaigns and hindering them from reaching potential customers (Bhimani et al., 2018; Ishak et al., 2018; Jumin et al., 2017; Sharma & Singla, 2017; Thakur & Hale, 2017). Existing models for marketing instruction are unsustainable due to new marketing processes in the information age that are not adopted quickly (Fortin & Chen, 2017). But social media is opportunistic for businesses, and further research is crucial to address instructional challenges in social media campaign marketing for entrepreneurs and their employees (Gaur & Anshu, 2018). There was an increased need for understanding what types of instruction small business owners and their employees need in order to learn necessary skills to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand what types of instruction small business owners and their employees needed in order to learn skills to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns. Developing markets have their own set of

issues, which underscores the need for instruction when attempting social media marketing (Kapoor et al., 2018). Because emerging markets face different challenges, there is a need for more instruction when learning to conduct social media campaigns (Ilavarasan et al., 2018).

Research Questions

1. What were small business owners and their employees' instructional experiences in learning how to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns?
2. What were small business owners and their employees' instructional needs in learning how to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns?

Conceptual Framework

This research required a conceptual framework that involved understanding the dissemination of a new innovation by identifying the instructional needs of small business owners and their employees learning how to conduct social media marketing campaigns. Innovation adoption supported in the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) model, which was derived from social cognitive theory, the technology acceptance model (TAM), diffusion of innovations (DOI) theory, and others (Taiwo & Downe, 2013). Additionally, the TAM was employed in this study to align new developments with future needs to improve instruction for the technological innovation of digital marketing. I used this framework to explore innovative approaches to instruction that converged with the need to help define better ways to teach how to leverage social networks and networked knowledge complimented by technology tools (see Goldie, 2016).

Nature of Study

A basic qualitative approach was used to investigate the instructional needs of small business owners and their employees learning how to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns. Qualitative research is rooted in the methodology of seeking how people understand and interpret the world around them (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Basic qualitative studies are used to understand how people interpreted experiences, constructed their worlds, and meaning behind their experiences (Merriam, 2009). Semi structured interviews were conducted via phone with participants who owned or were employed by a small business in Arkansas to understand what types of instruction small business owners and their employees needed in order to learn skills to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and coded to decipher patterns and themes that emerged to understand what types of instruction small business owners and their employees required in order to learn necessary skills to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns.

Definitions

Digital divide: Considered to be digital inequality for rural as opposed to urban users of technology in the United States (Kruger & Gilroy, 2013).

Innovation: A term used to describe the way something is done, or an idea which is considered new by individuals or society (Lundblad, 2003). It involves making or adopting new things, such as products, ideas, programs, services, technology, policies, new systems of administration, or structure (Pichlak, 2016).

Media: Referred to mediums used to reach large audiences, such as radio, television, print (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Reuben, 2008).

Small business: Local, state, and national governments, as well as within the industry, a definition was continuing to evolve (Abitbol & Rook, 2020); however, the Small Business Administration limited small businesses as having fewer than 500 employees and microenterprises as having 10 employees or fewer with limited access to funding (Anastasia, 2015).

Social media: Defined as internet-based technological applications focused on promotion of creative artifacts and the re-use of updated user-generated content that was exchanged in the process of making new connections between the content and the users who created it (Xu & Zhang, 2013). Re-defined as being “made up of various user-driven platforms that facilitate diffusion of compelling content, dialogue creation, and communication to a broader audience” (Kapoor et al., 2018, p. 537).

Social media marketing: The delivery of information for marketing via social media platforms, significantly recognized as one of the best methods to promote products and services (Hilal, 2018). Kim and Ko (2012) described the purpose of social media marketing as communication used to market, which resulted in desired brand equity and a positive impact on purchasing decisions.

Social media networks: Considered to be a phenomenon for global markets with over two-thirds of the world population of Internet users visiting social networking or blogging sites and accounting for a majority of time spent on the internet with a minimum of 60% active social media users (Nielsen, 2016).

Social media strategy: A defined marketing plan for business that stated specific objectives, procedures, target audience, and metrics to measure the outcome of social media campaigns (Ng et al., 2013).

User generated content: Shared on social media networks, content was “created by the people and for the people and provides an environment that is conducive for interactions and networking to occur at different levels ... for instance, personal, professional, business, marketing, political, and societal” (Kapoor et al., 2018, p. 537).

Web 4.0: Considered to be symbiotic interaction created between humans and machines that allowed for improved interface and performance (Aghaei et al., 2012).

Assumptions

I assumed that small business owners and their employees demonstrated the need for instruction because it was not certain how they learned or to what level they had accessed knowledge (Pechenkina & Aeschliman, 2017). There had also been an assumption that consumers were passively receiving information via marketing and advertisements; however, with the advent of Web 4.0, that paradigm shifted to consumers becoming active participants seeking out new information about products and services when making purchasing decisions (Hassan, 2018). Another reason these assumptions were necessary in the context of this study was due to social media becoming a mainstream communication channel which has disrupted traditional media outlets (Muresan & Sinuraya, 2018). Lastly, it was assumed that social media had emerged as a dominant form of communication and digital means of marketing products and services; though 67% of users on the internet actively engage in social media, there are few who

are knowledgeable about how digital marketing actually affects their brand or how social media relationships supported marketing efforts with positive word of mouth advertising (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Mousazadeh et al., 2018).

Scope and Delimitations

The focus of this study provided evidence of economic sustainability achieved by small business owners and their employees by acquiring the needed skills to be successful in social media marketing. The boundaries identified in this study were a specifically targeted population of businesses in Arkansas; a tourist-destination, involving deep rural regions of the United States, and zooming in on small businesses in the state. Business owners who did not use social media marketing were not included. Instructional needs were identified, and an investigation of digital marketing strategies evaluated, without crossing into more narrowly-defined disciplines where analytics and the ability to translate their meaning were represented.

Theoretical alignment was limited to understanding the adoption and utilization of an innovation to achieve a defined objective. The conceptual framework that related best to the topic consisted of the UTAUT and the TAM to focus on social media marketing for small businesses, instructional needs, experiences, perceptions, and the rate of adoption of an innovation. As for potential transferability, it might have been warranted to look into what others had learned in urban regions where they offered more networking in the way of meet-ups and small business incubators to present the latest in digital marketing tactics to support the growth of small businesses (see Morah & Omojola, 2018). The

results of this study were intended to inform future research to help identify instructional needs of entrepreneurs and their employees learning social media marketing.

Limitations

There were limitations involved in the small number of participants available to perform this research, because the scope of the study was initially focused on a rural area with a limited number of business owners and employees meeting the criteria of managing social media marketing for their business. In-depth data probing and exhaustive analysis were critical (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). Dependability in finding what knowledge was gained was accomplished by exploring how small business owners and their employees used social media to market their companies, what innovative uses they may have discovered that created successful social marketing campaigns to reach customers, and how learning techniques may have been improved upon to support small business marketing education. In lieu of gathering large amounts of data from a big dataset, this type of inquiry was intended to provide in-depth feedback to allow for an exhaustive means to analyze data, producing a clearer picture of learning perceptions and experiences (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). Since the business owners and employees were the only source of data, there could have been limitations in having other sources of information, such as artifacts calling for content analysis that allowed for additional perceptions and realities to be considered.

Additionally, personal bias was apparent in my background as a social media educator and consultant. It was imperative for me to keep personal opinions out of the research, allowing for each interview participant to divulge experiences and perceptions

they had to report for this study. I had to practice professional distancing from the participants who were involved in the study. Equally important to note was the potential for bias on the part of the business owners due to their personal position in the community, company or industry bias, or preconceived bias about the subject matter, research being performed, or the researcher conducting the study.

Significance

Business owners' opinions and attitudes affect the overall diffusion of innovative digital marketing strategies (Park et al., 2017). Being concerned about how to best instruct digital marketing strategy to help small business owners and their employees reach potential customers effectively is essential for business sustainability and has contributed to a healthy local economy (Bhimani et al., 2018). Small business owners and their employees need to be taught current ways to learn and use this innovation effectively to launch and maintain successful social media campaigns (Fortin & Chen, 2017). Practical application for this research was to further the development of professional practice for small business owners and their employees and involved having a clearer picture of what types of instruction they needed to learn social media marketing.

Summary

The background in this chapter provided research related to the discipline of instruction in social media for small businesses. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand what types of instruction small business owners and their employees need in order to learn skills to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns. The nature of this study was qualitative in an effort to address the purpose and research

questions. This introductory chapter also defined the scope of the study and limitations. Then I reviewed the significance of the outcomes, pointing to a need for instruction as the identified gap in research, which was intended to help educators know how to offer new ways for students to learn and provide practical solutions for future practice.

In the following exhaustive literature review I was able to synthesize studies with the related constructs and methodology chosen in alignment with the scope of my study. A myriad of researchers in the domain of education, technology, and business are highlighted. In the literature review I review other studies related to my research questions to support the rationale for the approach selected for this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Instruction for small business needs upgrades due to marketing practices in the digital age involving new social media tools and resources (Kapoor et al., 2018). But there have been questions about what area of discipline would be appropriate to address instructional needs of entrepreneurs (Ilavarasan et al., 2018). Educators have faced the issue of re-defining how to teach marketing strategies while attempting to remain current in digital marketing trends that were always changing (Huggins & Cunningham, 2019). Though some social media instruction has been added to curriculum, more knowledge is warranted. Additionally, it is important to ask questions about how instruction produces different results when applying technology (Jordan & Lande, 2016; Rogers, 1995; Siemens, 2008).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand what types of instruction small business owners and their employees needed in order to learn skills to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns. It was important to acknowledge evidence for a new digital divide that did not involve a lack in access for small business owners and their employees but instead was based on the level of knowledge in the use of digital technology to market products and services (Richmond et al., 2017). Previous scholars and practitioners have also examined methods for knowledge acquisition, documenting experiences and perceptions of entrepreneurs to ascertain what instructional needs were not being met (Fortin & Chen, 2017; Gaur & Anshu, 2018; Richmond et al., 2017).

This chapter includes a brief explanation of the literature search strategy, followed by the theoretical underpinning of the study including a rationale for the choice of theory.

Next, the literature review section involves a discussion of study outcomes focused on approaches used by previous researchers and what was known from studies on similar topics. The literature review also clarifies what was lacking in the current body of knowledge. Finally, the summary describes how this study fills the identified gap in research, which was intended to further knowledge in the domain of social media marketing education.

Literature Search Strategy

Resources that defined the scope of the literature review were accessed via web-based libraries and databases including Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, EBSCO Discovery Service, ERIC (Education Research Information Center), Walden University Library, Google Scholar, ProQuest, and Sage Publications. Keywords included *Social networking, small business, digital marketing instruction, networked knowledge, connected learning, small business and entrepreneurship, small business marketing instruction, social media marketing, social media marketing, training, and technology acceptance model*. Ninety-three articles were selected for this literature review.

This search was completed as comprehensively as possible, including all resources related to instruction for social media marketing. Topics crossing boundaries in disciplines of education, information communication technology, and business were taken into consideration when search criteria was applied. For example, Buratti et al. (2018) found 26 papers had been published in the last 10 years, and 13 more publications had been reviewed more recently by Kapoor et al. (2018). However, these scholars

warned that some research may have been limited due to the need to investigate social media concepts using studies regarded as sentinel models and theories, such as the TAM and UTAUT, which were still considered to be in early stages of development.

Conceptual Framework

This study addressed instructional needs of small business owners and their employees who were learning how to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns. Supporting evidence showed a new digital divide, which indicated a lack of access to instructional opportunities (Richmond et al., 2017). This divide also supports a need for new tools by which business owners communicate with their customers due to the shift in resources that are available with the advent of social media marketing. It is critical for entrepreneurs to learn social media strategies that align with their business plan to achieve their goals (Bala & Verma, 2018). Thus, theories for this conceptual framework consisted of UTAUT, the TAM, and connectivism. El-Masri and Tarhini (2017) extended the UTAUT (Taiwo & Downe, 2013), which was extracted by a team of researchers led by Venkatesh (Venkatesh et al., 2003) from earlier models like social cognitive theory, the TAM, and DOI theory. The study of acceptance in technological innovation use could help uncover factors that impacted adoption rate, thus reducing costs for business owners (El-Masri & Tarhini, 2017).

The TAM was also in alignment with this study because it can help describe how users adopt innovations, applying two factors that impact attitudes toward technology acceptance: perceptions of how useful the technology was and how the technology was being used. This framework directly supported why user behavior was a key factor in

regard to how they were using technologies to facilitate, influence, and perhaps predict customer intention (Khadim et al., 2018). And finally, connectivism offered a theoretical foundation from the perspective where teaching and learning may have been supported by technology to be better utilized, understood, and managed when development and evaluation were applied. It was considered impossible to use one theory to explain any phenomenon involved with technology and networked learning. That is why it was vital to recognize the importance of instruction, as well as how teaching was approached in networked learning environments online (Goldie, 2016; Siemens, 2008).

Literature Review

Themes that emerged in the literature included the need for instruction for small business owners and their employees learning social media marketing and the adoption rate of an innovation; layers uncovered in the documents involved a concept referred to as the new digital divide (Bala & Verma, 2018; Pick et al., 2019; Richmond et al., 2017) as well as social media marketing, experiences, perceptions, and needs of entrepreneurs facing this challenge. Subtopics considered were competition, sustainability, and global economy. This was a systematic literature review of studies related to instructional needs in social media marketing for small business owners and their employees to understand perceptions and innovation adoption experiences. Constructs in alignment with the research questions of this study were social media marketing, instructional needs of small business owners and their employees learning digital marketing, and small business owner experiences.

Based on the literature 92% of businesses were marketing their products and services on the internet and believed social media marketing was crucial to their success, and 80% believed social media marketing increased website visits; therefore, social media a worthy investment for companies using digital marketing (Khadim et al., 2018). Further, Facebook has been recognized as the leader in social media marketing worldwide (Patra, 2020; Sukrat & Papasratorn, 2018). Facebook alone had 2.5 billion monthly users, with 50 million active users on business pages, and the Facebook advertising platform reported three million business users (Statista, 2019).

Though social media marketing can lead to success in marketing products and services and brand recognition (Ariff et al., 2018; Hilal, 2018; Muresan & Sinuraya, 2018), there is a lack of knowledge in proper implementation, leading to incorrect use and reputation damage (Williams & Hausman, 2017). Incorrect employment of social media marketing initiatives could damage the image of business who chose to embrace the technology by attempting digital marketing practices (Williams & Hausman, 2017). Often small business users of social media are not aware of the increase in platforms globally, not realizing opportunities available to increase the visibility of their brand (Vijay & Srivastava, 2019). There is also a gap between modern business practices and current curriculum to cover the issues and challenges faced by entrepreneurs when social media marketing (Mukherjee & Hollenbaugh, 2019). More DOI studies are needed due to slow adoption of technology as a result of negative perceptions regarding how useful social media could be for marketing purposes as well as lack of time, money, and labor to

ensure proper training took place to fill the gap of unfamiliarity with the new technology (Al-khinji et al., 2019).

The rationale for choosing the concepts of social media marketing, small business owner experiences and instructional needs, was based on other studies focused on the sustainability of small business, furthering the need for developing digital marketing training opportunities. An empirical study, found social media had a direct impact on business revenue and that effect was increasing, which was a compelling trend that supported this premise (Patra, 2020). Additionally, a study referred to as The Social Media Magnet reported shifting paradigms calling for inbound marketing education programs for professors to consider when teaching digital marketing strategy, to help them keep up with technology trends in education (Huggins & Cunningham, 2019). Their contribution was a pedagogy for online delivery, updated regularly, offering new theory within a practicum for teaching college students' strategies for digital marketing, including website development, tools and resources for social media, and email campaigns. This curriculum was recommended for academics who may not be current in digital literacy by utilizing recommended tools to develop skills holistically, from strategic and tactical perspectives (Huggins & Cunningham, 2019). An instructional gap existed without educators knowing how entrepreneurs currently learned; to identify and develop better training opportunities.

A review of studies related to key phenomena involving instructional needs and perceptions of small business owners and their employees when learning social media marketing exposed gaps in research providing instructional best practices for small

business owners and their employees learning social media marketing tactics. There was much written on the positive impact of social media marketing for businesses in the digital age, however research was limited in current studies regarding how business owners learned digital marketing strategies, for further development of best practices in teaching and implementing social media marketing. There were numerous studies investigating the adoption of innovations and technology use, showing the adoption rate of social media marketing for small business survival had continued to increase (Ariff et al., 2018). For example, Ilona et al. (2019) performed a qualitative study to address a gap in knowledge to support social media adoption by small and medium enterprises in Indonesia. They utilized the technology organization environment model to show adoption of social media was determined by the context of technology, such as advantages, how compatible, complex and ability to trial and observe outcomes. They found users were more likely to adopt an innovation if they were open to the concept (Ilona et al., 2019). In addition, Mukherjee and Hollenbaugh (2019) performed the only study of its kind to learn the effects in how social media was being used for business, using fictitious case studies as examples, filling a gap for research to follow, and providing a pedagogy that business communication instructors could utilize to teach the future workforce of socially connected practitioners.

Studies related to the research questions of this work fell short in addressing instructional needs and experiences of small business owners and their employees learning to use social media. Reasons for chosen concepts stemmed from instructional needs and perceptions of small business owners and their employees, as were addressed

in the research questions of this study. The approach of this study was meant to help fill gaps in the literature supporting instruction for small business owners and their employees learning to use social media marketing (Bhimani et al., 2018; Ishak et al., 2018; Jumin et al., 2017). Some studies focused on instruction of social media marketing in colleges, universities, and small business incubators; however, many were dated (Barton, 2019; Case & King, 2011; Cydis, 2015; McHaney et al., 2015).

Understanding Instructional Needs

The number of global citizens who used the internet had exceeded 4.54 billion, with 3.80 billion using social media platforms, spending close to 7 hours a day online (Kemp, 2020). However, there were not many educational institutions reported that had attempted to fill the gap in knowledge of digital marketing for small business owners and their employees (Huggins & Cunningham, 2019). From the perspective of potential students, the domain of digital marketing called for more skill in technology applications, which pushed the development of social media marketing principles to be addressed in practicum environments that allowed for collaborative learning (Malik, 2017). Future marketing managers needed learning experiences that were effective at creating knowledge for best practices in social media marketing; utilizing analytical data to evaluate outcomes, which was reported as a huge domain for future research in business and industry (Dammert & Nansamba, 2019). Instructional needs identified for digital marketing include social media marketing knowledge as an effective means for positioning advertising campaigns on digital platforms, as well as ease in monitoring and tracking success (Malik, 2017).

Local Economy to Global Marketplace: Competition and Sustainability

Depending on the industry, the Small Business Administration defined small business as having 500 employees or less and limited access to funding (Anastasia, 2015). The sustainability of small businesses was important because they were the catalysts of local economies and represented 28 million (99.7%) of the companies in the United States, with 49.2% of employed individuals in the entire country who could have benefited greatly by utilizing social media for marketing (Small Business Administration, 2020). Many small business owners and their employees struggled to compete in micro enterprise with the innovative social media rich environment used for marketing in the digital age (Henry (2019).

Studies continually reported the disruption of traditional communication channels, which created new means for disseminating information by social media marketing and building personal relationships with consumers who were also using the free platforms to connect, seek knowledge, and communicate (Lee, 2018). It was not clear how participants expected to gain knowledge and principles; other than in a connected environment of trusting individuals, business rivals, and other reputable companies, which assisted them in networked knowledge construction while exercising social media implementation (Henry, 2019). There was confirming evidence in user attempts to make sense of social media, in an effort to learn how to utilize its features, which had been believed to help achieve business goals. Additionally, entrepreneurs leveraged their knowledge of social media marketing and economic challenges, by defining markets they targeted to remain competitive (Henry, 2019).

How Entrepreneurs Learned to Use Social Media Marketing Techniques

The outcome of this study helped understand instructional needs and experiences of small business owners and their employees learning to use social media marketing; explored challenges and identified needs for digital marketing knowledge and documented the experiences of small business owners and their employees launching and maintaining social media campaigns. Morah and Omojola (2018) used the DOI and TAMs to provide descriptive research about small and medium enterprises in Nigeria and found a great number of entrepreneurs were not aware of strategies employed to use social media to stimulate economic growth for their business. Additionally, a pedagogy was developed to teach digital marketing strategies, producing tech-savvy graduates to fill positions in firms that called for inbound marketing professionals (Huggins & Cunningham, 2019). Small business owners and their employees had been reported to understand the challenge, however were uncertain about how to use social media and technology resources to boost their economic standing (Henry, 2019). There was uncertainty in how small business owners and their employees learned to use social media marketing, thus appropriate training methodology and potential avenues for instruction were also in question.

Training Methodology Based on How Entrepreneurs Learned

In alignment with practice, how small business owners and their employees learned to use social media marketing was not clearly understood. A pedagogical tool designed to increase engagement for learners revealed how theory and practice were concepts that were not always in alignment in real world situations, however studies

showed social media marketing could have made a difference in business success (Mukherjee and Hollenbaugh, 2019). Pedagogy was designed to engage learners in methods for online delivery with systematic and timely updates added innovative theory and online interventions that taught students digital marketing tactics used in launching live campaigns (Huggins and Cunningham, 2019). These methods of instruction were designed to help better understand how to improve training opportunities and learner experience.

Understanding Instructional Experiences

Digital Divide

Innovative technology had been a boon to small businesses that lacked traditional resources. Utilizing the infrastructure of free social media networking sites, provided unlimited opportunities to reach out to customers without a strain on financial budgets. The reliability and consistency of this notion was proven with outcomes that suggested the new digital divide was real, but pointed to the lack of access in training opportunities (Muresan and Sinuraya, 2018). This showed how important digital skills were for using the internet to promote products and services, which have proven to be more beneficial than employing traditional media outlets and marketing mixes. Findings indicated the internet to be a more effective way to target audiences and define demographics on many levels (Muresan & Sinuraya, 2018).

Perceptions

Social media marketing had been proven to have a significant impact on business success and scholars agreed that it was an important tool for small businesses to be able

to listen, learn, and engage with their customers like never before, however business owners are often skeptical in their use of innovative social marketing tools and resources (Szymkowiak & Garczarek-Bąk, 2019). The innovation may also prove to be unattractive to new users who might have been slower to adopt new technologies due to negative attitudes, which created barriers due to potential lack of resources, training, and basic unfamiliarity in use (Al-khinji et al., 2019).

Adoption of an Innovation

There were no shortages of studies in the effectiveness of using social media for marketing purposes (Sanwariprasad et al., 2020). A pedagogical study on the sustainability of small businesses was performed using case studies that were fictional examples of typical scenarios of social media use (Mukherjee & Hollenbaugh, 2019). claimed small businesses often enjoyed flexibility and were more agile in their ability to navigate social networks, due to having fewer employees and stronger social connections that translated to highly innovative uses for new digital marketing channels (Nummela et al., 2016). Business Process Management helped researchers to study the design of processes and activity sequencing, while employing innovation dissemination, which helped to understand processes as they unfolded, while keeping current with technological changes and the organization of systems (Mendling et al., 2020). Digital literacy was found to be essential in overcoming resistance to any new technology, and that it was still unclear how online media use led to positive or negative long-term effects when different ways of processing information versus time spent on social media were used (Szymkowiak & Garczarek-Bąk, 2019).

Summary and Conclusion

The major themes found in the literature involved understanding small business owner needs for instruction in the domain of social media marketing, with clarification of perceptions and rate of adoption. Layers revealed in the research indicated a new digital divide in learning online marketing strategies, identified instructional needs, and uncovered how they learned by understanding their experiences. Subtopics identified included local and global economy, competition, sustainability, and future directions for digital marketing instructional opportunities. Related to instructional needs of small business owners and their employees learning to use social media marketing to promote their products and services, there were many studies that supported the need for digital literacy to produce effective outcomes. There was a gap in knowledge about how small business owners learned social media marketing techniques, which pointed to a need for instructional assessment and implementation of new methods for learning to use innovative marketing tools. Buratti et al. (2018) offered supporting evidence and proclaimed that keeping up with the competition and pressure to adopt technological innovations has become more prevalent for business sustainability, hence causing business owners to reconsider their approach to management, communication, stakeholder interests, and how they deliver value.

The gap in literature this study filled in an effort to further knowledge and understanding in the domains of education, business, and technology was to understand the experiences and identify the needs of small business owners and their employees learning to use social media to launch and maintain successful marketing campaigns.

Future research is warranted to expand populations and generalize their business model to other environments and define maturity levels in social commerce (Sukrat & Papasratorn, 2018). Rural users were behind urbanites by 10 percent, and pointed to social and economic influences and discrepancies in technology use for counties in the U.S. (Pick et al., 2019). This study was not able to provide statistics regarding social media adoption but showed there were clearly different patterns in social media use in metropolitan regions in contrast to rural regions of the country.

In summary, it was believed traditional methods for advertising via print, radio, and television need review due to new markets that have opened up with digital tools and communication channels (Subramanian, 2018). Social media was a catalyst for innovation and revealed behavior and perspectives about resources was the theoretical lens most commonly used in research (Bhimani et al., 2018). Finally, businesses needed a systematic way to adopt social media marketing as an advantageous means for marketing and communication and called for the development of a framework for adoption, noting key performance measures for organizations who attempted to use social media marketing (Hamid, 2020).

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand what types of instruction small business owners and their employees need in order to learn skills to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns. This chapter describes the research design and rationale for the study as well as my role as the researcher. In the Methodology section, there is information regarding participant selection and instrumentation used in this study, explaining how content validity was established and the research questions were addressed. Following this information, procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection are explained. This chapter concludes with full disclosure on issues of trustworthiness acknowledged in conducting this research.

Research Design and Rationale

Central concepts to this qualitative study involved social media marketing for small business owners and their employees and how they learn. The research questions were

1. What are small business owners and their employees' instructional experiences in learning how to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns?
2. What are small business owners and their employees' instructional needs in learning how to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns?

In performing this qualitative study, I attempted to understand experiences, needs, and perceptions of small business owners and their employees learning to use social media marketing, which can clarify the dissemination of an innovation that is designed to

support the local and global economy (Szymkowiak & Garczarek-Bąk, 2019). Current literature supported the need for a systematic approach to instruction and a framework to understand the adoption rate of social media marketing and how small business owners and their employees learned (Hamid, 2020).

Qualitative research was designed to draw out deep perceptions and rich data, after which a complete analysis takes place with coded interpretations that tend to be far more accurate than a general survey of variables and concepts (Gill, 2020). This approach was best for focusing on the experiences and needs of my participants and gave them a chance to describe the phenomena in a study that was bounded. A better understanding of the perceptions small business owners and their employees regarding social media campaigns was derived by phenomenological interpretation (see Elfenbein & Schwarze, 2020).

Role of the Researcher

My knowledge and experience in education technology and digital marketing strategy assisted interpretation of the perceptions participants expressed on launching and maintaining social media campaigns. Descriptive bracketing was implemented to keep personal assumptions and opinions to myself and look objectively at the phenomenon experienced by participants (Gearing, 2004). Additionally, as an observer in this study, participants had no personal relationship with me, and little communication between me and the participants took place outside of basic information regarding the study and the process for their participation.

Ethical issues taken into consideration involved the approach taken to invite participants to the study and how much contact was allowed without causing affinity or judgment on the part of the participant when answering questions in the interview. The plan to address this issue was to invite participants through a flyer disseminated via mail or electronic messaging to allow for transparency. Once invitations were accepted, formal written communication followed, with little personal contact and verbal communication. I was considered an outside researcher interested in helping the local economy by providing feedback and evaluation for the betterment of the community. Equally important to note is that I owned property in this state and had my own interests and preferences in doing business and meeting needs. However, these interests and agendas remained confidential, with little to no knowledge on the part of the participants as to my personal background and geographic origin. The participants were only made aware of my professional background in social media marketing, education, and instruction.

Methodology

Methodology of this research was focused on social media marketing for small businesses, training and instruction needs, perceptions, adoption of an innovation, and skill level. The methodology involved open-ended interviews with 12 small business owners and their employees through phone. I utilized qualitative research design with open-ended interviews to investigate strategies used to market products and services with social media tools. The interviews generally did not exceed 1 hour, depending on how much information each individual was willing to divulge. I prepared questions that allowed each participant to describe perceptions, approaches, and outcomes of what they

currently knew about digital marketing strategies. The conversation audio was recorded to ensure no data were lost and to be able to refer back to transcriptions to verify results reported in the final outcomes and conclusion of this study.

Selection Logic

Participants involved in this study were comprised of small business owners and their employees located in Arkansas who had been using social media strategies to market their products and services prior to and during this study. The criteria for selecting applicants required they:

- Owned or was an employee of a small business located in Arkansas
- Offered products and services locally, and/or globally
- Had experience conducting social media campaigns

The definition of small business depends on the industry but has a maximum of 250 employees or maximum of 1,500 employees and a maximum of \$750,000 to \$38.5 million in annual income (Small Business Administration, 2020).

Nonprobability sampling was in alignment with this research due to the nature and purpose of this qualitative study, which was to understand what types of instruction small business owners and their employees needed in order to learn skills to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns. Specifically, purposeful sampling was employed due to the small-sized population and to answer the research questions (Elfenbein & Schwarze, 2020). There were a limited number of entrepreneurs doing business in Arkansas, especially in the rural regions, which limited the scope of the study by narrowing down constructs to fit a finite number of small business owners and their

employees actively launching and maintaining social media marketing campaigns while this study was being conducted. Should there have been too little of a sampling yield, convenience sampling would have been used due to potential participants being situated in a near proximity to the researcher collecting the data (Clarke & Braun, 2020).

The number of participants required was targeted at 12–18 small businesses due to the size of the state and total number of businesses that potentially existed. Justification for the small sample size was the availability of participants and quality data analysis and resources that were available, such as time and number of small businesses that qualified (Farrugia, 2019). It was important to qualify participants at the onset of the research (Lester et al., 2020). Business owners were considered to have met the criteria outlined in the invitation and supported by the Small Business Administration definition (2020).

Since there were no local networking organizations willing to partner with my study, I reached out directly to small business owners. Procedures to identify participants involved an assessment of small businesses listed on the local Chamber of Commerce websites, followed by visiting potential business websites verifying the use of social media to market their business. This initial assessment created a qualifying list of potential business owners, whereby several consented to being interviewed. The businesses on the qualifying list were sent an invitation to join the research to be interviewed about their social media marketing experiences. They were further recruited by a follow up request and consent form.

To confirm a relationship between the sample size and saturation, snowball sampling was utilized in a final effort to get valid responses from as many owners as possible to gather data from a large enough population for saturation to take place (Clarke & Braun, 2020). Snowball sampling is a commonly applied method of sampling in qualitative research (Noy, 2008). It ensured that these potential participants also met the eligibility requirements.

Instrumentation

The instrument used to collect data for this research was an interview protocol using open-ended questions to receive input during about a 60-minute-long meeting via phone. Other instruments included me as the researcher, an invitation to participate in the study, a consent form, interview questions, and a thank you letter. The source of information was derived from interviews with small business owners and delegated employees who had experience in launching and maintaining social media campaigns to market their products and services.

To evaluate the experiences and instructional needs of small business owners and their employees learning to use social media marketing, it was sufficient to ask them to disclose what they knew, learning directly from their experiences and attitudes about what form of instruction might have helped them overcome challenges associated with digital marketing education. Member checking provided transferability to be able to generalize outcomes to similar settings where entrepreneurs and their employees were struggling with accessing instruction for using tools and resources available on social media networks.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

An invitation was created for potential participants by me for recruitment purposes. I created the invitation to outline the goal for the study to be accomplished and provided a disclaimer stating the study was to be objective as possible, and that *the researcher* was to remain transparent throughout the process. This invitation also provided a brief explanation of what the research study was about, and what role they would play by offering information about their experiences in learning how to conduct social media campaigns. As interested persons responded to the invitation, they received more detailed instructions about the interview process and were given choices for preferred interface for their personal interview, including the time, date, location, and expected duration of the interview. It was re-emphasized that interview audio would be recorded.

For all meetings I recommended a private, comfortable, and secure environment and began by reassuring them that confidentiality was to be adhered to at all times, explaining that their identity would remain confidential throughout the process of their involvement, followed by a review of security measures that were strictly followed. The informed consent form contained a review of study criteria, along with a confirmation of their commitment, date, time, and instructions to access their interview. It also provided contact information for myself and the Research Participant Advocate at my university should they have needed to address any issues or concerns. The interviews contained open-ended questions and were structured to take no more than one hour, depending on how much information participants were willing to provide. I implemented 12 interviews

for this basic qualitative study using purposeful sampling at the onset, moving to convenience sampling to achieve the number projected, and following up with snowball sampling to locate more participants as needed to ensure saturation (Clarke & Braun, 2020).

The first research question asked about small business owner experiences in learning how to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns. This interview was conducted using open-ended questions to help participants recall and share needs they had been confronted with, including how they dealt with issues and met challenges during the process of learning social media marketing strategies. The data was collected from interviews with participants, by me, the author of the research study. One main interview with each participant, of no more than 60 minutes in length took place in the study. The interviews were recorded via audio recording software for transcription purposes during the analysis phase of the study. These measures took place with security and safety protocol in mind at all times when handling the data.

The second research question identified instructional needs in how they learned to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns. The data was collected from semi-structured interviews with participants, by me, the author of the research study. One main interview of no more than 60 minutes in length took place in the study. Finally, the information was recorded via audio recording software and a backup recording was made for redundancy; with security and safety protocol in mind at all times when handling the data. Should there have been too few participants to achieve saturation, the number of

participants might have had to be reduced to fit the finite number of businesses located in this region of the country.

For debriefing, participants were released from the study after a final exit section on the script during the interview process. This process took place at the end of the interview scheduled with each participant by formal member checking, giving ample time to provide any information that might have been necessary and help the participant understand how they would receive information about the outcome of the study, as well as answer any questions they may have had about their participation in the study. Each exit interview concluded with the final assurance of security measures taken and the observance of confidentiality of all the information they provided for this study. Then, I personally wished them success for their business and in using social media marketing in the future to promote their products and services via the internet. Follow up procedures implemented thereafter involved sending thank you gift cards and/or contacting the participant formally to provide additional information, such as clarification to give answers to previous questions they may have had about their participation, questions about the purpose of the study, or outcomes that may affect them. A condensed final draft and outcomes of the study were made available to all participants, and the general public, through educational institution communication channels, local business networking organization publications, as well as local news outlets electronically or in print.

Data Analysis Plan

Data collection instruments are essential tools used to address the research questions in a study (Hollin et al., 2020). Interview protocol was employed in this study,

with complete confidentiality and full disclosure to increase the credibility of the findings. To maintain the integrity of the data, accuracy was achieved by using audio recording software for transcribing the interview contents, which allowed for the ability to member check the outcomes reported and provided a backup of each recording for redundancy. Software was used for recording and coding the interview content. Discrepancies were noted, addressed, and documented to account for potential misinformation being reported in the study.

A period of 6 months was used to allow enough time for interviews to take place. A brief period before and after each interview was allotted for introductions and logistical acknowledgments, taking special care to make certain the participants were comfortable and able to function well in the interview setting. I reviewed the interview protocol and announced when the interview and audio recording began. The interviews were structured with an introduction to explain the purpose of the study, reviewing previous knowledge or background information that might have helped to provide context to the research goals, with a review of research questions. Closing each interview with an invitation for the participant to ask any questions they might have had about the study, offering them a copy of the findings when complete. Finally, thanking them for their participation and following up with a written acknowledgment of appreciation. In addition, it was important to organize a section for note taking, where I recorded personal observations, I might have had as the researcher, as well as insights or additional knowledge that might be pertinent; such as tones, feelings, physical observations, ideas, impressions, expressions, or non-verbal cues. This tool was used for reflection and was

utilized to document any personal judgments; consciously using bracketing to reduce bias.

Using numbers for participants and an alphanumeric system to ensure the confidentiality of small business owners and their employees participating were employed. The data was locked in my cell phone and computer, which required password authentication; I am the only person who had access to these credentials. Hard copies were stored in a locked cabinet that only I was able to access, and paper files were destroyed after 5 years, by shredding and disposing of them properly.

As the researcher of the study, I qualified as a primary data collection instrument (Mays & Pope, 2020), because my background in social media education and marketing were used to guide in the process of identifying how knowledge is constructed by small business owners and their employees learning to use social media as a marketing tool. It was equally vital to use other instruments to access a bulk of the data by conducting semi-structured interviews until information gathered became redundant and saturation was achieved. Organizing the data, coding, identifying themes that were common to the study, then interpreting and processing that data to disclose results was conducted with focused attention to detail. Key themes, common themes, hierarchical framework, conceptual framework, layers and overarching themes were identified (Clarke & Braun, 2014).

Coding the information allowed for themes to emerge and patterns to be identified, which added to the credibility of outcomes (Cope, 2020). It was vital to gather data in chunks, to use descriptive coding and merge subcategories, to achieve a deep

understanding of the information derived from the interview process. There was a requirement to seriously reflect on the data analyzed and allow for the most accurate interpretation as possible. A matrix was created to organize data, note observations, and present findings. Discrepancies were noted and mitigated with rigor to align information derived from qualified evidence and outcomes were determined by the most credible sources of data.

Issues of Trustworthiness

This section outlined the ways trustworthiness was addressed to support the credibility of this qualitative research study, concluded with my approach for the ethical treatment and observation of the rights of participants throughout the process. Transparency in the role of the researcher was vital to achieve fairness and accuracy in outcomes (Alt, 2019).

Credibility

Verifying internal credibility and validity of the findings was established by member checking, saturation, and bracketing on the part of the researcher to achieve exactness in intended meanings of themes represented in the outcome (Richard, 2020). It was crucial to invite participants to share additional information and to ask questions, to gain their approval to use what had been acquired from the interview process. Saturation occurred once the interviews began to duplicate answers and agreed with the findings represented. It was my responsibility as the researcher to practice bracketing by allowing the participants to review and offer suggestions based on their perspective, being cautious

to remain objective, carefully facilitating the process. Peer review also determined support or denial in the credibility of the findings.

Transferability

To sustain the transferability of outcomes and external validity, it was necessary to have feedback to provide thick descriptions during the interview process, which were solicited upon completion of each interview as warranted. This was a form of member checking used to verify whether the findings were consistent with the intended meaning of the information collected (Carlson, 2010). Should participants have displayed bias in changing information in the member checking phase, that was noted in an effort to curb skewing of results in response to personal agendas. Again, I had provided a consent form for participants who agreed to be interviewed to articulate the critical need for honesty; and a reminder that they could stop participation of their own free will or withdraw from the study at any time.

Dependability

To establish dependability and reliability of information and outcomes it was necessary to document everything to be accurate in reporting data without any errors or misrepresentations. I iteratively asked the questions and reviewed the answers to ascertain whether the answers were consistent was one strategy to check for accuracy. Using personal narratives from several interviews at different times allowed for a variety of perspectives, while also setting standards and scope to compare data gathered. As the researcher, I was constantly expecting challenges for dependability analysis (Morozov et

al., 2019) due to complex components, and more importantly for this research, behavioral objectives, which explained operational modes and differing perspectives.

Confirmability

Strategies to establish confirmability involved the elimination of any researcher bias, by using only information garnered in the context of the study by member checking to document any deviation from accurate interpretation of information derived from interviews to determine whether the outcomes agreed to understand how they learned social media marketing. Reflexivity required a mutual understanding between the myself and participants, consciously observing and paying particular attention to any preconceived notions or bias that may have existed in an effort to remain objective throughout the process (Whitaker & Atkinson, 2019). Overall, transparency was strictly observed in the process of gathering data.

Ethical Procedures

For integrity in gathering the data, ethical procedures were utilized to gain access to participants and gather data for this research effort. The Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) documents verified permissions and approvals that were required to conduct this study. These documents reflected my intention to adhere to strict guidelines about the treatment of human participants during the recruitment and data collection process (Head, 2020). Concerns and how they will be addressed were outlined in these documents, including refusal or early withdrawal from the study, or any other incident that could have potentially occurred during contact with participants. Treatment of participants who chose to withdraw was the same as those who remained

active, with all due respect and integrity. Data was stored digitally on my computer hard drive and cell phone with password authentication necessary to obtain access. Research files were saved for 5 years, after which digital copies were deleted from the hard drive of my computer and phone; while paper copies were stored in a locked file cabinet and after 5 years shredded and disposed of properly.

Treatment of data, issues, and archival concerns were addressed according to the steps taken to monitor confidentiality and security measures (Corti et al., 2019). The subjects remained confidential throughout the entire process and protections taken to ensure the data remained secure, which involved data storage protocol that was widely accepted by using secure password authentication to access data that only I could use. After member checking was used to verify the accuracy of the data, it was organized and disseminated as needed.

To ensure there was no conflict of interest, it was necessary for me to remain as transparent as possible throughout the process (Head, 2020). It was critical to protect and store all of the information to ensure the confidentiality and security of data was not compromised in any way (Corti et al., 2019). Power issues that could have arisen involved my position as a business owner owning property in the same state as the participants, while implementing this research project. Professional distancing was encouraged to create a barrier for little to no personal information to be shared with the participants of the study. There was incentive to participate in the study to encourage interested persons in being a part of the project, without requiring anything in return after their participation in the interviews.

Summary

This study was initiated to understand the experiences of small business owners and their employees learning to use social media marketing to identify instructional needs that may have existed. These elements adequately covered the nature and scope of this study, which rendered quality data to be collected and achieve effective qualitative outcomes (Johnson et al., 2020). There were numerous studies that supported entrepreneurs and their employees using social media to market their products and services, however a limited body of knowledge existed for determining how they learned digital marketing practices, what challenges they faced, and what instructional needs were not being met. It was essential to know how they learned, to develop guidelines to succeed in launching and maintaining social media campaigns for entrepreneurs. In summary, alignment between the research questions, phenomena under investigation and approach to this research was presented, and my role as the researcher with intended transparency in collecting and analyzing data was reported. Finally, the process for selecting participants was reviewed and issues of trustworthiness were examined. The results of this research will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand what types of instruction small business owners and their employees needed in order to learn skills to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns, focusing on their instructional experiences in learning how to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns as well as their instructional needs. The following chapter contains information about the setting at the time the study took place, demographic data, data collection methodology, data analysis process, and evidence of trustworthiness clarified, following by the results of the study.

Setting

The setting for this qualitative study was focused on small businesses located in Arkansas, which is reported as having one of the poorest economies in America (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). The data collection process began in a rural county, but the scope needed to be broadened due to a lack of willing participants to take part in the study to include small businesses located in cities of Arkansas. Participant contact information was found via the local Chamber of Commerce website directory, and they were initially contacted by phone. Upon consent, the interviews took place on a recorded phone call, which were transcribed and coded following each interview.

Demographics

A majority of the interviewees reported having conducted hundreds of social media campaigns for their company. The number of employees ranged from 1 to 500, and they reported being in business from 2 years to 102 years. All the participants had a high school education, most had attended college, and one reported graduate work obtaining a

master's degree. A majority of the participants were female, and the ages ranged from 20 to 66 years old, with the mean average being 38 years old. Table 1 shows demographic data collected.

Table 1

Demographic Data

Participant number	Number of campaigns	Number of staff	Years in business	Level of education	Gender	Age
P1	Hundreds	1	39	High school	Female	66
P2			20	High school	Female	32
P3		5	30	College	Male	43
P4	Hundreds		102	College	Female	43
P5	Hundreds	8	12	College	Female	42
P6	Hundreds		8	Master's degree	Male	57
P7	200	50	26	College	Female	25
P8	Hundreds	500	35	College	Female	35
P9	300		2	College	Female	20-30
P10		<200	50	College	Female	23
P11	100	15	7	Associate's degree	Female	24
P12	350,000		35	College	Male	33

Data Collection

After initial approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB; # 11-25-20-0386534), an invitation flyer was delivered electronically to businesses listed on the local Chamber of Commerce website. The flyer was distributed via each business Facebook page on Instant Messenger. After receiving no replies from the invitations, follow up was done with one of the business owners who reported they had not received a message from me. After follow up with another business, it was clear that the invitations were being blocked by Facebook as spam. At that point, there needed to be a change in the method for contacting participants. This required a request for a clarification in procedures to the IRB for review. This also involved expanding the scope of the study to include other

counties and larger cities due to lack of enough willing participants in the originally-targeted rural county. The initially-targeted rural area of Arkansas gleaned only two participants. After IRB approval, a call out campaign followed and there was consent from enough participants to complete the process. Snowball sampling was also instrumental in finding participants willing to be interviewed. Once consent forms were received via email an interview was scheduled with each participant.

Data were collected from 12 recorded interviews via telephone with participating business owners or their designated employees. Each interview was recorded and transcribed on TapeACall: call recorder software. The transcriptions were received by email and downloaded to a designated file for interviews created in my laptop, which was secured with a password that only I had access to. Each interview was conducted via telephone call, and each participant was aware they were being recorded. The interviews lasted less than 1 hour. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded. Notes were taken during the interviews, which were referred to in the analysis and interpretation of the results to double-check for correct comprehension and identify discrepancies. With repetitive reading, key themes emerged to help make sense of the data collected.

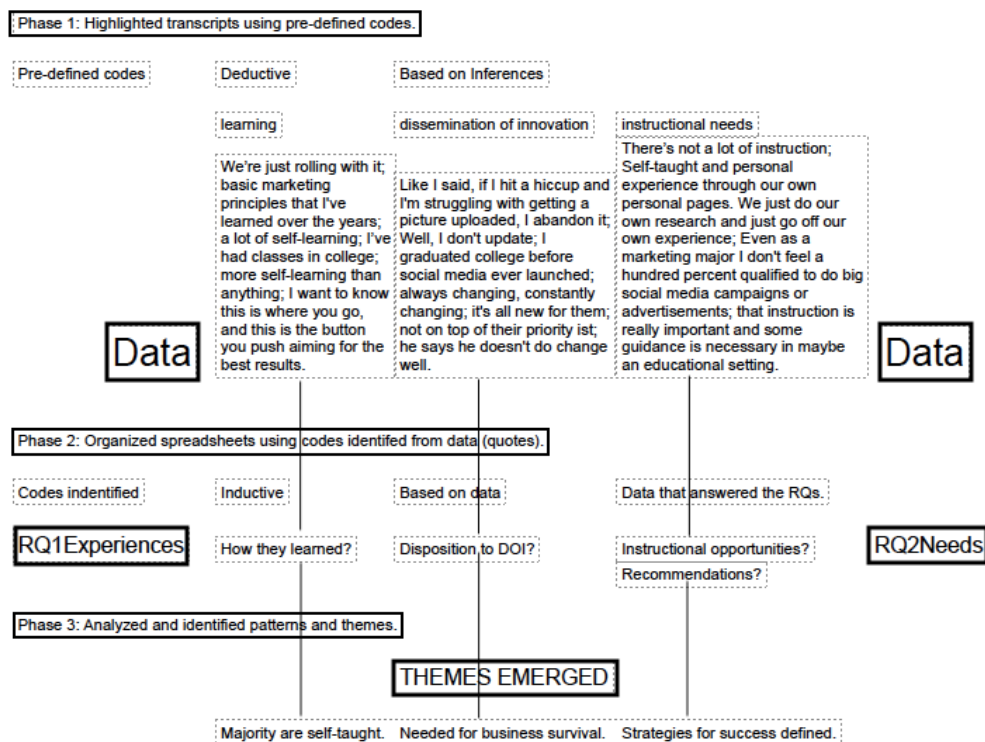
Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data in this basic qualitative study codes (see Clarke & Braun, 2014). Prior to data collection open coding methods were applied to predefine a potential set of codes that were assigned in the qualitative data analysis process. Open coding is what makes it possible to explore ideas, break them apart, and find meaning in the raw data (Clarke & Braun, 2014). These codes were small

business, DOI, and instructional needs. In the next step of the process the open codes were expanded to allow for theory-driven axial coding. Additionally inductive coding in the data analysis phase was essential to locate themes and patterns that were revealed during the process of synthesizing the data. These inductive codes were instruction, learning, and DOI. Descriptive coding involved reading the transcript documents, then color-coding phrases and identifying codes to help visualize patterns in the findings, which emerged into the themes identified in the analysis phase. Each transcript was read, reviewed, and coded according to the open codes. The coding process is outlined in Figure 1 to demonstrate what occurred during each phase of analysis.

Figure 1

Coding Process



During axial coding, phrases and words were noted and placed into spreadsheets to represent similar subject matter. There were a total of 516 quotes logged into the spreadsheets by code. The largest number of quotes from participants was strategies with 142 quotes. The second most quotes were 93 that were listed for instruction. Ranking third was innovation with 74 quotes. The term *social media* had 57 quotes entered, there were 46 quotes about challenges, and 46 quotes coded as business. The last step in the process involved sorting the quotes into subcategories and adding them to the spreadsheets, at which point key themes began to be more obvious. The step-by-step process of data analysis was used to decipher key themes and patterns as they emerged (see Figure 3). Based on the codes there were three themes identified: instructional needs for small business owners and their employees, learning social media marketing techniques, and the dissemination of an innovation. These themes answered the research questions.

Figure 2

Code to Theme Process

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7	Step 8
Open Codes Identified	Theory-driven axial coding	Entire Coding Process	Manual Coding	Data-driven axial coding	Theory-driven axial coding	Thematic analysis	Thematic analysis
Codes	Codes	Themes	Over-arching themes	Layers	Key Themes	Common themes	Hierarchical frames
<i>Inductive</i>	<i>Inductive</i>	<i>Deductive</i>	<i>Deductive</i>	<i>Deductive</i>	<i>Inductive</i>	<i>Deductive</i>	<i>Deductive</i>
Small business	Instruction	Instruction	DOI	Challenges	Instruction	People	Self-taught
DOI	Learning	Learning	Social Media	Needs	Learning	Platforms	Business
Instructional Needs	DOI	DOI	Small Business	Business	DOI	DOI	Economy
			Challenges				
			Strategies				
			COVID				
My own intuitive choices for codes as the researcher.	Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology UTAUT, Technology Acceptance Model TAM, and Connectivism.	INSTRUCTION: Participant 5, "I just wish that there was more training out there...maybe just through chambers, through local college..." LEARNING: Participant 4, "Just by doing it. Trial and error." DOI: Participant 9, "...just play with it, and learn as I go."	This step involved organizing the data in the spreadsheets by code to visualize categories and subcategories; noting patterns and themes as they began to emerge.	CHALLENGES: Participant 8, "I've made a lot of mistakes, I've learned a lot." NEEDS: Participant 8, "What's your primary goal for social media marketing?" BUSINESS: Participant 3 noted, "Social media, it's a powerful tool."	INSTRUCTION: Participant 5, "My major was marketing... before social media was launched". LEARNING: Participant 7, "For the most part, I think it's just trial and error figuring things out". DOI: Participant 1, "...all about giving it a whirl and just putting it out there."	PEOPLE: Participant 8, "What's your target audience, what's your primary goal for the social media". PLATFORMS: Participant 8, "So I found on different platforms that you're going to get different responses". DOI: Participant 4, "...always changing... constantly changing".	INSTRUCTION: Participant 2, "Googling things on how other people do things". BUSINESS: Participant 1, "It's quite competitive in a way for a business like mine". ECONOMY: Participant 3, "(social media) the most bang for our buck".

Discrepant Cases

Toward the end of the data collection process, the recording software performed an upgrade and began using artificial intelligence (AI) to transcribe the recordings. Hence, the transcriptions for the last two interviews may have been considered discrepant cases because they were noticeably different in the way they were presented and often translated. For instance, P12 was quoted as saying, "I did that for ten years actually end up without any formal. Education often the social media director for a large". These issues made it necessary to review the audio recording and correct any grammar or punctuation errors until a clear understanding of the information that matched the audio

recording was verified. The two cases that potentially contained discrepancies in the transcription recordings were carefully monitored to make sure the transcriptions reflected the meaning behind the audio recorded answers. Another outcome from these discrepant cases worth noting was that the last two interviewees were from businesses located within the largest city in the study. These two interviews contained information that involved more digital strategies, which were outside of the scope of this study, reporting successful outcomes using analytics for enterprises in their metropolitan area.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

There is a need for rigorous methods of research to support confidence in the data, straight-forward interpretation of the findings, and overall methods that are employed in qualitative research must show evidence of trustworthiness (Connelly, 2016). Quality research studies should include clearly written procedures. The following constitutes the steps taken in this research study to make sure the data collection and interpretation of the findings and reporting methods were trustworthy.

Credibility

Strategies used to establish credibility in the implementation of this study involved member checking, saturation, and bracketing on my part. This was the initial plan and was virtually how the research unfolded. After each question and at the end of the interviews, participants were asked to check for any errors and encouraged to ask questions. There was significant evidence of saturation in the answers as the study continued to build momentum. The use of bracketing on my part was apparent when keeping the conversations on course, limiting small talk or deviation from the interview

script. An interview script was used to make sure that the same format and questions were used in each interview for uniformity. There were instances where more probing was required to obtain thick descriptions and obtain more detailed answers from participants.

Transferability

The implementation of transferability was consistent with the original idea of sustaining external validity. External validity provides correlation between a study sample size and addresses the potential to apply the outcomes to similar settings with broader target populations (Findley et al., 2021). My research study aligned with this comparison by filling a need to widen the scope to include metropolitan areas. The answers derived from the interviewees in larger cities were similar to their rural counterparts, which allowed for saturation to be detected in the answers. Additionally, there was a conscious effort put forth to create a safe environment for participants to offer thick descriptions, using member checking to make sure I was understanding the answers correctly, by repeating the main point in the answers back to the participants to verify the outcomes.

Dependability

Consistent strategies used in implementation to establish dependability and reliability of the outcomes were maintained by following protocol to document everything for accurate reporting. Visualizing the outcomes to test for dependability was evident in the spreadsheets generated in the coding phase of data analysis to avoid discrepancies that would appear more frequent and be detected (Kabir, 2017). Iteratively

asking questions and reviewing answers to check for accuracy, while allowing for a variety of perspectives due to complex components, was critical when meeting challenges for dependability analysis in the data collection phase.

Confirmability

Strategies to establish and maintain confirmability in the findings were followed as planned by eliminating bias and member checking for any deviation from accuracy in the interpretation of the information received. Applying reflexivity and consciously observing potential bias in an effort to remain objective and transparency were strictly observed in the process of gathering data. Bracketing is recommended to minimize bias and confirm objectivity, which was applied by member checking, reflecting on the data collected, and making notes to document any potential bias (Gearing, 2004).

Results

Based on the data collected several themes emerged from the codes. The first theme verified was social media marketing used by all the participants to promote their business. The second theme dealt with identifying instruction that helped to understand what types of strategies might be considered a best practice. The third theme represented how they learned to use social media to market their business. The fourth theme detected was dissemination of an innovation, which allowed for a better understanding of what was needed to learn and adopt digital marketing techniques. The themes came out of the codes and reflected the research questions that were intended to help learn about the experiences and needs of small business owners and their employees who were attempting learning to use social media to market their products and services.

Research Question 1: What Were Small Business Owners and Their Employees' Instructional Experiences in Learning How to Launch and Maintain Social Media Marketing Campaigns?

Theme 1: Social Media Marketing for Small Business

The theme of social media marketing for small business helped answer the research question that asked what were the experiences of small business owners and their employees learning social media marketing, which helped identify ways to understand what plans and strategies were employed when using social media to market their business. From the data collected the consensus established reiterated what P3 noted, "Social media, it's a powerful tool." P10 added, "Social media has helped us reach a lot of younger demographics like college age students and just younger people that are moving to town...it's where everyone is at nowadays." This outcome appeared to be in alignment with the common notion in the literature about the proven effectiveness of social media marketing for small business success (Sanwariprasad et al., 2020).

Theme 2: Learning Social Media Marketing

Learning social media marketing emerged as a theme that identified answers to the research question that asked what experiences small business owners and their employees had when learning to use social media marketing techniques. Experiences reported included: P2 exclaimed, "Been flying by the seat of my pants". P4 explained how they learned social media marketing was, "Just by doing it. Trial and error". From the learning aspect, there seemed to be a lot of self-learning involved in the process of digital marketing success. Supporting statements included: P9, "I've taken the initiative

to go out and learn from the different platforms that offer training; I've had classes in college; My previous career offered a lot of training and tutelage more self-learning than anything." P8, "I've made a lot of mistakes, I've learned a lot." P6, "I really work within my limitations. If it gets beyond me, I shut it down." And, P3 reasoned, "There's obviously a formula somewhere". These findings helped to answer the research questions by supporting what scholar-practitioners posited about the need for more instruction in digital marketing strategies (Bhimani et al., 2018; Ishak et al., 2018; Jumin et al., 2017; Sharma & Singla, 2017; Thakur & Hale, 2017).

Theme 3: Instruction for Social Media Marketing

The theme of instruction for social media marketing helped answer the research question to understand the experiences small business owners and their employees had learning social media marketing. This data was disclosed by participants who in answering questions about their experiences in learning social media marketing, offered strategies that were successful for their business. The data helped identify what kind of instructional resources the participants were able to access that were intended for learners of social media marketing. The theme of instruction also helped identify challenges small business owners and their employees faced when learning to use social media marketing.

P10 had earned a degree and imparted,

"Part of my education was very heavily based on PR (public relations). I did take classes on social media theory, but even the classes that I was taking I wouldn't say necessarily prepared me for the job. For someone who was educated formally

about these kinds of things, I'll still say that a large part of it (social media marketing) is going to come from experience.”

P11 shared, “There are tools out there for a price for professionals that give you a knowledge-base on social media marketing,” following up with the statement, “I have been able to learn from some resources on Instagram and social media, you know, marketers themselves, who do this on a professional level independently and coach.”

There is a need for more instructional opportunities for small business owners and their employees learning to use social media to market their products and services (Morah and Omojola (2018). Direct input received that described instructional challenges for learning how to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns revealed this notion from P5:

I just wish that there was more training out there...maybe just through chambers, through local colleges that could help small business entrepreneurs with current trends and social media, so that we could be ahead of some of these trends instead of falling behind and just catching on to it a little bit later in the game.

The need for tech savvy approaches and making connections online to market in the digital age was a theme that came out of the code and aligned with the literature that claimed they were deemed vital for business survival (Nummela et al., 2016).

Theme 4: Dissemination of Innovation

The dissemination of an innovation theme answered the research question that asked what experiences small business owners and their employees were having when attempting to learn social media marketing. P9 divulged, “My employers have just been

so gracious to allow me to be flexible and just play with it, and learn as I go.” and P6 said jovially, “if I can find a 7-year-old to walk me through getting something uploaded, I’m in luck.” The theme of dissemination of innovation revealed strategies small business owners and their employees used when learning social media marketing.

Participants disclosed strategies for use and recommendations they might have suggested for what helped them adopt social media marketing techniques. P5 underscored this need when adding, “We would probably be a lot more successful if we did strategize.” The data derived from this theme helped address benefits they experienced when learning social media marketing. Participants disclosed how they had benefitted by early adoption and practicing perseverance when learning the innovation of social media marketing.

This theme represented the ability to readily and successfully adopt a new innovation like social media marketing for small business, which involved having the right attitude, training, resources, and familiarity with the tools to accomplish the intended outcome (Szymkowiak & Garczarek-Bąk, 2019). There was no shortage of approaches, techniques, and strategies being used to accomplish the task; strategies uncovered in this study were numerous and varied. Some recommendations from P11 included:

Keep it simple, good pictures, honesty, straight shooting; I think it comes back down to knowing your audience and knowing the purpose of each platform; Branding, it’s about creating that image and that brand, otherwise you’re walking

around in the dark; you have to know what your target is and then know what your goal is.

While some suggested mimicking successful campaigns of similar businesses, others were concerned that their success was being copied by their competitors and P12 advised,

It's more fluid and it's less likely to be duplicated because the plan is already so far ahead it's almost a sneak attack or catches competitors off-guard. And finally, ...another struggle for small businesses in general is that it's going to be the big corporate companies that set the standard.

Social media marketing has been proven a worthy innovation for small business success and has served to fill gaps in social, demographic, economic, and geographic areas that had been proven to have significant impacts on the success or failure of small business desiring to compete in the global economy (Huang et al., 2017; Mukherjee & Hollenbaugh, 2019). A final rationale from P10 to take into consideration was: "You're always going to learn a lot more on the job and from experience than you are just reading a textbook and writing papers and taking tests."

Research Question 2: What Were Small Business Owners and Their Employees' Instructional Needs in Learning How to Launch and Maintain Social Media Marketing Campaigns?

Theme 1: Social Media Marketing for Small Business

The social media marketing theme emerged as a critical means to how users were able to identify social media platforms and understand specific requirements for each particular outlet. This significant element emerged from the research question to help

understand instructional needs of small business owners and their employees learning how to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns. P5 affirmed, “We definitely see an increase in sales whenever we do stay on top of our social media marketing.” The social media marketing theme was derived from the data and helped address the research question to understand needs of small business owners and their employees learning social media marketing, which uncovered having a clear goal and knowing what was required to reach intended social media audiences in ways they were accustomed to being approached. P8 reiterated, “It’s being educated about what your primary goal is.”

Theme 2: Learning Social Media Marketing

Learning was a theme that emerged from the data and contributed to the research question that asked what the instructional needs of small business owners and their employees were when learning social media marketing. P6 complained of not being able to learn how to use social media, because they did not know where to locate learning resources that they were certain had to be available somewhere, while P10 shared educational opportunities they had experienced in learning to use social media marketing techniques. This theme revealed learning needs that were crucial to getting the information required to be successful in digital marketing and spoke to the research question to help define needs of entrepreneurs and their employees learning social media marketing techniques. As was found to be evident in prior research, novices to social media marketing may be unsure about how to use social media (Henry, 2019). Most of the participants reported being *self-taught*. Some of the answers regarding how they

received instruction included statements like these from P6, “Zero. I’ve not had anybody teach me that; Been flying by the seat of my pants; Just by doing it.” P5 added, “Trial and Error; It’s all on the fly” P9 echoed, “Spontaneous; We’re just rolling with it.”

Theme 3: Instruction for Social Media Marketing

Instruction was a theme uncovered by participant input when defining challenges small business owners and their employees faced when learning social media marketing and how they went about locating answers they were looking for. The requirement for instruction spoke directly to the research question to help identify instructional needs of entrepreneurs and their employees learning social media marketing by revealing strategies created to meet the needs of those learning how to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns. Participants shared how they confronted challenges and oftentimes turned their needs into opportunities, such as when the COVID pandemic made it necessary for many of them to change the way they did business. P5 said they were, “constantly having to figure out what is going to interest the followers to engage...honestly we don’t have a lot of strategies” and “I just wish that there was more training out there.” and P5 added, “...it has helped us become more technologically in tune with our customers.”

Theme 4: Dissemination of Innovation

Dissemination of an innovation emerged as an answer to the research question that asked what instructional needs small business owners and their employees had when learning social media marketing. The need for instructional opportunities underscored their pleas for more resources and training in the domain of social media marketing for

entrepreneurs and their employees to be able to fully adopt social media marketing. P6 reflected, “I think it was just an age gap thing where I didn’t get fluent in computer technology.” This theme was evident when participants described challenges they were confronted with as they learned social media marketing techniques, to disclose what strategies they found to be successful, to offer recommendations they might share with others who might be struggling, and offer any benefits they could identify when adopting social media to keep up with current trends in digital marketing. P9 offered, “We just do our own research and just go off our own experience.

The data collected answered the research questions about instructional experiences and the needs of users by allowing for the identification of key themes, which included learning and instruction of a new innovation. Common themes that emerged were social media platforms, people, and dissemination of an innovation. Challenges involved locating sources for instruction, which pointed directly to the research question querying whether there was actually need for instruction. Sub-categories that emerged were frustration, digital strategy, people/target audience, goal, and business survival, which all aligned with the research questions to identify experiences and needs in learning digital marketing. Some of the data reflected challenges in finding content, staying ahead of the competition, and in achieving consensus by stakeholders in their marketing plan implementation, which underscored the experiences that uncovered the need for more available instruction. Ultimately, the need created the means to find ways to learn in order to survive.

Summary

This chapter described the analysis of the results, including the setting, demographics of the participants, how the data was collected, variations from the original plan, unusual circumstances, and data analysis details and uncover themes to answer the research questions and evidence of trustworthiness was reviewed. The study was intended to help understand how small business owners and their employees learn social media marketing, to gain information from varying perspectives, and know what kind of issues small businesses have to overcome to accept the technological innovations of social media marketing. This information may transfer to the adoption and use of new social media marketing techniques. The findings from the answers to the research questions uncovered instructional experiences and challenges small business owners and their employees had in learning social media marketing. Experiences described helped to define learner needs, while challenges aligned with strategies which could potentially be transformed into instructional methodology for diffusion of this new innovation. Finally, in Chapter 5 I will discuss conclusions and make recommendations based on the findings of this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand what types of instruction small business owners and their employees needed in order to learn skills to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns. The nature of this study was a basic qualitative approach, which involved semi structured interviews conducted via recorded phone software with participants who owned and operated small businesses in Arkansas. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and coded to uncover themes.

Interpretation of the Findings

Previous literature has focused on the effectiveness of social media marketing; however, there was a gap in how entrepreneurs access, perceive, and receive instruction in innovative marketing strategies. Key findings of this study helped to confirm the need for small business owners and their employees to face challenges in finding instructional resources that would help them adopt an innovation. P11 noted, “Being able to apply that to social media marketing should definitely be our goal ... it should not be taken for granted.” P12 declared, “the goal for sales in general, is reaching as many people that can turn into leads.”

Data also revealed the need for small business owners and their employees to build skills and confidence, continuing to reach for new knowledge so that their marketing strategies would succeed. This supports the literature indicating that traditional marketing no longer has influence on consumers who are familiar with technology (Subramanian, 2018). Microenterprise owners and employees need to compete smartly in the digital age (Henry, 2019; Nummela et al., 2016). However, the adoption of an

innovation is particularly challenging for those who already have negative attitudes or barriers in training, resources, and/or familiarity of digital marketing strategies (Al-khinji et al., 2019; Szymkowiak & Garczarek-Bak, 2019). Further, social media campaigns are out of reach for practitioners who had no access to training in digital marketing (Muresan & Sinuraya, 2018). Pedagogical interventions can help learners who experience different outcomes in different settings, allowing for practice in using these tools and resources to gain much-needed social media marketing skills (Huggins & Cunningham, 2019; Mukherjee & Hollenbaugh, 2019). My findings acknowledged how some people literally grew into using social media in their career from personal experiences they gained by leveraging connectivity early in life. My study thus confirms what was known in the body of literature about successful strategies, experience, and practice (Bala & Verma, 2018; Pick et al., 2019; Richmond et al., 2017). The missing piece was instruction, which is noted in the conceptual framework (Richmond et al., 2017).

The conceptual framework used in this study helped to explore how innovative approaches to learning converged with the need for knowledge, to glean new approaches in learning social media marketing in a context of networked knowledge enhanced by technology tools and resources (Cydis, 2015; Siemens, 2008). The conceptual framework for this study consisted of foundational theories including UTAUT, TAM, and connectivism (El-Masri & Tarhini, 2017; Siemens, 2008; Taiwo & Downe, 2013; Venkatesh et al., 2003). The UTAUT framework stemmed from earlier models such as social cognitive theory, TAM, DOI theory, and other current education technology theoretical underpinning. Social media has been accepted as an innovation that

entrepreneurs in small and medium businesses can expect to influence a significant number of potential customers when applying the UTAUT model to monitor the adoption of social media marketing for small business (Puriwat et al., 2021). The results of my study also confirmed factors related to the adoption of a new innovation, which were crucial to small business owners and their employees who were learning digital marketing. The concepts explored supported evidence of a new digital divide, which pointed to a lack of instructional opportunities (Richmond et al, 2017). During this study it was important to monitor trends in academia to find out how small business owners and their employees learned social media marketing techniques. This premise confirmed a need to have more opportunities for instruction to close the gap of knowledge and knowing digital trends in marketing.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations involved the small number of participants willing to consent to being interviewed. Initially the scope was focused on one of the poorest counties in Arkansas (United States Census Bureau, 2021), and widened to include larger cities and eventually the entire state. As described in Chapter 1, there was a limited number of potential participants, which proved to be the case. It was necessary to request this change in procedures to the IRB for approval before continuing data collection. Unbeknownst to me, the initial plan for contact was flawed. Apparently, the social media platform blocked all invitation messages, so a request for a change to the IRB specifically in the method of contact had to be clarified. There had been a plan to do follow up interviews for member checking, which was revised due to difficulty in getting an initial interview scheduled.

The request for change to the IRB clarified that contact would be made by electronic message or phone.

There was certain dependability in finding what knowledge was needed once interviews began to be confirmed and scheduled. The questions were answered directly, and member checking was performed periodically during the interview, and again at the end, to make sure I had understood the answers correctly and to answer any questions they might have had during the interview process. Major limitations addressed in the study involved understanding what kinds of instructional needs were described, how they learned implementation and developed their own strategies, and how better training opportunities might be available to generalize the outcomes to other settings. This qualitative type of inquiry allowed for depth and breadth in the information gathered from participants, which made it possible to achieve saturation when the answers began to be repetitive, such as having clear goals for a marketing plan and defining a target audience (Johnson & Christensen, 2019).

And finally, when dealing with potential bias in the data, it was essential to limit small talk and guide all communication within the perimeters of the scope of the study. A considerable limitation could be found in the initial contact and investigating why there were no replies to the first set of invitations. It required going to great lengths to make contact that did not breach the IRB approved method of contact. Any perceived bias by myself or the interviewees was acknowledged and noted in the data collection phase.

Recommendations

Further research needed in this field was most apparent in the desire to know more about what type of instructional needs small business owners and their employees had when attempting to learn social media marketing. These needs demonstrated strengths and limitations as apparent in the results of this study due to thick descriptions offered by the participants. The data was grounded in theory that had been a reliable foundation of innovation dissemination for educators faced with similar challenges of guiding learners who were immersed in technology. It was possible for me to relate to the needs of small business owners and their employees troubleshooting when attempting to use social media platforms, identifying and reaching out to a target demographic. All of my electronic invitations to participate in the study being blocked by the social media platform was totally unforeseen, however that occurrence supported the need to broaden the scope of the study in which the rationale was discussed earlier within the limitations disclosed in Chapter 2. The strengths of this study included rich data that was derived from the interviews and in the way the themes and patterns became obvious in the data analysis phase. The limitations of this study were directly related to the variables of social media and learning to use digital marketing tactics. Most users of technology have experienced similar challenges.

The literature to date supported more emphasis being placed on digital literacy to create more outcomes that were deemed effective to marketers. My research was focused on identifying a gap in knowledge of small business owners and their employees learning social media marketing techniques, which directly related to a need for instructional

resources to learn strategies for successful digital marketing campaigns. It has been widely believed that social media marketing is essential and early adoption becoming more significant for businesses to be competitive in the global marketplace (Buratti et al., 2018). The very essence of business marketing was changing the way managers approached organization, planning, communication, upholding the interests of their stakeholders, and the way value was delivered. My study was potentially filling a gap in literature by furthering knowledge in areas of education, business, and technology which aligned well to help understand challenges experienced by small business owners and their employees who were attempting to launch and maintain successful social media campaigns.

In conclusion, the traditional marketing mix for businesses had vastly changed, therefore new techniques and best practices when using digital resources were recommended (Subramanian, 2018). The literature reiterated how the internet and advent of social media were catalysts for the dissemination of this business marketing revolution (Bhimani et. al, 2018). It was widely believed that there should be a system to navigate adoption and implementation of digital marketing within a framework used to guide and measure performance for business social media marketing campaigns.

Implications

The outcome of this study could serve as a catalyst for the potential to explore other metropolitan areas where greater numbers of entrepreneurs were currently using methods that can be verified to work. Due to the small number of participants affecting the transferability of this study (Farrugia, 2019), implications point to how they

participated in learning and how readily they were able to adopt a new innovation. Social media was a new way of marketing by digital means that forced users to upgrade the outdated print and broadcast analog models of the past.

Knowledge

With increased need for understanding what types of instruction small business owners and their employees needed in order to learn necessary skills to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns, it was vital to analyze the gap in the literature between how small business owners and their employees received instruction that translated to skills needed to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns. Taiwo and Downe (2013) provided validity, which supported innovation adoption in the UTAUT model, which was derived from previous seminal research such as social cognitive theory, TAM, and DOI. This query for knowledge considered new approaches to learning to utilize social networks and connected knowledge driven by technology, new media tools, and strategies (Goldie, 2016).

Practice

To know what is involved in learning social media marketing, further development of practical application is a necessity (Subramanian, 2018). In addition, further research is warranted to address instructional challenges in social media campaign marketing for entrepreneurs and their employees. Potential contributions of this study that advance practice would allow for any novice to be allowed an opportunity to access resources that provided guidelines and best practices in digital marketing for small business owners and their employees.

Sustainability

Implications for social change point to business owners and their employee's attitudes that have an impact on the dissemination of an innovation like digital marketing. The notion that reaching potential customers is vital for business sustainability (Bhimani et al., 2018) contributes directly to the local economy and could be a force for creating social change in a community. Hence, instruction in how to launch and maintain successful social media campaigns is crucial for small business sustainability (Fortin & Chen, 2017).

My research supported positive social change, because small business growth has been known to sustain communities by developing socioeconomic opportunities, which enhances the lives of citizens by increasing income potential and improving living conditions, while transferring the adoption of this innovation to other communities (Gaur & Anshu, 2018). Instruction and education could have a profound impact on the ability to overcome poverty by increasing income for struggling individuals and building communities, which represents significant implications for positive social change.

Conclusion

In this study the unit of analysis was the experience of small business owners and their employees, which included need, rate of adoption, and level of skill. To find out how small business owners were learning social media marketing strategies, data collection was performed using personal interviews with business owners and their employees as a source for data. Interviews were scheduled with entrepreneurs who were actively engaged in social media campaigns during the period of time the study takes

place. This methodology required analysis of the data collected, by looking at marketing strategies used to determine their understanding of digital marketing, as well as whether small business owners were using, or were interested in using, the vast array of digital tools available to administrators of business pages on social media platforms.

“Incorporating multimedia information in the coding process is another interesting avenue for future research” (Yang, 2018, p.59). Observation of multimedia and content analysis could be utilized in future studies, developing a specific plan to analyze data derived from interviews focused on small businesses that employ social media marketing.

Future studies could also benefit stakeholders by analyzing what others have learned. Urban regions tend to offer more networking in the way of meet-ups and small business incubators to give entrepreneurs business tactics and models, as well as providing a support group of ambitious small business owners learning how to grow and maintain their enterprises (Thakur & Hale, 2017). It may be necessary to explore a setting where they currently use methods that work, looking at how they were participating in learning and how innovations were accepted as a new way of marketing by digital means, versus the analog print and broadcast model.

More research is needed to uncover and further identify problems encountered and potential solutions to issues faced by small business owners needing help in marketing their products and services using new digital strategies (Richmond et al., 2017). It was important to find out what knowledge was gained by learning how small business owners used social media to market their companies, what innovative uses they may have discovered that created successful social marketing campaigns to reach

customers, and how learning technique may have been improved upon to support small business marketing education. Ultimately, the need created the means to find innovative ways to learn in order to survive.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Demographic Information:

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Level of Education
4. Number of years in business
5. Number of employees at time of the study
6. Estimated amount of social media marketing campaigns conducted

Research Questions:

1. What are your (small business owners and their employee's) instructional experiences in learning how to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns?
2. What are your (small business owners and their employee's) instructional needs in learning how to launch and maintain social media marketing campaigns?

Sub-Questions:

1. How do you apply digital marketing strategies using social media platforms?
2. How does your company's marketing plan involve social media marketing specifically?
3. Describe any challenges you may have experienced in promoting your business utilizing social media marketing strategies.

4. How do you approach challenges you have been confronted with when launching and maintaining social media marketing campaigns for your business?
5. Have you found any strategies that work well, versus practices you do not recommend?
6. How does your company benefit by social media marketing campaigns?
7. Is there anything you would like to add that we have not covered completely that relates to this study about implementing social media marketing?

Appendix B: Codebook

Theory-driven codes	Definition	Example	Data-driven codes	Definition	Example
Small Business	Companies having less than 500 employees, and microenterprises as having 10 employees or less with limited access to funding (Anastasia, 2015).	Mom & Pop restaurants, small stores, services like lawncare, cleaning, accounting.	Challenges	A difficult task or problem or something that is hard to do.	Interacting with people socially, writing a detailed report, a goal that is hard to achieve.
Diffusion of Innovation	Theory used to explain how, over time, an idea or product gains momentum and diffuses (or spreads) through a specific population or social system (Rogers, 1995).	The adoption of a new innovation, like cell phone technology and computer software.	Strategies	A general direction set for a person or organization and its various components to achieve a desired state in the future. Strategy results from the detailed strategic planning process	Plans for building or creating. A step by step instruction in how to accomplish a goal. Budgeting finances, marketing, search engine optimization
Instructional Needs	Following instructions is an important ability to practice in everyday life. Within an academic setting, following instructions can influence grades, learning subject matter, and correctly executing skills	Needing to know how to operate a motor vehicle, whiteboard, cell phone, or strategies for marketing or finance.	People	The men, women, and children of a particular nation, community, or ethnic group.	Potentially the target population for your marketing or dissemination effort.
Learning	The acquisition of knowledge or skills through experience, study, or by being taught.	Ability to read, write, calculate, problem-solve, or demonstrate skill.	Social Media	Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.	Platforms like Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc.
Instruction	Detailed information telling	Someone giving another	COVID-19	COVID-19 is the name given by	Effects of the

	how something should be done, operated, or assembled.	person detailed directions to the library, or showing someone how to cook.	the World Health Organization (WHO) on February 11, 2020 for the disease caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV2. It started in Wuhan, China in late 2019 and has since spread worldwide. COVID-19 is an acronym that stands for coronavirus disease of 2019.	pandemic on activities of people and their survival.
Innovation	A new method, idea, product, etc.	Electric vehicles, biodegradable Lego blocks, wind turbines, solar power and photovoltaic cells.		
Self-taught	Having acquired knowledge or skill on one's own initiative rather than through formal instruction or training.	Design and graphic arts, sewing, skating, riding a bicycle, learning to swim, etc.		