

2022

Marketing Strategies to Adapt Organizations to Changes in the Business Environment

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Sara Hammoud

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

Marketing Strategies to Adapt Organizations to Changes in the Business Environment

by

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MA, University of Balamand, 2012

BA, University of Bari, 2009

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

July 2022

Abstract

Organizations with low marketing programs adaptation to changing market requirements suffer low firm performance. Retail business leaders who fail to implement marketing programs adaptation can experience decreases in profitability. Grounded in the 7S model, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore marketing strategies that retail business leaders use to adapt their organizations to changes in the business environment. The participants comprised four business leaders of retail apparel organizations in southern Italy who developed and implemented successful marketing strategies to adapt their organization to changes in the business environment. Data were collected from semistructured interviews and company documents relevant to marketing program adaptation strategies. The thematic analysis included a five-step process to analyze the data. Four themes emerged: consumer behavior marketing strategies, innovative marketing strategies, marketing research strategies, and customer acquisition marketing strategies. A key recommendation for retail business leaders is to target their customers through an omnichannel approach that includes traditional and online social media channels. The implications for positive social change include the potential to create new job opportunities for individuals in the local communities who want to work in the retail business.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my family. To my mother, the woman who gave me life. Thank you for the way you raised me up, making of me the woman I am. Thank you for taking care of us, and for sacrificing yourself for our benefit. Thank you for teaching me the value of being together and taking care of each other. To my brother, my childhood partner and my life model. Above all, I dedicate this doctoral study to my father, my backbone, my life guide. Thank you for always being by my side, in happy moments but especially in discomfort. Thank you for always encouraging me to keep progressing even when I wanted to give up on everything. Thank you because I always find you there next to me.

Acknowledgments

I enrolled in the DBA program in a very difficult period of my life. The pandemic caused by COVID-19 forced me to leave London where I lived and move back to Bari, my hometown. COVID-19 left me jobless and without any stimulus. My father suggested to start a DBA program at Walden University. I was a bit skeptical at the beginning, but I then recognized that it could represent a great opportunity to change my life. Thank you, Dad, for guiding me in my lifepath.

I would like to thank Dr. Banasik for all the support and efforts he put into the success of this doctoral journey. I would also like to thank Dr. Gottlieb, second committee member, and Dr. Lentz, university research reviewer, for providing feedback to improve the quality of this study. My thanks go to my peers for exchanging their experiences and knowledge with me during these years. Finally, I would like to thank my research participants for dedicating time and effort to provide substantive information upon which the results of this study are grounded.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Change is present in many aspects in business and digital transformation and globalization, and the COVID-19 pandemic magnified its effects. Many consumers moved to online shopping during the pandemic. Globalization and digital transformation enable consumers to use e-commerce to buy products from their homes (Güven, 2020). The survival of retail business depends on marketing leaders' ability to use strategies to cope with these changes.

Background of the Problem

Digital transformation, globalization, and the COVID-19 pandemic have characterized the retail market in the second decade of the 21st century. Digital transformation enabled retailers to use e-commerce platforms to increase revenue (Verhoef et al., 2021), reach new markets (Pantano et al., 2020), create online marketplaces (Pantano et al., 2020), and use technological tools to create a competitive advantage (Kazim et al., 2020). Globalization enables retailers to reach international locations and compete with local organizations without the need to create local presence. The government restrictions due to COVID-19 heavily affected consumer behavior and buying patterns. These changes in the business environment were some of the factors that determined the survival or failure of retailers. Many retailers closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). A lack of marketing program adaptation to the changing business environment is a driver for failure for organizations

(Khan, 2020). Organizations experience declining revenues when they fail to adapt to changes in the business environment.

Problem Statement

Organizations with low marketing program adaptation to changing market requirements suffer low firm performance (Khan, 2020, p. 7). In Italy in January 2021, after a major change in market requirements occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the value of retail trade year-on-year was down 6.8%, with a 15.5% fall in nonfood sales (Italian National Statistics Institute, 2021, para. 3). The general business problem is that some organizations experience declining revenues when they fail to adapt to changes in the business environment. The specific business problem is that some retail business leaders lack marketing strategies to adapt their organizations to changes in the business environment.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the marketing strategies that some retail business leaders used to adapt their organizations to changes in the business environment. The targeted population comprised business leaders of four selected retail apparel organizations in southern Italy who developed and implemented successful marketing strategies to adapt their organization to changes in the business environment. The implications for positive social change include the potential to create and sustain new job opportunities for individuals in local communities who want to work in the apparel business.

Nature of the Study

The researcher's perspective on inquiry affects the researcher's choice of method (Ryu, 2020). Moreover, different research questions and contexts require different research methods (Lo et al., 2020). The research methods are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed. The quantitative research method refers to the analysis of variables' characteristics or relationships using statistical analysis (Apuke, 2017). Because the study was not about analyzing variables, testing hypotheses, and transferring results to a larger population, the quantitative method was not appropriate. Qualitative researchers use open-ended questions to describe, decode, and explore phenomena and concepts (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). The qualitative method is thus considered an interpretative approach. Qualitative researchers collect and analyze rich and in-depth data to explore participants' experience (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The qualitative method was a good fit for this study because the plan was to collect rich data to describe the marketing strategies that business leaders used to adapt their organizations to changes in the business environment. A mixed method combines the use of quantitative and qualitative components (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). The mixed method was not appropriate for this study because the study was not about analyzing variables or testing hypotheses and transferring results to a larger population.

Principal qualitative designs include ethnography, phenomenology, and case study (Yin, 2018). Ethnography refers to the study of social events and is ideal to generate in-depth descriptions and analyses about a society (Ngenye & Kreps, 2020). The

ethnographic design was not suitable for this study because the study did not include groups' cultures or a society. Phenomenology is ideal to understand individuals and their personal meanings for interactions with others and with phenomena (Ngenye & Kreps, 2020). The phenomenological design was not the right choice for this study because the goal was not to understand the personal meanings of individuals experiencing phenomena. Through a case study, a qualitative researcher seeks to explore a time- and space-bound phenomenon (Alp & Evans, 2019). The purpose of this study was to explore a phenomenon bounded by time and space. Researchers use the multiple case study to collect empirical evidence about a case (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) added that using multiple case study enables researchers to replicate results in similar settings. Because the study was based on open-ended questions to collect and analyze rich data from research participants, multiple case study was the ideal qualitative research design. A single case study limits the findings to a unique setting (Yin, 2018). A multiple case design was preferable because rich and diverse data provided greater opportunities for theme development and comparative analyses.

Research Question

What effective marketing strategies do business leaders use to adapt to changes in the business environment?

Interview Questions

1. What marketing strategies do you use to adapt your organization to changes in the business environment?

2. How do you measure the effectiveness of these marketing strategies?
3. What are the criteria for developing marketing strategies to adapt your organization to changes in the business environment?
4. What were the key obstacles you found to implementing your marketing strategies to adapt your organization to changes in the business environment?
5. How did you overcome these key obstacles?
6. How did your customers respond to the different marketing strategies implemented to adapt to changes in the business environment?
7. What other information would you like to share with me regarding strategies that you used to adapt your organization to changes in the business environment?

Conceptual Framework

Waterman et al. (1980), consultants at McKinsey, developed the McKinsey 7S model to combine the essential factors that sustain an organization's effectiveness. The model is based on seven variables: structure, strategy, system, style, staff, skills, and superordinate goals (Waterman et al., 1980). Structure refers to the way that the organization is composed. Strategy refers to the actions that the organization plans to create unique value. Systems are all the organization's procedures. Style refers to leadership style. Staff refers to the people that make up the organization. Skills are individual capabilities. Superordinate goals are guiding concepts, values, and aspirations that lead the actions of the leaders of an organization. Changes in one of the variables

require changes in all the others. The seven variables need to be aligned to achieve successful organizational change (Waterman et al., 1980). Managers use the 7S model to identify organizational problems and opportunities, as well as to develop and implement a new strategy (Singh, 2018). The McKinsey 7S model focuses on the need for alignment among the seven soft and hard elements (Cox et al., 2018). Failure in alignment leads to the need for organizational change. Thus, the 7S model is a key means for developing and implementing organizational strategic change. Adopting the right strategies enables organizational leaders to create competitive advantage and achieve organizational objectives (Ganesh, 2017). Marketing strategies and leadership style are essential components of the McKinsey 7S model. The study involved identifying and exploring leadership and marketing strategies. The McKinsey 7S model was helpful in studying and explaining the marketing strategies that business leaders in the apparel industry used to adapt their organizations to changes in the business environment.

Operational Definitions

Marketing adaptation: Marketing adaptation is a process in which marketers tailor their marketing program to the specific conditions of the foreign countries in which they operate (Slangen & Dikova, 2014).

Marketing sustainability: Marketing sustainability is a process in which marketers consider the entire social and environmental setting, including the social goals of the entire community (Benedict, 2021).

Multisensory augmented reality: Multisensory augmented reality (m-AR) is digitally enhanced interactive visual, auditory, and tactile sensory information that contributes to the perception of a consumer's physical environment (Heller et al., 2019).

Pay-to-use: Pay-to-use is a marketing approach to providing goods and services at low prices and for the common good (Kelleci & Yildiz, 2021).

Smart walls: Smart walls are intelligent reflective surfaces that can receive and process data through electromagnetic waves such as 5G technology used in mobile communication (Kazim et al., 2020).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The accuracy of a study directly relates to how much a researcher reports assumptions and limitations (Lange & Dodds, 2017). Researchers identify research limits by factors outside their control (limitations) and by other factors that they decide to include in their studies to create boundaries for the study (i.e., delimitations) and thus reduce the time and effort to complete the study. Researchers discuss the limitations and delimitations of their studies to provide readers with a clear indication of the trustworthiness of their research (Elo et al., 2014).

Assumptions

An assumption is a preconceived opinion or belief of a researcher that the researcher assumes to be true even without scientific proof (Eisenhardt, 2020; Yang et al., 2018). Two assumptions guided this research. The first assumption was that leaders participating in this study were able to articulate their experiences and answer the

interview questions honestly. The second assumption was that participants provided information that was relevant to marketing strategies that they used to adapt their organizations to changes in the business environment. Both assumptions proved to be true as participating leaders provided information that was honest and relevant to the research question.

Limitations

Limitations reflect the weaknesses of a study and are factors outside of the researcher's control that may affect the generalization or conclusiveness of the findings (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The first limitation of this study was the restrictions on my ability to take fieldnotes from participants' work environment due to COVID-19. The government restrictions limited my access to participants' workplace and thus the possibility to take fieldnotes from the participants' work setting. COVID-19 government restrictions limited the selection process to participants who had video or telephone capability for interviews. The third limitation was that the findings of this study depended on participants' honesty in answering the interview questions.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the boundaries of a study that a researcher can control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). There were three delimitations in this study. First, the scope of the study was bound to marketing strategies to adapt to changes in the business environment. Second, southern Italy was the geographic location that delimited this study. Third, research participants included business leaders of retail apparel who

developed and implemented successful marketing strategies to adapt their organization to the changes in the business environment.

Significance of the Study

Adaptation to the continuously changing business environment is key to organizational success (Gutierrez-Gutierrez et al., 2018). Business leaders can sustain or even expand their business, especially in periods of change, if they can imbibe the tenets of successful marketing strategies to adapt their organizations to changes in the business environment. The findings of this study contribute to the identification of marketing strategies to enable organizations to adapt to changes in the business environment by improving and sustaining business performance, which can benefit communities.

Contribution to Business Practice

Quick changes in customers' preferences and fierce competition characterize the retail industry (D'Avolio et al., 2015). A lack of marketing program adaptation to changing market requirements is a driver for failure for organizations (Khan, 2020). The study's findings are significant to business practice by providing guidelines for better understanding what marketing strategies some business leaders in the retail industry used to adapt their organizations to changes in the business environment. These guidelines could enable business leaders to avoid organizational failure and achieve organizational success instead. The findings of this study identified key strategies, processes, and tools for assessing and addressing disruptive changes in the marketplace caused by changes in the business environment. Policy makers could use such indicators to identify radical

changes in the business environment and mitigate their negative effects on organizations' performance.

Implications for Social Change

Retail business leaders could use the findings of this study to change and improve their products and services to meet changes in the business environment. Improving products and services to meet changes in the local business environment could enable retail organizations to satisfy the needs of local customers by increasing the availability of appropriately designed products. Providing customers with tailored products would enable these leaders to sustain and grow their organizations. Organizational growth typically creates new job opportunities for individuals in communities who want to work in the retail business.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore marketing strategies that some business leaders used to adapt their organizations to changes in the business environment. This literature review's primary purpose is to provide a comprehensive and critical analysis of current and previous research about marketing strategies to adapt to changes in business environment. The synthesis of relevant literature on apparel retail marketing strategies, the conceptual framework, and relevant theories are essential parts of this literature review.

The keywords used when researching this topic were *apparel, 7S, big data, change management, COVID, consumer behavior, CRM, data mining, Kotler's 8 steps,*

market, marketing, marketing adaptation, marketing strategies, marketing survey, marketing sustainability, marketing tools, marketplace, McKinsey, leadership, pandemic, pest, pestle, retail business, SWOT, TQM, value marketing, and word of mouth. Google Scholar and the Walden University library were the search engines used to locate the sources included in this study. The databases used were Google Scholar, ABI/Inform Complete, EBSCO Host, ProQuest, Emerald Insight, Education Source, Business Source Complete, Science Citation Index, Science Direct, Directory of Open Access Journals, Academic Search Complete, Scholar Works, and Sage Publications. The search included governmental websites and documents to find statistical information about market trends. Of 202 sources, 83% were published in 2018–2022, and 88% were peer reviewed. The literature review included 91 peer-reviewed and recent articles.

I organized the literature review by following a topical approach. The literature review included six main topics: (a) changes in the business environment that led to declining revenues and business closures; (b) the 7S model, which was the conceptual framework for this study; (c) other relevant theories considered and discarded in the selection of the conceptual framework; (d) a review of the retail business; (e) tools used to create marketing retail strategies; and (f) a final section on successful marketing apparel retail strategies. The conceptual framework subsection includes a brief historical introduction of the 7S model, a detailed analysis of the key components of the model, some business applications of the model in scholarly works, and a conclusion on why the conceptual framework fit this study. The relevant theories subsection includes theories,

concepts, and models considered and discarded when evaluating the conceptual framework to use for this study. For each, explanations include why there was a preference for the 7S model. The review of the Italian retail market helped in narrowing the study on a specific business setting. The subsection on changes in the business environment includes reasons for change and best practices and models to facilitate change and to monitor its impact. The last subsection includes marketing retail strategies present in the literature. This section is essential to complete Section 3 of this study to compare the marketing strategies that emerged in this study with those discussed by other researchers.

Changes in the Business Environment

Changes in the business environment may affect organizations, competitors, suppliers, customers, products, and services. COVID-19 has had a disruptive effect on the business environment globally—it has been a choking event that has changed the world (Grech, 2020; Mazzoleni et al., 2020). After COVID-19, the world will not be the same. Doing business as before this event may prove disastrous.

Disruptive change may affect business sustainability. Many businesses in most industry sectors closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). In 2020, many retailers filed for bankruptcy protection, including J.C. Penney, Neiman Marcus, J. Crew, Pier 1 Imports, and Stage Stores. Gauri et al. (2021) claimed that e-commerce accounted for a quarter of retail sales in the United States in 2019, and that the number of retail stores is likely to fall from 883,000 in 2019 to 782,000 in 2024.

The closure of businesses led to an employment crisis worldwide. The International Labour Organization (2020) estimated that the employment crisis will result in the loss of 25 million jobs globally, with wage losses between \$860 million and \$3.4 trillion. Retail business is one of the businesses that face short-term and long-term challenges. Short-term challenges in retail business are those related to the supply chain, the workforce, cash flow, consumer demand, sales, and marketing, whereas long-term challenges are those related to the survival of enterprises (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). Retail organizations that operate in specific markets such as the tourism and hospitality market may vanish because these markets may no longer exist. Disruptive change such as COVID-19 reduces business sustainability, decreases employment rates, and creates long- and short-term challenges for organizations.

The business situation in Italy was like the rest of the world. In March 2020, retail sales showed a collapse of 21.3% cyclical variation in volume caused by a 36.5% drop in trade in nonfood products (Italian National Statistics Institute, 2020). In the same year, in the Milan metropolitan area, which was the commercial capital of Italy, sales turnover had a decrease of 4.9 billion euros because of closed retail firms. Over 22,700 commercial organizations closed, and approximately 123,000 employees lost their jobs (Tricarico & De Vidovich, 2021). Tricarico and De Vidovich (2021) expected Italy to produce 180 billion less in 2021. Out of those 180 billion Euros, 23 billion were due to the lack of contribution of the Milanese metropolitan area, in particular linked to the crisis induced by the pandemic in the service macro sector (Italian National Statistics

Institute, 2020). In Italy, the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the retail market, causing a reduction in sales turnover, closure of many retail firms, reduction in production, and reduced contributions to local municipalities.

The changes in the business environment affected not only the survival and the bottom line of businesses, but also the way in which marketers behave and act and how marketing theorists explain marketing concepts and theories. Marketers are likely to face a totally different marketing landscape and much-changed customers during and after the pandemic (He & Harris, 2020). The COVID-19 outbreak will have a profound impact on opinions, beliefs, values, habits, and behaviors. Customer loyalty, market and customer share, and customer equity were marketing standards pre-COVID-19. Some scholars critically questioned the validity of previously standard marketing metrics such as customer lifetime value, share of customer, and customer equity in the post-COVID-19 period (He & Harris, 2020). Potts (2018) argued that the marketing landscape was edging from evolution to revolution and that *digital disruption* was the new term for progress that would displace industrial progress. The changes in the business environment affected the way that business leaders market their products and services; customer loyalty, market and customer share, customer lifetime value, share of customer, and customer equity were likely to be critically questioned post-COVID-19.

The essence of marketing can be viewed as exchange. Lockdowns and travel restrictions immediately changed the communication means between buyers and suppliers (He & Harris, 2020). Skype, WhatsApp, and Zoom exploded in use, and the

digital age of online, mobile, and social media marketing went from preadolescence to adulthood in few weeks (He & Harris, 2020). Digital and social media have changed the nature of marketing (Ye et al., 2021). The advent of social media allowed marketers to create a new form of digital marketing called *social media influencer marketing* (Saima & Khan, 2020). Social media influencers are users who regularly create and post photos, videos, and other content related to their topic of expertise (Saima & Khan, 2020).

Advertising and media companies have needed to develop campaigns and responses in days when earlier efforts took months and years. The context of competition has also changed. During the pandemic, consumers, publics, and governments required—and in some cases forced—collaboration for the good of all. To accelerate the design and production process of ventilators, past competitors became collaborators (He & Harris, 2020). The pandemic accelerated the process of using new communication means such as Skype, WhatsApp, and Zoom and increased online, mobile, and social media marketing.

Governments and legislators created changes that affected local and global markets. The Italian government, like many Western governments, issued Law Decree No. 18 of March 17, 2020 (The Cura Italia Decree), which obliged organizations to temporarily close their businesses during the pandemic in exchange for tax reductions and liquid money (Governo Italiano Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, 2020). The lockdown measures severely affected the everyday life of consumers and businesses, presented retail managements with unprecedented challenges, and changed the way that consumers shop (Pantano et al., 2020). The profound changes experienced at a global

level were challenging consumers' perceptions and behaviors in retailing to the extent that they could have a residual impact even when the emergency was over (Pantano et al., 2020). Spatial proximity during the pandemic forced some consumers to reconsider their established habits and switch from the retailers they usually patronized to competitors that operated closer to their homes. Some of these consumers could maintain their new buying relationship with the new retailers even after the pandemic was over as a thank you sign for the help that they received during the difficult times of the pandemic. Some consumers tried other marketing channels that they never thought of before. For example, some elderly consumers switched to online purchases, discovering the safety and benefits of home deliveries, store pickup, and cashless payment (Pantano et al., 2020). Indeed, in this emergency scenario, several governments classified online shopping and home deliveries as essential services. Even the timing of opening of a store might contribute to the success of a business. Ivanov (2020) suggested that the timing of the closing and opening of facilities might become a major factor that determines the epidemic outbreak impact on the supply chain and thus the organization. Spatial proximity, switching to online purchasing, home deliveries, and the timing of opening of the store are factors that contribute to the success of a business in times of epidemic outbreak.

The Italian government also continued to accelerate the digital transformation in both the government and private sector. A big portion of the funds received from the European Union to support the Italian Recovery and Resilience Plan to convert Italy's long-run decline and to solve its enduring structural problems were planned to be

invested in the digital transformation (Marelli, 2021). This was a first step to prepare the country for the digital disruption, which was the new term for progress as suggested by Potts (2018). The digital transformation or disruption will impact marketing and sales dramatically. Potts predicted smart walls for shopping and communication. Marketers should consider these and other marketing landscapes in the future if they want to succeed (He & Harris, 2020).

Digital transformation was affecting not only organizations and governments, but also global consumers. Verhoef et al. (2021) claimed that global sales on e-commerce platforms were \$2.3 trillion in 2017 and forecasted them to reach \$4.88 trillion in 2021. The digital gap, which is the gap between individuals who have access to information and communications technologies and those who do not, was getting smaller every day, even for the elderly. Older and less digitally savvy consumers started discovering and enjoying online shopping, welcoming the safety offered by technology and the benefits of home deliveries. Marketers witnessed such trends in retail business in many countries. For instance, Miss Fresh, an online retailer in China, had a 237% increase in the number of users over 40 years old (Pantano et al., 2020). Digital transformation reduced the digital gap and had a positive effect on global sales on e-commerce platforms.

Conceptual Framework

Waterman et al. (1980), consultants at McKinsey, developed the McKinsey 7S model. The model is based on seven variables that are interdependent. Alignment of the seven variables is essential to achieve successful organizational change (Waterman et al.,

1980). This research was about successful marketing strategies to adapt to changes in the business environment. To adapt to changes in the business environment, business leaders change and align their companies' structures, strategies, systems, leadership styles, resources, skills, and shared values. Structure, strategy, system, style, staff, skills, and superordinate goals are the seven variables that form the model (Cox et al., 2018).

Structure refers to the way in which the organization is composed. Practitioners of the McKinsey 7S model analyze structure through the company's organizational chart, interconnections between various departmental functional activities, hierarchical structures of management, the conjunction of decentralized decision-making structures, and the combination of organizational structures to collectively accomplish organizational goals (Masilela & Nel, 2021). For example, to understand an organization's structure (i.e., how business leaders organize a business to fulfill and perform its roles), business leaders may examine the organizational chart and the interconnections between various departmental functional activities. This will enable these leaders to identify gaps in organizational capabilities and workflows between various departments. Business leaders may also identify gaps in structure by analyzing the hierarchical structures from senior, middle, and lower levels of management. Finally, these leaders may assess the conjunction of decentralized decision-making structures (i.e., bottom-up approaches), as well as centralized decision-making structures (i.e., top-down approaches) and study the combination of functional, matrix, or networked

structures used in the organization to evaluate whether these are the right decision-making structures and organizational structures.

Strategy refers to the actions that the organization plans to create unique value. Strategy is the top-down overall plan that is based on the company's resources, constraints, and environment to achieve the organization's business goals (Meijuan & Jiangdi, 2020). Waterman et al. (1980) argued that aligning structure to organizational strategy is not enough to reach organizational success. Business leaders should analyze how the organization's strategies fit and integrate with the other six areas of the McKinsey 7S model and if these elements are aligned to the overall production, feasibility, and functionality of the organization (Ravanfar, 2015). The seven elements must be aligned to achieve and maintain organizational synergy (Masilela & Nel, 2021).

Systems are the business and technical infrastructure that govern the organization's workflow and decision making. Systems are the organization's procedures that enable the organization to perform better (Kukkamalla et al., 2020). Systems refer to the way that employees perform work within an organization, and system changes can improve organizational effectiveness (Waterman et al., 1980). Style refers to leadership style and how leaders act to achieve the organization's mission within the cultural context of the firm (Kukkamalla et al., 2020). Waterman et al. (1980) claimed that style is related to what leaders do rather than what they tell. Leadership style enables leaders to signal what they have on their minds, reinforce a message, or nudge people's thinking in a desired direction. Another aspect of style relates to the company. An organization's style,

which reflects organizational culture, refers to the organization's ability to change structure or performance more quickly than competitors. In other words, it is an indicator of the organization's ability to adapt to change. Systems and style are two components of the 7S model that relate to how leaders and employees perform and optimize things at an organization.

Staff refers to the people that make up the organization. Staff includes human resources an organization has and their skills (Cox et al., 2018). Appraisal systems, pay scales, formal training programs, morale, attitude, motivation, and behavior guide staff management (Waterman et al., 1980). Top executives should spend time in nurturing, developing, guarding, and allocating their human resources. Skills are the individual capabilities in an organization and should include both staff and administration (Polyanska et al., 2019). Skills are the benchmark for doing business nationally and internationally. Superordinate goals are guiding concepts, values and aspirations that lead the actions of the leaders of an organization. Superordinate goals are the shared values or glue that hold the other six elements together (Westney, 2020). Superordinate goals are the main ideas that govern the lifecycle of an organization and are the broad notions of the future directions that top executives want to create in their organization (Waterman et al., 1980). Staff, skills, and superordinate goals are respectively the individuals that make up the organization, their skills, and the ideas they plan to achieve.

The focal point in the 7S model is the alignment between its components. Managers use the 7S model to identify organizational problems and to develop and

implement a new strategy (Masilela & Nel, 2021). The McKinsey 7S model focuses on the need of alignment between the seven soft and hard elements (Cox et al., 2018). Failure in alignment leads to the need for organizational change. Thus, the 7S model is a key tool for organizational strategic change. Adopting the right strategies enables organizational leaders to create competitive advantage and achieve organizational objectives (Wadstrom, 2019). Organizational leaders either align the seven components to face a change in the business environment or make an organizational change.

The McKinsey 7S model includes different elements. These elements are soft and hard (Cox et al., 2018). Strategy, structure, and systems are hard elements, while style (i.e., leadership style), staff, skills, and shared values are soft elements. Hard components are easier to identify, and managers can directly influence them (Masilela & Nel, 2021). Hard components are more concrete and measurable (Cox et al., 2018). Moreover, managers can easily control them. Soft elements are less tangible as they are consistently evolving, developing, and changing in an organization's internal environment and, thus, more difficult to describe (Masilela & Nel, 2021). Leaders and cultures have direct influence on soft elements.

Different authors used the 7S model to explain the changes organizational leaders made to enable their companies excel and create a competitive advantage. Kukkamalla et al. (2020) showed how leaders at BMW innovated the company's services from the innovation of elements in the business model which is part of the systems element. Innovation started with changing the key activities of the firm and by using innovative

systems such as social media. In March 2019, the firm also introduced an intelligent personal assistant to help drivers with driving-related issues (Kukkamalla et al., 2020). Higher Education Institution, an educational institution in Oman, made an organizational change, using the 7S change management model, to meet the requirement of institutional accreditation (Paquibut & Al Naamany, 2020). Paquibut and Al Naamany (2020) affirmed that the educational institution received institutional accreditation at the conclusion of the change management process. Innovation and change go hand-by-hand and add a competitive advantage to the organization.

Other authors used the 7S model to link change to corporate culture. Westney (2020) asserted that the 7S model first appeared as a key contribution to the cultural turn in organization behavior. Polyanska et al. (2019) used the 7S model to focus on corporate culture for organizations in a state of changes. Polyanska et al. suggested that leaders support employees in making innovative decisions, facilitate cooperation and elimination of conflicts between employees, and create corporate values. Polyanska et al. added that leaders create trust between employees and top managers, promote the development of young workers, and use of the mechanisms of education and maintenance of a high level of morality and culture of workers. Change in organizational culture starts with leaders' support to employees.

Some researchers used the 7S model to explain strategic alignment issues. Gaspar et al. (2018) asserted that in a dynamic business environment, strategic alignment and adaptability are essential to the continuously changing requests of this environment. Cox

et al. (2018) used the 7S model to understand strategic alignment in academic libraries. The authors used an adapted 7S model that included users, stuff, space, and services, in addition to the traditional seven element. The authors retained the 7S model to describe the resources available to the organization and to represent those whom the library serves (users), and the functions it performs (stuff, space, and services) separately. These authors attributed the distance between researchers and library to lack of qualified researchers. Cox et al. added that library directors and researchers' skills should align with the changes in the way researchers search resources in modern libraries. Changes in the way researchers search resources affect researchers and librarians and create a gap between them that could be filled by updating their skills.

Initially, the 7S model contributed to changes in organizational culture. Westney (2020) asserted that the 7S model evolved from the study of Japanese firms. The McKinsey 7S framework for strategy first appeared in *The Art of Japanese Management*, as a key contribution to the cultural turn in organization behavior. The 7S stood for the three hard elements of strategy, structure, and systems, the three soft elements (style [i.e., leadership style], staff, and skills), and the integrator of the other six (Pascale & Athos, 1981). Pascale and Athos (1981) called this integrator as superordinate goals and Peters and Waterman (1982) renamed it as shared values. Strategy, structure, systems, style, staff, and skills support shared organizational values, which are the basis of organizational culture and behavior.

Relevant Theories

In reviewing the literature to identify the framework for this study, considerations include social sciences theories such as marketing, behavioral, and leadership theories. Evaluation focused on the change management model, social exchange theory, and Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. A discussion of each of these theories and an explain of the preference of the 7S model will follow. The change management model was the conceptual framework for this study and was one of the concepts included in the research question. Considerations include the social exchange theory to focus on the interaction between leaders, employees, suppliers, and customers of the companies as marketing is a process that involves these players. The hierarchy of needs theory fits with addressing customers' needs and marketing to create and adapt products and services to the continuously evolving needs of customers.

Change Management Model

Some researchers created models to create and sustain organizational changes. Kotter (1996) developed the change management model. Appelbaum et al. (2012) revisited Kotter's change management model (CMM) and added to it. Appelbaum et al. included eight steps in the model: (a) establish a sense of urgency about the need to achieve change, (b) create a powerful guiding coalition, (c) create a strategic vision, (d) communicate the vision, (e) empower others to act on the vision, (f) generate short-term wins, (g) consolidate gains and produce more change, and (h) anchor new approaches in the corporate culture; however, not all the eight steps are necessary in the model.

Chappell et al. (2016) affirmed that business leaders do not use a formal change management model when implementing a change and that some leaders think that communicating and developing the vision, and creating a guiding coalition are integral parts of the process whereas they consider less important creating a sense of urgency and consolidating change. Practitioners of the CMM create effective change management strategies to manage entering and contracting change activities, identifying areas for improvement and expansion, planning, implementing, evaluating, and institutionalizing change (Haas et al., 2020). Kotter's change management model is composed of eight steps that start with establishing a sense urgency and end with anchoring the change in the corporate culture.

Resistance to change is the main factor for failing to implement changes.

Resistance to change is the main reason of organizational failure but little is known about the factors that trigger this behavior at the workplace (Amarantou et al., 2018).

Employee-management relationship, personality traits, employee participation in the decision-making process, and job security influence resistance to change (Amarantou et al., 2018). CMM is an excellent tool to overcome resistance to change as the model is based on leadership involvement as champions of change (Kotter, 1996). The role of change agents is essential in implementing an organizational change. Scholars and practitioners use the CMM to create and implement a change rather than creating marketing strategies to align products and services of an organization to changes in business environment. Thus, the model did not totally fit for this study.

Social Exchange Theory

Some researchers studied the exchange process between individuals to explain their behaviors. Homans (1958) developed a series of testable propositions on how individuals behave, influenced by experience, via a cost–benefit framework he called the social exchange theory (SET). Homans used the SET to explain how groups interact on the basis of three fundamental tenets: rewards, costs, and economics. The process of framing SET consisted of establishing five propositions: the success proposition, the stimulus proposition, the value proposition, the deprivation-satiation proposition, and the frustration-aggression proposition (Homans, 1958). The success proposition, the stimulus proposition, and the value proposition sum together to form a combined proposition that facilitates the selection of the action that provides the greatest benefit for the individual (Wang et al., 2020). The SET is a theoretical explanation and prediction of individual’s behavior based on the combined proposition of all five propositions (Wang et al., 2020). Wang et al. (2020) asserted that dynamic benefits and costs are negotiated to determine subsequent individuals’ involvement. The SET is a theoretical explanation and prediction of individual’s behavior based on the tenets of rewards, costs, and economics and the combined proposition of the success proposition, the stimulus proposition, the value proposition, the deprivation-satiation proposition, and the frustration-aggression proposition.

This theory explains interactions and behaviors in organizations and games. For example, Kim and Qu (2020) used the SET to study the mediating roles of gratitude and

obligation to link employees' social exchange relationships and prosocial behavior. The researchers noted leader-member exchange and coworker exchange were positively related to obligation and this latter had a positive relationship with both role-prescribed customer service and extra-role customer service. Bettis-Outland et al. (2020) used the SET to evaluate the behavior of micro and macro business networks in a trade show context. Bettis-Outland concluded that trade show participation enables both adaptive and generative learning and results in different approaches to organizational learning. Practitioners can use this theory to explain the relationship between marketing leaders and customers and why customers buy a product or service and at what price; however, it did not help in identifying marketing strategies that fit with the changes in the business environment.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Some researchers studied the attributed individuals' behaviors to their unsatisfied needs. Maslow (1943) theorized a five-stage hierarchy of needs motivational pyramid. The hierarchy of needs pyramid has the physiological needs at the bottom and self-actualization at the top (Maslow, 1943). As such, a person must satisfy the most fundamental needs to progress from the base of the pyramid toward self-actualization at the top of the pyramid. In between these extremes are safety needs, social needs, and esteem needs (Maslow, 1943). Individuals behave to realize their unsatisfied needs and physiological and safety needs should be satisfied before social, esteem, and self-actualization needs. Aliekperova (2018) found that the needs of belongingness and love,

esteem, self-actualization, and the desire to know and understand the aesthetic needs play an essential part in motivating employees. Chiao et al. (2021) found a strong relationship between nurses' willingness to remain in the occupation and the dimensions of needs. In the hierarchy of needs motivational pyramid, individuals behave to realize their unsatisfied needs and physiological and safety needs should be satisfied before social, esteem, and self-actualization needs.

Maslow's (1943) theory is not only applicable to employees' behavior; researchers such as Cui et al. (2021) and Tang et al. (2020) used to explain consumer behavior which is fundamental in marketing. The hierarchy of needs theory fits with addressing customers' needs and marketing to create and adapt products and services to the continuously evolving needs of customers. Some unsought products, especially in cutting edge technology, are created and sold because of changes in technology without stated customer needs or wants (Rivers, 2008). Marketers use push strategies to take these products to the consumers. In such cases, Researchers and marketing practitioners cannot use Maslow's hierarchy of needs to explain push marketing strategies, which are also essential aspects of marketing. Thus, Maslow's theory does not fit to explain marketing strategies that fit with such changes in the business environment.

Review of the Retail Business

To compete in the international arena, retail business leaders reach their customers through marketplaces. Marketplaces can be bound by locations referred to as brick-and-mortar (B&M) or online through the internet. Whether it be a B&M or online,

a store is the place where a retail business operates (Kardes et al., 2020). Stores are places where the marketing strategies of a firm come to life; in them firms communicate, foster the loyal relationship with their customers, and constantly monitor market tastes and needs (Passaro et al., 2020). Market leaders compete in marketplaces in B&M or online stores.

B&M stores can play an important role in the customer experience. They provide consumers sensory experience through the opportunity to touch and feel products and enable them to interact with salespersons who can affect their decision-making process. One of the main challenges B&M retailers had since the beginning of e-commerce is their relative disadvantage in pricing compared to online competitors. Online retailers did not incur sales tax for a longtime, which enabled them to offer the same products that B&M competitors offered, but for a lower price (Gauri et al., 2021). Furthermore, because online retailers do not incur the expense of maintaining stores and holding inventory at multiple stores, their overall cost structure can be lower. During the pandemic, the resulting fall in foot traffic forced marketers to invest in other marketing activities that further increased B&M retailers' cost (Gauri et al., 2021). Another critical challenge for B&M retailers is rising customer expectations regarding purchase convenience and purchase experience (Jain et al., 2020). Purchase is more likely to happen if a salesperson assists consumers (Jain et al., 2020). B&M retailers may not have sufficient resources and physical space to offer the breadth and depth of assortment available through online channels.

Retailers witnessed considerable fluctuation since the emergence of the internet and the market share of local versus multinational retailers varies across countries. The emergence of the internet added substantial changes in various business activities. Online retailing changed the marketplace and large multinational retailers have taken the lead (Kardes et al., 2020). In 2019, the main retailers were Amazon.com, JD.com, Apple.com, Suning.com and Walmart.com, with Amazon and JD as the most prominent leaders (Kardes et al., 2020). Despite their dominance in developed countries, giant online retailers struggle to obtain a substantial market share in emerging markets. For example, in Brazil, the online market share was 5% for Walmart, 4% for Amazon, and 3% for Carrefour, whereas it was 11% for Magazine Luiza, a domestic retailer (Kardes et al., 2020). Dannenberg et al. (2020) found that online retailers sell more in major cities as compared to the whole country. Online retailing changed the marketplace, however, the market share of local versus multinational retailers varies across countries.

B&M retailers strive to provide excellent products and services to maintain existing and attract new consumers. However, in times of pandemic, it becomes harder and more complex (Tarki et al., 2020). For example, a sudden disruption of consumer demand such as panic buying of staples such as toilet tissue and pasta leads to negative impacts on supply chain performance (Ivanov, 2020). Other B&M retailers may add other retail products and services to their businesses. During the pandemic in the United Kingdom, the government allowed B&M retailers to stay open and these retailers extended their product lines to sell other primary goods. For example, bakeries started

selling milk, pasta, eggs, and flour to support local communities (Pantano et al., 2020). A disruptive change may open new markets for B&M retailers who adapt their organizations to these changes.

With the development of e-commerce, online shopping has become increasingly common; yet online retailers have competition from B&M retailers. Some of the obstacles that online retailers face relate to the characteristics of B&M retailing such as location-based services, sensory products, and product returns (Gauri et al., 2021). Online retailers cannot offer their customers the location-based services that B&M retailers offer such as touch and feel of the products, consulting with sales representatives, and changing room services. Many consumers buy products because they are satisfied when they touch and feel them. In some cases, products, such as sensory products, are selected only because of the feelings consumers have when they try them. Sensory products are products that necessitate personal sensorial inspection such as perfumes or apparel. Another challenge online retailers have is that they do not have the possibility to create a relationship between sales representatives and customers to help customers select the best choice that fits their expectations or hear the opinions and recommendations of the sales representatives. Purchase is more likely to happen if salespersons assist the consumers (Jain et al., 2020). Locker rooms enable potential buyers to wear clothes and check their appearance before buying the product. In online retailing such services are impossible. B&M retailers differentiate themselves from online retailers by location-based services, sensory products, and product returns.

Another main challenge for online retailers is product returns. The problem of product returns in online retailing has been the focus of many studies in the first two decades of the 21st century (Patel et al., 2021; Ren et al., 2021). Online stores have an average product return rate of three to four times that of B&M stores (Ren et al., 2021). Because product returns have a direct impact on the profits of online organizations, such a high percent of product returns may erode the profit margins of these organizations and jeopardize their survival.

Regardless of whether retailers operate online, B&M, or in a hybrid mode, the challenges they face are many. In times of a tenuous economy and pandemic, these challenges may jeopardize the survival of retailing organizations. Tailored marketing strategies can mitigate the negative impact of such radical changes in the economy and in the customer behavior due to government restrictions on retailing. The following section includes marketing tools and strategies identified and discussed by scholars in the recent literature.

Tools Used to Create Marketing Retail Strategies

Marketers use specific tools to create, update, and monitor their strategies. Strategies are building blocks against the competitive forces in a specific market or finding a position in the market where the competitive forces are weakest (Porter, 2008). The building blocks or defenses, as Porter preferred to call them, enable the firm to maintain its competitive advantage and fight competition. Finding a position in the market where the competitive forces are weak necessitates tools and instruments to assess

these forces. Thus, marketing practitioners and scholars know that marketing strategies coexist with marketing tools. In many cases, marketing strategies cannot be explained without understanding the marketing tools used to assess the market opportunities and create and implement the marketing strategy (Del Vecchio et al., 2021). Scholars and practitioners use a myriad of tools to monitor market trends and to create and implement marketing strategies. In this review, focus is on the most common and latest marketing tools; in particular: the political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental factors (PESTLE) analysis; the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis; customer relationship management (CRM); surveys, big data, and data mining; and artificial intelligence.

Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, and Environmental Factors

Analysis

Marketers use tools such as PESTLE analysis in their decision-making process. Before making business decisions, marketing leaders should assess all market and nonmarket forces that may impact a marketplace (Verbeke & Hutzschenreuter, 2021). Market forces are the economic forces of supply and demand and include actions of buyers and sellers that cause the prices of goods and services to change without government control. Nonmarket forces can include political, economic, sociological, technological, legal, and environmental changes outside the firm's industry (Aguilar, 1967). Market or supply and demand forces, and nonmarket or political, economic,

sociological, technological, legal, and environmental forces affect the marketplace and marketers assess these forces in their decision-making process.

Both market and nonmarket forces are potential sources for disruption, complexity, and change. Marketers use the PESTLE analysis in their decision-making process. For example, Racz et al. (2018) investigated the PESTLE factors and produced numerical data that they used for their multicriteria decision analysis. Kardes et al. (2020) used only the environmental factor of the PESTLE to assess determinants of competition between online retail multinationals and local firms in emerging markets. Nandonde (2019) used the PESTLE analysis to explain international business dynamics such as international retailing. Researchers use all or some of the PESTLE factors in their decision-making process.

Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat Analysis

Another tool that marketers use in their decision-making process is the SWOT analysis. The SWOT analysis is a tool that enables marketers to present and organize information in a perfect way for decision making (Buyukozkan et al., 2021). Practitioners of the SWOT analysis identify factors that contribute to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Marketers use the SWOT analysis to increase strengths, and to remove or reduce weaknesses while evaluating opportunities and identifying threats especially with complex strategic situations. Practitioners use the SWOT analysis in the decision-making process for current and future situations (Abbasi et al., 2019). For current situations, SWOT users identify the strengths and weaknesses of the situation

along with the opportunities and threats. SWOT analysis is also an analytical technique that predicts how the future state of the current situation will be. With this predictive ability, SWOT is a future situation analysis tool.

Some researchers considered the limitations of the SWOT analysis tool. SWOT analysis is qualitative in nature, and scholars consider this as a limitation because the quantification of each factor in the decision-making process is not possible (Buyukozkan et al., 2021). This limitation makes it difficult to determine the impact of SWOT factors on strategic decisions. Scholars started to use the SWOT analysis in conjunction with other tools to overcome these limitations and to allow decision-maker to make their decisions based on numerical data. Buyukozkan et al. (2021) used a quantitative technique with the SWOT analysis to select health tourism strategies. Abbasi et al. (2019) added the combination of the quantitative strategic position and action evaluation matrix and quantitative strategic planning matrix to SWOT analysis to formulate strategies for farm advisory services. Eugenio-Vela et al. (2020) added a questionnaire to SWOT analysis to integrate qualitative and quantitative data in the decision-making process. Some researchers identified the qualitative nature of the SWOT analysis tool as a limitation; others used the SWOT analysis with quantitative tools such as the evaluation matrix and quantitative strategic planning matrix to fill in the quantitative gap.

Customer Relationship Management

Customer relationship management (CRM) is a marketing tool to manage interactions with customers. CRM is a tool that marketers use to attract, develop, and

retain customers and to implement process innovation to adapt to the changing business environment (Guerola-Navarro et al., 2021). Marketers attract customers by updating them on sales opportunities and informing them on research and development operation that their organizations are developing (Chatterjee et al., 2021). Marketers develop customers by providing support and informing them of financial activities. They retain customers by serving them better and through loyalty programs (LPs) (Chatterjee et al., 2021). LP provide loyal customers with discounts and awards. Marketers use CRM to manage customers and to provide them with support and information about their products.

CRM is present in various categories such as traditional CRM, mobile CRM (m-CRM), electronic CRM (e-CRM), and social CRM (SCRM). Traditional CRM refers to CRM without the use of mobile communication, internet, and social media and network. m-CRM is a CRM accessible via a mobile application and provides salespeople in the organization the opportunity to gain access to customer information more efficiently (Rodriguez & Boyer, 2020). e-CRM is an internet-based CRM that facilitates business consumer interactions (Dehghanpouri et al., 2020). Dehghanpouri et al. (2020) asserted that e-CRM reduce service support costs, increase sales, improve customer targeting, facilitate innovation and excellence in services, improve transaction frequency, and increase customer satisfaction. SCRM relates to including social media and social networking interaction in the CRM tool (Chatterjee et al., 2021). Social media connects to the organization's CRM database with profiling and preferences information regarding

customers and potential customers. Social networking is an excellent tool to reach out to customers and potential customers or to receive requests from customers. Through SCRM, marketers can cover the effective monitoring of customers, enhance contact with customers, create compact customer communities, nurture feedback by the customer community, and identify products that could be in high demand. Marketers use systems and tools based on customer details such as CRM, m-CRM, e-CRM, and social SCRM in their decision-making process.

Marketers use other sophisticated tools to analyze business historical data. Marketers use business analytics to extract previously unknown, potentially useful, and interesting knowledge (Oztekin, 2018). Business analytics includes statistical methods and technologies for analyzing available business historical data (Oztekin, 2018). Marketers can thus use this new knowledge to better sense market threats and opportunities (Cao et al., 2019). Marketers use business analytics to enhance the organization's CRM capabilities, thereby improving their organization's marketing performance (Cao & Tian, 2020). Business analytics and improved CRM capabilities enable marketers to detect threats and opportunities and increase organizational performance.

Surveys, Big Data, and Data Mining

Surveys, big data, and data mining are tools retail marketers use to create and manage information about their customers and potential customers to offer them the mix of products and services they seek at a price they can afford. Marketing managers use

surveys to collect data that they can use to increase the company's marketing knowledge (Hulland et al., 2018). Big data are complex and variable data that manifest in substantial high-speed information (Huang et al., 2021). The complexity and variability of big data necessitate advanced technology to achieve the acquisition, storage, distribution, management, and analysis of these data. The internet of things, the wide spread of personal devices, and social media generate huge volumes of big data (Buhalis & Volchek, 2021). Such technologies enable the observation of human behavior and the transfer of such data along marketing channels. Big data analysis enables marketers to solve problems that classical marketing analyses fail to solve such as production failure (Huang et al., 2021). Marketers use surveys, alternative data, and big data to solve problems related to their customers, products, mix of products, and production failures.

Data mining is another process that marketers use in their decision making. Retail marketers use internal and external data sources in their data mining process to find useful information (Salih et al., 2020). Data mining includes five phases: dataset identification and collection, data preparation for processing, input/output formulation, model development, and model evaluation and assessment. External data bases are databases provided by other specialized providers such as Bloomberg Enterprise Datasets, Mongo DB, and Gartner. Gon (2021) used data mining, and specifically local experience in social media from Instagram, to explore the potential of social media in supporting the understanding of experiences and providing new knowledge to experience design. Experience design is essential for marketers as it may include information on the

experience customers have on their products. Xu et al. (2020) used data mining to extract the potential information in consumer reviews, and then used Python to segment these reviews to understand how this information affects consumer behavior such as purchase intention. Researchers use multiple sources of data in the data mining process to solve different marketing problems such as experience design and consumer reviews.

Artificial Intelligence

Marketers need sophisticated tools to help them make decisions promptly. Artificial intelligence (AI) is a computer application that enables users to use the computational power in the selection process (Vlacic et al., 2021). Marketers use AI to make marketing actions to achieve the best marketing outcome given the information they have about consumers, competitors, and the company's products and services (Overgoor et al., 2019). Companies such as Google, Rare Carat, Spotify, and Under Armor are enhancing their performance through the adoption of AI-based platforms. Amazon is using the most recently updated innovations based on AI from social media to conduct retailing analytics (Vlacic et al., 2021). AI has assisted marketers in establishing new paradoxes in strategy, such as the association of the pros of luxury brands with those of the mass market (Kumar et al., 2020), the alignment of strategic orientation with market potential (Vlacic et al., 2021), communication (Paschen, 2019), pricing (Calvano et al., 2019), and personalized mobile marketing strategies (Tong et al., 2020). AI is a strategic marketing tool used to relate the pros of luxury brands with those of the mass

market and align strategic orientation with market potential, communication, pricing, and personalized mobile marketing strategies.

Practitioners use AI in various contexts such as powering chatbots that interact with customers on e-commerce websites. Chatbots enable business leaders to manage customer service experiences and are the most common artificial intelligence-based applications that transformed customer service interactions (Murtarelli et al., 2020). Chatbots are interactive computer processes that engage in verbal interactions with humans (Przegalinska et al., 2019). A final note is that marketers can use AI to translate big data into information and knowledge which they can use to develop more effective marketing and sales strategies, which often translate into a sustainable competitive advantage (Paschen et al., 2020). Powering chatbots and translating big data into information are two examples of using AI in marketing activities.

Apparel Retail Marketing Strategies

This last section of the literature review includes marketing strategies that some apparel retail leaders use to succeed in their businesses. Identifying and discussing these strategies is essential to compare the future finding of this study with what other scholars recommended. The literature review includes articles published in 2019/2021. The topic of this study is about marketing strategies that business leaders use to adapt to changes in business environment. A change in business environment necessitates an assessment of the business processes and eventually implementing new strategies to face these changes. These new strategies are changes that business leaders could implement and that could

require changes in structures, strategies, systems, leadership styles, resources, skills, and shared values. Implementing change and change management strategies is thus an essential part of this section.

Change Theory and Change Management

Business leaders use change theories and models to implement changes in their organizations. Kotter is the father of the change model theory (Kotter, 1996). Kotter (2011) claimed that 70% of organizational change efforts fail because organizational leaders do not develop and implement a detailed change management plan for changing the organization. Kotter highlighted the difficulties in implementing change and asserted that the most difficult part in making a change is the human part. Because of these difficulties, Kotter suggested a systematic approach to implementing change. The eight steps that Kotter suggested for implementing change in organizations are: (a) establishing a sense of urgency about sharing the need to achieve change, (b) creating a guiding coalition, (c) developing a strategic vision, (e) enlisting an army including volunteers that serves as a change engine, (f) removing barriers, (g) generating short-term wins, (h) sustaining project acceleration, and (i) instituting and inculcating new approaches in the corporate culture. Kotter added that these steps are concurrent and continuous rather than sequential. Business leaders can implement change using concurrently and continuously Kotter's (1996) eight-steps change model.

Practitioners and scholars used the change model in many business fields to implement organizational change. Mohiuddin and Mohteshamuddin (2020) successfully

used Kotter's change model blended with Hersey and Blanchard's (1988) situational theory model to improve the self-reporting of medication errors. Paris et al. (2017) explored the characteristics of business to consumer e-commerce implementation in the apparel business. Paris et al. recommended organizations who want to implement Kotter's model to have three actors: (a) e-commerce champion – a person who is involved in the early stage of the implementation process and who starts the idea of changing the company into a fully embedded e-commerce business, (b) system moderator – a person who makes the process of implementation run smoothly, and (c) a reputable vendor to perform the work that is not core to the organization. To implement change, organizational leaders could establish a sense of urgency about sharing the need to achieve change, create a guiding coalition, develop a strategic vision, enlist an army including volunteers that serves as a change engine, remove barriers, generate short-term wins, sustain project acceleration, and institute and inculcate new approaches in the corporate culture.

Marketing Sustainability Strategies

Marketing sustainability strategies are long-term strategies. Marketing sustainability strategies enable organizations to gain long-term competitive advantage. Kelleci and Yildiz (2021) identified a convenient path for traditional firms who want to move from a short-term marketing perspective to a long-term sustainability and sufficiency perspective to earn a long-term competitive advantage. Apparel retail leaders should craft and execute strategies to improve corporate social and moral grounds

because corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives predict corporate reputation, customer loyalty, and purchase intentions (Kelleci & Yildiz, 2021). Ginder and Byun (2022) added that retailers can use tools such as Google Alerts or Keyhole to periodically assess how consumers perceive their CSR reputations and communicated messages. Pauluzzo and Mason (2021) claimed that Generation Y consumers buy ethical and sustainable products and services and think that apparel companies should contribute to the general well-being. They also prefer ethical fashion, which addresses a wide range of issues, such as exploitation, fair trade, working conditions, sustainable production, and animal welfare. Generation Y consumers are willing to pay extra money for socially responsible products and seriously consider business sustainability when selecting the clothes to buy (Pauluzzo & Mason, 2021). Marketing sustainability strategy is based on some parameters specific to organizations such as corporate social responsibility and ethical and sustainable products and services, and consumer preferences such as Generation Y consumers' willingness to pay extra money for socially responsible products.

Different consumers have different value scales in selecting the products they plan to buy. Byrd and Su (2021) found that consumers have positive sentiments towards apparel sustainability; however, consumers lack knowledge about socially and environmental practices within the apparel industry nor about the brands that sell these types of garments. Marketing managers could create strategies to educate consumers about their practices and how they label their apparel garments. Retail apparel marketers

should focus on the multi-dimensional nature of consumers' values and the impact of specific combinations of them on Generation Y's socially responsible consumer behavior (Pauluzzo & Mason, 2021). Manufacturers and retailers could design campaigns stressing green consumption values which can affect young consumers and increase their customer base.

Consumer Behavior, Consumer Loyalty, and Word-of-Mouth Strategies

Consumers behave differently based on age and gender. Pauluzzo and Mason (2021) conducted a quantitative cross-sectional study to assess Generation Y's consumption in the fast-fashion industry. Generation Y's consumers or young adults born between 1980 and 2000 are more conscious than previous generations in social, cultural, and environmental matters. Generation Y is the largest consumer of fast-fashion products and the target market for fast fashion retailers. Apparel retail leaders should use strategies to enable their organizations to move from the ownership business model (pay-to-have) to a more inclusive "pay-to-use" business model (Kelleci & Yildiz, 2021). In addition, women can see photos posted by previous users of clothes and accessories they may want to rent. Generation Y consumers may require further details about the environmental and social labels than older consumers (Byrd & Su, 2021). This indicates that apparel brand leaders should invest in marketing, promotion, and education efforts towards younger consumers to better explain sustainable labels.

Product differentiation and brand recognition is another marketing strategy in the apparel retail sector. Kotler and Keller (2012) stated that products consist of: the core

product, the tangible product, and the augmented product. The core product is a service or benefit provided to satisfy the needs of the target market. The tangible product is a special offer carried out in order to sell something by emphasizing that consumers will receive it in return for the money that they pay. The augmented product is all forms of added value given to tangible products offered, so that it becomes more attractive to prospective consumer. Attractiveness depends on the values each consumer has. Values are beliefs that direct the selection and behavior of individuals regarding a specific product or service (Rokeach, 1979). Design is a potent strategic tool that companies can use to gain a sustainable competitive advantage by enhancing products, environment, communications, and corporate identity (Kotler & Alexander Rath, 1984). Marketers consider the core product, the tangible product, the augmented product, the consumer value, and the design in crafting their product differentiation and brand recognition marketing strategies.

Product design is a strategic marketing tool. Some marketing leaders in apparel retail followed the guidance of Kotler and Alexander Rath (1984) regarding design as a strategic tool. For example, private label brands (PLBs), also termed as store brands, are brands owned, produced, and sold by retailers exclusively (Mishra et al., 2021). Retailers control the production and sales of these products through their in-store marketing techniques such as promotional offers. Consumers often consider PLBs to be of lower quality than national brands (Bao et al., 2011), which creates some challenges for retailers to develop a sustainable and loyal customer base. A good marketing strategy for

apparel retailers is to provide adequate shelf space, give prominence to their PLBs in the display, and educate their salespersons about the value PLBs offer to overcome the false perception of PLBs' lower quality as compared to national brands (Mishra et al., 2021). Promotion through in-store posters and pamphlets could also aid consumer recognition of PLBs and help build their image in consumers' minds (Mishra et al., 2021). Product design is an important strategic marketing tool especially for PLBs; retailers provide adequate shelf space for their PLBs, give prominence to PLBs in the display, and educate their salespersons about the value of PLBs.

Consumer loyalty is essential in marketing as loyal customers return to buy products and are essential contributors to positive word of mouth (WOM). Positive WOM is one of the best marketing communication strategies to attract new customers. Yin and Xu (2021) found a strong relationship between product experience and customer loyalty. This finding indicated that product performance (e.g., quality and price) is essential to customer loyalty. Khaled et al. (2021) confirmed that store image has a positive and significant impact on consumer satisfaction and that brand store equity is strongly correlated to consumer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is a contributing factor to customer loyalty. Asnawati et al. (2022) claimed that strong brand images positively contribute to purchasing decisions and improve consumer loyalty (Asnawati et al., 2022). Chih et al. (2020) recommended retailers not to just display relevant messages on product information but to post relevant products' activities to lead customers'

discussions and increase their participation and loyalty. Customer loyalty can improve through positive WOM, store image, and customer satisfaction.

Promoting positive WOM is essential for increasing retail intentions. According to Yin and Xu (2021), apparel e-retailers and vendors should use strategies that focus on promoting positive WOM and a positive brand image to foster customer loyalty. The authors concluded that emotional experience could influence repurchase intentions and WOM. Chih et al. (2020) found that perceived positive electronic word of mouth (eWOM) review credibility is significantly and positively correlated with attitude toward the product, attitude toward the fan page, and eWOM review adoption. Asnawati et al. (2022) added that eWOM positively predicts purchasing decisions either directly or indirectly through brand image. According to Chih et al. (2020), brand managers should execute strategies that facilitate the spread of their consumers' opinions on a brand product through an open eWOM platform as eWOM review is key for consumers' purchase decisions. Facilitating the spread of consumers' opinions on a brand product through an open eWOM platform promotes positive WOM and fosters customer loyalty.

Just as marketers facilitate positive WOM, they should also control negative WOM. For example, if retail leaders do not manage the negative WOM at the launch of a new product, they would lose considerable market shares later in product diffusion (Zhang et al., 2022). Retailers can reduce the impact of negative WOM and thus repurchasing intention by providing customers with unique seamless experiences (Chang

& Li, 2022). Marketers should facilitate positive WOM and mitigate the impact of negative WOM.

Marketing innovation helps marketers reach out to consumers. Khaled et al. (2021) found that marketing innovation positively and significantly impacts store image, and that technological innovation has a positive and significant relationship with store image. Managers within the online clothing industry could try to offer their products at the best prices they can afford guided by marketing strategy. Price consciousness positively influences customer loyalty (Yin & Xu, 2021). Yin and Xu (2021) claimed that a well-designed website facilitates consumers' browsing to find their products and increase the probability of purchase. In particular, virtual reality, three-dimensional environment, and live broadcast have been incorporated into B2C platforms to improve customer experience (Yin & Xu, 2021). The authors suggested that retailers should invest in marketing innovation to increase the reputation of the store and its image among the consumers. Another recommended strategy was to highlight the important role of technology in increasing innovation in retail set up. Marketing innovation impacts store image, enables customers to find their products, increases the probability of purchase, and improves customer experience.

Strategies to Capture Customers' Senses

Marketers strive to identify and execute strategies to sustain their organizations especially in a changing business environment. Buyers use their senses in their judgement about the cloth they want to buy. Biswas (2019) reviewed eight research articles to

highlight how the different sensory modalities can influence consumer behavior across store and online retailing contexts. Biswas found that some retailers focus on how visual and auditory cues might interact and influence consumer judgments and behaviors. Ringler et al. (2019) studied frontline employees' deliberate restriction of customers' access to touch products on display, and how sensory blocking may increase customers' downstream purchasing. Ringler et al. found that restriction of customers' access to touch products on display does not negatively change customers' attitudes toward retailers' products and service. On the contrary, customers purchase significantly more items after employees block them from touching the displayed product than when they could touch. Ringler et al. supported these findings by conducting a series of one-way ANOVAs with total number of items purchased and total amount spent as the dependent variables and sensory blocking as the independent variable. Ringler et al. argued that retailers can create specific store experiences by changes in lighting levels, ambient scents and sounds, how a customer can move through the store, and what products customers are permitted to handle. Ringler et al. suggested retailers consider implementing this practice to encourage downstream sales. In online purchasing, some sensory elements are not present such as those related to touch and odor. In online purchasing, m-AR applications are useful to overcome mental intangibility.

B&M and online store banners are among the sensory elements that influence consumer judgments and purchase behavior. Store banners attract customers' attention and are an open invitation to purchase products (Khachatryan et al., 2018). B&M stores

are still the main contributors to the retail business (Khachatryan et al., 2018). Ringler et al. (2019) argued that even though online shopping is increasing in number of transactions and revenue, over 85% of customer purchases still occur in B&M retail stores because customers prefer to see, touch, feel, and try out items. Because B&M stores are still the main place where customers buy their products and services, store banners are essential elements to include in a marketing plan.

Many researchers studied banners and other sensory tools on consumer behavior. Heller et al. (2019) studied, through the active inference theory as the conceptual framework, how sensory control and feedback modalities affect consumer value judgements. Heller et al. found that touch control, compared to voice control, positively affects consumers' willingness-to-pay. Biswas (2019) suggested that retailers are increasingly using sensory elements in their stores to facilitate the consumers' decision-making process and to improve in-store customer experience. Biswas added that in the apparel industry marketing leaders in Hugo Boss use ambient scents in their stores. Biswas continued that other retailers use visual cues to influence imagery and flavor perceptions and auditory cues such as soft ambient music to influence consumers in a retail setting. Researchers found that banners especially those that represent the global retailer's organization (i.e., retail banner standardization [RBS]) are strategical to retailer's success. Nath et al. (2019) conducted quantitative research on the effects of RBS on performance of global retailers in a longitudinal sample of 69 global retailers. Nath et al. found that RBS improves retailers' profitability and has stronger effects on

profitability as retailers increase their focus on emerging markets and ecommerce. Nath et al. suggested that retailers can use RBS and thus benefit from economies of scope and reduced managerial complexity to improve financial performance. Consumers consider the RBS of a global retailer as a prestigious symbol and thus a differentiator to local branding (Nath et al., 2019). Sensory control and feedback modalities affect consumer value judgements and banners are strategic to retailer's success.

Online retailers have similar virtual banners that use multi-sensory augmented reality to fill-in the gap between the touch and feel of a physical banner and a virtual banner. Heller et al.'s (2019) findings indicated that in the context of m-AR product interactions, sensory control that closely resembles skin aesthetic aspects of actual product interactions significantly outperforms voice control for consumer value perception of a product. Heller et al. (2019) showed that sensory touch control leads to reduced perceived mental intangibility that subsequently increases decision comfort for consumers, making consumers feel more comfortable in their decision-making process. Biswas (2019) recommended strategies to attract customer's attentions and suggested that retail leaders, in both online and store premises, should (a) pay attention on how to word textual communications, (b) be mindful of the direction of airflow from their ventilation system, (c) use ambient music "softness" to create an atmosphere that favors product evaluation, (d) prohibit customers from touching products as restricting touching of products can lead to greater downstream purchases, and (e) use technology-oriented devices at checkout counters that make distinct sounds as this helps in enhancing

consumer trust. Biswas supported his fourth recommendation (i.e., prohibit customers from touching products as restricting touching of products can lead to greater downstream purchases) by the Ringler et al.'s (2019) findings and argued that customers use their visual cues as a remedy to haptic cues blocking. Researchers identified sensory strategies for online stores such as virtual banners that use multi-sensory augmented reality to fill-in the gap between the touch and feel of a physical banner, and strategies that both online and B&M store leaders can use such as paying attention on how to word textual communications and using ambient music “softness” to create an atmosphere that favors product evaluation.

LPs increase customer's long-term commitment to purchase from the same firm. Belli et al. (2022) found that LPs are more effective at promoting behavioral loyalty favorable to the firm than at nurturing “true” loyalty. LPs induce customers to make an early purchase, leading to a higher inventory ordering decision and more profit for the retailer (Gu et al., 2022). Program loyalty is a strong driver of customer average purchase and retailing revenues (Afonso Vieira et al., 2022). LP members appreciate trying and discovering new products (Agarwal et al., 2022). LPs promote customer loyalty and are indicators of higher sales and increased margins.

Marketing Research Strategies

Marketing research is a marketing strategy that assists in auditing present and past marketing outcomes and in predicting the future. Good marketers need insights to help them interpret past performance and plan future activities (Kotler et al., 2019). Market

research is the systematic design, collection, analysis, and reporting of data and findings relevant to a specific marketing situation facing the company. Marketers should continuously conduct marketing research to update market information and knowledge which, if dated, may create serious business outcomes. Holmqvist et al. (2019) criticized the current marketing knowledge which is based on marketing research and that holds that customers prefer frontline personnel to speak the customers' first language. Holmqvist et al. asserted that current managerial practices require frontline employees to either use the customers' first language or to use English. Marketers use marketing research to decide which products and services they should focus on, which product to support through advertisement, and which product to disinvest.

Apparel retail marketers use different marketing research strategies to assess marketing conditions in specific markets. Yang et al. (2019) explored, through an equilibrium and differentiation analysis, strategies for new market research and positioning of stores or products by competing retailers in a duopoly setting which is a situation in which two suppliers dominate the market. Yang et al. followed a dual setup: A sequential setup where a leader enters a new market followed by a follower, and a simultaneous-move setup in which both retailers enter the market simultaneously. Guan et al. (2019) claimed that the information that the manufacturers receive focuses on the quality of their products while that of the retailer is on consumers' preference for product quality. Enabling both parties to share this information is a win-win approach. According to Guan et al., retailers can benefit from the ads of the manufacturers that include

information they shared regarding their customers' preferences and manufacturers can ask retailers to conduct market research to determine consumers' preference for product quality. Marketers use different marketing research methods such as equilibrium and differentiation analysis and sharing of information between marketing and production.

Even when marketing research strategies are clear, apparel retail marketers need to define the sequence of performing these strategies. Yang et al. (2019) found that apparel retailers must make decisions on whether or not to first conduct research about the new market and its size before deciding on their own positioning in it. Guan et al. (2019) examined, through a game-based analysis, the strategic impacts of these two alternative scenarios on the firms' equilibrium information strategies and payoffs. The authors found that in the upfront market research scenario, a manufacturer's investment in quality advertising is directly proportional to the consumer's quality expectations. The authors added that in upfront quality advertising scenario, the retailers better understand the product quality and make more precise market research decisions.

Several factors contribute to the marketers' decision on which scenario to consider first. Yang et al. (2019) found that such a decision is dependent on the size of the new market. When the potential new market is small, neither retailer is adequately incentivized to do research to acquire information about the new market (Yang et al., 2019). When the new market is big, the market leader conducts research and knows the new market's location while the follower does not (Yang et al., 2019). In a simultaneous-move setup, Yang et al. found that retailers might decide against acquiring new market

information even when the cost of doing so is low. Guan et al. (2019) recommended retailers to make the market research decision after seeing the manufacturer's quality advertising decision. The size of the new market contributes to the marketers' decision on the best marketing research scenario to consider.

Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning Strategies

Marketing processes include segmentation, targeting, and positioning. There is no clear evidence on who is the theorist who invented these concepts but some works that included these concepts were published in the beginning of the 19th century such as the works of McCann (1923). Market segmentation is a process, in which marketers divide groups of buyers within a market and profile them based on specific parameters. Buying behavior in the apparel segment depends on a variety of variables such as personal preferences, family income, age, sex, style, fit, comfort, durability, and variety (Dhiman et al., 2018). Targeting is the process of identifying the most attractive segments from the segmentation where the company can offer value products and earn much profits (Dhiman et al., 2018). Positioning is the process in which business leaders use their organizations' advantage to best position their organizations in the consumers' minds (Huang & Rust, 2021). Marketers use segmentation, targeting, and positioning to order their customers into groups with similar characteristics and provide each group with the most attractive products and services.

There is no one way that fits all apparel retail businesses in segmenting a market. Marketers segment a market by geography, culture, income, age, style, comfort, style, fit,

and durability. Dhiman et al. (2018) divided the apparel market based on personal choices, family income, age, gender, style, fit, comfort, and durability. Lichao (2017) segmented the market by geography and culture. When such information is difficult to identify, artificial intelligence and big data are an excellent remedy to help marketers in the segmentation process (Huang & Rust, 2021). Researchers use different tools such as artificial intelligence to segment markets using different parameters such as geography, culture, income, age, style, comfort, style, fit, and durability or a mix of these.

Apparel retail marketers could target a particular segment of consumers for which they can offer better value. In the apparel retail, value differs from one individual to the other. Previously standard marketing metrics such as customer lifetime value, share of customer, and customer equity may not work post-COVID-19 (He & Harris, 2020). For example, Dhiman et al. (2018) asserted that in the retail apparel market, purchasing evolved from satisfying consumers' purposeful needs to satisfying more emotional needs. Neumann et al. (2019) asserted that digital consumer profiling, using online browsing data, is a strategy for targeting. Huang and Rust (2021) added that artificial intelligence is an excellent strategic tool to recommend the best target segments. Because customer needs evolve rapidly, some marketers use new technological approaches such as artificial intelligence and digital consumer profiling in the targeting process.

The third process that marketers use is positioning. Positioning is about speaking to customers' hearts, typically as a positioning statement or slogan in promotional communication (Huang & Rust, 2021). Some apparel retail companies follow this

strategy in positioning their goods and services such as Nike's "Just do it" and Armani's "Take control of your style." Others follow a pricing positioning strategy. Apparel retail customers are quite price-sensitive and financial aspect has its own importance in making a purchase decision. Despite good brand name, good comfort and style, price acts as a key decision-maker in apparel purchase (Dhiman et al., 2018). In some cases, high price is an invitation for customers seeking quality products. Zhang et al. (2022) concluded that an increase in product price may increase consumers' expectations for product quality. Marketers use different positioning strategies such as positioning statements or slogan, and pricing.

In this review of professional and academic literature, the focus was on different modes and theories to use as a conceptual framework and the conclusion was that the 7S model is the best choice for this study. An analysis of the retail business, online versus B&M stores, international retailers, and challenges these retailers face in tenuous business conditions followed. The reader can grasp the overall picture of how retail business leaders identify and implement retail business strategies by reading the next section on marketing retail tools. The last section of this literature review is on apparel retail strategies and covers change theory and change management; marketing sustainability strategies; consumer behavior, consumer loyalty, and word-of-mouth strategies; marketing research strategies; and segmentation, targeting, and positioning strategies.

Transition

Section 1 included the background of the problem, the problem statement, and the purpose statement. Other topics in this section included the nature of the study, the research question, interview questions, and the conceptual framework. Section 1 concludes with the significance of the study and a review of professional and academic literature. The literature review includes six main topics: changes in the business environment, the 7S model, which is the conceptual framework for this study, other relevant theories, a review of the retail business, tools used to create marketing retail strategies, and a final section on successful marketing apparel retail strategies.

Section 2 include the purpose of the study, the role of the researcher, the research method and design, the research ethics, and the procedures for data collection and analysis. Section 2 conclude with a discussion on the validity and reliability of the study. Section 3 include the results of this study. A discussion also includes the applications of the findings to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, and my reflections and conclusions.

Section 2: The Project

This section begins with a restatement of the purpose of the study, followed by discussions of the role of the researcher, the qualitative research method, and the multiple case study design. Also included are discussions on the selection criteria and the number of study participants, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection technique, and data organization technique. A description of the data analysis, reliability, and validity of the study concludes this section.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the marketing strategies that some retail business leaders used to adapt their organizations to changes in the business environment. The targeted population comprised business leaders of four selected retail apparel organizations in southern Italy who developed and implemented successful marketing strategies to adapt their organization to the changes in the business environment. The implications for positive social change include the potential to create and sustain new job opportunities for individuals in local communities who want to work in the apparel business.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research and in the data collection process, the researcher is the data collection instrument (Clark & Veale, 2018; Geddis-Regan et al., 2021). I served as the data collection instrument in this study. I created the interview questions, set up the interviews, selected research participants, conducted the interviews, shared my

interpretations of the participants' responses with research participants when performing member checking, and collected public company documents.

The topic of this study was about marketing strategies that leaders in the retail apparel industry used to adapt their organizations to changes in the business environment. At the time that I conducted this study, this topic was not new to me; it was the reason for enrolling in the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program and the reason for immigrating to the United Kingdom to search for a job in the retail business. I worked in retail apparel as a store manager for more than 6 years. I started in the United Kingdom and moved back to Italy during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a store manager, I had responsibilities that included marketing strategies to adapt to changes in the business environment. I worked full time in a retail village in a town near the City of Bari and selected research participants from that environment. I had no relationship with other store managers in that area.

Researchers must ensure an ethical approach in their research and should not violate the human rights of research participants (Yin, 2018). Exhibiting respect for the participants, maximizing benefits from the research while minimizing harm to the participants, and ensuring justice and fairness in the distribution of benefits are the guidelines of the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The study followed these guidelines. I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) preparation and test to increase my knowledge of the ethical standards and applied them

to this study. Furthermore, in compliance with the principles of informed consent, I shared clear and relevant information about the research and voluntary participation with participants and ensured their confidentiality.

Bias in research can commonly occur during data collection, analysis, and interpretation stages, which can lead to false conclusions (Yin, 2018). Researchers reduce bias through bracketing, various forms of triangulation, and use of an interview protocol. Bracketing is a process in which researchers put aside their beliefs, experiences, and assumptions (Dorfler & Stierand, 2021). Methodological triangulation is a process in which a researcher collects data from different data sources (Shapiro et al., 2020). Interview protocols enable the researcher to follow a predefined path during an interview, maintaining consistency in data collection and thus improving reliability (Yin, 2018). During the data collection and analysis, I put aside my experience and beliefs, used an interview protocol (see Appendix), collected data from interviews and reviews of public company documents, and focused on the data collected to produce the research findings.

Participants

In qualitative research, selecting participants who can provide rich descriptions of the answers to the research problem is essential for the trustworthiness of the findings (Stahl & King, 2020). The inclusion criteria for this study were the following: (a) is a business leader in a retail apparel organization in southern Italy; (b) has been heading or has headed the implementation of a successful strategy to develop and implement successful marketing strategies to adapt their organization to the changes in the business

environment; and (c) has directive responsibility of a retail apparel company or is an owner or store manager of an independent retail apparel store. The Puglia Village website (<https://www.pugliavillage.it/it/shop-and-brands>) contained information to identify potential participants' email addresses and telephone numbers and select business leaders who met the inclusion criteria. Upon receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to start data collection, I sent these business leaders an invitation letter and a consent form, via email, and asked if they would be willing to participate in the study. I also searched the internet for retail apparel organizations in southern Italy. The informed consent form included detailed information about the background, nature, benefits, and risks of the study, as well as the processes to maintain the confidentiality of research participants. I asked potential participants to reply to me with the words "I consent" only if they met the inclusion criteria and wanted to participate in this study.

Researchers establish a relationship with participants to improve the quality of the research findings (Farooq & Villiers, 2017) and to encourage the participants to participate (Alase, 2017). Once participants signed the consent form, I built rapport either by inviting them for a coffee or through video conferencing to chat and share common hobbies and experiences. The consent form included an explanation that participants would receive a summary of the findings of the study. Newton (2017) confirmed that researchers can build a positive relationship with participants if they share the research findings.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

A researcher's perspective on inquiry affects the researcher's choice of method (Ryu, 2020). Moreover, different research questions and contexts require different research methods (Lo et al., 2020). The research methods are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed (Yin, 2018). Researchers should understand the three methods, identify when to use each, and select the method that best fits the research question and context.

The quantitative research method refers to the analysis of variables' characteristics or relationships using statistical analysis (Apuke, 2017). In the quantitative research method, researchers use representative samples and statistical analysis to generalize their findings to the population (Tominc et al., 2018). Quantitative researchers use research instruments such as questionnaires and surveys for analyzing relationships among variables (Ghauri et al., 2020). Because this study was not about analyzing variables or testing hypotheses and transferring results to a larger population, the quantitative method was not appropriate.

Qualitative researchers use open-ended questions to describe, decode, and explore phenomena and concepts (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). The qualitative method is thus considered an interpretative approach. Qualitative researchers collect and analyze rich and in-depth data to explore participants' experiences (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Researchers use the qualitative research method to collect data through participant interviews (Patel & Patel, 2019). The qualitative method is appropriate when the

researcher wants to understand human experience from the respondent's view (Berner-Rodoreda et al., 2020). The most appropriate method to obtain rich data on participants' experiences was the qualitative method because the plan was to collect rich data to describe the marketing strategies that business leaders used to adapt their organizations to changes in the business environment from the perspective of these leaders.

The mixed method combines the use of quantitative and qualitative components (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). By combining both methods, a researcher can test hypotheses, and at the same time, explain why the results for the hypotheses are as such (Taguchi, 2018). Researchers who choose the mixed method for their studies collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data (Clark, 2019). The mixed method was not appropriate for this study because the study was not about analyzing variables or testing hypotheses and transferring results to a larger population.

Research Design

The main qualitative designs are ethnography, phenomenology, and case study (Yin, 2018). Ethnography refers to the study of social events and is ideal to generate in-depth descriptions and analyses about a society (Ngenye & Kreps, 2020). Researchers who choose this design are mainly interested in understanding topics related to culture, society, group, environment, and life (Jamali, 2018). The ethnographic design was not suitable for this study because the goal was not to study groups' cultures or a society.

Phenomenology is ideal to understand individuals and their personal meanings of interactions with others and with phenomena (Ngenye & Kreps, 2020). Phenomenology

design is appropriate when the researcher aims at describing the lived experiences of research participants to make sense of a phenomenon (Smith, 2019). I did not choose a phenomenological design because the aim of the study was not to understand the personal meanings of individuals experiencing phenomena or to make sense of a phenomenon.

Through a case study, a qualitative researcher seeks to explore a time- and space-bound phenomenon (Alp & Evans, 2019). The goal of this study was to explore a phenomenon bounded by time and space. Researchers use a multiple case study to collect several empirical evidences about a case (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) added that using multiple case study enables researchers to replicate results in similar settings. Because the study was based on open-ended questions to collect and analyze rich data from research participants, multiple case study was the ideal qualitative research design. A single case study limits the findings to a unique setting (Yin, 2018). A multiple case design was preferable because rich and diverse data could provide greater opportunities for theme development and comparative analyses.

Case studies can be explanatory, descriptive, and exploratory. An explanatory case study is useful in answering “how” or “why” questions and in explaining a phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Researchers who use the explanatory case study design examine data closely to explain phenomena based on the collected data. In this study, I did not seek to explain the process of marketing strategies or the why these strategies are suitable for organizations to adapt to changes in the business environment; rather, I sought to identify and explore these strategies. As such, explanatory case study was not

suitable for this study. Researchers use descriptive case study to describe a phenomenon as it exists (Yin, 2018). The purpose of this study was not to explain what marketing strategies were, and as such, a descriptive case study was not the best option. An exploratory case study is useful in exploring situations and processes and is the basis for future investigations (Yin, 2018). The study included the use of an exploratory case study because the goal was to explore the experiences of participants in successfully addressing the defined business problem.

The quality of a qualitative study depends on data saturation (Saunders et al., 2018). Data saturation is the point in the data collection process at which the researcher identifies no new information (Hennink et al., 2019). Data saturation occurs when there is sufficient information and no new codes emerge from collecting more data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). To ensure reaching data saturation in this study, recruitment of participants continued until interviewing other participants yielded no new information or themes.

Population and Sampling

Purposive sampling is the most common sampling method in qualitative research, and it is a sampling method to collect relevant data from individuals who have knowledge of and experience with the problem investigated (Baltes & Ralph, 2020). Researchers use purposive sampling to better match the sample to the aims and objectives of the research (Campbell et al., 2020). I selected purposive sampling because the objective was to explore marketing strategies, which required rich data from business leaders who had

specific knowledge and experience and who could answer the research question. The inclusion criteria for this study were the following: (a) is a business leader in a retail apparel organization in southern Italy; (b) has been heading or has headed the implementation of a successful strategy to develop and implement successful marketing strategies to adapt their organization to changes in the business environment; and (c) has directive responsibility of a retail apparel company or is an owner or store manager of an independent retail apparel store.

In qualitative research, sample size depends on the characteristics of the study because the objective is to find participants who can provide rich data to answer the research question (Ames et al., 2019). Yin (2018) suggested a sample size of two to 25, and Braun and Clarke (2021) suggested a sample size of eight to 16 to reach data saturation. Groselj et al. (2020) used a sample of four business leaders in a case study to explore the importance of psychological empowerment when transformational or authentic leaders want to stimulate innovative work behavior. This research included a minimum sample of four retail leaders, and the interview process continued until data saturation. Data saturation is reached when no new information or themes are observed in collecting additional data and when the collected data can be used to replicate the study (Hennink et al., 2019). To achieve data saturation, I continued to select and interview participants who matched the inclusion criteria of the study until no new information emerged.

The interview location can convey knowledge to the research, and the choice of location affects the knowledge gained by an interview (Jackson, 2021). In addition to providing useful information, location may become a source of bias and a limitation to research participants' privacy. Individuals who identify the risk of others hearing them during the interview may change their responses to protect themselves. Bias can lead to false conclusions (Yin, 2018). Protecting the privacy of research participants is a primary responsibility of researchers (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). In conducting face-to-face interviews, researchers should select a quiet and comfortable location where there will be no disturbances and where the privacy of participants remains protected (Yin, 2018). In videoconferencing interviews, in addition to selecting a quiet and comfortable place, both researchers and research participants should turn off all device notifications, avoid back lighted or distracting backgrounds, and dress similarly as they would in a live interview setting (Patel et al., 2020). I interviewed research participants either in a place they preferred or through video conferencing. In both cases, selection included a setting that would protect the privacy of participants. I also advised research participants to follow the same process in the consent form.

Ethical Research

Researchers may face various ethical issues when using human beings as research participants (Islam, 2019). Ethical issues, if not addressed properly, may lead to harm for participants. Researchers should protect research participants from any harm, including

psychological harm (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). To protect the privacy and confidentiality of research participants, and upon receiving IRB approval to start the data collection, I sent the business leaders an invitation letter and a consent form, via email, and asked if they were willing to participate in the study. The informed consent form included detailed information about the background, nature, benefits, risks, and confidentiality of this study. The consent form also included a statement about the right of participants to withdraw from the research at any time during the data collection process with or without notice. Participants replied to me with the words “I consent.” Participants who were not interviewed or were in the process of being interviewed withdrew by not showing or leaving the interview meeting. Participants who finished the interview and opted to withdraw communicated their intentions to me either verbally or in writing. I deleted all data related to participants who withdrew from the study.

Offering incentives to research participants may lead to ethical issues. Breakwell and Barnett (2020) attributed the participation of, otherwise unwilling, sources to incentives. The consent form included a statement that participants will not receive any compensation or incentives for participating in this research. As a sign of gratitude and to help participants identify strategies that they might not have considered in their businesses, participants received a summary of the research findings.

In research, ethical protection of participants is the responsibility of the researcher. Researchers are responsible for ensuring that study subjects are willing, have

the mental capacity to provide consent, are fully informed, understand their role and responsibility in participating, and make the decision to participate without pressure (Eisenhauer et al., 2019). To protect participants, I took measures to protect their privacy and confidentiality. To protect their privacy, I did not exert any pressure on participants and I selected a quiet and comfortable location where there were no disturbances and where the privacy of participants remained protected (see Yin, 2018). Researchers are responsible for keeping the identities of their participants confidential (Turcotte-Tremblay & McSween-Cadieux, 2018). To protect the confidentiality of participants, this study includes pseudonyms such as P1, P2, P3, and P4 to refer to the first, second, third, and fourth participant. Similarly, C1, C2, C3, and C4 represented the first, second, third, and fourth company that participated in this study. I shared this study with Walden's IRB to ensure meeting Walden's policy for the protection of human subjects. Data collection started only after receiving an approval from the IRB. The IRB approval number was 02-23-22-1043767. I stored the research recordings and electronic documents on a USB drive and kept the drive together with all paper documents in a safe at home where nobody else could access them. Five years after the research was complete, I will shred all documents and crash the USB drive.

Data Collection Instruments

I was the primary data collection instrument in this study as I developed the research question, interview questions, conducted the interviews, collected and reviewed available company documents, analyzed data, and completed the findings. Fountouki et

al. (2020) asserted that in qualitative research, the researcher is both the investigator and the end or the investigator and the research instrument. The study included the use semistructured interviews and reviews of publicly available company documents to collect data about marketing strategies that apparel business leaders used to adapt their organization to the changes in the business environment.

Silverman (2019) stressed that using semistructured interviews enables the researcher to collect rich data because of the bidirectional communication approach. Semistructured interviews enables the researcher to ask probing questions and the participants to answer questions and ask questions to understand better and elaborate on their responses (Silverman, 2019). Upon receiving approval from the IRB, I sent the invitation letter together with the consent form to the selected participants. Upon receipt of the consent email from participants, I called them and set up the meeting details. Participants had the option to use either face-to-face or video conferencing meetings. The interview process followed the steps included in the interview protocol (see Appendix) to add trustworthiness to the research. According to Yeong et al. (2018), using an interview protocol improves the quality of the interview, the interview data, and thus the trustworthiness of the findings.

Another source for data in case studies, is company documents reviews (Yin, 2018). I collected publicly available company documents from the companies' websites and from research participants. During the interviews, I asked participants to send me via email any document they can share with the public that related to marketing strategies

they used to adapt their organization to the changes in the business environment. For example, the annual fiscal report might include information on products and mix of products they sold, new market areas they entered or planned to enter, costs of marketing campaigns, and partnerships. The Message to Shareholders was another publicly available document that might include useful information on marketing strategies they used to adapt their organization to the changes in the business environment. Publicly available partnership and memorandum of understanding agreements might also include such information.

Researchers enhance the reliability and validity of the data through member checking (Yin, 2018). Member checking is the process that researchers use to ensure they capture the voices of the participants in their interpretations of the interview responses (Candela, 2019). I shared my interpretations with participants via email within a week of the interview, called them 3 days after to know if the interpretations were correct, set up a final meeting with participants who wanted to make corrections to the interpretations based on their availability, and made the requested changes during the meeting.

Data Collection Technique

In qualitative research, researchers can select among semistructured interviews, document reviews, and observations as data collection techniques (Marion & Mann-Feder, 2020). I used semistructured interviews and document reviews in this study. After receiving approval from The IRB to collect data, I sent the invitation letter together with the consent form to the selected participants. Upon receipt of the consent email from

participants, I called them and set up the meeting details. Participants had the option to use either face-to-face or video conferencing meetings. I followed the steps included in the interview protocol (Appendix) for the interviews and member checking.

Semistructured interviews have advantages and disadvantages. One of the advantages of semistructured interviews is that the researcher can reformulate the interview questions through probing questions (Vasquez, 2021). Another advantage of semistructured interviews is that the researcher has the flexibility to provide explanations, ask probing and follow-up questions, and gain the knowledge needed from the participants to answer the research question (Yin, 2018). A semistructured interview involves a candid conversation between the interviewer and the research participant (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). A final advantage is that semistructured interviews are flexible and enable respondents to share their knowledge and experience (Kuo, 2020). Yin (2018) suggested that semistructured interviews are time consuming and participants may bias their responses intentionally in sensitive discussions or because they cannot recall. The bias in semistructured interviews can also happen because of poorly articulated interview questions and the difficulty for the respondent to analyze and answer open-ended questions (Xu et al., 2019).

In addition to the interviews, I used publicly available company documents to collect data for this study. During the interviews, I asked participants to send me, via email, publicly available company documents such as the annual fiscal report, the message to shareholders recorded speech, and partnership and memorandum of

understanding agreements. I also downloaded these documents from company websites if available. In document reviews, researchers review various data sources such as publications and journals to ascertain the consistency of the information gathered during the research exercise (Yin, 2018). The advantages of document reviews are that they are relatively inexpensive, good source of background information, unobtrusive, and provide additional information on a case that may not be available in other data sources (U.S. Department of Health and Human Service, Centers for Disease Control and prevention, 2018). Document reviews have disadvantages: information may not match with the scope of the study and documents may be disorganized, incomplete, inaccurate, or out of date (U.S. Department of Health and Human Service, Centers for Disease Control and prevention, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Member checking is a process that enables the researcher to validate data to ensure their credibility and accuracy (Stahl & King, 2020). Member checking enables researchers to validate their interpretations of participants' responses by sharing these interpretations with participants and updating the interpretations based on the feedback they receive (Candela, 2019). I performed member checking by reviewing and interpreting the interview transcripts, emailing a copy of my interpretations to each of the participants, asking participants if my interpretations represent their answers, and in case participants had additional information, setting up a final meeting with participants to update my interpretations.

Data Organization Technique

The data sources for this research were semistructured interviews and document reviews. This study included different systems for keeping track of data, emerging understandings, and labeling. I used a personal iPhone to record interviews, Word application to transcribe interview responses, a reflective journal to write my reflective notes during the data collection and analysis, and NVivo software to assist in data analysis. A reflective journal will include the researcher's preconceived notions and assumptions that may influence research results (Kennedy & Gardner, 2021). NVivo assisted in data analysis. NVivo is a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software tool that researchers use to analyze data. NVivo improves the efficiency of data organization and coding (Clarke et al., 2021).

Researchers use pseudonyms de-identify research participants, organizations, and other textual data collected for research purposes to protect confidentiality (Heaton, 2021). To protect the confidentiality of participants, pseudonyms such as P1, P2, P3, and P4 referred to the first, second, third, and fourth participant. I used a similar approach to protect the names of the companies and used C1, C2, C3, and C4 to represent the first, second, third, and fourth company that participated in this study. After the interviews, I transcribed the recordings into a Microsoft Word document and used NVivo to code and identify specific themes. NVivo has instructional manuals, workshops, and online videos to enable novice researchers to quickly import and organize files of almost any type (see Clarke et al., 2021). I secured paper documents and digitally recorded interviews in a

locked safe box for 5 years, and then destroyed all such data as required by Walden University.

Data Analysis

Triangulation is a concept that broadly refers to the use of multiple resources (Natow, 2020). Yin (2018) identified four types of triangulations, the most common is methodological triangulation. Fusch et al. (2018) added that triangulation ensures the validity and reliability of data and results. Methodological triangulation occurs when researchers employ more than one type of qualitative data collection procedure such as interviews and documents (Natow, 2020). I used methodological triangulation in this study to employ data from interviews and reviews of company documents in the data analysis.

I used Yin's (2015) five-steps data analysis approach. Yin described a step-by-step approach for data analysis in case studies. According to Yin, researchers should analyze data following these steps: compiling the data, disassembling the data, reassembling the data, interpreting the meaning of the data, and concluding the data.

The first step was to compile the data. Data compiling is the process of organizing data in a meaningful manner (Yin, 2015). After the interviews, I transcribed the interviews, read the transcripts, and listened to the recording of each interview several times, interpreted each interview and wrote my interpretations in a Microsoft Word document, shared my interpretations with participants for member checking, received feedback, and updated my interpretations and the interview transcripts. I also completed

document reviews by reading the documents and writing the material that related to marketing strategies to adapt these organizations to the changes in the business environment in another Microsoft document. I then imported the data from the interview transcripts and the document that included document reviews to NVivo. The second step was to disassemble the data. Yin (2015) described disassembling as a proper way to code data. NVivo improves the efficiency of data organization and coding (Clarke et al., 2021). I generated automatic codes, also known as nodes or child nodes, using the auto coding feature in NVivo (see Pathak et al., 2021).

The third step was the data reassembling. Researchers organize and arrange data in different logical manners until themes emerge (Yin, 2015). This logical organization and aggregation of data produce emergent themes, which are known in NVivo terminology as father nodes. I used NVivo user interface to create these themes. The fourth step of the data analysis was interpreting the meaning of the data (Yin, 2015). Interpreting the meaning of the data is a basic step in the effort of making sense of the data and is a process of recognizing relationships within data (Barbarossa & Sardellitti, 2020). I identified the major themes and related them by reflecting on the knowledge acquired from the current literature. The major themes were those themes expressed by most participants to provide meaningful information to help answer the research questions.

The last step in the data analysis would be making conclusions based on the data (Yin, 2015). Concluding is essential to understanding the significant findings of the

qualitative study that derive from patterns and themes relating to the central question (Yin, 2015). The major thematic findings from the study were main aspects of the findings. A comparison of the thematic findings to the prior and current literature and the conceptual framework was an integral aspect of the final discussion of the results of the study.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

In qualitative research, reliability is related to appropriateness of the methods selected and how researchers used these methods; it refers to the soundness of the research (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Yin (2018) asserted that reliability is the consistency of the methodological procedures, supported by a detailed study protocol, documentation, and a database, so that others can follow similar procedures. Ormin (2020) added that reliability refers to how researchers will address the dependability of their research to ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings.

Dependability

Dependability is the extent to which researchers can repeat a study in similar context; it means that the research includes sufficient information to enable another researcher to follow the same procedures in a similar context and reach the same conclusions (Kyngas et al., 2020). Kyngas et al. (2020) added that describing the study process thoroughly increases the dependability of the research. I provided rich descriptions of the research process, methods, and coding procedures so that readers

could follow the research and draw their conclusions. The presuppositions, choices, actions, decisions, and context of the research are also factors that contribute to its dependability (Kyngas et al., 2020). The reflective journal includes the researcher's preconceived notions, decisions, and assumptions that may influence research results (Kennedy & Gardner, 2021). I used a reflective journal to write notes of my personal reflections including presuppositions, choices, actions, and decisions undertaken during the research process.

Member checking is a research technique to ensure dependability (Cypress, 2017). Member checking enables researcher to validate their interpretations of participants' responses by sharing these interpretations with participants and updating the interpretations based on the feedback they receive (Candela, 2019). I applied member checking by sharing my interpretations of participants' responses to the interview questions with participants and asking them to comment on.

Validity

In qualitative research, validity refers to the quality or trustworthiness of the findings, the integrity and applicability of the research methods, and the accuracy in which the findings reflect the data (Noble & Smith, 2015). Krawczyk et al. (2019) identified credibility, transferability, and confirmability as validity criteria and dependability as a reliability criterion. Saunders et al. (2018) added that data saturation adds to the quality of the data and thus to the trustworthiness of the findings.

Credibility

Credibility is a measure of the trustworthiness of a study and represents the level of appreciation of the readers of the quality of the findings (Kyngas et al., 2020).

Researchers address credibility by taking steps to demonstrate credibility in research reports and sharing these steps with readers so that readers will trust the findings (Kyngas et al., 2020). Member checking can improve the credibility of a research (Candela, 2019). Member checking enables researcher to validate their interpretations of participants' responses by sharing these interpretations with participants and updating the interpretations based on the feedback they receive (Candela, 2019). I applied member checking by sharing my interpretations of participants' responses to the interview questions with participants and asking them to comment on these interpretations.

Researchers should select participants who have the required knowledge and experience and ensure that data saturation is reached during data collection (Kyngas et al., 2020). Researchers use purposive sampling to better match the sample to the aims and objectives of the research (Campbell et al., 2020). I selected purposive sampling because the objective was to explore marketing strategies which required rich data from business leaders who had the specific knowledge and experience and who could answer the research question. Saunders et al. (2018) affirmed that data saturation adds to the quality of the data and thus to the trustworthiness of the findings. To achieve data saturation, I continued to select and interview participants until no new information emerges.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree in which the reader considers the results of a study transferable to other contexts and situations (Maxwell, 2021). The reader is not alone in this process; the researcher should provide thick descriptions of the setting, participants, other data, and compelling interpretation and synthesis to position the readers to transfer the findings to their own context (Maxwell, 2021). To help readers with their decisions on the transferability of this study, I shared detailed descriptions about the participants' selection criteria, their knowledge, and experience. I also identified the type of documents to collect; these are: annual fiscal report, the message to shareholders recorded speech, and partnership and memorandum of understanding agreements. This study also included descriptions about the interpretation and synthesis of the data in the data collection technique, data organization technique, and data analysis subsections in Section 2 of this study.

Confirmability

Confirmability is a measure of how well the data support the study findings (Cheung et al., 2021). Turner et al. (2020) recommended that researchers use an audit trail which is a description of the research steps taken from start to finish as an approach to establishing the confirmability of qualitative research. This section provides a detailed step-by-step approach of all the processes used from the data collection till the research findings. McGinley et al. (2021) added that researchers can improve confirmability through triangulation and reflexivity. I enhanced triangulation in this study by using

multiple data sources, which is participants' interviews and reviews of publicly available company documents. A final step to achieve confirmability is through reflexivity. The reflective journal includes the researcher's preconceived notions, decisions, and assumptions that may influence research results (Kennedy & Gardner, 2021). I used a reflective journal to write notes of my personal reflections including presuppositions, choices, actions, and decisions undertaken during the research process.

Data Saturation

Data saturation is a point in the data collection process when no new information or themes are observed in collecting additional data and when the collected data can be used to replicate the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Saunders et al. (2018) affirmed that data saturation adds to the quality of the data and thus to the trustworthiness of the findings. To achieve data saturation, selecting and interviewing participants who match with the inclusion criteria of the study continued until no new information emerges. The data analysis process started with the first interview and terminated with the fourth interview when data saturation was reached.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 included a restatement of the purpose of the study, and discussions of the role of the researcher, the research method and design, the research ethics, and the procedures for data collection and analysis. This section concluded with a discussion on the validity and reliability of the study. Section 3 includes the results of this study. Section 3 also includes a discussion of the applications of the findings to professional practice,

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

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the marketing strategies that some retail business leaders used to adapt their organizations to changes in the business environment. Data analysis revealed the need for four research participants to meet data saturation. The findings included the following themes: (a) consumer behavior marketing strategies, (b) innovative marketing strategies, (c) marketing research strategies, and (d) customer acquisition marketing strategies.

Presentation of the Findings

The research question for this study was the following: What effective marketing strategies do business leaders use to adapt to changes in business environment? I identified four themes: consumer behavior marketing strategies, innovative marketing strategies, marketing research strategies, and customer acquisition marketing strategies. These themes emerged from the data analysis process and aligned with the existing literature. In the following discussion, I identify and discuss each theme and relate it to the existing literature on effective marketing strategies and the McKinsey 7S model.

Theme 1: Consumer Behavior Marketing Strategies

Consumer behavior marketing strategies emerged as the first theme in this study. Consumers have the final say in the success or failure of an organization. Their behavior was the focus of all participants. The data analysis indicated that the consumer behavior theme was mentioned 26 times. Consumers behave differently based on their

characteristics such as education, psychology, age, gender, and location. Participants implemented marketing strategies to satisfy the behavior of their customers. P3 recognized the different behavioral aspects of their customers and stated, “The customer is knowledgeable and chooses the brand in which they recognize themselves at the DNA level, the vision and not just the product.” P1 focused on “hundred percent natural garment, almost zero environmental impact, made in Italy, a reusable and recyclable garment.” P1 added, “If they [customers] think the company is doing a good job with sustainable products, they are willing to spend, they are willing to support the company.” Generation Y consumers are cautious about the environment and society and may weigh these factors in their purchasing decision (Byrd & Su, 2021). P2 affirmed that “there is a clientele who may be able to spend a certain amount for a quality product.”

Consumer loyalty is essential in marketing, as loyal customers return to buy products. P1 asserted, “Then when the customer has known the whole brand and tried the garment, they can easily buy back again.” Brand image positively contributes to purchasing decisions (Asnawati et al., 2022). P1 added that in many cases, their customers are loyal customers. P3 echoed P1: “I have never heard of anyone who left our shop unhappy because we try in every way to please the customer.” P4 claimed that they have a high customer retention rate because of customer loyalty: “We have 4.6 out of 5 of positive reviews.” P4 added that they provide customers with fidelity cards and corporate customers with corporate cards. Gu et al. (2022) noted that organizations with LPs benefit from more profits. LPs not only reward customers, but also enable the

organization to improve its inventory, increase revenue, increase margins, and test its new products (Agarwal et al., 2022). P2 focused on the relation that they have with their customers: “Today’s approach is customer centric. So, it is by placing the consumer at the center and trying to identify all the touch points with the brand.” Customer satisfaction contributes to customer loyalty (Khaled et al., 2021).

Participants shared some documents supporting their marketing strategy to manage consumer behavior. P1 sends customers a newsletter to raise their interest and increase their loyalty. Customers can freely enroll in this service by filling in an application on C1’s website. All participants shared social network documents to support the customer review high rating. C1 and C3 share press releases on their websites with customers to increase customer awareness and loyalty.

To adapt to changes in business environment, business leaders change and align their companies’ structures, strategies, systems, leadership styles, resources, skills, and shared values. The 7S model is constructed on structure, strategy, system, style, staff, skills, and superordinate goals (Cox et al., 2018). The theme of consumer behavior marketing strategies aligns with the 7S model, as it is a strategy that cannot be achieved without the alignment of all seven factors. To deploy this strategy, these organizations had to update their structures to include online and B&M shops in their organizational structure and workflows, update their systems to capture consumer behavior and consumer loyalty, update their leadership styles by putting the customer at the center, hire qualified staff to run new online businesses, partner with universities to increase

customer satisfaction and loyalty, update their employees' skills through specialized courses, and review their shared values to include customer satisfaction as core to their business.

Theme 2: Innovation Marketing Strategies

The second theme that emerged from the data analysis was innovation marketing strategies. This theme included two subthemes: innovative marketing strategies and benefit organization marketing strategies. Innovation marketing strategies are marketing strategies that touch on innovation of products, services, processes, and resources in the organization. Innovation of products and services may involve rethinking of products and evaluating how new products may be considered in the market. Like new product development, product innovation is a marketing activity. On the other hand, benefit organization marketing strategies focus on new ways to introduce the concepts of human and environmental well-being. Both innovation strategies and benefit organization strategies are innovative, as they add innovation to an organization. Table 1 includes these subthemes, their frequencies, and percentages.

Table 1*Innovation Marketing Strategies*

Subtheme	Frequency	Percent
Innovative strategies	23	52%
Benefit organization strategies	21	48%

Note. Frequency is the number of times that a subtheme appeared in the data. Percent is the rate of each subtheme as compared to all subthemes of the same theme.

Innovation Strategies

Marketing innovation helps marketers reach out to consumers. Khaled et al. (2021) found that marketing innovation positively and significantly impacts store image and technological innovation has a positive and significant relationship with store image. C1 focused on digital innovation and new products. P1 stated, “From digital measurements and surveys that we do to our customers and not only to them, we try to measure what is the response.” P1 added, “We bring to the market some values and concepts that are still quite new.” P3 echoed P2 regarding digital marketing: “We are talking about omnichannel marketing; we are approaching the whole digital world.” P2 added that they are in the process of redesigning their website and shooting some photos for that reason. Yin and Xu (2021) claimed that well-designed websites enable consumers to easily find and purchase products. P4 introduces click-and-collect services where customers can buy online and collect their garment in the store. Yin and Xu suggested that retailers can enhance their stores’ reputation by investing in marketing innovation.

Benefit Organization

The benefit organization subtheme includes nodes related to sustainability, health protection, 100% green, and ways of life. P1 and P3 operate benefit organizations, as both focus on sustainability and well-being. Pauluzzo and Mason (2021) claimed that Generation Y consumers are more oriented to buying ethical and sustainable products and think that apparel companies should contribute to general well-being. P1 stated, “We have chosen to differentiate all our products by focusing on sustainability and ethics.” P3 echoed, “We started an eco-sustainable project for the reforestation of the territory.” P1 also focused on respect for the health as well as health protection of the consumer. Generation Y consumers prefer sustainable products and will pay extra money if needed to buy them (Pauluzzo & Mason, 2021). Ginder and Byun (2022) added that retailers can use tools such as Google Alerts or Keyhole to monitor how consumers perceive their CSR reputations.

Participants shared documents supporting their marketing innovation strategy. P1 shared a document called the Digital Diagnostic Report, which included the following: “C1 does not sell fashion, C1 sells value and a life-style.” This confirms P1’s approach to the market—“bring to the market some values and concepts that are still quite new”—and P2’s statements about being a benefit organization. C4 displays an e-banner on their website that includes innovative processes products and processes such as gift cards, promotions, and online selling on WhatsApp. C4’s website includes e-commerce as the

first option in the selection process. C2's website starts with the new 2022 collection and highlights a customer-centric process for tailored clothes.

Marketing innovation strategies involve the whole organization. Participants highlighted the changes and alignments that they made in their organizations' structures, strategies, systems, leadership styles, resources, skills, and shared values. Even though none of the participants mentioned the 7S model, this model explains the actions that these leaders took to implement the innovation strategy. To address changes in the business environment, business leaders developed new products and services, new marketing channels, new approaches to customers' needs and way of life, and sustainability that touches on all aspects of the organization.

Theme 3: Marketing Research Strategies

The third theme that emerged in this study was marketing research strategies. This theme appeared 13 times in the analyzed data. All participants used marketing research as a strategy to learn about their customers, staff, and competitors, as well as the efficiencies of their products and strategies. Marketers use tools and methods to help them explain past performance and plan future activities (Kotler et al., 2019). P1 stated, "We carried out a survey to measure our ability to reach and arrive to the market." P2 uses social media to know about their customers: "If you are talking about communication on social media, it is obviously linked to engagement and audience growth and therefore to followers." P4 confirmed the attention toward customers: "We conduct a real analysis of

our clients and create personalized promotions.” Marketing research focuses on consumer participation (Su et al., 2022).

P2 conducted research on competitors and asserted that competitors package their products abroad at an exceptionally low price, penalizing them as they pack their products in Italy. P3 stated, “Every 6 months, we ask our clients to give us a general evaluation on our products, staff, assortments, and degree of satisfaction within the stores.” P1 stated, “Today with a colleague of the team, we were conducting research on competitors.” Yang et al. (2019) used marketing research to explore strategies for new market research and positioning of stores or products by competing retailers.

Some leaders highlighted the use of marketing research strategies to assess the efficiency of their products and strategies. P1 declared, “The measurement of the efficiency of our strategies is essentially digital.” P1 added, “So, on the data that come out of the continuous market research we develop our marketing strategies.” P3 echoed, “To measure the effectiveness of these strategies we are obviously depending on tools and platforms.” P4 asserted that they use a dedicated platform to measure the success of their strategies through key performance indicators (KPIs): “We have a new platform linked to CRM which is called Salesforce. Our goal with these KPIs is to track the satisfaction of our customers.” Dehghanpouri et al. (2020) asserted that marketers who successfully use e-CRM, an internet-based CRM that facilitates business consumer interactions, have significantly decreased service support costs, increased profitability and sales, improved effective customer targeting and database management, facilitated

innovation and excellence in services, improved transaction frequency, and increased customer satisfaction.

Document reviews confirmed the findings regarding the use of marketing research. C4 uses e-CRM to reach their customers. Customers can use an online “Contact Us” application to inquire about a product, ask for a fidelity card, ask for a gift card, send a claim, or require or provide information. C1 has a WhatsApp and Facebook interface on their website to enable customers to provide comments and suggestions.

Market research is the systematic design, collection, analysis, and reporting of data and findings relevant to a specific marketing situation facing a company (Kotler et al., 2019). Marketers need insights to help them interpret past performance and plan future activities (Kotler et al., 2019). Participants highlighted the changes and alignments that they made in their organizations’ structures, strategies, systems, leadership styles, resources, skills, and shared values. For example, P1 conducted initial market research and found a market niche in 100% green garments. P1 developed an organizational structure, detailed a strategy (100% green), developed a system (online sales), built a leadership style that focused on ecology and well-being, hired staff, developed staff members’ skills to increase their knowledge, and created shared values that matched with the core values of 100% green. The 7S model perfectly fit in this case.

Theme 4: Customer Acquisition Marketing Strategies

The last theme that emerged from the data analysis was customer acquisition marketing strategies. Marketers use segmentation, targeting, and positioning to classify

their customers, identify the most interesting category, and provide customers with the most attractive products and services (Huang & Rust, 2021). This theme was composed of three subthemes: segmentation, targeting, and positioning. Table 2 includes these subthemes, their frequencies, and percentages.

Table 2

Customer Acquisition Marketing Strategies

Subtheme	Frequency	Percent
Segmentation	14	22%
Targeting	34	54%
Positioning	15	24%

Segmentation

The first subtheme included in this theme was segmentation. Market segmentation is a process in which marketers divide and order buyers within a market into classes based on specific characteristics (Dhiman et al., 2018). Customers of C1 are within the categories of sustainability, well-being, and innovation. P1 stated, “Ours is a 100% green brand. Speaking of natural colors, very often they [customers] ask us for a simple extra color so that they can change their sweaters. In fashion, the customer always wants novelty, they always want innovations.” P2 segments customers based on their ages, gender, and geography, and used a marketing campaign where three men of different ages but from the same region (i.e., Puglia) interpreted the campaign to perfection. P4

confirmed the attention toward customers: “We conduct a real analysis of our clients and create personalized promotions.” Marketing leaders cannot achieve such actions without the help of innovative and automated processes. Retail marketers use data mining to find useful information from different data sources such as traditional CRM, other companies’ databases, and external databases (Salih et al., 2020). P3 divided their customers based on geography: “Traveling from Bari to Montalbano where we operate, potential customers may get attracted by many other companies on the road. Unless one really wants a specific product then yes, they also come from Bari.” Different organizations use different segmentation approaches. Dhiman et al. (2018) segmented the apparel market based on personal preferences, family income, age, sex, style, fit, comfort, and durability. Lichao (2017) segmented the market by location and culture.

Targeting

The second subtheme incorporated in this theme was targeting. Targeting is the process of identifying the most attractive segments from the segmentation stage, usually the ones most profitable for the business and where they can offer better value (Dhiman et al., 2018). C3 targets the three categories that they have by offering specific clothes to each category. P3 stated, “The last advertising campaign promotes the Spring/Summer 2022 collection through three men of different ages.” P1 uses digital profiling and social networks to target their categories: “The customer becomes aware of the sustainability of our products through social communication.” P1 added that they have a very low conversion cost because customers want to know and to be informed. Neumann et al.

(2019) recommended digital consumer profiling using online browsing data as a strategy for targeting. P2 is more concerned with the satisfaction of their customers and uses an ad-hoc targeting technique: “I have this strategy of inviting the girls [customers] who are to marry in 2022 to my atelier and I did an exhibition.” Dhiman et al. (2018) asserted that in the retail apparel market, purchasing was based on satisfying consumers’ purposeful needs in the past and evolved to satisfy more emotional needs.

Digital and social media have greatly changed the nature of marketing (Ye et al., 2021). Participants used social media to reach customers, maintain and increase their customer base, and receive feedback. P1 said: “The customer becomes aware of the sustainability of our product through social communication. We need to talk and express concepts. It works a lot more on LinkedIn and Twitter. We have a particular attention to the press.” P2 stated: “The social channel is now essential. Surely, on social networks we are active on both Instagram and Facebook.” P3 and P4 use social media as a visibility channel. P3 stated: “Our relationship with social media is that they are part of communication and therefore it is a way of communicating that has somewhat replaced or accompanied traditional media.” P4 echoed: “Currently social channels do not represent a sales channel, but rather a visibility channel and also a customer care channel.” Communication means, which are the basic principles in marketing, between buyers and suppliers immediately changed as governments enacted lockdowns and travel restrictions (He & Harris, 2020).

During the pandemic, e-commerce was the choice for most participants. P1 said: “We essentially sell through our site or marketplace.” P3 stated: “We are working on the first site that will no longer be just a brand but also be e-commerce through which to sell as a direct store.” P4 has a deep experience in e-commerce: “We learned from our experience in e-commerce and used that experience in WhatsApp sales. Only P2 is late with e-commerce: “We are recovering, shooting photos, and soon updating our website.” Retailers use e-commerce platforms to increase sales (Verhoef et al., 2021), reach new customers in new markets (Pantano et al., 2020), create online marketplaces (Pantano et al., 2020), and create a competitive advantage (Kazim et al., 2020).

Positioning

Positioning was the third subtheme. Positioning is the final process, and is the most business-orientated stage, where the business must assess its competitive advantage and position itself in the consumer's minds to be the most attractive option (Huang & Rust, 2021). P1 used a differentiation strategy to deliver the sustainability concept to their customers: “We have chosen to differentiate all our products by focusing on sustainability and ethics, certifications, and made in Italy production.” P1 added that they are a benefit organization. P1 also stressed the higher costs they have because of the sustainability and ethics in their products: “Even if the garment costs more than the others, the customer is willing to spend because he feels informed and does not feel cheated.” In some cases, high price is an invitation for customers seeking quality products. Zhang et al. (2022) concluded that customers expect a better quality product

with an increase in product price. P3 focus on customer-centric as a positioning strategy: “Today’s approach is customer-centric. So, it is by placing the consumer at the center and trying to identify or highlight all the customer’s touch points with the brand.” A strong brand image positively affects purchasing decisions which improves consumer loyalty (Asnawati et al., 2022). P2 highlighted the importance of a unique product that can be easily adapted to fit most customers’ expectations: “Many and many customers ask for it because it fits well, is beautiful in the workmanship, and therefore it is the most popular.” Whether it is to propose the right product for the right customer or to propose a tailored product, all targeting strategies selected by participants had the outcome of achieving customer satisfaction.

Participants partnered with other retailers, agents, universities, and financing institutions to increase their sales and help customers overcome the burdens of buying apparel in difficult times. P3 affirmed: “The company has over 400 indirect points of sale B2B in Italy and a series of others abroad.” P1 stated: “There is the University of Bari that is doing an excellent job in the recovery of the Apulian wool that is being thrown away. It would be a short supply chain with a very low environmental impact and almost zero kilometers.” P4 echoed: “Our company is trying to get closer to the university world.” P4 and P1 also deal with financing institutions. P4 offered payments by installments to their customer. P1 stated: “We are looking for partners to increase our sales campaign which can be credit institutions.” Nwankwo and Kanyangale (2022) recommended marketers to include partners such as other retailers, agents, and financial

institutions in their marketing decisions. Shen (2022) claimed that universities are financing vehicles to projects. During the pandemic consumers, publics, and governments required and, in some cases, forced, collaboration for the good of all. Past competitors became collaborators out of need and designed, manufactured, and supplied ventilators at incredible speed (He & Harris, 2020).

Document reviews supported the customer acquisition marketing strategy theme. C1 shared a document that includes details about their last social media marketing campaign. The results of the campaign included 726 clicks (website hits) and an average cost per click of .2 Euros and were indicative of the high match between segmentation, targeting, and positioning strategies. C4 use e-CRM to reach their customers. C4 customers can use an online “Contact Us” application to inquire about a product, ask for fidelity card, ask for a gift card, send a claim, or require or provide information.

The theme customer acquisition marketing strategies aligns with 7S model as it is a strategy that cannot be achieved without the involvement and alignment of all the seven factors. To deploy this strategy, these organizations had to update their structures to deal with marketing partners such as agents, universities, and financial institutions; update their systems to enable them to capture, analyze, and organize customer data and to match these data with the products they sell; update their leadership styles by putting the customer at the center of the customer acquisition marketing strategy; have qualified staff to implement this strategy; update their employees skills through specialized courses; and review their shared values to put customer first as core value.

Applications to Professional Practice

The findings of this study may contribute to the professional practice of business in several ways. Participating leaders use consumer behavior strategies to adapt to changes in business environment. Marketing leaders use consumer behavior marketing strategies to understand the buying behavior of their customers (Dhiman et al., 2018), increase the repurchasing rate, and increase their customer base (Yin & Xu, 2021). Marketing leaders may use social media to communicate with their customers, fidelity cards to improve customer loyalty, and eWOM for customer review rating.

Innovative marketing strategies may involve either innovation practices or the legal status of an organization. The study indicated that click-and-collect service enables customers to buy online and collect their garment in the store. Yin and Xu (2021) affirmed that marketing innovation can improve the reputation and image of the store among the consumers. This study findings indicated some organizations used a benefit corporation as legal status. Some consumers prefer to buy sustainable products from environment-friendly organizations. Pauluzzo and Mason (2021) asserted that Generation Y consumers prefer buying ethical and sustainable products from apparel companies that contribute to the general well-being.

Customer survey emerged as a marketing research practice. Marketing is a process in which marketers reaching out to customers, receiving their input and feedback, and tailoring products to fit their needs. Involving consumer is mandatory in marketing

research (Su et al., 2022). Marketers can integrate data from these surveys into the company's CRM and use such data in the data mining applications.

Two business practices used in executing marketing strategies to reach and capture customers are the use of social media and the use of e-commerce platforms. Innovation involves using innovative tools such as social media (Kukkamalla et al., 2020). Social media was an excellent opportunity to reach customers when the government enacted stay-at-home restrictions because of the pandemic.

Customer acquisition marketing strategies can be achieved by profiling customers and selling tailored products. Marketers profile customers based on specific commonalities (Dhiman et al., 2018). Once business leaders identify these commonalities, they should find products that fit each. Tailored products enable organizations to meet the needs of most customers as a tailored product is customer centric.

To implement and use these marketing strategies, some participants used the benefit organization status and updated their structures to include marketing partners and online and B&M shops in their organizational structure, and new marketing channels. They also updated their systems to enable them to capture through social media and e-commerce applications, consumer behavior, customers' needs and way of life, consumer loyalty, and customer reviews. Participants updated their leadership styles by putting the customer at the center and hired qualified staff to deal with social media big data, run new online business, and partner with qualified institutions such as universities.

Participants updated their employees' skills through specialized courses; and reviewed their shared values to include customers' satisfaction as core to their business. Business leaders can use the 7S model to ensure their marketing strategies align with their organizations' structures, systems, leadership styles, resources, skills, and shared values.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of this study may contribute to positive social change in many ways. The use of technology such as social networks, e-commerce, and e-WOM may create new job opportunities in Puglia. Organizations will need to hire individuals with technology knowledge and experience. These organizations will also need to use professionals with such experience to fill-in the knowledge gap for their existing employees. Applying the recommendations of this study may enable retailers to sustain and grow their organizations which could create new job opportunities for individuals in communities.

This study included benefit organizations as a subtheme of innovation strategies. Benefit organizations benefit the community by offering sustainable products that are environmentally friendly. The Italian società benefit hybrid model allows, through a voluntary choice of the founding members or the shareholders' meeting, to include values typical of corporate social responsibility in company's purpose clause, making these values legally binding for the organization (Ventura, 2022). Thus, sustainability aspects become part of the business strategy and the company's commitment to creating not only value for its shareholders but also shared value, or so-called public benefit (Ventura,

2022). Benefit organizations can benefit the local community by recycling products, producing and selling 100% natural and zero kilometers products. This will have a positive aspect on the environment and will create an income to community members who used to spend money to get rid of such material that were waste before.

Recommendations for Action

Retailers could assess changes in the business environment as these may lead to changes in consumer behavior and consumer loyalty, development of new products and substitutes, emergence of new markets, entrance of new players, and creation and implementation of new business models. Retailers could use the marketing strategies discovered in this study to benefit from these changes and reduce their negative impact, if any. This study identified the 7S model as an approach to align the organization's structures, strategies, systems, leadership styles, resources, skills, and shared values. Retail leaders could consider using the 7S model in their decision-making process as it might enable them to align all the organization's resources and processes. The findings suggested that retail leaders and owners could consider structuring their organizations as benefit organizations to adapt their organizations to changes in the business environment.

This study highlighted the need for marketers to use technological and innovative tools and products. Information and telecommunication experts could support retail organizations in selecting, implementing, and operating modern technology tools such as eCRM, e-commerce platforms, social media applications on e-commerce platforms, and survey tools to enable these organizations to focus on their core business while benefiting

from the advantages that technology offers. I will disseminate the study findings through seminars and peer-reviewed journals. I also plan to share a summary of the findings with research participants via email.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study had limitations that future researchers can address. COVID-19 government restrictions limited the selection process to participants who had video or telephone capability for interviews and restricted my ability to take fieldnotes from participants' work environment. Researchers could repeat the same study after the pandemic to include in-person face-to-face interviews in the participants' work environment. Another limitation was that the findings of this study depended on participants' honesty in answering the interview questions. Future researchers could consider other data sources such as observations and internal company documents. This study identified and explored marketing strategies that retail business leaders used to adapt their organizations to changes in business environment. Future researchers could assess the strength and direction of a potential relationship between the strategies identified in this study as predictor variables and adapting to changes in business environment as a criterion variable.

Reflections

I started my DBA journey, few days after returning from the UK because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The DBA journey was a way to distract myself from the issues related to being forced to stay at home with no job and no clear vision of the future. I

selected a topic that matched with my experience and which in some way addressed the changes in the way retail business evolved to fit with the changes imposed. Enrolling in the DBA program and making progress day by day built more confidence in me and within a few months I found the right job. Allocating enough time for work, research, and family and friends was not an easy task. The pandemic did not show any sign of weakness and continued to condition all of us until the day I wrote this section. I had to limit my interviews to video or telephone interviews. I thought that limiting my research to video or telephone interviews will not allow participants to provide enough information and knowledge about the study. Fortunately, participants were happy to share their knowledge and experience and were anxious to receive a summary about my findings because they believed they could learn things that others may use and of which they were not aware.

Before this study, I was convinced that retail apparel can only succeed in a B&M shop. I know that customers use their senses when buying clothes. In addition to selecting the model and the color, which they can do in online purchasing, they touch the cloth, wear them, and smell them all of which are not possible in an e-commerce environment. The findings proved that I was wrong. One of the companies included in this study was only an e-commerce company and was extremely successful; the other three were hybrid companies that used both approaches. I learned that preconceptions, if not supported by facts, could lead to wrong conclusions. Hard work supported by knowledge and facts lead to success!

Conclusion

The only certainty in this world is change. Change touches on all aspects of life including business. In a continuously evolving business environment, retail leaders and owners must align all their limited resources to facilitate the positive impact and mitigate the negative impact of change. The 7S model offers an excellent opportunity for retailers to align their organizations to better face a change in the business environment.

Consumer behavior marketing strategies, innovative marketing strategies, marketing research strategies, and customer acquisition strategies to reach and capture customers are marketing strategies that successful retailers use to adapt their organizations to changes in the business environment.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

What I will do	What I will say
I will introduce the interview to set the stage preferably in an informal way either in a physical setting or over a phone or video call.	Hello. My name is Sara Hammoud. Thank you for finding the time in your schedule for this interview. The information you will provide will serve as the basic data for my research. Please let me know if you have any questions before we start. You can also ask as many questions as you want during or after the interview session.
I will ask the interview question in the order shown, listen to the answers, paraphrase if needed, and ask probing questions to get more information.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What marketing strategies do you use to adapt your organization to changes in business environment? 2. How do you measure the effectiveness of these marketing strategies? 3. What are the criteria for developing marketing strategies to adapt your organization to changes in business environment? 4. What were the key obstacles you found to implementing your marketing strategies to adapt your organization to changes in business environment? 5. How did you overcome these key obstacles? 6. How did your customers respond to the different

	marketing strategies implemented to adapt to changes in business environment?
	7. What other information would you like to share with me regarding strategies you used to adapt your organization to changes in business environment?

I will wrap-up the interview with a “thank you” note to the participants.	I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to acquire this knowledge from you. You have provided a great support to me in this research process for my doctoral study. Before I close this interview session, please let me know if you have any question.
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I will schedule the member checking interview.	To ensure that I have correctly interpreted your responses during the interview, I will share my interpretations with you via email within a week. I will call you after 3 days of the email to know if my interpretations were correct. In case you want to make any corrections, I will set up a final meeting with you based on your availability.
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During the member checking interview, I will ask the participant about the changes to make to my interpretations and thus make the changes as	<p>What are the changes you want me to make on my interpretations of your responses?</p> <p>Do these changes satisfy you?</p> <p>Is there anything else you want to add or change?</p> <p>Thank you so much. This concludes my interview. I</p>
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required.

really appreciate the time and effort you dedicated to this
study.
