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Strategies for Achieving Sustainability of Small Business Restaurants

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Tanisha Thomas-Beard

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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

Strategies for Achieving Sustainability of Small Business Restaurants

by

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MBA, Bethel University, 2015

BS, Bethel University, 2012

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

August 2022

Abstract

Many small business restaurant owners perform unprofitably and fail within 5 years of opening. Small business restaurant owners are concerned about sustainability as approximately 50% of small businesses that start up do not last beyond the fifth year. Grounded in the general systems theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies small business restaurant owners use to grow and maintain profitability to sustain business beyond 5 years. The participants were five small business restaurant owners in the Southeastern region of the United States who sustained their business beyond 5 years. The data were analyzed using Yin's five-step process. Three major themes emerged: providing an excellent and non-substitutable customer service experience, capitalizing on using social media effectively, and accentuating the competitive advantages of the restaurant location. A recommendation for restaurant owners is to infuse effective social media tools into all digital marketing efforts to drive customer engagement, build relationships, and maximize sales. The implications for positive social change include the potential to aid in reducing the unemployment rate, increasing tax revenues, and fostering positive relationships between restaurant owners and the community.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my parents, children, brothers, and grandmothers.

My father, John Thomas, helped to lay my foundation. Without him instilling guidance and discipline in me at an early age, I would not have been able to remain focused. My mother, Annie Thomas, has always been an excellent example of diligence and determination. She has shown me that, with perseverance, I can achieve all that I desire. In addition, her undying support and willingness to stand in the gap for me encourages me to shoot for the universe. My children, DeJuan and Davion, have each supported me in various ways of their own. Even though they didn't understand the magnitude of many of the issues I faced, I appreciate their listening ears and patience on this journey. My brothers, Jason and Jeremy, endlessly help me to balance all things while I achieve my goals. Our bond and comradery provide a comfort like no other. My grandmother, Annie Richardson, is pivotal in all my achievements. Her expectation of me pushes me to keep moving forward. And lastly, my grandmother, Annie Mathis, helped me to achieve this goal in numerous ways. I could not have completed this journey without her. I wish she were here to see what her efforts helped me to accomplish.

To my peers, Arielle, Angela, Kevin, and Yalonda, you all have been a tremendous support system. I appreciate not having to go through this alone.

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First, giving honor to God, the head of my life, who gave me the strength to begin and complete this journey. I wanted to give up many nights because there was so much going on in my life during this time. But every time, You reminded me why I chose this path. Thank You, FATHER. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us (Romans 5:3-5). I am so grateful.

Additionally, I thank my chair, Dr. Warren Lesser, for helping to guide me through this process and extending warm patience continuously. I also appreciate the feedback from Dr. Isabel Wan and Dr. Rollis Erickson that helped to strengthen my study.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Background

Small businesses are important because they provide strength to local economies (Ribeiro-Soriano, 2017). The major problem is that the failures of small businesses not only exist in the United States, but worldwide. In the United States, small businesses account for nearly 50% of businesses (U.S. Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy, 2017). For over 30 years, small business success rates have been low (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2017).

Very few small business restaurant owners are able to maintain business operations past 5 years (Lofsten, 2016). Many small business restaurant owners lack financial and leadership experience, which limits their capability to grow and maintain profitability to sustain their businesses (Jogaratnam, 2018). Jogaratnam (2018) also posited that some small business owners are not experienced in designing strategies to market their product and services. Small business restaurant owners are in need of effective strategies to maintain their operations beyond 5 years. Because of this widely common problem, there is a need for research to understand why most small businesses do not survive outside of the first 5 years of opening so that better strategies are provided to increase sustainability.

Problem Statement

Small business owners in the United States create approximately 60% of the new jobs in the entire nation each year but unfortunately, the success rate of small businesses is low (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2017). Approximately 50% of small

businesses that start up do not last beyond the fifth year (Turner & Endres, 2017). The general business problem is some small business restaurant owners do not know how to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years after opening. The specific business problem is some small business restaurant owners lack strategies to grow and maintain profitability to sustain business beyond 5 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore strategies used by some small business restaurant owners to grow and maintain profitability to sustain business beyond 5 years. The targeted population consisted of five small business restaurant owners located in the southeastern region of the United States, who have grown and maintained profitability to sustain business beyond 5 years. The implication for social change is small business restaurant owners can grow and maintain profitability to sustain business beyond 5 years, provide more jobs for the community, and help stimulate the local economy through revenue circulation. In addition, employees' self-worth and self-dignity may increase through improved restaurant sustainability because of new and continuing job and career opportunities.

Nature of the Study

There are three types of research approaches: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Yin, 2018). Quantitative researchers measure relationships and correlations between and among independent and dependent variables. Qualitative researchers explore the experiences of those who have experienced the phenomenon (Park & Park, 2016). When a researcher wants to explore a problem, the use of a qualitative approach is more

appropriate (Park & Park, 2016). Although the mixed method is a combination of the qualitative and quantitative methods, measurements of the significance among variables may not be necessary or for qualitative researchers (Almalki, 2016). To explore successful business strategies for small business restaurant owners who have grown and maintained profitability to sustain business beyond 5 years of opening, I did not need quantitative measurement dynamics and therefore, I used the qualitative method.

Principal qualitative research designs include narrative, ethnography, case study, and phenomenology. In a narrative design, researchers compile accounts of participants' shared personal experiences but that is not the purpose of my study. In an ethnographic design, researchers identify shared patterns or trends of a group's culture (Muskat et al., 2018). However, my intention was not to discover patterns among groups' members. Phenomenological design includes the experiences of subjects regarding the subject phenomenon, including the subject's emotional aspects (Gaete Celis, 2019). Case study is the preferred design researchers employ when asking how or what questions. I chose to use a case study design because I wanted to fully explore successful strategies sustaining small restaurant businesses. More specifically, I chose a multiple case study design instead of a single case study design to increase the credibility of my findings through the account of multiple small business restaurant owners.

Research Question

What strategies do small business restaurant owners use to grow and maintain profitability to sustain business beyond 5 years?

Interview Questions

1. What issue did you determine to be essential in your decision to open your restaurant?
2. Based upon your experience, what traits and skills contributed to your success in sustainability in the restaurant industry beyond 5 years?
3. What was the initial strategy that you selected to open this small business?
4. What adjustments/improvements did you make to your initial strategies for surviving in the restaurant industry?
5. What specific strategies did you implement to create a competitive advantage over the competition?
6. What steps did you take to control the quality of your goods and services?
7. What marketing strategies have you utilized to contribute to the continued success of the business?
8. What critical strategic choices did you make to respond to changes in the small business restaurant industry?
9. How did you focus on overcoming the key barriers that presented challenges to sustainability?
10. What else can you share with me about the strategies, processes, and tools you've used to achieve and sustain your businesses' profitability beyond 5 years?

Conceptual Framework

Investigators in the 1940s used systems theory to study business sustainability.

Ludwig von Bertalanffy introduced the general systems theory in 1949 (vonBertalanffy,

1972). Being interdisciplinary, the systems theory pertains to an exploration of a phenomenon as a whole (Tadros, 2020). To apply the systems theory, one must use systems thinking, which is a type of qualitative approach that individuals employ to gain more insight of the problem by considering multiple perspectives (McMahon & Patton, 2018). More specifically, systems thinking is when a person understands a structure comprehensively and how changes in one area may affect the entire structure (Sardone, 2017). For example, in the restaurant industry, if a chef orders too much food, eventually there will be waste and a cost increase. Similarly, if too little food is ordered, the restaurant owner may reduce cash outlay but orders will go unfilled and customers may become upset, which will decrease profits and could negatively affect business sustainability. Chefs can use the tenets of the systems theory to correct these kinds of errors.

Small business owners in any field must use different sustainable strategies than strategies large corporation executives use (Zeuli & O'Shea, 2017). The original systems theory specifically applied to large corporations with several departments. However, recent additions to the theory are now relevant for small business owners. Unless small business restaurant owners are experienced, there are several unpredictable challenges they may face. The start-up phase of small restaurant businesses can be challenging so owners should remain proactive and responsive so they can quickly adapt and as necessary, revise their business strategies. Small business restaurant owners could benefit from the systems theory to help prepare owners for identifying, understanding, and

addressing how their key business strategies and related processes need to be designed, improved, and sustained.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are accepted truths that have not been proven (Schoenung & Dikova, 2016). I assumed that all participants would answer the interview questions honestly. I also assumed that all participants would answer each interview question with adequate details. My third assumption was that each participant wants to contribute to this research. Lastly, I assumed that participants would remain neutral (i.e., minimal bias) when answering questions.

Limitation

A limitation is a potential weakness beyond the researcher's control (Morgado et al., 2017). The primary limitation of this study is the results are derived from the planned 5 subjects, which may reduce the scope of the generalization of the study findings. The sample size will consist of a small number of small business restaurant owners located in the southeastern region of the United States. The study results may vary with a larger group of participants or in a different geography. Also, participant responses may vary based geographical reference.

Delimitations

Delimitations refer to the factors that restrict the scope of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The first delimitation of this study is that the focus is on small

restaurant businesses with less than 15 employees. The second delimitation is that participants of this study are located in the southeastern region of the United States.

Operational Definitions

Business performance: Business performance refers to the actual business output regarding financial performance, product performance, and shareholder return measured against the intended business output (Foley & O'Connor, 2017).

Competitive advantage: Competitive advantage is a business attribute that business owners use to outperform their competitors to increase business profitability (Makhmoor & Rajesh, 2017).

Closed system (in systems theory): A closed system in the systems theory means there is no interaction among any systems (VonBertalanffy, 1972).

Open system (in systems theory): An open system in the systems theory refers to the way information is obtained from the operating environment to influence the business system (VonBertalanffy, 1972).

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

There is a vast number of published articles about competitive business practices for small businesses. If there were a significant number of articles available that address key specific challenges that small business restaurant owners undergo and important management skills to maintain profitability, identifying, and exploring successful sustainable business strategies would be a helpful contribution. By applying the systems theory, business owners can improve sustainability rates by assessing each business

component and their interaction with other business components. Small business restaurant owners may discover new strategies or confirm the success of existing strategies regarding strategic planning, leadership, finance, innovation, and marketing that will encourage long-term sustainability. Small business restaurant owners can elect to make more effective and efficient business decisions.

Understanding the strategies that small business restaurant owners use to successfully grow and maintain profitability to sustain business beyond 5 years could help decrease the failure rate. The results of this qualitative study may help small business restaurant owners in strategizing more efficiently and effectively remain profitable and competitive. By implementing successful business strategies, small business restaurant owners can make more effective and efficient business decisions.

Implications for Social Change

There are a couple of advantages to starting or having viable small businesses in local communities (Ribeiro-Soriano, 2017). One major, positive result of beginning a small business is that new jobs are created, which stimulates local economies. Small business owners contribute to decreasing unemployment rates when they start their businesses (Maller & Wapshott, 2017). Small business owners also play important roles in supporting local communities by providing employment and tax revenues (Dahlstrom & Talmage, 2018). The sustainability of small businesses can benefit local economies through the circulation of money spent by consumers, whose spending could enhance the quality of life and dignity of local citizens.

Review of Academic Literature

A literature review is an accumulation of synthesized knowledge from multiple scholars (Onwuegbuzie and Weinbaum, 2017). Researchers construct literature reviews to offer knowledge about the business problem and bridge gaps in literature relating to the topic of the business problem (Wilson, 2017). The purpose of this review is to assess published research on strategies for small business restaurants owners to grow and maintain profitability to sustain business beyond 5 years.

In this review of literature, I researched articles regarding the sustainability of small businesses. I analyzed peer-reviewed articles related to the systems theory, small businesses, strategic planning, leadership styles and skills, innovation, business marketing, business funding, and sustainable practices in businesses. I reviewed various sources for this study, the sources are from an assortment of management and business, economics, multidisciplinary social and human sciences databases, which includes EBSCOhost, ProQuest, SAGE Premier, Emerald Management Journals, and government websites. The keywords and phrases that I used to obtain the literature used in this study included *small business owners, small business success, small business sustainability, sustainability strategies, leadership strategies, leadership styles, marketing strategies, social media marketing, innovation, systems theory, contingency theory, grey systems theory, complexity theory, profitability, small business funding, small business restaurants, and small business finance*. The search phrases that I selected for the literature were helpful in identifying strategies for increasing sustainability in small business restaurants beyond 5 years. The systems theory is the conceptual framework that

grounds the information in this literature review. By using the systems theory, small business restaurant owners can enhance their levels of forecasting abilities and interpretive power of typical situations that commonly occur.

I referenced 237 journal articles, books, and non-peer-reviewed government sources in this literature review. Of the 237 references, 202 were published within 5 years of my expected year of CAO approval. In Table 1 below, there is a detailed, numerical summary of reference types.

Table 1

Details of References in the Study

Sources of Publication	Older than 5 years	Within 5 years (2018-2022)	% within 5 years	Total of Publication
Peer-reviewed articles	30	192	86	222
Government	0	7	100	7
Books	5	2	0	7
Total	35	201		237

Systems Theory

Business owners can use systems theory for assistance in making the right decisions in an ever-changing and unstable environment (Kurucz et al., 2017).

The systems theory originator, VonBertalanffy, defined a set of principles useful to address complex issues in a holistic way (VonBertalanffy, 1972). The systems theory was not originally designed for business use; VonBertalanffy developed

the systems theory by integrating biology, psychology, psychiatry, sociology in his thesis (Drack, 2009). However, researchers found that the general systems theory is broad and is applicable in many subject areas, including sustainable strategies for small businesses (Colengelo, 2016). Small business restaurant owners may benefit from using the systems theory to examine strategies to sustain operations beyond 5 years.

The systems theory is based on a process of inputs and outputs where information is obtained from the operating environment and feedback is produced when applied to system processes (Sayin, 2016). In addition, VonBertalanffy (1972) explained that the systems theory is comprised of open and closed systems. An open system is where business owners influence their business processes by using the information gathered from the operating environment (Hill & Alexander, 2017). In a closed system, there are no interactions (VonBertalanffy, 1972). Using an open system, small business restaurant owners maintain business stability through feedback and change/improvement in business processes.

Flood and Carson (1993) applied systems theory to study the phenomena of changing elements in an organization. Later, Sturmberg et al. (2014) pinpointed components of the systems theory in a business environment that incorporated system dynamics, development, transformation, and acclimatization. Based on the research of Sturmberg et al., the systems theory is suitable for application in creating sustainable strategies for the business environment. Instead of fixating on

single patterns, researchers identify interrelationships of people and components of a system using the systems theory (Caws, 2015). Small business restaurant owners can use the theory to understand the complexity of business systems and the interconnections with external forces using an open system.

Caws (2015) postulated that business leaders could use the systems theory to gain a better knowledge of intricate business systems and the relation of those systems to environmental factors. Environmental factors are internal and external components located within areas not limited to economic, political, and physical environments. Business leaders should consider environmental factors such as environmental policies and the availability of natural resources because they are significant in business (Arieftiara et al., 2017). For instance, environmental policies are laws that can affect the way a business operates, which may cause business leaders to modify their procedures or equipment. While there may be some costs associated with changing operational equipment, a more significant cost may be the consequence of violating environmental policies. By employing the systems theory, small business restaurant owners can make informed decisions through visualizing environmental demands as an integrated whole with business operations.

Small business owners in the restaurant industry face various types of challenges such as market trends, financial resources, and competition. As a result, owners usually modify their original plans of action to adjust to the changes. Applying the systems theory to study complicated phenomena or

challenges helps in the understanding of situational issues in detail (Sturmberg et al., 2014). Morgeson et al. (2015) agreed that researchers apply the systems theory to real-life situations in the business world for simplification. When developing sustainability strategies, the system theory is useful for small restaurant business owners because the restaurant industry is complex and inconsistent. The systems theory is a guide for business owners to discover principles that contribute to improving business processes and performance.

Researchers and business owners use system theory as a framework for an increased level of predictability when studying a phenomenon such as the ever-changing environment (Adams et al., 2014). VonBertalanffy (1972) proposed that the systems theory is composed of patterns, relationships, holistic views, and interactions. In a qualitative study, Shaked and Schechter (2016) proposed that those who follow the systems theory should have a holistic view to understand situations because many important business elements are interrelated. The start-up of small businesses requires the integration of several processes and elements (Snow, 2020).

Sometimes, the result of success or failure in small businesses is dependent upon the adaptability of the owner to recognize and make changes as the business continues operation (Dominici, 2017). Small business owners can use the systems theory to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of their businesses based on goals they set (Bridgen, 2017). By using the systems theory, small business owners can more accurately understand internal and external business

influences and their effects (Block et al., 2018). Restaurant owners may improve sustainability by using critical thinking capabilities, decision-making skills, and the holistic view aspect of systems theory (Van Scheers, 2018). Small business restaurant owners can effectively address complex environments and improve business sustainability with the application of an open system in the systems theory (Block et al., 2018; Van Scheers, 2018).

The systems theory is beneficial in aiding researchers to analyze and describe how people work collectively to yield results (Sayin, 2016). According to VonBertalanffy (1972), business leaders and researchers can adapt the systems theory to explore correlations between phenomena in a business. Pouvreau (2014) continued that when researchers holistically examine components, they will discover systemic interconnections among several elements of which business leaders must identify and govern. Through the understanding and implementation of key constructs of the systems theory, business leaders view their business as an entirety of interrelated parts because every component of the company is interconnected (Broks, 2016). The systems theory is helpful for small restaurant business owners to remain sustainable because leaders will have a better understanding of how making changes in one area affects the rest.

Constructs of Systems Theory

Open system, holism, systems thinking, and interconnected components are the key constructs of systems theory in which users find helpful in obtaining a better understanding of the individual components of a system (Belinfanti &

Stout, 2018; Yaşar, 2017). The status of a whole system is dependent on the status of each component in the system; therefore, the components must align with the whole system to properly function (Belinfanti & Stout, 2018). Restaurant owners should strive to understand the constructs of systems theory to gain an in-depth understanding of their business, improve sustainability, and maximize profit effectively and efficiently (Yaşar, 2017). By using the systems theory, restaurant business owners may be better equipped on how to employ sustainable business strategies by using a holistic approach in the way they view their business and understanding how each business component interacts with each other (Belinfanti & Stout, 2018).

Open System

In an open system, a continuous exchange occurs between the business process and business environment, which involves inputs and outputs (Hill & Alexander, 2017). Business owners continuously obtain external business information to input in business processes and take note of the output to adapt to frequent changes (Howell, 2017). In a closed system, there is no exchange so business owners are unable to utilize external elements to affect the business process (Sayin, 2016). Using an open system, small business restaurant owners may find solutions to continuous complex issues that involve multiple interrelated components.

Holistic Approach

The concept of the holistic approach is the whole is greater than the sum of its components. When systems theorists use a holistic approach to examine systems, the research is comprehensive and exhaustive (Fiandaca et al., 2017). Bridgen (2017) focused on the holistic approach of systems theory to pinpoint issues regarding wholeness and behavior. Some small business restaurant owners encounter several types of compartmentalized problems and fail to realize the relationship between those issues (Cao, 2017). To increase business sustainability, business owners must understand the interrelationships of business components (Cao, 2017). Business owners who analyze system components using a holistic approach can examine business issues more thoroughly (Breil, Ritchie, & Greer, 2017).

Systems Thinking

Business owners utilize enhanced business analysis and decision-making skills by using systems thinking, which is a construct of systems theory (Langstrand, 2016). Being able to identify patterns between the interactions of business processes and challenges is useful, however, business owners must address those challenges (Cao, 2017). Systems thinking is helpful for performing a descriptive, analytical evaluation of business challenges and developing methods to resolve those challenges with consideration of all business components (Langstrand, 2016). Small business owners would benefit from using systems thinking to concentrate on components of their business and determine the possible effect on other business components (Fiore et al., 2018).

Interconnected Components

McMahon (2017) stated that the use of the systems theory is beneficial in comprehending the connections among the components in a complex system. Interconnected components are related elements in a system with individualized, distinct functions (McMahon, 2017). The function of each business component makes up the overall business process (Yaşar, 2017). Some business processes are unsuccessful because business owners fail to acknowledge interconnected components in the business system (Cao, 2017). When all business components are addressed as interconnected, the overall business process flows much smoother and the quality of service increases. By viewing each business component as interconnected opposed to being attentive to single aspects of the business, business owners can design and implement more efficient strategies to promote sustainability (Belinfanti & Stout, 2018).

Marketing, finance, and leadership may appear as three different functions but business owners benefit from viewing each function using a holistic approach and understanding that a change in one area affects the others. Insufficient finances may decrease the ability to properly promote the business or hire skilled, qualified leaders. For example, insufficient cash flow may result in necessary staple items being out of stock (e.g., ketchup) or the menu being reduced (e.g., “temporary not available” notices). Another example is hiring an unskilled leader, who may negatively affect marketing and finance components because of their lack of knowledge in those areas. While each function has a different objective,

they are all interconnected. Viewing each as components of a whole helps business owners to create a process in which customer orders are fulfilled in a timely manner (Yaşar, 2017).

Contrasting Theories

Researchers may view phenomena through several approaches. Before confirming that the systems theory was suitable for this qualitative study, I explored several alternative theories that might have been applicable in discovering sustainable strategies for small restaurant businesses. Sayin (2016) maintained that the systems theory can be perfect, imperfect, defective, or universal. Many of the sustainability theories that surfaced from research literature contradicted the general systems theory. In the following subsections, I will list contrasting theories and explanations for why they were not fit for this study.

Contingency Theory

I considered using the contingency theory to ground this multiple case study regarding sustainable strategies for small business restaurant owners. Small business restaurant owners should demonstrate leadership qualities to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The contingency theory was developed by Fiedler (1964) to bring attention to the effectiveness of leadership based on personal and situational characteristics. According to Fiedler, leadership style is fixed in the contingency theory. Fiedler recommended that the best leadership style is dictated by the situation (Pratono, 2016). Using the contingency theory, the success of small businesses is based on the method of the leader, as opposed to the leader themselves.

During the development of the contingency theory, Fiedler constructed the Least Preferred Co-Worker Scale (LPC) to determine leadership style and task orientation. However, the practicality of Fiedler's contingency theory is questionable (Da Cruz et al., 2011). While some small business owners are successful in using the contingency theory, one concern is that the focus is primarily on leadership situations and not on the leader. Therefore, the contingency theory was less applicable than the systems theory for my purpose of exploring skills and strategies for small business restaurant owners to sustain business beyond 5 years.

Grey Systems Theory

Deng developed the grey systems theory as a framework to assess issues and bridge gaps between natural and social sciences (Liu et al., 2016). Similar to systems theory, researchers can use the grey systems theory to comprehend systems, conduct an analysis on relations, and create fuzzy models. Researchers who use the grey systems theory approach problems with incomplete data (Liu et al., 2016). Business leaders may use the systems theory to facilitate decision-making when in unpredictable environments (Mierzwiak et al., 2019). The small business restaurant industry is a complex environment with frequent, unpredictable changes, in which small business owners could possibly address with the grey systems theory.

However, the grey systems theory may be flawed and inconsistent. Using the grey systems theory, researchers address problems with modest samples and insufficient information (Liu et al., 2016). Essentially, researchers must make assumptions based on partial information using the grey systems theory. With sufficient information about the

problem, researchers can use the systems theory to properly identify problems and understand patterns and relationships. The framework of the grey systems theory is a concentration on inadequate and unavailable information, which is not suitable for this study because restaurant data will be information will be available and sufficient.

Complexity Theory

Hartmanis and Stearns (1965) created the complexity theory and surmised that the connections in system elements were due to growing patterns and links. Complexity theory is a complex adaptive system with different behaviors (Axelrod, 1999).

Complexity theory closely resembles the systems theory in that researchers examine patterns and relations of elements. Small business owners can use the complexity theory to encourage growth and discover sustainability methods, such as networking, relationship building, and accountability (Han & McKelvey, 2016).

Business environments frequently change due to a variety of reasons such as customer preferences, socioeconomic and political issues, and rising competition (Domanović & Janjić, 2018). To adapt to frequently changing business environments, business owners may apply the complexity theory to identify business challenges. While small business owners can use the complexity theory to identify business challenges in unpredictable environments, the theory is less fitting than systems theory for this study. Small business owners may be unable to view their business holistically when identifying challenges and utilize critical systems thinking to project how changes in one area may affect others.

Chaos Theory

As one of the founding fathers of the chaos theory, Lorenz (1963) employed the butterfly effect to exhibit the theory. The butterfly effect is an occurrence that happens when a minute change produces a largescale effect (Yas et al., 2017). Boudreau and Dube (2017) summarized the chaos theory as a system that keeps stability through continuously changing patterns that never go back to its initial state. Akmansoy and Kartal (2014) explained that business leaders use the chaos theory to conjure an extraordinary change within the business and for predictability.

McCarthy (2014) argued that the chaos theory is too delicate and challenging to pinpoint the original state, which presents concerns for accuracy in predictability. The small business restaurant industry is frequently changing so the use of chaos theory may help to identify sustainable strategies for business owners. However, there are no control measures in chaos theory (McCarthy, 2014). Because initial conditions are important, using the chaos theory for achieving sustainability strategies for small business restaurant owners is not advantageous as the industry must be at a fixed state to produce a certain result.

Small Businesses

Explicitly defining the term *small business* is complicated because the definition has changed over the past 50 years (Lampadarios, 2016). Small Business Administration officials explicitly define small business according to size. The Small Business Administration officials have listed the limitations of sizes for specific industries on its website for clarification (Electronic Code of Federal Regulations, 2018). All small

businesses have less than 500 employees (Small Business Administration, 2019). Small businesses are put into classifications that consist of micro (less than 5 employees), small (less than 50 employees), and medium (less than 500 employees) (Ellis, 2016a). A small business is defined by the number of employees, asset value, and place of origination (Dilger, 2017b).

Small business owners account for nearly half the business in the United States, therefore, owners have a considerable influence on the advancement of local economies (U.S. Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy, 2017). There are several owners who bring in employees from disproportional demographical backgrounds; employees who are less likely to be hired by other companies (Reuben & Queen, 2015). Small business owners take part in a critical job in shaping economies all over the world (Quartey et al., 2017) More specifically, small business owners have the power to change countries' gross domestic product (GDP), revenue, and employment rates (Aleksandr et al., 2016). Economies benefit from sustainable business strategies as well because successful small business owners develop successful countries.

As the number of small business owners continues to rise, owners have varying reasons for starting their own businesses. More than half of owners start their business for personal flexibility reasons, 41% desire to add a new product to the market, and about 34% are inspired by the additional income (Hurst & Pugsley, 2011). Another reason that business owners start their own companies is because they want to be in control of their own financial destinies. Business ownership is seen as an accumulation of wealth because of the value and continuous income (Poposka et al., 2016). Although each owner has

their own reason for start-up, there is no doubt that business owners create a specialized freedom for themselves when starting a business.

The key to business sustainability is understanding the reasons why so many small businesses fail. Joshi et al., (2016) discovered that one reason for failure was because of the lack of management skills. Skill levels are important in entrepreneurship because they are decision-making abilities that determine sustainability (Lee, 2016). Lobacz et al., (2016) presented another reason for small business failures, which explained that distrust has a negative influence on performance.

Mueller and Shepherd (2016) noted that the scope of duties of a small business leader might be so broad that the business owner may not be sufficiently skilled or knowledgeable to carry out the entire range of administrative functions. Because the success of new small businesses may be dependent on the skills and experience of the business leader, there is an urgency for the leader to have the ability to perform a full range of managerial functions (Visser et al., 2016). The ability to carry out the complete range of administrative and managerial functions is essential to be successful. Ultimately, small business owners must be skilled and experienced to achieve success.

The successes or failures of small businesses may depend on the flexibility of the business leaders to make changes, based on feedback, as business leaders interact with their environments (Jayawarna et al., 2013). General systems theory will be the lens that I will use in this study to explore the strategies that small business restaurant owners used to sustain their business. The holistic view of the general systems theory will be appropriate for the study of business activities and strategies that small business

restaurant owners can use to sustain their business enterprises in their unique environments.

The Restaurant Industry

In 2020, a worldwide pandemic occurred that affected all businesses, more specifically small restaurant businesses. Small business restaurant owners across the United States were ordered to shut down to prevent the spreading of COVID-19, an infection caused by a new strain of coronavirus in which those infected have mild to severe symptoms, including death (Centers for Disease Control and Infection, 2020). However, there were some restaurants that were allowed to continue services such as fast-food restaurants with drive-through services because there was little human-to-human contact. Many owners were unprepared for this type of situation because their business model was based on dine-in service. As a result, there was a significant decrease in the small restaurant business survival rate and a massive increase in the unemployment rate (Jennings, 2020).

Some owners quickly adapted to the environmental change and implemented curbside pick-up and delivery (Thorn, 2020). Curbside pick-up is a service where customers go to the restaurant and an employee brings the order to their car. To prevent a busy phone line when customers call to place orders, some small business owners strategically created an application for online ordering. Another advantage of online orders is that customers can see the full menu, pricing, and available pick-up times through online ordering. Small business restaurant owners must continuously consider the wavering demands and changes in the restaurant industry to survive.

Unfortunately, several small restaurant businesses did not reopen their doors because the owners were unable to develop a strategic business plan to remain sustainable (Canada Newswire, 2020). In addition, some small business owners may have had limited resources and possibly were unknowledgeable about how to use available resources. During this pandemic, small business restaurant owners may benefit from using the systems theory to review each department and aspect of their business as the sum of a whole. By using the systems theory, owners may have the ability to see how a change in one area affects any other areas and strategically use forecasting to the make adjustments to remain sustainable.

Strategic Business Planning

Strategic business planning is a notable management tool used in business to map paths of success (Lidstone & MacLennan, 2017). Some business owners may use the strategic business planning process to declare their objectives and discover ways to meet their goals. While there are varying definitions of business planning, Lidstone and MacLennan (2017) defined strategic planning as a process that includes placing goals and outlining steps to meet to achieve those goals. According to Wolf and Floyd (2017), the process of strategic business planning includes the analysis of current, available resources and deciding on the best course of action to use them.

Strategic business planning also includes being diligent and focusing on the strategy for a designated period of time for monitoring. Constant changes with technology, politics, competition, and the economy should prompt business leaders to continuously review their business plan and revise as necessary. For efficient strategic

planning, small business restaurant owners should consider several factors before finalizing a business plan.

One leading cause of failure with small businesses is the lack of strategic planning, which is usually because some small business owners lack experience in strategic management and planning (Martinez et al., 2019; Turner & Endres, 2017). Business owners tend to plan from their own experiences rather than formulizing a documented plan (Popa et al., 2019). When planning strategically, business owners should review past actions to forecast the future (Telesford & Strachan, 2017). In addition, the strategic planning process should include the implementation of business process changes and changes with contingency plans (Kuan et al., 2020).

When small business restaurant owners develop strategic plans, they are practicing a sustainable process (Telesford & Strachan, 2017). Strategic plans are not only essential for ensuring that current business processes align with the mission of the business, but well-developed and implemented strategic plans are also important for business longevity. By including sustainable practices such as innovation, marketing, and financial strategies in the business plan, restaurant owners can foster business growth and gain competitive advantages. Although business longevity is a goal that is not literally put in the business mission, more thought should be put into ways to sustain business practices. To remain sustainable, business leaders should develop strategic plans to identify current business problems, goals, and future trends (Kearney, 2019). that impacts small business sustainability and success (Telesford & Strachan, 2017).

Small business owners create business plans to encourage operational activities of small businesses (Serven (2017)). Strategic business planning is an analytical and purposeful process so when a business strategy is implemented poorly, the chances of success decrease for the business (Telesford & Strachan, 2017). Effective strategies are an aid in achieving business objectives. Small business owners who adequately plan increase their chances of success (Wolf & Floyd, 2017). Higher levels of business success and increased sustainability are achievable through continuous evaluations of the business environment, products, and services.

With strategic planning, small business owners can also utilize relevant tools to identify and address business challenges through the use of a SWOT analysis. A SWOT analysis is an assessment of business strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (Guth & Asner-Self, 2017). Business owners conduct a SWOT analysis to outline the strong points of their businesses, identify organizational limitations explore opportunities for continued success, and detect potential threats. By using a SWOT analysis, small business owners can develop strategic plans through an organized approach. However, a SWOT analysis is a descriptive model so that the tool may be too vague and not inclusive of all the variables that need to be considered (Bodi & Gotea, 2016).

Small business sustainability is essential to the economy for many reasons. For example, successful small business owners are drivers of economic growth regarding employment (Ribeiro-Soriano, 2017). Because the survival rate of small businesses is 50% in the first 5 years is low, small business owners would benefit from effective business strategizing (Turner & Endres, 2017). Small business owners should precisely

define the parameters of success so they can create a feasible strategic plan. There are various explanations for small business failures but owners should realize that a failure to plan strategically may result in unsustainability. Therefore, small business restaurant owners should strive to successfully implement strategic business plans to increase the chances of sustainability. Therefore, small business restaurant owners should strive to develop strategic business plans to increase sustainability.

Sustainable Strategies

In business, the purpose of sustainable strategies is to increase the longevity of operational services (Kurucz et al., 2017). Some small business owners lose competitive leverage because they lack certain resources and skills such as financial education, innovativeness, leadership skills, and marketing knowledge (Ritz et al., 2019). By adapting sustainable strategies (i.e., financial, leadership, innovative, marketing, etc.), small business restaurant owners may efficiently increase profitability to sustain business beyond 5 years.

Financial Strategies

Some small business owners encounter sustainability issues from the opening of their business because of how they are funded (Elston et al., 2016). Limitations in financing present several issues in different areas of small businesses. The most effective method to select funding is to review the benefits and drawbacks for each option while keeping the business model in mind (Michiels & Molly, 2017). Wong et al. (2018) agreed that business leaders should seek financial options that include competitive advantages that align with their goals. A few of the best funding options include those from family,

friends, and the owners themselves (Michiels & Molly, 2017). In general, loans from family or friends are more pliable than those from financial institutions because of the repayment terms (Faulkner, 2017).

Business owners should consider using bootstrapping to accelerate business (Faulkner, 2017). Bootstrapping is a strategy that business owners use to quickly turn over inventory and decrease the amount of funding required by a business (Khwaja, 2016). Through bootstrapping, business owners may be able to increase their sustainability by creating a strong financial foundation. Equity financing is another method of funding available for small business owners. Equity financing is a process in which ownership interests are exchanged to receive an unsecured backing (Madura, 2015). There are business owners who favor equity financing because equity capital does not usually require collateral risk or bear the burden of amortization payments with interest expense (Buchanan, 2017). Another benefit for equity financing is that the investors are skilled in business processes (Goh et al., 2017). When small business owners create strategies for their finances, they are more apt to be successful, especially through unpredictable times (Bellavitis et al., 2017).

Researchers have found that inadequate financial resources contribute to business failures. When there is a lack of financial resources and sales revenue, business leaders are at greater risk of failure (Dutta & Folta, 2016). Some business leaders downsize to decrease labor cost and increase financial performance, which is usually not the best option for small business owners because they have few employees. Small business restaurant owners should understand the essentials of finance and possess the necessary

financial skills to evaluate their business' profitability and ensure that debt management is efficiently controlled.

Business leaders should have detailed knowledge of how to produce income and keep their business (Dominici, 2017). Khan and Quaddos (2017) explained that the reasons for some small business failures are because of business leaders that lack financial skills and experience in creating strategies to increase profitability. An example of an unskilled financial decision could include a business owner focusing on product price without paying attention to other elements of financial importance such as the cost of the product. There is a crucial need for small business owners to be skilled financially so that they make effective decisions for the business. Effective financial management is essential for business survivability; therefore, business owners should ensure they are skilled in financial literacy (Khan and Quaddos, 2017).

When developing sustainability strategies, business owners must be aware of economic and non-economic external factors. For example, economic factors include new restaurant competitors, unemployment, or the amount of disposable income from consumers. Non-economic factors could include road construction that limits customers' access, supply shortages because of inclement weather, or the effects of a pandemic virus. In business, financial stability occurs when small business owners consistently reorganize financial resources in a timely manner to sustain in a durable, steady condition (Kremen & Ohol, 2017). Owners can almost guarantee financial stability through adverse environmental conditions by continuing to assess and plan for sufficient working capital (Kremen & Ohol, 2017). Ample working capital aids in small business sustainability.

Businesses may benefit from building their models to be adjustable to changing factors that are outside of the business and concentrate on continuous financial stability while foregoing quick gains.

Of paramount importance, small business owners must create financial strategies before opening because of the challenges of procuring funding, being that there is little to no financial history, increased financial risk, and limited collateral. In both small businesses and large organizations, internal and external financial resources are essential (Rostamkalaei & Freel, 2017). Banks are more cautious to lend to small business owners because of their lack of security and reliance on money from informal avenues such as family and friends (Berger et al., 2014). According to the Security Exchange Commission (2017), small business owners have a difficult time raising money because they are not able to reach capital markets. Some small business owners use crowdfunding, investment programs specifically for small businesses, and small business loans to collect funding (SBA, 2017). Developing financial strategies before starting the business is essential to avoid the potential barriers that small business owners typically face.

Innovation Strategies

Financial problems and business discontinuity may be the consequences of the absence of innovative strategies (Atsan, 2016). Small business owners can strategically use innovation to extend the business's continuity and profitability (Reed, 2019). When business owners focus on customer desires, they are likely to forge new markets and create new products (Suraksa et al., 2016). Small business owners should use innovation to obtain the competitive advantage and add value to the stakeholders (Kumaza, 2018).

Assembling innovative teams could be helpful for generating, selecting and implementing ideas to gain the competitive advantage (Shin et al., 2016). Lavolette et al. (2016) suggested that business owners reward those who developed creative ideas with items such as monetary compensation, paid travel time to visit conferences, and promotion.

Small business owners are major innovation drivers and play a significant role in developing new ideas and methods (Muenjohn & McMurray, 2016). There may be a strong, positive link between innovation and business performance, which link could increase business sustainability (Bortoluzzi et al, 2018). Integrating innovation in business strategies is essential to small business sustainability. The integration process for innovation involves two steps: induction and application (Moldogaziev & Resh, 2016). Through induction, business owners persuade employees to be imaginative and original when brainstorming about processes, products, and services. After reviewing the ideas that employees have put together, the most creative ideas are applied in the business strategy. Efficient, effective leadership and innovation in small businesses assist in attaining sustainable progress and profitability (Muenjohn & McMurray, 2016).

Small business owners explore fresh and untested markets through the use of innovation; however, innovation can be costly at times because of the call for inventiveness (Manso, 2017). Business owners must take under advisement the cost of possible failures and proof that innovation methods work (Manso, 2017). Katila et al. (2017) determined that a reputable source of innovation is customers. Business owners

can solicit feedback from their customers through reviews and surveys to employ new ideas, which are inexpensive.

To compensate for their small size and limited resources compared to large businesses or franchises, small business owners should also use networking to boost innovation (Lefebvre et al., 2014). Social media platforms also increase the origination of innovative products, processes, and services because of the widely-diverse users. Consumers use social media platforms to communicate to businesses about products and services; positive and negative experiences; and technical issues (Valos et al., 2016). Pavlov (2017) asserted that deciding on an innovation strategy is dependent on the goals of the business, availability of time and money, environment, business culture, innovation potential, and position the business leader takes in the market. While small businesses may not compare in size and resources compared to major companies, owners still have options available for less costly, yet effective innovation strategies.

Small business owners should take advantage of disruptive innovation because change is always happening. Disruptive innovation is when new products, services, or technologies interrupt and replace the former (Lofsten, 2016). Competition and constant changes in technology threaten the performance of small businesses and their ability to sustain (Levina, 2017). Nagy et al. (2016) stated that disruptive technology is a process that occurs when new technology is constructed for new markets or thoroughly changes conditions in pre-existing ones. Bohnsack and Pinkse (2017) added that radical changes in business models from established models are driven by disruptive innovation. Disruptive innovation is necessary when current technology becomes dated and newer

technology is better suited to satisfy the needs of consumers or when changes occur in the business environment (Hazlett et al., 2016).

Hahn et al., (2014) found that use of disruptive innovation is not limited to any area and is especially applicable in small businesses. Karimi and Walter (2016) posited that business owners are more successful when disruptive innovation is integrated in the business model. When implementing disruptive innovation, business owners should examine the extent of disruptiveness to determine whether the change is different from previous practices (Helkkula et al., 2017).

Sometimes, the result of success or failure in small businesses is dependent upon the adaptability of the owner to recognize and make changes as the business continues operation (Dominici, 2017). Business owners that take risks and integrate disruptive innovation business models may see improved business performance (Batra et al., 2017). Disruptive innovation is a significant factor of business sustainability that owners should consider (Batra et al., 2017).

Leadership Strategies

One cause for failure with small businesses is the lack of leadership skills (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2018). Small business restaurant owners may have management knowledge but fail to materialize their vision. Leadership and management tenets are similar regarding the requisite engagement and involvement of others to achieve a goal; however, both have specific functions in business (Oltean, 2016). Leaders consider their influence on others and managers examine resources such as employees, data, and other materials that get the day-to-day job done (Vecchiotti, 2018). Small

business restaurant owners may benefit in employing a leader with competent leadership skills to assist in achieving sustainability beyond 5 years.

Behrendt (2017) and Vecchiotti (2018) stated that whether leadership can be defined as a process, attribute, position, or skill depends on the leadership theory. There are differing perspectives and ideas about leadership that includes the belief that postulates leadership as a natural-born characteristic (Miguel, 2017). While there is no clear-cut definition for leadership because experiences vary across a broad spectrum, leadership is vital in the success of small businesses (Vecchiotti, 2018; Longenecker & Insch, 2018). Postma and Zwart suggested that in order for small businesses to flourish in intricate business environments, there is a need for direction. When selecting leadership styles, small business owners should adopt a style that increases their likelihood of sustainability. There are different styles of leadership that when executed properly will add to the business; however, transformational leadership may yield more positive results for small business restaurant owners in their attempt to retain employees and influence them to commit to the business vision (Megheirkouni et al., 2018).

Among the vast of array of types of leaders are transformational leaders. Transformational leaders instill motivation in their followers and earn their trust by attending to their needs (Prasad & Junni, 2016). Prasad and Junni (2016) posited that transformational leadership style is when there is a distinct focus on transforming and inspiring. Transformational leaders are usually respected as role models as they give followers a sense of purpose. The traits of transformational leaders include (a) inspirational motivation, (b) influential, (c) strong consideration for others, and (d)

intellectually stimulating. In business, transformational leadership occurs when leaders influence followers to achieve the business goals through inspirational motivation (Baškarada et al., 2017).

In transformational leadership, the leader and follower equally work together for the success of the business (Diggin et al., 2016). Transformational leaders aim their attention at processes where the leader and follower are inspired to transform while working to meet the shared vision (Pitoyo & Sawitri, 2016). Transformational leadership may be viewed as an extension of transactional leadership, but this is not to say that one is better than the other (Megheirkouni et al., 2018). Transactional leaders center their actions around rewards, incentives, and punishments to get followers to achieve the goal while transformational leaders provide inspiration (Baškarada et al., 2017). In transactional leadership, leaders may not closely engage with their employees, which may cause employees to feel undervalued. Transformational leaders work to identify needed changes in the work process, observe and familiarize themselves with each employee, and share their vision, which may be more effective in inspiring employees to achieve sustainability goals.

Leadership skills are crucial for small business owners or the leader they designate to oversee their business operations (Hockerts, 2017). Dillen et al. (2018) pointed out that business owners with leadership skills increase sustainability because of their strategic focus. One example is how well employees respond to those leadership's direction (Javad et al., 2017). Those in leadership positions directly affect business performance, which may determine the length of business sustainability.

Leadership is more than leading a group; leadership is the art of inspiring and motivating people to achieve the ultimate goal (Solomon et al., 2016). Leaders are crucial decision-makers that use strategies to support business goals. Having leadership skills will help business leaders to effectively communicate business goals and influence employees to work harmoniously to achieve those goals. Small businesses should be headed by leaders that continuously think analytically, examine internal and external relationships, and promote sustainable and profitable business practices (Sarfraz, 2017). If not running the business themselves, small business owners must select leaders that share their vision of the company to increase the likelihood of success.

Small business restaurant owners who demonstrate strategic leadership traits may have qualities that those who are unsuccessful lack. Some of those qualities include being a visionary, prudent, open-minded, and an influencer. Bloom's taxonomy clarifies strategic leadership in a way that is simple to understand (Sarfraz, 2017). Bloom's taxonomy describes strategic leadership as thinking skills with the ability to comprehend fact, ideas, and their links, apply and methods in various ways in current and past situations, analyze and organize information into groups by identifying causes, inferences, and evidence; assess and combine information in different ways by propositioning substitute resolutions; creating a set of criteria certifying the work quality. Successful business owners create innovative business strategies that include encourage business expansion by looking past short-term gains and focusing on sustaining long-term success (Schoemaker et al., 2018).

The successful application of leadership styles and use of leadership skills by small business owners lead to increased sustainability through business performance and competitiveness (Flanigan et al., 2017). A skillful leadership style is imperative to be successful in increasing sustainability in small restaurant businesses. With the right type of leadership, small business owners are able to create beneficial opportunities such as cultivating internal and external relationships, implementing strategic ideas, and gaining access to new markets.

Marketing Strategies

Marketing is essential because the process makes consumers aware of products and services offered from the business. In the case of smaller businesses, marketing is especially vital to inform consumers of the business's existence (Resnick et al., 2016). Small business restaurant owners attract new customers by utilizing marketing strategies such as advertising, outreach, flyers, and viral marketing (Zheng, 2017). When developing a marketing strategy, the ultimate goal of marketing is to turn prospective consumers into recurring customers. Through the creation and execution of a competitive marketing strategy, small business restaurant owners can enhance their sustainability in complex business environments (Gerhardt et al., 2014).

The marketing strategies for small businesses are not similar to those in larger companies (Miles et al., 2016). Small business owners usually have to select marketing methods that are less costly because of limited financial resources. Patriotta and Hirsch (2016) explained that the cost is expensive to survey new markets through trial and error. Word of mouth is a strong, effective marketing tool that business leaders use for no cost

(Dadzie et al., 2017). According to Archer-Brown et al. (2017), word-of-mouth communication takes place 75% of the time face-to-face, 15% of the time on the phone, and 10% of the time online. To develop inexpensive ways to reach consumers, small business restaurant owners may consider doing research on their target customers.

Short-and long-term marketing strategies should align with the financial strategic business plan to attain profitability. Small business leaders should use cross-functional engagement while focusing on inter/intraorganizational partnerships as a part of a marketing strategy system (Whalen et al., 2016). A strategic marketing system includes a needs analysis, innovation, positioning, plan development, implementation, evaluation, and possible adjustments (Janicic & Jankovic, 2014). Strategic marketing is comprised of approaches that help leaders develop and strengthen intended marketing plans. Marketing is a valued contribution to customers and shareholders because of the development of customer-oriented solutions (Rossiter, 2017). Without an appropriately designed marketing strategy, small business owners are less likely to be competitive, which may lead to early failure.

Marketing Mix

Small business restaurant owners must organize a plan to promote and sell their products to be sustainable, competitive, and profitable (Lidstone, 2017). Marketing specialists use marketing mixes to be efficient in creating differentiation strategies to make sales (Rotileanu, 2020). Although the marketing mix continues to evolve and include more Ps, the original marketing mix included 4 Ps: price, promotion, place, and product (Borden, 1964). Small business restaurant owners may choose to include as many

Ps they feel are appropriate in their marketing mix, along with combining other marketing strategies to achieve their sustainability goals. Some business owners in the food industry use non-conventional marketing mixes for remaining sustainable and profitable (Kazibudzki & Trojanowski, 2020). The marketing mix is an aid for small business restaurant owners in advertising/showing products to consumers, communicating and highlighting product elements, and demonstrating how the products will benefit the customer (Al Badi, 2018). By organizing an effective marketing mix and efficient promotion, small business owners can possibly increase their sustainability.

Utilizing the 4Ps marketing mix may not be advantageous for small business restaurant owners in their attempt to maximize sustainability. Bahadir et al. (2015) tested the 4Ps marketing mix in global markets to determine the effect on performance and concluded that the 4Ps marketing mix is not fitting for all types of markets. Gordon et al. (2013) acknowledged that the 4Ps of marketing needed to be enhanced for application in different types of markets. Booms and Bitner (1981) created a service marketing model that accommodates business leaders who offer do not physical products but a service instead. The service marketing model is an expansion of the original 4 Ps marketing mix and includes an additional three Ps: people, physical evidence, and process. The way that small business owners utilize different types of variables in the marketing mix is a contribution to small business sustainability (Al Badi, 2018).

Product. The business product may be the most important business component because the actual product or service is what the customer purchases. Small business owners should continuously strive to improve their products and/or services to remain

competitive (Liu et al., 2020). For example, a restaurant may be primarily known for their pizzas. However, the restaurant owner may elect to expand their product mix and include wings, salads, and alcoholic beverages. By diversifying the product mix, the restaurant owner may increase revenue, reach new customers, and mitigate risks.

Price. Setting a price for the product is essential because that is how customers gain access to purchase the product (Efanny et al., 2016). An attractive product price is a contributing attribute in the food industry. If products are high-priced, the number of sales may be affected negatively. Some pricing strategies that may benefit small business restaurants are peak-load pricing and bundling (Heide, et al., 2008). Peak-load pricing is when business leaders set a higher price during a specified time. An example of bundling price strategizing is when the lamb chops are only available with two side dishes and a glass of wine. If products are priced too low, the perception of the product's quality may be affected negatively. Ultimately, small business restaurant owners should strategically price their products to achieve competitive advantage and to maintain sustainability.

Place. The *place* element in the marketing mix refers to the location of product distribution (Macomber, 2012). The key to achieving success in the *place* element is to focus on answering how customers will find and purchase products. Marketers should strive to understand who their target audience is to effectively choose the most fitting channel for product distribution. If customers have a difficult time when attempting to purchase the product, they may not buy it at all (Van Meir, 2016). One of the most important considerations for small business restaurant owners in the *place* element is choosing a location with adequate seating to avoid unnecessary wait times (He et al.,

2019). Small business restaurant owners may also want to consider the distance between the location and the majority of their target customers. Opening a restaurant in certain areas may attract unintended customers, which could make sustainability difficult (Yang et al., 2017). Small business restaurant owners should be critical in their evaluation of ideal locations and distribution channels to ensure convenient access to products.

Promotion. The *promotion* process occurs when business owners inform consumers about products and/or services that the company offers (Resnick et al., 2016). When small business restaurant owners have a new or signature dish, product promotion is the best way to inform consumers about the product. While the task seems simple, small business owners should first determine the target audience. After determining the audience, business owners should perform research on the best ways for engagement to pursue efficient avenues to promote their business. One way to promote a small business is to brand products. According to Bellin (2016), product branding is a tool that marketing specialists use to attract potential consumers and differentiate products effectively. Consider the *Meat Lover's* pizza from Pizza Hut or *The Meats* pizza from Papa John's. Each of these pizzas has similar ingredients but the business leaders have given them specific names, which is an aid in gaining customer attention. When promoting, each key attribute regarding the product must be clearly emphasized and supported by the brand to maximize the return on investment from marketing. The ultimate goal for the promotion element is to show consumers why they need to buy a product and pay the listing price.

People. The *people* element of the marketing mix pertains to the employees of the business (O'Neill, 2018). Having the right employees is an essential part of business. Small business restaurant owners should strive to obtain employees that interact well with customers. For example, waiters should be polite, quick, and knowledgeable of the menu. Providing excellent customer service is a competitive advantage. Restaurants are part of the hospitality industry and consumers expect employees to be hospitable. The behavior of restaurant employees is a major component in attracting customers.

Processes. The *process* element involves the intangible activities that occur in the business (Kwok et al., 2020). Business owners focus on *how* the activity is being performed. For small business restaurant owners, these activities may include kitchen procedures, handling reservations, dining room procedures, and cleaning. Each of these activities impacts the experiences of potential customers. For instance, having reservations is a benefit to most customers because they have a general idea of when they will be seated. However, if customers are unable to reach an employee to make the reservation or there are technical difficulties with the online process, business owners may lose customers.

Physical Evidence. The *physical evidence* element of the marketing mix represents tangible aspects of the business that potential customers may evaluate (O'Neill, 2018). Some tangible aspects that customers would evaluate in a small business restaurant are the building, dining room, and kitchen. The *physical evidence* of a business is important because the first impressions of potential customers are critical in sustaining

business. Customers are less likely to revisit a restaurant with broken tables, uneven chairs, or inadequate lighting.

Branding Elements. Brand elements and marketing strategies must be carefully selected because of the effect when building brand equity (Krautz, 2017). Strategically developing a well-known brand boosts customer value perception, increases profitability, and enhances the quality level of products and services (Eryigit, 2017). Sahin et al. (2017) postulated that brand strategy is a marketing plan that fosters growth and strategic brand development initiatives. When developing a brand strategy, small business restaurant owners should ensure that their brand aligns with their purpose and that their brand connects with the customer. Brand performance may be improved by understanding the perception of a customer's value and utilizing market activities (Cao et al., 2016). To heighten brand advancement, small business restaurant owners should continuously develop creative concepts.

Krautz (2017) interviewed restaurant leaders to pinpoint marketing strategies for developing brand equity. Brand equity is the value of the brand name that comes from consumers' perception rather than the value of the product or service. Krautz (2017) discovered that customers between the ages of 21-30 years old pay attention to what they see, hear, and smell such as food, restaurant environment, and appearance of staff. Customers between the ages of 31-40 years old place more value on service attitudes because they want to have a pleasant experience. The results of the interview may be beneficial in assisting small business restaurant owners to create, assess, and improve brand equity. More specifically, small business restaurant owners may be able to use the

interview results to develop successful marketing strategies and enhance the customer value of brand equity.

A business' brand name is closely linked to the product/service's quality and profitability (Syed Alwi et al., 2016). Businesses such as Sony and Coca-Cola are well-known brand names that customers generally gravitate towards due to their strong reputation (Whittler & Farris, 2017). Putting viral marketing into place may also encourage brand growth initiatives. Pöyry et al. (2017) suggested that business leaders do viral marketing in a way in which viewers can relate to the marketing strategy. Small business owners should strategically select brand names for their business, products, and services so that customers retain the name and/or relate to the service. Customers are more likely to purchase from businesses when the brand value and equity are first-rate, relatable, and popular (Wu et al., 2019). Therefore, by strategically selecting brand names, small business owner improve sustainability by attracting and retaining customers.

Mobile Technology Marketing

Small business owners should invest in mobile technology for marketing to reach more potential customers and improve profitability. Mobile technology is an aid in providing unique customer experiences and new communication channels for small business restaurant owners (Pantanoa et al., 2017). In general, consumers have individual needs and expect exclusive experiences. Ordering products from online has become a common task but even more so during the COVID-19 pandemic (Browne & Redman, 2020). Customers can access the mobile site at any time and choose from a variety of

products without physically visiting the restaurant. In addition, customers avoid long wait times at the restaurant through mobile technology (Alalwan, 2020). The integration of mobile technology is an opportunity for small business leaders and marketing specialists in growing their customer base and increasing profitability to sustain beyond 5 years.

Mobile marketing is a marketing technique that reaches consumers on their mobile devices through mobile channels. Marketers use mobile channels such as text messaging, social media, and push notifications based on the current location and environment of the customer (Tong et al., 2020). Because of the increasing availability of mobile devices such as cellphones and tablets, marketing specialists should strive to understand how to reach mobile device users. With an understanding of mobile technology, marketing specialists can target customers more effectively opposed to traditional marketing techniques, which can be costly. By implementing mobile marketing, small business owners may enhance the overall business performance and improve business sustainability.

Social Media Marketing

Some business leaders struggle in connecting with customers, which affects business sustainability (Oyza & Agwu, 2016). In those cases, business owners should strive to find other avenues to reach customers such as using social media platforms. According to Bandyopadhyay (2017), social media are website-based communications tools that are designed for users to interact by sharing and consuming information. Although business owners typically use social media to communicate to customers for marketing purposes, the set of website-based communications tools is also useful for

increasing efficiency in business practices (Cole et al., 2017). By using social media platforms, business owners can observe buying behaviors, increase visibility, and build relationships with customers (Jovevski & Vasilevski, 2019). To remain sustainable and increase competitiveness, small business owners should implement effective strategies to include technological and trendy techniques such as social media marketing (Scalco, 2018).

Social media marketing has become a vital key to sustainability for small business owners (Abrons, 2018). Small business owners use widely known social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to interact with customers and remain competitive with larger companies (Basri & Siam, 2017). Due to the high number of social media users, owners are likely to have a greater reach in various geographical areas as opposed to traditional marketing (Bandyopadhyay, 2017). The popularity of a business is a positive contribution to business sustainability (Poddar & Agarwal, 2019). Arora et al., (2019) posited that those who are well-known and use social media heavily have a considerable influence on others. The use of social media is a sustainability strategy for business owners in becoming popular, gaining access to new customers, and engaging with customers more closely (Tripathi & Verma, 2018).

Transition

Section 1 began with a background of the business problem and continued with the purpose of my qualitative, multiple case study. I selected a population for sampling and listed interview questions that supported my central research question. In addition to describing the conceptual framework and significance of my study, I provided a review

of literature for support. In Section 2, I will restate the study's purpose and provided more detailed information about the participants and research design and method. I will also explain my data collection and organization techniques. I will complete Section 3 by presenting my findings with recommendations.

Section 2: The Project

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore strategies used by some small business restaurant owners to grow and maintain profitability to sustain business beyond 5 years. The targeted population consisted of five small business restaurant owners located in the Southeastern region of the United States, who have grown and maintained business profitability to sustain beyond 5 years. The implication for social change is small business restaurant owners could potentially grow and maintain profitability to sustain business beyond 5 years, provide more jobs for the community, and help stimulate the local economy through revenue circulation. In addition, employees' self-worth and self-dignity may increase through improved restaurant sustainability because of new and continuing job and career opportunities.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is to compile and explain the data that is acquired (Ridder, 2017). In this qualitative study, I will be specific, detailed, and concise. In order to be detailed and concise, researchers must be diligent during the data collection process (Kumar & Cavallaro, 2017). As the researcher in seeking sustainable strategies for small business restaurants, I selected the research methodology and design, theory, and potential participants. Afterwards, I conducted interviews to collect, analyze, and evaluate the data. Lastly, I presented the results of the research. As the primary data collection instrument, I strictly adhered to ethical principles and guidelines to cover all subjects during my research study.

In a qualitative case study, researchers have a vital task in collecting data through people who is or have experienced a phenomenon. I followed my interview protocol (see Appendix A) to ensure transparency and fairness for each interview participant. I used member checking to alleviate any bias and increase my research credibility. I adhered to ethical research standards that guard human subjects while conducting my study. Also, I treated every participant involved in this study professionally. Recognizing and impeding any possible bias is the role of the researcher when conducting any type of research (Talbert, 2019). Prior to the study, I had no existing relationships with any of the research participants and no ownership operational experience in the restaurant industry.

According to the Belmont Report on Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research (1979), there should be processes to mitigate any possible ethical issues and protect the privacy of participants during the study. I adhered to ethical research standards that guard human subjects while conducting my study. Also, I treated every participant involved in this study professionally.

The Belmont Report is an outline of ethical principles such as respect, beneficence, and fairness (Houghton et al., 2013). Houghton et al. (2013) stated that these three principles, alongside a signed informed consent form, are essential for evaluation of risks. The role of IRB is to act as an independent ethics committee and make certain that the rights, safety, and well-being of human subjects are protected (Clapp et al., 2017). I followed each principle to ensure the safety and contentment of every participant.

I have been working in customer service for over 20 years. I have experience in working in the fast-food industry. My working experiences may potentially contribute to

small business restaurant owners because I have interacted with several customers concerning their purchase decisions. Business operators faced with high competition and limited operating margins gain competitive advantage through excellent customer service (Bhat & Ahmad, 2018).

I understand there is potential bias that may stem from my personal views and will use member checking to reduce it. Member checking is a technique used in qualitative studies to improve accuracy, validity, and credibility. Because of the pliability and open questions that are asked, semistructured interviews are one the most common types used in qualitative research (Puyvelde, 2018). To mitigate bias, I used the interview protocol (See Appendix A) to ask open-ended questions and allow participants to elaborate on their experiences.

Participants

Researchers should check the eligibility of participants to ensure the sample of participants are representative to the research for validity (Knechel, 2019). Knechel (2019) also pointed out that researchers have the crucial task to select participants that can potentially be instrumental in finding a solution to the problem at hand. The process of recruiting includes actions such as advertising the need for participants, reviewing the pool, and choosing the most qualified individuals (Marks et al., 2017). The participants for this study were five small business restaurant owners located in the southeastern region of the United States, who have grown and maintained profitability to sustain business beyond 5 years.

When selecting participants, the eligibility criteria included small business restaurant owners who sustained their businesses beyond 5 years. I used purposeful sampling and the Google search engine to locate five small restaurant businesses in the southeastern region of the United States. I inquired about the length of time the business has been operational. I contacted and sent an invitation letter to participants that meet the criteria.

Setting a positive tone and establishing rapport with participants is advantageous for researchers because how the interview process begins has a significant impact on the data collected (Hamilton & Finley, 2020). My initial contact to each small business restaurant owner was via telephone, e-mail, or letters that include a brief summary of the study. However, I maintained communication with each prospective participant via telephone to establish a positive working relationship. Communicating to participants in person or via telephone is more personable than other forms of communication (Hershberger & Kavanaugh, 2017). I thoroughly explained the interview process and immediately address any concerns in person and via telephone, which helped participants to feel more comfortable and increase their willingness during the process. When sending information to prospective participants, I included a request for willingness to participate. The information on the consent form included detailed information about the research, possible benefits and risks of study participation, and the requirements of participants (Roulet et al., 2017).

Research Method

Researchers should select the most appropriate method and design that best answers the problem they are exploring (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018). There are three types of research methods: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Strijker et al., 2020). I selected a qualitative research method for my study so that I can conduct semistructured interviews using open-ended questions.

When using a qualitative method, the researcher can find solutions to questions and get an in-depth perspective by posing open-ended questions such as *what*, *why*, and *how* regarding the phenomenon (McTat & Leffler, 2017; Misund, 2017). Researchers conduct an in-depth analysis through observation and exploration by analyzing collected data using a qualitative approach (Almalki, 2016). The goal of qualitative researchers is to collect data from human subjects (Clarke & Veale, 2018). There are several options of data collection methods that include interviews, focus groups, and observations (Aarsand & Aarsand, 2019). Researchers use the quantitative method to test hypotheses (Crane et al., 2017). In order to test a hypothesis, the quantitative researcher must collect numerical data and utilize statistics to analyze the data (Crane et al., 2017). A quantitative research method is not fitting for this study because I will not be testing a hypothesis or reporting statistical data.

In a mixed-methods approach, researchers combine qualitative and quantitative research methods to answer questions. However, a mixed-methods approach is not applicable when seeking answers to questions that are specifically qualitative (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). The qualitative research method is more applicable

for collecting data to explore sustainable strategies for small business restaurant owners located in the southeastern region of the United States.

Research Design

In qualitative research, there are several designs to choose from that includes: (a) narrative research, (b) ethnography, (c) phenomenology, (d) case study (Petty et al., 2012). In a narrative design, researchers develop stories from individuals who experience the same phenomenon (Jones, 2016). In an ethnography design, researchers conduct a study of individuals and collect data via interviews, observations, and the assessment of influences on the culture (Sulkowski & Marjanski, 2018). My intent is not to understand cultural influences. Phenomenological researchers seek to understand the experiences of the subjects (Gaete Celis, 2019). When researchers use the phenomenological design, they are attempting to determine the meaning of the occurrence (VanManen, 2017). Gaete Celis (2019) posited phenomenological researchers focus upon how study subjects feel, based upon their own experiences regarding a phenomenon. Therefore, a phenomenological design is not fit for this study.

The research design that I chose to address my research question for this study is a multiple case study design. A multiple case study design is a research method where researchers examine multiple cases using several data collection methods (Haines, 2017). Using interviews, researchers have the ability to gather in-depth information from each case (Schmidt et al., 2018). McKim (2017) posited that a case study design is advantageous because the data comes from individuals who have experienced and overcome issues; this is the reason I am using a multiple case study. A multiple case

study design will be advantageous as I examine the experiences and views of small business restaurant owners. A multiple case study design is more suitable for this study instead of a single case study design to increase the credibility of my findings through the account of multiple small business restaurant owners.

Population and Sampling

Researchers can use probability sampling and nonprobability sampling to identify potential study subjects (Lucas, 2017). Probability sampling is when a researcher uses random techniques to select samples (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Nonprobability sampling is a method based on the discretion of the researcher where everyone in the population does not have the same opportunity to be selected because the researcher selects those who are more suitable for the study based on their qualities (Rafail, 2018). I used the nonprobability sampling method so that I could increase the reliability for my study. Purposive sampling is a method of nonprobability sampling, in which researchers locate participants with knowledge about the research topic (But & Ap, 2017). I used a purposive sampling method to explore strategies for small business restaurant owners to grow and maintain profitability to sustain business beyond 5 years because the participants will have essential knowledge about the research topic.

Selecting an appropriate population is critical for the reliability and validity of the study (Runfola et al., 2017). For this study, I selected small business restaurant owners who have the appropriate qualifications about the research topic, problem, and purpose. The eligibility criteria for participants are: (a) has a small business restaurant, (b) at least 18 years of age, (c) established in the Southeastern region of the United States, (d) has

less than 50 employees, (e) and have grown and maintained profitability to sustain business beyond 5 years.

Robson and McCartan (2016) suggested that qualitative researchers select a sample size that is in alignment with the research question. According to Park and Park (2016), the sample size is usually small in qualitative studies. The participants in this qualitative, multiple case study were five small restaurant businesses in the Southeastern region of the United States, who have grown and maintained profitability to sustain business beyond 5 years. By interviewing five small business restaurant owners, I was able to collect enough data to obtain detailed descriptions of common themes and patterns among the participants.

If I am unable to collect enough data using five participants, I will conduct additional interviews from additional participants until I reach data saturation. Data saturation occurs when no new information emerges during the data collection process (Hagaman & Wutich, 2017). Data saturation is confirmation of meticulous data collection (Constantinou et al., 2017). I ensured data saturation is achieved when no new information emerges among each participant that I interview.

Ethical Research

To assure ethical research, the protection of each participant is crucial (Roets, 2017). I completed the training for *Protecting Human Subject Research Participants* by the National Institute of Health Training to ensure a low risk for ethical concerns from each participant. I made clear that participation is strictly voluntary and participants can decide to not take part in the interview at any time. Participants who decide not to

participate may contact me via telephone or email to withdraw from the study. I confirmed the voluntary basis of subjects on the informed consent form (see Appendix D). The information in the informed consent form included my contact information and Walden's University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) contact email and phone numbers.

Researchers must be transparent about the research purpose and obtain consent from each participant. Traceable information such as contact information should not be visible on any documents (Hamilton & Stichler, 2015). An informed consent cannot be obtained through influence of any kind and the form should be clear and concise for each participant (Sil & Das, 2017). The purpose of the informed consent is to establish and confirm the participants are knowledgeable of their purpose, the risks and benefits, their rights, and the voluntary basis (Nusbaum et al., 2017). I informed each participant of the subject and key elements of the research study. I also thoroughly explained the purpose of involvement, risks and benefits, participant rights, and voluntary basis to each participant.

The researcher is responsible for keeping all data from participants confidential as permitted by law (Ross et al., 2018). I will keep and protect all data from each participant protected, which I procure from study subjects. To assure privacy and anonymity, I used code names instead of participant names. Instead, I used generic names such as P1, P2, and P3. All data collected from each participant will be password-protected and kept on an external USB flash drive for 5 years, after which time I will delete all electronic

documents and shred any paper documents. By following this process, I will protect the confidentiality of each participant.

Hamilton and Stichler (2015) mentioned that the approval process for data collection may delay the researcher's planned schedule but collecting data before approval is a serious violation. My first goal was to comply with the ethical research guidelines and receive approval from the Institutional Review Board for data collection before working with potential participants. The participants did not receive any payments or incentives for participating in the research study.

Data Collection Instruments

Yin (2017) opined that the primary data collection instrument is the researcher. I was the primary data collection instrument for this qualitative, multiple case study. I collected data from small business restaurant owners operating in the Southeastern region of the United States, who have grown and maintained profitability to sustain business beyond 5 years. To collect data for this research study, I used face-to-face or virtual semistructured interviews and followed the established interview protocol (see Appendix A). The interview protocol consisted of rules and methods for the interview process, which was important for case study interviews (Yin, 2017). When conducting semistructured interviews to study phenomena, Marshall and Rossman (2016) pointed out that researchers ask participants open-ended questions. I asked open-ended questions (see Appendix B) to each participant to retrieve qualitative data from small business restaurant owners who have grown and maintained profitability to sustain business beyond 5 years.

I recorded the interview of each small business restaurant owner using a voice recorder application on my laptop. My second recorder was a voice recorder application on my cellular phone. I tested both devices using the application to verify they work properly before each interview. The audio volume was critical for transcription so I ensured that the quality was acceptable before each interview by completing a test recording.

The most convenient time and location for each interview was confirmed either through email or phone call. I blocked 60 minutes for each interview. The block included time for unforeseen events such as tardiness, lengthy answers, and technical issues. Each interviewee received a confirmation email or call to finalize the date, time, and location of the interview. The data collection process took place at the interview location.

Researchers use member checking to increase study reliability and validity (Varpio et al., 2017). Member checking is appropriate for the data collection in this study because the process involves each participant reviewing their interview transcripts for assurance of accuracy (Madill & Sullivan, 2017). I used member checking to edit any possible misrepresentation of the interview and increase the validity and reliability of the study.

I provided a copy of the interview transcription to each participant when completed who was able to address any errors. I enhanced the reliability of the study through my use of methodological triangulation using the interview data and company documents, such as promotional materials, website information, and sales history.

Data Collection Technique

Participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and the analysis of audio-visual materials are among the most popular of qualitative research methods (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Through semistructured interviews, research participants can express themselves more candidly (Yin, 2017). I conducted semistructured interviews to explore successful sustainable strategies used by small business restaurant owners. The face-to-face or virtual interviews will be conducted face-to-face or virtually include 10 open-ended questions to 5 small business restaurant owners who have successfully managed to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. Following the interview protocol (see Appendix A), I asked each interview question and as necessary, probed for more detailed responses. I proceeded with each interview with transparency and open communication to establish a trustworthy relationship with each participant (Croix et al., 2018). In addition to the interviews, I collected information from each participants' website and gathered other data from public records and company artifacts.

Each small business owner received a copy of their signed consent form for review before the interview began. I audio-recorded each interview in a discreet location where only the participant and myself are present. I allotted 60 minutes for each interview. At the beginning of each interview, I started by asking general questions to get background, education, and specialty information. I observed all interview details such as body language, voice inflections, long pauses, and other nonverbal signals, which is an advantage of face-to-face interviews. By conducting interviews, I was able to ask probing questions and immediately clarify responses to gain a deeper understanding with my

subjects. Another advantage of face-to-face interviews is that interviewers have control over the interview and keep participants focused on the subject (Mu, 2007).

A disadvantage of face-to-face interviews is the travel cost and time to each participant (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2011). The transcription process could be tedious because researchers collect large volumes of data when conducting interviews (Kern, 2016). According to Kern (2016), manual data entry is another disadvantage of interviews because this method can be time-consuming and prolong the data analysis process.

For reliability and validity, I used member checking. At the conclusion of each interview, I transcribed the data that I collected from each participant and provided them with a copy for their review. By using member checking each participant can review the accuracy of the interpretation of their responses (Bradshaw et al., 2017). I am the only individual that will have access to the interview data and will work to make sure that the information remains secure for 5 years. After the 5-year period, I will delete all electronic documents and shred any paper documents.

Data Organization Technique

Researchers label each participant's interview as a data organization technique (Bishop & Kuula-Luumi, 2017). To specify each participant using discretion, I labeled each small business restaurant owner as the following: P1, P2, P3, P4 and P5. Each participant's file included a transcription of the interview, the agreement documents, and all company data collected for the study. I wrote down my observations using a reflective journal immediately after each interview so that I can accurately reflect on each interview

experience. Through reflective journaling, researchers are able to examine and analyze their experiences (Rodriguez, 2017). I transcribed each participant interview and filed each interview under their respective labels to ensure a precise organization of participants' statements and identify common themes. NVivo is a data analysis software program qualitative researchers use to compare interview data and draw resulting themes (Paulus et al., 2017). I used NVivo to input interview results and converted the data into codes for organization before beginning the data analysis process.

Hammad (2016) maintained that password-protected files are not visible when conducting a physical examination. Therefore, the data I collect will be safely stored in my desk on a USB drive that is password-protected. I will be the only individual with access to the data. After 5 years, I will delete all electronic documents and shred any paper documents that I collected from each participant.

Data Analysis

In qualitative, multiple case studies, the data analysis process involves (a) compiling data, (b) organizing and mapping, (c) identifying themes, (d) comparing literature, and (e) drawing conclusions (Yin, 2017). I began the data analysis process by compiling all data from participant interview responses. Interview data should be transcribed verbatim and while the information is fresh (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I transcribed the interview data within 2 days from the interview completion date. Although there are other qualitative data analysis software programs, most qualitative researchers use NVivo for their studies (Woods et al., 2016). I used NVivo to organize and map my data collection.

Researchers must remain unbiased and put aside all pre-judgments in the data analysis process to effectively consider all possible meanings through analysis of statements into themes (Clark & Vealé, 2018). I remained open-minded and ensured to use member checking for all collected data during the analysis process. To code the interview data, notes, and company documents, I used the NVivo 12 qualitative analysis software program. Next, I created reports to improve the quality of the data for the research study. There are four ways data can be triangulated: (a) investigator triangulation, (b) methodological triangulation, (c) data triangulation, (d) theory triangulation (Fusch et al., 2018). Case study researchers use methodological triangulation to interpret and analyze data (Yin, 2018). I used methodological triangulation for the interview data using each company's information sources and company documents, such as promotional materials, website information, and sales history to establish validity during the data analysis process. By combining methodological triangulation and the use of NVivo 12, I identified and classified the data into themes.

I compared the data from each semistructured interview and company documents, including those found on each small business owner's website. From the sources of data, I explored recurring themes for identifying strategies for achieving sustainability in small business restaurants in the Southeastern region of the United States. I classified and coded all themes that I obtained from interview data, notes, and company documents. I maintained the use of the systems theory as the conceptual framework, which grounded this study while correlating key themes with existing literature to develop a conclusion.

At the conclusion of this analysis, I determined if the themes were consistent with previous case studies.

Reliability and Validity

Two similar terms that describe the accuracy and rigor of research are reliability and validity, whereas reliability refers to consistency and validity refers to the value of truth (Olsen et al., 2016; Maher et al., 2018). Including participants with knowledge of the study subject will increase the reliability and validity of the research study (Yin, 2017). Macduff et al., (2016) listed the commonly used criteria to evaluate the precision of qualitative research as dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability.

Reliability

In qualitative research, reliability refers to the dependability of the data in terms of its consistency and trustworthiness (Maher et al., 2018). The quality of a qualitative research study's findings should be dependable, which means that the research findings should be consistent if replicated under similar conditions. In research, dependability is vital when considering the trustworthiness of the findings.

For dependability in this research study, I audio-recorded and took notes during each interview. Next, I transcribed each interview and used the NVivo 12 software to analyze my collected data. To maintain reliability and dependability, the basis of my data analysis came from interview responses, my personal observations, and written notes using the same research and interview protocol (see Appendix A) for each participant. Researchers use member checking as a research assistant tool in retaining the reliability and dependability of studies (Chiumento et al., 2017). I used member checking to ensure

that I transcribe an accurate interpretation of interview responses. Triangulation is another technique to increase reliability (Robin & Eisen, 2017). Turner et al. (2017) opined that triangulation occurs when researchers use multiple sources of data to support the interview data to verify the trustworthiness of the research conclusions. I used methodological triangulation to compare my data sources including interview data and data from company documents and company websites.

Validity

Validity is crucial for confirming the quality of the research study. In research, validity is a combination of the accuracy and truthfulness of collected data, analysis, and study findings (Dennis, 2018). Similar to reliability, researchers use triangulation for interview data to provide validity (Kern, 2016). In addition to triangulation, I provided validity through the use of member checking and data saturation.

Credibility

To evaluate the accuracy of data that is collected, researchers ensure credibility when examining the information (Bradshaw et al., 2017). Through credibility, researchers can ensure that the study's findings are truthful and reasonable (Turner et al., 2017). To ensure credibility that each interview transcription is a true reflection of each participant's response, I used member checking by disseminating the interview transcription to each participant for their personal, thorough review. Subjects will then inform me of any necessary corrections. This member checking process enhanced study validity. In addition, I used methodical triangulation to focus on all data from the interview and company documents to avoid biases.

Confirmability

Nowell et al., (2017) stated that confirmability refers to a process where the research findings can be confirmed by others. In qualitative studies, confirmability involves the objectivity and accuracy of data that is absent of researcher bias (Nowell et al., 2017). The purpose of this study was to provide adequate, unbiased information, which accurately reflects participants' views. I used member checking, follow-up interviews, NVivo data analysis software, and triangulation to enhance confirmability.

Transferability

Transferability is the extent to which the research findings are applicable to other content (Nowell et al., 2017). For transferability, I methodically documented the research study method, design, and geographical limit. I also provided a detailed description of the techniques of data collection to equip readers with the opportunity to transfer the study findings to other settings. Lastly, I provided substantial evidence so that the research findings were applicable to different situations and populations.

Data Saturation

Although achieving data saturation can be tedious, continuously gathering data until there is no new information is vital in research studies (Hagaman & Wutich, 2017). Hennink et al. (2017) stated that data saturation is achieved when no new data are available to duplicate the study. To ensure I achieve data saturation, I continued to interview participants until their responses were repetitive or no new information was available.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 contains the purpose of the study, details the role of the researcher, and a description of the research participants. I outlined the rationale for selecting a qualitative, multiple case study as the most appropriate research method and design. Following is a description of my population and sampling technique and a presentation of the data collection and analysis techniques. At the conclusion of Section 2, I identified how I would ensure reliability and validity of the study.

In Section 3, I will restate the study's purpose and present findings of the study. Section 3 will also include a discussion on how to apply the study's findings in business practices, implications for social change, and recommendations for action. I will end Section 3 by reflecting on my experience throughout the study process and offering a conclusion.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies used by some small business restaurant owners to grow and maintain profitability to sustain business beyond 5 years. The targeted population consisted of five small business restaurant owners located in the Southeastern region of the United States, who have grown and maintained business profitability to sustain beyond 5 years. I used methodological triangulation after collecting data and identifying three emerging themes. The strategies that participants use to grow and maintain business profitability to sustain beyond 5 years aligned with VonBertalanffy's system theory. The recurring themes that I identified among the small business restaurant owners that participated in this study are: (a) providing an excellent and non-substitutable customer service experience, (b) capitalizing on using social media effectively, and (c) accentuating the competitive advantages of the restaurant location.

Presentation of the Findings

The research question used to guide this study was: What strategies do small business restaurant owners use to grow and maintain profitability to sustain business beyond 5 years? I conducted semistructured interviews using the interview protocol (Appendix) with five small business restaurant owners in the southeastern region of the United States. Each participant answered 10 open-ended questions about strategies. After the interviews, I transcribed the audio recordings and provided each transcript to the corresponding participant for member checking. I used NVivo 12 to organize the

collected data and create nodes to identify recurring themes: (a) providing an excellent and non-substitutable customer service experience, (b) capitalizing on using social media effectively, and (c) accentuating the competitive advantages of the restaurant location.

Emerging Theme 1: Providing an Excellent and Non-substitutable Customer Service Experience

According to Zaefarian et al. (2017), customers become loyal and repeat buyers from quality customer service. Each participant spoke thoroughly about providing quality customer service and how by doing so contributes to their sustainability. By providing excellent customer service, small business owners can compete with major businesses because customers enjoy good service (Zaefarian et al., 2017). Small business owners should strive earnestly to build customer service skills.

P1 discussed how during the pandemic that customers were not upset with her because of the supply shortages. P1 stated: “This was confirmation that I’ve been providing the right type of customer service.” P1 was able to maneuver through the challenges of the pandemic more smoothly as a result of her history of providing good customer service.

P2 expressed the critical need for small business owners to continuously provide good customer service. P2 stated: “In my experience, new business owners provide excellent customer service in the beginning but stop much sooner than later.” P2 also stated: “Providing excellent customer service should be a continuous strategy for all small businesses to remain competitive.” P4 mentioned the importance of all employees providing good customer service. He stated: “If I’m the only one upholding my vision

and mission, customers will only want to interact with me. And that would become extremely stressful.” P3 voiced: “I believe that customer service is the differentiation technique that sets me apart from my competitors and some large businesses”. The participants of the study realized the value of customer service and use the service as a competitive strategy.

Building relationships helps small business owners to connect with their customers on a personal level (Iglesias et al., 2020). Most of the participants explained that they immediately recognized the importance of customer service when starting their business. P1 stated: “Providing excellent customer service has always been part of my strategy so that people would trust me and my brand.” P4 mentioned: “It is important to know who my customers are because it’s helped me to develop relationships with them. Knowing my customers gives me the opportunity to know what they want and meet their needs.” All participants mentioned that many of their transactions come from repeat customers of whom they have developed some type of relationship with. Study participants stated that good customer service creates customer loyalty and free marketing from word-of-mouth, which in turn increases profitability.

Support from Existing Literature and Conceptual Framework

According to McQuerry (2019), customer service is more about the entire interaction with customers than being nice. Gleeson (2019) posited that customer service is about meeting the customer’s need and striving for customer satisfaction. The way a business owner treats their customer affects customer trust and loyalty (Iglesias et al., 2020). Customer relations management is useful to cultivate and retain profitable

customers. By providing excellent customer service, business owners set themselves apart from their competition, increase customer retention, and gain other customers through referrals (Brown, 2018).

The result of these findings supports the interrelated components construct of general systems theory (Appignanesi, 2018) because a business is composed of several interrelated elements and any issue with one element affects the entire business. Customer service affects customer retention and customer referrals. Customer service can also affect pricing. Customers tend to be more content with higher prices if there is quality service (Yand & Xia, 2022). Turner and Endres (2017) posited that business owners must consider each business process to achieve long term sustainability. Business owners may experience challenges with some business processes because they do not acknowledge interconnected components in their business system (Cao, 2017). Belinfanti and Stout (2018) advised to view each business component as interconnected instead of focusing on the individuality of one component so that business owners could implement more efficient strategies to promote sustainability.

Emerging Theme 2: Capitalizing on Using Social Media Effectively

Social media is an essential marketing tool for business owners in promoting their brand and increasing visibility (Singh & Zaki, 2017). Through promoting, business owners connect with increase their customer reach and have better opportunities to increase brand recognition and sales (Carnesi, 2020). The goal of promotional marketing is to inform potential customers of products/services, get them to engage with the

business, and create profitability. Without a marketing strategy, owners limit their potential reach. Small business owners can use social media as a marketing tactic to promote their restaurant, increase visibility, and expand their reach.

Franco (2018) stated that businesses that want brand recognition should develop strategies to access customers and research implementation methods. P3 said, "It's not just about reaching customers, you have to make sure you reach the people you're trying to sell to... your target audience." Most of the participants mentioned they use hashtags when making posts about their restaurant to reach potential customers outside of her normal following base. Chen et al. (2022) believe that the use of hashtags (#; i.e., the pound key) have become a fundamental component in social media communication. Social media users add the "#" symbol before relevant keywords that link their post to similar content regarding the same topic (Rauschnabel et al., 2019). By using a least one hashtag, social media users receive increased engagement (Chen et al., 2022).

Business owners can also increase visibility by engaging with their audience on social media (Singh & Zaki, 2017). Four participants emphasized the importance of responding to comments left on their social media pages. P1 said, "I enjoy responding to comments because I like showing customers they matter." P3, P4, and P5 stated they respond to comments to show customers and consumers they are accessible.

So et al. (2017) suggested that visibility of consumption influences customer brand recognition, which contributes positively to word-of-mouth communication. Mohr (2017) opined that word-of-mouth is a type of buzz marketing that business owners should take advantage of. According to the participants, online word-of-mouth is a highly

effective driver of customer recruitment, which increases sustainability and profitability.

P2 stated,

I decided to put a few signs out for customers to see that provided an incentive for them. Each time they leave a review on my Facebook page, they receive 5% off their order. By doing this, I was able to increase my following base, which meant I reach more customers.

P5 encourages his patrons to leave reviews and comments on his Facebook page because he knows that potential customers will read them.

Nguyen et al. (2021) posited that many consumers rely on and are influenced by online reviews. Reviews on social media are testimonials that come from customers informing readers about their experiences. Small business owners should capitalize on reviews left on social media about their restaurant. Online word-of mouth is an effective strategy to attract customers and increase profitability. Business owners increase their competitive advantage when there is a high brand recognition and loyal customers.

Support from Existing Literature and Conceptual Framework

Social media is often used to express opinions and has become a trustworthy tool for reviews because the feedback generally comes from actual customers (Nakano & Kondo, 2018). (Alalwan et al., 2017) stated that business owners have the opportunity to engage with their customers more, be more attentive to their feedback, and create transparency. Promoting through social media has several advantages not limited to gaining new customers, brand recognition, increased revenue, and social impact (Jacobson et al., 2020). This theme supports Jiang and Erdem (2017), who contended that

social media is an aid in driving customer engagement and influencing purchasing behavior.

Word-of-mouth is a useful marketing tool for business owners (Mohr, 2017). Word-of-mouth is a low-cost, effective method for business owners to promote and strengthen their brand because customers are spreading word to others of the business quality (Dadzie et al., 2017). When small business restaurant owners identify their target audience and tailor promotions to their taste, there is a positive effect on word-of-mouth (Markovic et al., 2018). Successful word-of-mouth leads to profitability and sustainability and is a demonstration of the importance of developing customer relationships. This emerging theme supports that online word-of-mouth positively impacts profitability due to the reach of potential customers.

The responses from participants indicated that using social media to increase their visibility is a successful promotion strategy that has helped to increase sustainability and profitability.

This theme supports the opens systems construct of general systems theory. The input includes the development and implementation of marketing strategies. The output includes customer loyalty, referrals, and the opportunity to allocate funds to other business processes. The data from participants and existing literature confirms that the general systems theory was an appropriate framework to examine the marketing strategy that small business restaurant owners use to remain profitable beyond 5 years.

Emerging Theme 3: Accentuating the Competitive Advantages of the Restaurant

Location

The location of a restaurant business is an essential element for its success (Saleem, 2017). Choosing the right location is an aid for business owners in attracting their target audience (Gholami & Trachter, 2021). P1 said, “When I moved here, I didn’t see any coffee shops and thought this would be the perfect place to have one. I felt there was a need.” P1 also noted that she faces challenges with parking periodically for her first store and made sure to include easy accessibility when looking for the location of her second store. P1’s restaurant is located on the outskirts of a major city. I observed that P1’s coffee shop is in a small shopping center where there is high foot traffic.

P2’s restaurant is located near a high-traffic, tourist area. P2 discussed how he wanted to put a soul food restaurant in a location where there was not much competition. P2 stated,

I looked for a spot where I could appeal to locals that didn’t have a soul food restaurant in their area. There are five different apartment complexes near me. Also, I’m located near a major street where tourists visit and we’re 2 minutes from the interstate.

I observed that P3’s restaurant is between two office buildings. P3 noted, “The most important factor to me when choosing a building was making sure that I was close to my customers and the appearance and infrastructure of the building.” P3 also explained that he wanted the building to be a place he could design to match his brand. The building infrastructure was critical because he wanted to avoid excessive utility costs to warm or

cool the building. P5 added that the cost of the building was a major consideration in developing his location strategy.

Support from Existing Literature and Conceptual Framework

According to Gaskill-Elizabeth and Montgomery-Delta (2017), selecting a business location is a long-lasting decision that impacts business performance. Cissé et al. (2020) specified that choosing the right location is essential for maximizing profitability. Gaskill-Elizabeth and Montgomery-Delta also posited that a pre-business location plan is critical for business success regarding revenue and productivity; therefore, the strategy should align with the business' needs and mission.

One of the first steps in choosing a location is to determine the target audience (Gholami & Trachter, 2021). Because the location of a business affects the operating costs and stakeholders, business owners should choose restaurant locations where costs and risks are minimized (Scarlat, 2020). Business owners should also ensure that the location is easily accessible. The location also adds to the business brand. The business goals most important to the restaurant will determine the ideal location. Small business restaurants are more likely to be successful in a competitive location.

Participants of the study regarded the selection of a location as a strategic contribution to their sustainability and profitability. This emerging theme aligns with systems thinking, a construct of general systems theory (VonBertalanffy, 1972) because selecting a location involves a thorough business analysis and critical decision-making skills. Langstrand (2016) noted that systems thinking is an aid when performing analytical evaluations for challenges and developing methods to address those challenges

with consideration of all business components. This emerging theme also correlates to the holism and interrelated components constructs of general systems theory (VonBertalanffy, 1972) in that an action in one area affects the entire system. The choice of a business location affects all business processes not limited to revenue and business costs, which are critical for sustainability and profitability. By using the systems thinking, holism, and interrelated components constructs of general systems theory, business owners can focus on choosing an ideal location and determine possible effects on other business components. Small business restaurant owners should review their business goals and choose a location that best aligns with their objectives and financing.

Applications to Professional Practice

The data collected and analyzed for this study was insightful on how small business restaurant owners in the Southeastern region of the United States have managed to sustain operations beyond 5 years. The findings of this study might be useful for current and future small business restaurant owners in growing and maintaining business profitability beyond 5 years. Three themes emerged from the qualitative analysis: (a) providing an excellent and non-substitutable customer service experience, (b) capitalizing on using social media effectively, and (c) accentuating the competitive advantages of the restaurant location. Small business restaurant owners may apply these findings to improve business processes, sustainability, and profitability.

Customer relationship management (CRM) and relationship marketing are applicable professional practices related to the emergent themes identified in my study. Rahimi and Kozak (2017) define CRM as a business process and conceptual tool to

engage, attract, and retain customers. Relationship marketing is a facet of CRM with an emphasis on cultivating more meaningful customer relationships (Trenggana & Cahyani, 2019). Business owners construct strategies for CRM to personalize products and services for customers, which has proven to be advantageous for increasing profitability and customer retention (Anshari et al., 2019). When restaurant owners build relationships through excellent customer service, they equip themselves with the knowledge of how to satisfy their customers and quickly resolve potential issues.

CRM is also an applicable business practice associated with business location strategies. A business location strategy is highly important for small business restaurant owners to, not only reduce business costs, but increase sustainability. Small business owners should develop location strategies that engage and attract customers, which may include focal points such as building aesthetics and neighborhood reputation (Hasse, 2018). The findings of this study may be an aid for small business restaurant owners in creating a strategic plan prior to starting their business or a corrective action plan to increase sustainability.

Implications for Social Change

Currently, the unemployment rate in the United States is 3.6% and that rate is fluctuating (U.S Department of Labor, 2022). This study may contribute to social change because small business owners are essential drivers in reducing unemployment rates based on Maller and Wapshott's (2017) research. Dahlstrom and Talmage (2018) echoed that small business owners are key supporters of local communities because of the employment opportunities they present and generation of tax revenues. Taxes paid by

small business owners help to pay for community improvements such as schools and public transit. Profitable small business owners can stimulate local economies through the circulation of money spent by consumers, whose spending could enhance the quality of life and dignity of local citizens.

The study findings may also contribute to social change by fostering positive relationships between small business owners and communities. Profitable small business owners usually tend to be more involved in their communities by doing tasks such as donating to charities and sponsoring local events. Because of their efforts in enhancing the community, successful small business owners are considered to be pillars of the community.

Lastly, this study may inspire a positive social change by encouraging innovation and growth within the community. To remain competitive, business owners have to be innovative and unique. When small business owners offer unique products and services, they give the community a more distinct personality and create a more diverse marketplace.

Recommendations for Action

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies used by some small business restaurant owners to grow and maintain profitability to sustain business beyond 5 years. While analyzing the data for this study, I identified three emerging themes: (a) providing an excellent and non-substitutable customer service experience, (b) capitalizing on using social media effectively, and (c) accentuating the competitive advantages of the restaurant location. I have three recommendations that

could help small business restaurant owners to grow and maintain profitability to sustain business beyond 5 years. The three recommendations include: (a) commit to a high level of quality in customer service practices, (b) integrate effective social media tools into their digital marketing efforts, and (c) conduct a detailed building location analysis that aligns with business goals.

I recommend that small business restaurant owners commit to a high level of quality in customer service practices that reinforce their business reputation. Restaurant owners should develop strategies with a strong focus on customer satisfaction to forge relationships and strengthen their brand. Restaurant owners should be more personable with their customers and attentive to customer needs, which will also allow owners to become more proactive than reactive. Through the creation of relationships, small business restaurant owners will have a better understanding of their customers and how to best to serve them. The way a business owner treats their customers contributes largely to the business's active status (Ward, 2019). Most customers will not support a business where they are treated badly (Hyken, 2020). Small business restaurant owners must instill in all employees that they are service providers; therefore, customer attraction and retention is crucial.

My next recommendation for capitalizing on using social media effectively is for small business restaurant owners to integrate effective social media tools into their digital marketing efforts. One way to do so is by incorporating social icons into email templates that drive consumers to social pages. Secondly, restaurant owners should use social media to foster interactions that drive engagement such as empowering customers to

share their experiences and maintaining two-way communication with consumers. Restaurant owners can use social media for advertising, engage with customers, and reach new customers (Singh & Zaki, 2017). Finally, I recommend that restaurant owners tie their brand to current events and holidays that are related to their food dishes. Small business owners limit their reach without an effective marketing strategy that includes promotion (Carnesi, 2020). They should also send emails that are linked to the restaurant's social accounts based on current events to drive engagement via social media.

My last recommendation is that future small business restaurant owners diligently assess their business goals and determine their target audience before selecting a location. When creating a location strategy, owners should also consider building size, operational needs, building cost, competition, accessibility, neighborhood reputation, and the infrastructure of the building. Hasse (2018) opined that choosing pre-existing infrastructures is helpful for reducing business costs because the building has the operational layout and equipment the business owner needs. Choosing an ideal location will improve overall business performance. For restaurant owners who are presently in their location, I recommend making aesthetic changes to the location that best align with the business goals to attract and engage customers.

Recommendations for Further Research

To explore strategies for small business restaurant owners to remain sustainable beyond 5 years, I chose to conduct a qualitative, multiple case study using five participants in the Southeastern region of the United States. I identified three emerging

themes during the data analysis process: (a) providing an excellent and non-substitutable customer service experience, (b) capitalizing on using social media effectively, and (c) accentuating the competitive advantages of the restaurant location. My first recommendation is for future researchers to use a different research method to obtain more specific data on the themes identified. For instance, each participant of the study placed a strong emphasis on the importance of developing a relationship with their customers. Future researchers can use a quantitative research method to explore the correlation between profitability and relationships.

I also recommend further research in a broader region because participant responses may vary based on geographical reference. Choosing a sample from a broader area will increase the generalization of the scope of the study, which increases the study's transferability. Finally, I recommend future researchers interview business owners who have failed to sustain their restaurant beyond five years to identify specific factors that contributed to their closure.

Reflections

While collecting data for this study, I began to develop a deeper understanding of the challenges that small business restaurant owners face. I now understand that providing good customer service is an excellent strategy to retain customers and obtain customer referrals. In addition, I was able to hear from participants, in detail, on their strategic use of social media to expand customer reach for their business. Lastly, I learned the importance of choosing a business location because this element enhances sustainability efforts. All participants in this study were eager to participate in this study

and provide insight on how they have managed to sustain beyond 5 years. Because of this doctoral study, I have acquired new knowledge about small business restaurants that has changed my perception on business practices in general.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore strategies used by some small business restaurant owners to grow and maintain profitability to sustain business beyond 5 years. Small businesses are critical for economic growth. Understanding strategies for achieving sustainability can assist small business restaurant owners in increasing their profitability and help stimulate the local economy through revenue circulation.

To conduct this study, data were collected from five small business restaurant owners, who have sustained their business beyond 5 years, using semistructured interviews. Three central themes emerged from the analysis of this study: (a) providing an excellent and non-substitutable customer service experience, (b) capitalizing on using social media effectively, and (c) accentuating the competitive advantages of the restaurant location. According to the findings of this study, these are the three successful strategies that small business restaurant owners should use to increase sustainability. Although these three themes complement the findings of other investigators, the difference and the research gap fulfilled regards the emphasis on competitive advantage and achieving the perception of non-substitutability in customer's minds.

The results of this study have implications for positive social change by providing sustainable strategies for small business restaurant owners, which includes a reduction in the unemployment rate and positive relationships fostered between restaurant owners and

the community. Using the strategies identified in the study can aid restaurant owners to grow and maintain profitability to sustain beyond 5 years and help stimulate the local economy through revenue circulation.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. Greet and introduce self to the participants as a Walden University DBA doctoral candidate.
2. Explain the research purpose and procedure to participant.
3. Present and review the contents of the consent form with the participant. Emphasize the confidentiality of the participant's information. Address the participant's questions and concerns.
4. Inform the participant that they may stop answering interview questions or leave the study if they are experiencing distress at any time during the interview process.
5. Obtain permission from the participant to audio tape record the interview session.
6. Turn on the audio recorder and begin recording.
7. Introduce the participant with coded identification in place of name for confidentiality; note the date and time.
8. Begin the interview asking the first question and continue through to the last question. Also, take brief notes of pertinent information during the interview process.
9. Probe and ask follow-up questions to clarify vague responses.
10. End the interview. Provide contact information for any concerns the participants might have. Thank the participant for participating in the study. Provide the participant with the address, phone number, and email of the Walden University IRB contact person if there are any questions about the study.

11. Turn off the recording device and end the protocol.
12. Return to the participants later for member checking.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What issue did you determine to be essential in your decision to open your restaurant?
2. Based upon your experience, what traits and skills contributed to your success in sustainability in the restaurant industry beyond 5 years?
3. What was the initial strategy that you selected to open this small business?
4. What adjustments/improvements did you make to your initial strategies for surviving in the restaurant industry?
5. What specific strategies did you implement to create a competitive advantage over the competition?
6. What steps did you take to control the quality of your goods and services?
7. What marketing strategies have you utilized to contribute to the continued success of the business?
8. What critical strategic choices did you make to respond to changes in the small business restaurant industry?
9. How did you focus on overcoming the key barriers that presented challenges to sustainability?
10. What else can you share with me about the strategies, processes, and tools you've used to achieve and sustain your businesses' profitability beyond 5 years?

Appendix C: Letter of Invitation

Dear <Participant>,

My name is Tanisha Thomas-Beard and I am a student at Walden University. I am conducting a study on strategies for small restaurant business sustainability to complete my degree requirements. I would like your assistance by discussing the strategies you used to sustain your business beyond 5 years.

I am requesting to conduct an interview with you that will take about 1 hour. With your consent, I will ask you business-related questions and record your responses via an audiotape. Your personal information will remain confidential and will not be shared with any individuals or organizations. To comply with Walden University's guidelines, any information that you share will remain in a secure location for 5 years. While there is no compensation for study participation, you can help make a difference in increasing business success for small restaurant businesses.

Should you decide to participate in this study, please contact me by phone at [redacted] or email at [redacted].

Thanks for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tanisha Thomas-Beard

Doctoral Business Administration Candidate Walden University