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## Effective Strategies to Sustain Small African American Food Service Businesses Beyond 5 Years

Alvin West  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Alvin West, Jr.

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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## Review Committee

Dr. Cheryl Lentz, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Dina Samora, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Judith Blando, University Reviewer, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost  
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2023

Abstract

Effective Strategies to Sustain Small African American Food Service Businesses

Beyond 5 Years

by

Alvin West, Jr.

MBA, Walden University, 2017

MS, Alabama State University, 2014

MS, Alabama State University, 2010

BS, University of Mobile, 2003

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

January 2023

## Abstract

African American small food service business owners contribute to national and local economies; however, only 45% of them sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. African American small food service business owners are concerned with the lack of effective business strategy implementation, as it is the number one predictor of actual business failure. Grounded in the general systems theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies African American small food service business owners used to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. The participants were seven African American small food service business owners in the southeastern United States who employed effective business strategies necessary for maintaining African American small food service business operations. Data sources included audio-recorded semistructured interview data and business documentation, including business website information and Facebook social media site material. Through thematic analysis, three themes were identified: (a) building a robust business network, (b) strategic pricing, (c) and building strong customer and employee relationships. A key recommendation is for African American small food service business owners to enhance business networks through the membership of an industry-related business association. The implications for positive social change include the potential for African American small food service business owners to create jobs, augment local and national economies, and increase profitability.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this study to my parents, Alvin West, Sr., and Tyra West, and my children, Alvin III and Wynter. In addition, my dear friend Tiffany, my aunts Jennifer Armstrong and Barbara Jean Armstrong-Bunn, and a host of family and friends encouraged me on this journey.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

As of 2018, African Americans owned 7,492 small businesses in the food service industry, compared to 376,826 non-minority-owned small food service businesses in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). In the southeastern region of the United States, African Americans owned 2,209 small food service businesses, compared to 61,934 non-minority-owned small food service businesses (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). More than 50% of all small food service businesses in the United States fail within 5 years (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2018). Of all U.S. small food service businesses, 1.4% are African American-owned (U.S. Small Business Administration [SBA], 2018a). Of all small businesses in the United States, small African American-owned food service businesses have a higher business failure rate, 54.9%, compared to small non-minority-owned food service businesses, with a business failure rate of 45.9% (Pergelova et al., 2022; Stanford Graduate School of Business, 2017). Failing African American small food service businesses weaken the U.S. economy (Stanford Graduate School of Business, 2017).

### **Background of the Problem**

A small business in the United States is an independent company with less than 1,500 employees (SBA, 2018a). Each year, an estimated 630,000 new small businesses launch in the United States (SBA, 2018b). However, more than 50% of new small businesses fail within the first 5 years; approximately 320,000 in the United States failed from 2011 to 2017 (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Although the number of African American small food service business owners has

increased, African American-owned small businesses fail at higher rates than non-minority-owned small businesses (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). African American business owners identify limited knowledge of effective business strategies as a leading factor in this high failure rate (Lextrait, 2022; U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Identifying and analyzing African American small food service business owners who demonstrate effective strategies that sustain their business beyond 5 years might lead to new information to guide existing and aspiring African American small food service business owners to long-term sustainability.

### **Problem and Purpose**

According to the BLS (2018), from 2013 to 2018, more than 58.3% of U.S. small food service businesses failed. In 2018, 7,492 of the 533,176 U.S. small food service businesses were African American-owned (SBA, 2018c). African American-owned U.S. firms have a higher business failure rate, 54%, compared to non-minority-owned firms, with a failure rate of 45% (Pergelova et al., 2022; Stanford Graduate School of Business, 2017). The general business problem is that small African American-owned food service businesses have higher business failure rates than non-minority-owned small food service businesses. The specific business problem is that African American small food service owners lack effective strategies to sustain businesses beyond 5 years.

A qualitative explorative multiple case study was used to explore effective business strategies that African American small food service business owners use to sustain their businesses successfully beyond 5 years. The target population consisted of successful African American small food service business owners from the United States'

southeastern region who demonstrated successful business sustainability beyond 5 years. Establishing business strategies that African American small food service business owners use for long-term sustainability could influence social change through job creation and economic growth.

### **Nature of the Study**

This qualitative multiple case study explored the effective business strategies that African American small food service business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years of operation. The target population consisted of successful African American small food service owners from the southeastern United States who demonstrated business sustainability beyond 5 years. The states that comprise the southeastern United States include Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina.

African Americans own 2.5% of 88,508 small food service businesses in the southeastern United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). As of 2018, African Americans in the southeastern United States launched 2,209 small food service businesses, and non-minorities launched 61,934 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Only 5.4% of African American-owned small food service businesses in the southeastern United States sustained their businesses beyond 5 years, compared to 18.2% of non-minority-owned small food service businesses that sustained their businesses beyond 5 years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). The study results may have implications for positive social change by assisting African American small food service business owners in the southeastern United States to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation, thus

increasing jobs, reducing unemployment, increasing sales revenue, and increasing tax revenue.

### **Research Question**

The research question was the following: What are the effective business strategies African American small food service owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years?

### **Interview Questions**

- Q1: How did you address challenges you faced to sustain your food service business beyond 5 years?
- Q2: What do you believe are the most essential business strategies an African American small food service business owner must use to construct a sustainable business?
- Q3: How did you obtain the knowledge to construct effective strategies to sustain your food service business beyond 5 years?
- Q4: What strategies contributed to your profitability, longevity, and ability to sustain your small food service business beyond 5 years?
- Q5: What resources do you identify as sustaining your small food service business beyond 5 years?
- Q6: What other information, if any, would you like to share regarding sustaining your small food service business?

## Conceptual Framework

For this study, general systems theory functioned as the conceptual framework. Von Bertalanffy introduced general systems theory in 1936 (as cited in Pouvreau, 2014). Von Bertalanffy (1972) defined a system as evaluating small-scale interactions in diverse sectors; consequently, these interactions comprehensively influence all integrant parts. Fundamental postulates of this theory are (a) entities, the variables within the system; (b) the characteristics of the system and its entities; (c) the interconnection between entities in a system; and (d) the subsistence of a system within an environment (Von Bertalanffy, 1972). Daniel et al. (2022) determined that researchers can employ general systems theory to enhance processes by identifying patterns. Researchers employ general systems theory to explore diverse approaches to organizations and culture (Turner & Endres, 2017).

General systems theory applied to this study. General systems theory offered the most applicable construct to explore effective business strategies for African American small food service business owners to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. The construct aligned with exploring the challenges African American small food service business owners encountered sustaining their businesses. The system theory framework is suitable for studying African American small food service business owners' success, considering that small business owners execute diverse, effective business strategies to extend sustainability beyond 5 years (Daniel et al., 2022; Turner & Endres, 2017; Von Bertalanffy, 1972).



## **Operational Definitions**

*Business failure:* Amankwah-Amoah et al. (2018) defined business failure as the closure or cessation of business activity that results in a loss to a business's creditors.

*African American small business owner:* A business owner who self-identifies as African American or Black (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

*Bracketing:* The practice of controlling personal bias and subjectivity (De Carvalho & Dumke de Medeiros, 2022).

*Non-minority small business owner:* A business owner who identifies as non-Asian, Black, Hispanic, or Native American and owns 51% or more of the business's equity, stock, or interest (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

*Small business:* The SBA (2018a) defined a small business as an independent business having fewer than 1,500 employees.

*Sustainability:* Alvarez et al. (2020) defined sustainability as meeting current needs without compromising future needs.

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

Research studies include assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. A researcher cannot prove everything in a study because each study has limits. The researcher must state all assumptions and limits of a study and state the reasons for narrowing the study's focus (Malekpour & Newig, 2020).

### **Assumptions**

Fan (2013) indicated that assumptions are assertions or premises that researchers sanction as factual in a study bereft of evidence. Gao and McDonald (2022) asserted that

researchers recognize conjectured statements when developing theories in a study through assumptions. Researchers must recognize and manage assumptions when developing determinations, generalizations, and implications appropriate for research (Kot & Leszczyński, 2020). The assumptions that formed the basis of the study included that the qualitative process was the most appropriate method to explore the characteristics and collect data relevant to the study, that participant responses were true and accurate descriptions of their effective business strategies with small business sustainability, and that successful African American small food service business owners accurately described long-term business strategies valuable for continual success.

### **Limitations**

O'Neil (2019) indicated that limitations are uncontrollable influences that may affect the results of a study and lead to a study's inadequacies. Gao and McDonald (2022) added that limitations confine the research findings. This study's first limitation included the projected sample size of 15 successful African American small food service business owners in the southeastern United States. This study's sample size may not represent all African American small food service businesses in the United States' southeastern region. An additional conceivable limitation of the research may include oversights regarding participant recollection of events related to the effective business strategy employed to sustain business operations beyond 5 years.

### **Delimitations**

O'Neil (2019) stated that delimitations are guidelines or boundaries executed by the researcher to narrow the study's focus. One delimitation of the study may have been

the number of participants planned for interviews. Bolinger et al. (2020) established that smaller participant groups align with the application of qualitative research. Sample sizes might confine research studies (Gao & McDonald, 2022). The sample size might be an intrinsic delimitation of the study because the sample's reach could restrict the researcher's ability to generalize the study results. The projected sample size consisted of eight successful African American small food service business owners to develop a comprehensive analysis of information that would answer the research question. Consequently, Gao and McDonald confirmed that such strategies might only apply to certain groups of African American small food service business owners.

Another study delimitation might have been the data collection period's suitability with the participant group and the study's case study design. Minowa and Belk (2020) posited that data collection should materialize over extended periods. The scope focused on the effective business strategies African American small food service business owners need to sustain their businesses longer than 5 years.

An additional delimitation of the study might have been the geographical location. This study excluded African American small business owners in locations other than the southeastern United States. The study participants were African American small food service business owners in the southeastern United States.

### **Significance of the Study**

Dearman et al. (2018) determined that small business owners are fundamental to the progression and fitness of the U.S. economy. The SBA (2018b) reported that small business owners account for 43% of the total U.S. private payroll, 64% of the total U.S.

private sector employment, and major job creation and growth drivers. The data may contribute to social change by increasing awareness of the effective strategies that African American small food service business owners use to develop and maintain a sustainable business beyond 5 years. Analyzing and relating this study's findings with existing research and the conceptual framework could lead to new effective business strategies that African American small food service business owners could use to extend business sustainability beyond 5 years.

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

The research literature regarding African American small food service business owner failure includes evidence of African American small food service business owners' success. Boateng and Poku (2019) asserted that employing effective business strategies improves the sustainability of African American small food service businesses. The findings from this qualitative multiple case study extend current literature regarding effective business strategies African American food service owners employ to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years.

Tunes and Reis Monteiro (2017) claimed that establishing effective business strategies, including (a) globalization, (b) identifying and leveraging revenue-generating opportunities, (c) identifying and leveraging market opportunities, (d) determining causal factors of small business failure, (e) recognizing and addressing inferior business performance, (f) maintaining adequate managerial expertise, (g) maintaining a comprehensive understanding of economic divergence, (h) maintaining the ability to generate enough revenue to maintain operations and increase employee satisfaction, and

(i) maintaining business fitness to compete with similar businesses, may improve African American small food service business sustainability beyond 5 years. Business advisors in Small Business Association organizations in the southeastern United States may utilize the data to assist aspiring African American small food service business owners in sustaining their businesses beyond 5 years. Kim (2022) indicated that employing these effective strategies to increase African American small food service business owners' sustainability is a continual focus for researchers. This study's results may include additional effective business strategies that may lead African American small food service business owners to business sustainability beyond 5 years.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The data may contribute to positive social change. Lextrait (2022) suggested that African American small food service business owners aspiring to sustain their business beyond 5 years may develop effective business strategies to extend their sustainability beyond 5 years. Couch et al. (2020) indicated that increased African American small food service business sustainability might increase employment opportunities and promote wealth for the United States' southeastern region. According to Ferleger and Lavallee (2020), many African American small food service business owners fail because they lack effective business strategies to extend their sustainability beyond 5 years.

Jackson et al. (2018) suggested that employment decreases when new African American food service business owners fail. Jackson et al. continued that the impact of local African American small food service business owners' failure extends beyond the business sector and affects local, state, and national economies. Green and Houchins

(2017) suggested that the failure of African American small food service businesses affects stability in families, communities, and local economies. Lextrait (2022) mentioned the relational benefits of improving African American food service businesses' success and longevity, including increased local economic resources, improved amenities for the African American community, business mentor programs, and increased local jobs. Effective business strategies are a primary factor in small business sustainability (Couch et al., 2020). Exploring effective business strategies employed by successful African American small food service business owners may extend the sustainability of new and existing African American small food service business owners beyond 5 years.

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

This literature review includes relevant literature regarding effective business strategies attributed to African American small business owners who successfully sustained their businesses beyond 5 years. Rowley (2012) postulated that researchers utilize a literature review to propel the research process by exploring existing evidence linked to a study's research question, recognizing research gaps, and stipulating the foundation that answers the research question. Through the literature review, I assessed information about effective business strategies that African American small food service business owners employed to successfully sustain their businesses beyond 5 years in the United States' southeastern region. The literature review addresses factors influencing the establishment and progression of African American small food service businesses, African American small food service business owners' development, and the challenges

African American small food service business owners experience in maintaining sustainability.

For the literature review, I consulted 258 journal articles, dissertations, and non-peer-reviewed government or seminal sources. From the aggregate of sources, 245 were peer-reviewed articles, constituting 95% of the sources in this literature review; the remaining 5% of documents were from dissertations and non-peer-reviewed government sources or seminal works. Researchers published 91% of the sources after 2017, while 9% published their works in 2016 or prior years. In total, 258 sources, with 235 (91%) of the sources published between 2017 and 2022, provided references.

Peer-reviewed sources constituted 245 (95%) of the total sources referenced. The literature review addresses specific topics, including (a) a conspectus of small businesses, (b) the history and establishment of small businesses, (c) the characteristics of small business owners, (d) the constraints and challenges that small and African American business owners experience, and (e) the conceptual framework. Other sections address how internal and external influences affect small business owners and African American small food service business owner characteristics and disparities. Scholarly and peer-reviewed journal articles, organizational reports, and dissertations incurred review to answer the research question and elucidate that employing effective business strategies could lead to the success, viability, and sustainability of African American small food service business owners in the southeastern region of the United States.

In the literature review, Von Bertalanffy's (1972) general systems theory and systems thinking may provide insight for researchers to explore African American small

food service business owners' phenomena and the influence of implementing effective business strategies on African American small food service business owners' sustainability. The literature review provides an overview of contrasting theories explaining the conceptual framework's appropriateness guiding the study. The literature review addresses employing effective business strategies for the sustainability of African American small food service business owners beyond 5 years. Secondary sources include dissertations and seminal articles about effective business strategies contributing to the sustainability of African American small food service businesses. Finally, government publications with statistical information about African American small food service businesses' health further augmented this study's information.

A range of journal articles, dissertations, small business literature, and other reference material was obtained from the Walden University Library. The primary databases used to obtain information incorporated minority small enterprises, small businesses, and other business strategy sources. Specific databases included SAGE Publications, ScienceDirect, ProQuest, Emerald Management Journals, EBSCOhost, Management and Organization Studies, government databases, and LexisNexis Academic.

Supplementary database searches included ProQuest Central, ProQuest Dissertation, and Google Scholar. Researching scholarly documents required searching diverse keywords, including *small business*, *minority small businesses*, *African American (Black) small businesses*, *small business owners*, *African American (Black) small business owners*, *minority small business strategy*, *African American (Black) small*



*business strategy, successful minority business strategy, successful African American (Black) business owners, competitive business environments, general systems theory, minority small business in urban areas, African American (Black) small businesses in urban areas, sustainability, business strategy, qualitative analysis of minority small business, and qualitative analysis of African American(Black) small business. This study's key search terms included qualitative research and small business, qualitative research and minority small business, qualitative research, and African American (Black) small business strategy and multiple case studies.*

### **General Systems Theory**

Von Bertalanffy (1972) established general systems theory in the 1930s to explore connections between events and components. Bellman et al. (2021) indicated that researchers employ general systems theory to evaluate interrelationships and divergent parts of a system instead of focusing on single patterns. Daniel et al. (2022) suggested that the general systems theory framework could facilitate researchers' evaluation and identification of a collection of objects that work together to produce an outcome. Von Bertalanffy asserted that researchers and business leaders could employ general systems theory to analyze relationships between phenomena and organizational practices. Pouvreau (2014) maintained that researchers explore systems to understand the systemic interconnections that business owners must identify, diagnose, and control. By understanding general systems theory's primary principles, researchers can understand how systems work in successful African American small food service businesses.

Von Bertalanffy (1972) stated that a principle of general systems theory is open and closed systems. Von Bertalanffy asserted that when systems are open, there is a conversion of vitality, material, individuals, and data. Business leaders could use open systems to garner evidence from their operating environment. Xia et al. (2020) indicated no conversions of components, connections, or synergy between parts in closed systems. Sun et al. (2020) confirmed that business leaders who fully understand closed systems and external components of business success can enhance business operations. African American small food service business owners who employ the effective business strategy of maintaining a comprehensive understanding of open and closed systems may successfully extend their sustainability beyond 5 years.

Von Bertalanffy (1972) indicated that business leaders could improve their understanding of business systems by employing the general systems theory in business operations. Ngondo and Klyueva (2020) conjectured that business leaders could use the theory to comprehend system intricacies and understand external environmental influences. Rapp et al. (2020) continued that environmental inputs and outputs contribute to organizations' crucial functions. Such inputs and outputs generate the necessity for business leaders to establish a protocol for adapting to environmental demands. Daniel et al. (2022) concluded that business leaders employ general systems theory methods to acclimate abilities and proficiencies that result in superior performance through enhanced processes. African American small food service business owners who implement the effective business strategy of integrating general systems theory's diverse components into business operations could successfully extend business sustainability beyond 5 years.

Turner and Endres (2017) indicated that business owners must understand how business essentials and operations collectively improve business longevity. Chen et al. (2018) further contended that small business leaders must function within a range of systems, including (a) marketing, (b) technology, (c) consumer satisfaction, and (d) financial relations when maintaining sustainability. Roundy and Burke-Smalley (2022) confirmed that by integrating general systems theory, business owners could understand how interconnections within systems contribute to long-term business sustainability. African American small food service business owners who implement the effective business strategy of incorporating general systems theory approaches can successfully extend business operations beyond 5 years.

Von Bertalanffy (1972) conjectured that those managers could diagnose business problems in firm operations by integrating general systems theory and systems thinking. Karahan et al. (2022) stated that business leaders could employ systems thinking approaches to evaluate business operations. Justice et al. (2020) maintained that business leaders who implement general systems theory constructs might view their operations through diverse lenses. Justice et al. concluded that business owners could discover solutions to intricate problems comprised of multiple interrelated components by integrating general systems theory's postulates. African American small food service business owners who employ the effective business strategy of implementing general systems theory constructs in business operations could successfully extend their sustainability beyond 5 years.

Van Assche et al. (2019) posited that business leaders who employ the general system theory's tenets might better understand business strategy. Flood (2013) furthered that business leaders who establish effective business strategies constructed on general systems theory concepts have increased potential to attain long-term organizational success. Becker et al. (2022) synopsis that business sustainability predicates a business leader's knowledge to implement the theory methodically to generate favorable outcomes. African American small food service business owners who employ the effective business strategy to implement general systems theory concepts methodically could successfully extend business operations beyond 5 years. The subsequent section includes a description of systems thinking.

### **Systems Thinking**

Turner and Endres (2017) indicated that researchers employ systems thinking to explore system components' connections and dynamics. Brooks et al. (2020) conjectured that those managers regulate actions that affect a part of a system and whether those actions generate an outcome or new outcome in other parts of the system by applying systems thinking. Zhang et al. (2021) continued that managers should implement systems thinking to discover, describe, and forecast organizational discrepancies. By exploring systems thinking, managers can assess how divergent parts of an organization connect and influence other parts (Hochwarter et al., 2020). Systems thinking could be a productive approach that African American small food service business owners apply to their decision-making processes.

Laruelle (2021) indicated that leaders of successful organizations must employ pragmatic decision-making processes. Von Bertalanffy (1972) conjectured that general systems theory depends on (a) interactions with other successful African American small food service business owners, (b) pragmatic decision-making to maintain productivity, (c) business operation consistency, (d) connections with other successful African American small food service business owners, (e) customized business composition, and (f) comprehensive awareness of business performance. Laruelle concluded that the effective business strategy of merging general systems theory and systems thinking characteristics could help African American small food service owners identify specific management aspects essential to extending their business sustainability beyond 5 years.

Small business owners are components of a larger system that collectively performs sustainability (Senge et al., 2010). Bellman et al. (2021) asserted that diverse organizational leaders employ systems thinking to govern business processes that involve the adaptation and integration of operations in diverging environments. Merging characteristics of systems thinking with business initiatives and workplace environments originated from the necessity to explore the aspects that shape the establishment of learning organizations (Bellman et al., 2021)

Sohal et al. (2022) determined that organizational deviation and human agency were the foundation of learning organizations. Senge et al. (2010) indicated that successful small business owners learn organizations following five disciplines, including (a) individual mastery, (b) conceptual models, (c) collaborative learning, (d) shared beliefs, and (e) systems thinking. Caldwell (2012) confirmed that systems thinking

developed from the disclosure of (a) system change reaction, (b) organizational learning, and (c) the necessity to explore practices comprehensively. General systems theory and systems thinking concepts may help evaluate experiences and perceptions relevant to African American small food service business sustainability. African American small food service business owners who implement the effective business strategy to integrate systems thinking in business operations to govern adaptations to diverging environments could successfully extend their sustainability beyond 5 years. The subsequent section describes African American small businesses and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

### **African American Small Businesses and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises**

Masses of researchers have explored African American SME owners. The SBA (2018a) indicated that as of 2017, African Americans maintained 124,004 small employer businesses, an increase from 109,137 in 2012. The SBA further stated that of the 124,004 small African American employer businesses, 7,492 were food service enterprises, increasing from 6,938 in 2012. African American small food service business owners are fundamental to job creation, social cohesion, and economic growth.

Eresia-Eke and Okerue (2020) asserted that economic growth centers on small businesses and SME owners. Solberg et al. (2022) furthered that small businesses and SME owners contribute to economic systems because they pragmatically influence commonwealth GDP employment, valuation, and revenue. Owners of small businesses and SMEs are fundamental for job creation (Belmi et al., 2020). Successful African

American small businesses and SME owners lead to superior national and global economies.

African American small businesses and SME owners drive global economies. Csillag et al. (2019) claimed that employment rates, optimal resource usage, and economic development regulate a nation's wealth progression. Turner and Endres (2017) indicated that successful small businesses and SME owners maintain a comprehensive understanding of global economies. Owners of small businesses and SMEs comprise an outstanding share of businesses in global economies (Quartey et al., 2017). Small business and SME small food service business owners contribute an integral part in the economic composition of mass worldwide economies, particularly in developing countries (Nguyen et al., 2022; Quartey et al., 2017).

Csillag et al. (2019) indicated that small business and SME owners employ a mass of India's citizens and are catalysts of the region's economy. Small businesses and SMEs constitute 39% of manufacturing production and 33% of India's overall exports (Govindan et al., 2020). Ratten (2020) concluded that small businesses and SME owners who lack knowledge of global economies experience business failure. African American small business and SME food service owners who employ an effective business strategy to maintain an understanding of international economies could extend their business sustainability beyond 5 years.

The amount of African American small businesses and SME owners stimulating economic growth continues to increase. African American entrepreneurs launch new businesses for varied reasons. Hurst and Pugsley (2011) indicated that more than 50% of

new small business owners in the United States establish their businesses for latitude, while 41% launch their new business to market a new product, and 34% pursue additional or improved income opportunities. Unemployment is a crucial catalyst for new business formation. Madhusoodanan et al. (2022) recognized that unemployment is a factor that stimulates African Americans to launch new businesses. Mathias et al. (2020) contended that recognizing opportunities that more massive organizations disregard drives African American entrepreneurs to launch small businesses. Job development correlates to African American small business creation in certain instances. Zuofa et al. (2022) maintained that a connection exists between communal well-being and successful African American small business owners. African American small business and SME owners must maintain cognizance of employment opportunities that extend business sustainability (Avdullahi & Ademi, 2020). African American small food service business owners who implement the effective business strategy to possess the knowledge to identify and leverage opportunities that generate revenue and increase employment could increase their business sustainability beyond 5 years.

Mallet and Wapshott (2017) indicated that African American small business and SME owners incline to employ additional individuals when unemployment rates increase. Reuben and Queen (2015) posited that African American small business and SME owners use wage employees in under-resourced demographics. Contrasting a mass of larger businesses, Yallapragada and Bhuiyan (2011) contended that African American small business and SME owners incline to employ local, elderly, and disadvantaged individuals. Stoffers et al. (2020) concluded that small business and SME owners who



fail to leverage market opportunities that larger businesses discount could experience business collapse. African American small food service business owners who use the effective business strategy to identify and leverage market opportunities could use an effective business strategy to stimulate economic growth that creates jobs, reduces unemployment rates, and extends business sustainability beyond 5 years.

Dung and Giang (2022) mentioned that a necessary component of maintaining small business and SME owner survival is determining and evaluating why business owners fail. This study's research focuses on African American small food service business owner failure in the United States' southeastern region because of its prominent industrialized status (SBA, 2018d). Shertzer (2018) African American small businesses and SME owners in the southeastern United States experience high failure rates (Shertzer, 2018). In the United States, an assessed 2 of 3 small business withdrawals resulted from business owners closing their organizations (SBA, 2018c). African American small food service business owners who implement the effective business strategy of identifying and controlling business failure's causal factors could improve business sustainability beyond 5 years.

Small business and SME owner proficiency correlate to business owner knowledge for making decisions that ensure business sustainability (Munir et al., 2020). Faramondi et al. (2023) maintained that speculative sources, such as distrust, could cause deficient African American small business and SME owner performance resulting in business failure. African American small food service business owners who employ the effective business strategy to recognize and address inferior business performance could

extend business sustainability beyond 5 years. The following section discusses factors related to African American small business challenges.

### **African American Small Business Challenges**

African American small business owners experience diverse business challenges. Thrassou et al. (2020) conjectured that a potential contention of African American small businesses includes inadequate managerial knowledge. African American owners who fail to maintain adequate organizational expertise increase business failure. Small firm owner success hinges on managerial intellect and knowledge (Martínez-Tur et al., 2020). Bunner et al. (2020) suggested that successful African American managers address purchasing, financing, and decreasing demand challenges. African American small food service business owners who employ the effective business strategy to maintain adequate managerial knowledge could improve business sustainability beyond 5 years.

An additional impediment to African American small food service business owners' success exists in their competition with larger retailers. Armstrong (2012) indicated that some African American small business owners fail, consequently exposing organizations that disproportionately compete with smaller businesses. Armstrong continued those owners of larger businesses maintain superior access to funding, which regulates competitive pricing. African American business success depends on the business owner's ability to perform in declining economies (Mennens et al., 2022). Juma and Sequeira (2017) added that region, industry, and domestic economic conditions influence African American small business owner survival. Govindan et al. (2020) determined that African American small business owners who employ the effective

business strategy to identify factors affecting financial performance and exploit emerging market opportunities could extend their business sustainability beyond 5 years.

Wankhede and Vinodh (2022) stated that small business owners play a vital role in sustainable societies by leveraging emerging marketplace opportunities. Some African American small business owners adopt survival approaches that ensure profitability while failing to recognize the connection between time investment and sustainability. Some characteristics that stimulate African American small business owners include adequate revenue streams, preservation of ownership, and employment satisfaction (Gimenez-Fernandez et al., 2020; Stephens & Miller, 2022). Rao et al. (2019) indicated that extending small business longevity depends on implementing an effective business strategy of maintaining business owners' knowledge to generate enough revenue to maintain operations, increase employee satisfaction, and extend business longevity. African American small food service business owners who employ the effective business strategy of maintaining sufficient ownership expertise and adequate knowledge in generating revenue face an increasing likelihood of extending their business sustainability beyond 5 years.

Some African American small food service business owners lack the business fitness to compete with similar businesses (Rao et al., 2019). Thomason et al. (2013) indicated that preserving a competitive advantage is challenging when small business owners lack finances. According to Pertuz and Miranda (2022), larger vendors' continual competition constricts small businesses' growth potential. African American small food service business owners who employ the effective business strategy of maintaining

business fitness to compete with similar businesses could successfully extend their business sustainability beyond 5 years.

Upson and Green (2020) indicated that economies of scale and scope are vital aspects that dictate whether small business owners efficaciously compete with big-box vendors. Vozzella and Gabbi (2020) asserted that African American small business owners who maintain finite access to suppliers and smaller customer bases are more likely to encounter business disruptions when compared to larger organizations. African American small food service business owners who implement an effective business strategy to ensure business competitiveness may extend business longevity (Byun et al., 2020). African American small food service business owners who employ the effective business strategy to possess the knowledge to address competition with similar businesses and stimulate economic growth could successfully extend their business's sustainability beyond 5 years (Byun et al., 2020).

Maroufkhani et al. (2020) stated that African American small business owners propel economic development. Higuchi et al. (2019) maintained that small business owners must govern and preserve their businesses' trajectory. Successful African American small food service proprietors must assess the risks and challenges they encounter. African American small business owners are essential to a long-term productive economy (Soegoto et al., 2022). Moo and Eyiah (2020) concluded that successful African American small and medium enterprise owners reinforce economies and contribute to economic development. African American small food service business owners who employ the effective business strategy to identify economic weaknesses and

understand the influence of problem economics on business and job development could stimulate economic growth and extend sustainability beyond 5 years. The following section discusses the characteristics of African American small food service business owners.

### **African American Small Food Service Business Owner Characteristics**

Successful African American small food service owners possess groundbreaking ideas, present them to markets, and maintain economic accountability for modern business enterprises. Turner and Endres (2017) termed entrepreneurship and small business ownership as a barter and exchange process. Vaid and Honig (2020) described entrepreneurs and small business owners as introspective individualists who take risks that impel revenue or cost. Examples of notable small business ventures that developed into immense corporations and engendered international profits include Amazon, Apple, Google, and Mattel. Ertel (2019) confirmed that regarding the local community, sustainable African American small business owners maintain attributes that enhance economic development, including (a) generating jobs, (b) stimulating communities, (c) establishing civic synergy, (d) presenting innovative resources and agencies, and (e) expanding U.S. local and federal tax revenues. Small African American food service business owners who employ the effective business strategy of maintaining a comprehensive awareness of factors that regulate economic expansion may experience business sustainability beyond 5 years.

African American small food service business owners reinforce the U.S. economy by generating jobs. Limited material exists that defines characteristics successful African

American small food service business owners maintain for long-term sustainability. Cohen et al. (2019) contended that successful African American small food service business proprietors possess a tenacious internal locus of control and a passion for success. To progress and maintain sustainability, African American small food service business owners hinge on proprietor attributes, including (a) superior negotiating knowledge, (b) ingenuity, (c) grit, and (d) discipline (Games & Rendi, 2019). African American small food service business proprietors who lack college degrees maintain deficient business performance knowledge, consequently increasing business failure rates (Gyimah et al., 2020). African American small food service business owners who implement the effective business strategy of amassing college degrees to improve business performance could successfully extend their business sustainability beyond 5 years.

Agostino et al. (2020) conducted a study exploring primary employee-centered human capital in small businesses and evaluated the relation between employee proficiency and education and their influence on business efficiency. Agostino et al. asserted that increased human capital levels contributed to efficiency in African American small food service businesses. Agostino et al. added that education influenced task-specific proficiency but did not influence business-specific ability. African American small food service business owners who implement the effective business strategy of compounding education and task-specific knowledge could achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years.

Agostino et al. (2020) continued that business-specific human capital derived from extensive organizational experience enhanced efficiency. Small business owners experience little or no advantages in employing highly educated personnel such as accountants and financial advisers. Small business proprietors considering human capital must deduce the relationship between business-specific human capital, task-specific human capital, and education (Greer et al., 2017). Greer et al. (2017) continued a positive correlation between human capital and small business owner success. Ramírez et al. (2021) characterized human capital as education, experience, expertise, proficiency, and knowledge necessary when business proprietors launch new business ventures. African American small business owners who implement the effective business strategy to maintain superior human capital expertise could increase their decision-making knowledge and extend business sustainability beyond 5 years.

Individuals aspiring to launch a business should attain management knowledge and experience before establishing an enterprise (Cao, 2020). Byrd (2010) assessed the leadership approaches of effective and ineffective small business owners who lead their businesses. Byrd mutually analyzed variances between proficient and deficient small business owners' leadership styles in quantitative analysis. Byrd relied on the Byrd Personal Leadership Inventory (BPLI) to measure leadership approaches. The six personal leadership approaches measured by the BPLI involved (a) managing judgment, (b) managing sentiment, (c) managing physical awareness, (d) cultivating repose, (e) engaging complexity, and (f) aligning focus. Byrd discussed that successful business owners in the sample frequently applied the six practices in contrast to ineffective

business owners. African American small food service business owners who employ the effective business strategy of effective personal leadership approaches may establish an improved goal alignment resulting in extended sustainability beyond 5 years.

Al-Awlaqi et al. (2021) indicated that transformational leaders emphasize employee beliefs and objectives. Al-Awlaqi et al. continued that passion for business success is transmittable when small business owners exhibit analogous conduct to employees. Cake et al. (2020) furthered that goal alignment is a fundamental transformational leadership component. Cake et al. furthered that those leaders who apply goal alignment strategies might achieve superior business performance that enhances employee trust and promotes organizational cohesion. Small business owners' ability to align goals is an essential component contributing to small business survival (Kamal et al., 2022). African American small food service business owners that employ the effective business strategy of utilizing transformational leadership practices may extend their business performance beyond 5 years.

Visser et al. (2016) indicated that small business owners maintain entrepreneurial and management expertise in certain instances. Visser et al. continued that entrepreneurial knowledge hinges on establishing, generating, and leveraging opportunities. Visser et al. furthered that entrepreneurial management proficiency includes management knowledge and consolidating personnel and resources. Al-Awlaqi et al. (2021) determined that the five characteristics that successful small business leaders and entrepreneurs exhibit are (a) motivation, (b) education, (c) performance-enhancing expertise, (d) opportunity-enhancing skill, and (e) composure. African American small



food service business owners who implement effective business strategies to maintain superior leadership characteristics could extend business sustainability beyond 5 years.

Agnihotri and Bhattacharya (2022) discovered that small business owners who fervently engage in social networking generate interpersonal relationships that could increase business sustainability. Small business owners who integrate networking opportunities into their business practices experience superior sustainability, profits, innovation, and efficiency (Kundurpi et al., 2021). Kaporcic (2020) discovered that networking results in knowledge exchanges. Experienced small business proprietors enhance their business's activity for long-term performance. Lextrait (2022) concluded that many small business owners lack experience, a solid success record, and access to funds, which renders networking essential. African American small food service business owners that employ the effective business strategy to leverage networking opportunities may experience sustainability beyond 5 years.

Networks establishing permanent associations and diversity lessened ambiguity, improved general knowledge of small business owners, reduced market ambiguity, and contributed intelligence involving available capital sources (Lawrence et al., 2020). Stone (2019) asserted that diversity encompasses diverse genders, generations, stations, and industries. Small business owners experience advantages from networking that include (a) opportunity expansion, (b) technology and organizational progression, and (c) intelligence exchange (Williams et al., 2021). Williams et al. (2021) continued that small business owner who engages in networking opportunities stimulate awareness. Diverse support systems are essential to small business proprietors launching and maintaining

their businesses (Aguinaga et al., 2019). Aguinaga et al. (2019) concluded that ranges of small business owners with adequate support systems experience long-term success.

African American small food service business owners that employ the effective business strategy of developing diverse support systems may extend business performance beyond 5 years.

Wada (2019) indicated that a mass of minority small business proprietors starts new business initiatives when they encounter barriers in the conventional employment environment. Small business proprietors commonly discover opportunities through individual experiences. Martinez and Aldrich (2011) stated that 50% of U.S. small business owners confirmed that they initiated their business leveraging connections from network communications, ingenuity, peripheral adaptations, or innovation from existing enterprises. Small business owners who depend exclusively on liaisons could experience business failure. African American small food service business owners who effectively leverage diverse networks could present information to extend business sustainability beyond 5 years.

Shafi (2021) noted that teams are essential when business owners expand their businesses. Martinez and Aldrich (2011) conducted a randomly sampled study about small business owners launching businesses between 1998 and 2000. Martinez and Aldrich asserted that the study results indicated that 50% of participants received assistance when starting their businesses. The results indicated that many small business owners who launch technology-centered businesses obtained former workmates with the necessary experience to develop their new businesses (Martinez & Aldrich, 2011).

Establishing relationships with contractors, consumers, and residuals when exchanging products and resources offers small business owners the opportunity to share information that could decrease costs (Adomako et al., 2022; Jafari-Sadeghi et al., 2023). Martin-Rios et al. (2022) contended that a mass of small business owners could not construct a productive team to advance their business, resulting in a need for more educated employees. African American small business owners who implement the effective business strategy of establishing diverse relationships necessary to exchange information and develop their business could successfully extend business sustainability beyond 5 years.

Shahzad et al. (2022) assessed factors influencing minority small business sustainability to forecast the likelihood of new business viability and failure. Shahzad et al. determined that the Lussier model projected the viability and failure of minority small business owners. Gyimah et al. (2020) contended that the Lussier model fails to consider diverse commonwealth social and economic conditions. Gyimah et al. concluded that increasing the likelihood of experiencing small business owner viability includes (a) establishing adequate capital, (b) maintaining comprehensive financial documents and archives, (c) attaining industry and management knowledge, (d) integrating specific viability applications, (e) employing empiric intelligence, (f) attaining advanced education levels, (g) employing adequate personnel, (h) maintaining superior product stage and economic control, and (i) maintaining business strategy expertise. Considering that the research represents a minority population, Boateng and Poku (2019) suggested that the findings could offer African American small food service business owners'

insight into extending long-term sustainability beyond 5 years. The topic discussed in the subsequent section includes characteristics of small African American businesses.

### **African American Small Businesses**

Gutiérrez-Romero (2021) indicated that African Americans are key economic development agents in the United States. Gutiérrez-Romero continued that African American small business owners promote economic expansion in disadvantaged populations. Ullah et al. (2016) indicated that masses of African Americans attempt business ownership for economic latitude. African Americans are likely to launch a small business but unlikely to achieve their non-minority counterparts' success (Fullerton et al., 2019). Fullerton et al. furthered that African American business owners' primary challenges include inadequate business education, credit complications, and deficient management expertise. Additionally, after controlling for creditworthiness differences, Gutiérrez-Romero (2021) suggested that African American small business owners are twice more likely to experience a credit denial than their non-minority counterparts. African American small food service business owners that employ the effective business strategy of controlling potential biases and challenges may extend business sustainability beyond 5 years.

Rana (2020) conjectured that minority business owners account for 18% of U.S. businesses' aggregate. African American business owners account for 5.6% of all minority business owners in the United States (SBA, 2018b). African American business owners must recognize central factors that could result in long-term business sustainability (Mangum, 2020). Mangum indicated the factors that could enhance African

American-owned businesses are (a) an increase in African American population, (b) business acquirement from former owners, (c) an increase in migrant flow in the United States, and (d) expansion of the African American labor force. African American small food service business owners that implement the effective business strategy of leveraging business-enhancement factors could extend business sustainability beyond 5 years.

Rana (2020) stated that African Americans experience higher failure rates when assessed to their non-minority counterparts. Rana continued that controlling causal agents of African American small business owners' failure is necessary for long-term sustainability. Pergelova et al. (2022) conducted a study analyzing why African American small business owners elected to launch their business in African American localities and evaluated their sustainability compared to those servicing non-minority localities. The researchers indicated that African American business failure and profit deficits correlate to business locality (Pergelova et al., 2022). Pergelova et al. determined that African American small business owners that launch their business in debilitated localities sections experience increased failure rates. African American small food service business owners who employ the effective business strategy to identify viable business localities may extend business sustainability beyond 5 years. The topic discussed in the subsequent section includes barriers to African American-owned small businesses.

### **Barriers to African American-Owned Small Businesses**

African American small business owners encounter diverse barriers that could influence their potential to experience long-term viability. Arifeen and Syed (2020)

indicated that barriers associated with African American small business sustainability, particularly those less than 5 years, could reduce African American small business owner success. Small (2020) furthered that African American small business owners encounter internal and external barriers. External barriers to African American small business owners include (a) restricted financial assistance, (b) finite government provision, (c) inadequate management expertise, and (d) limited tax knowledge (Licsandru & Cui, 2019). Small (2020) asserted that African American small businesses' internal barriers include discrimination, marginal business prominence, and limited business education. A more comprehensive exploration excluding ethnological factors is requisite to assess explicit barriers that influence African American small businesses' viability or decline (Parks et al., 2012). African American small food service business owners who employ the effective business strategy to control internal and external barriers that influence business viability may extend business sustainability beyond 5 years.

Parks et al. (2012) analyzed 128 small business owners' survey responses assessing divergences, excluding ethnicity that could influence African American business viability among small business owners. Parks et al. (2012) indicated that sixty-two percent of the 128 small business owners amassed from the food service industry. Parks et al. concluded that the survey results delineated that implementing an effective business strategy contributed to divergences in business performance among African Americans. An effective business strategy is imperative for business performance (Reuben & Queen, 2015). African American business owners who cognize the necessity

of developing and employing effective business strategies could sustain their businesses successfully beyond 5 years.

Webster and Brown (2019) indicated that African American small business owners frequently maintain restrained alternatives for profit because they lack appropriate education and economic competence to construct effective business strategies. Arifeen and Syed (2020) suggested that marginal data exists regarding African American small business owner employment of effective business strategies, establishing the necessity of further research. African American small food service business owners with the education and expertise to construct and implement effective business strategies could extend sustainability beyond 5 years.

Odlin and Benson-Rea (2017) denoted that those small business owners who fail to develop relationships and exploit networking opportunities with successful small business owners experience business failure. Cao (2020) added that small business owners who maintain good network relationships with successful small business owners experience business success. African American small food service business owners who implement the effective business strategy of developing relationships and leveraging network opportunities with successful small food service business owners could successfully extend their business beyond 5 years. The topic discussed in the subsequent section includes African American and non-minority small business owner disparities.

### **African American and Nonminority Small Business Owner Disparities**

Mangum (2020) indicated that African American small business owners experience disparities in specific business areas compared to non-minority small business

owners. Green and Houchins (2017) continued that those disparities influence African American small business owners' viability. Business performance is a significant African American small business owner disparity (Mangum, 2020). The SBA (2018b) indicated that revenue and employment are decisive components in assessing African American small business performance. Pergelova et al. (2022) indicated that African American small business owners account for fewer revenues and employees when assessed to non-minority small business owners. Disparities exist among African American small business owners' sales and employment (SBA, 2018b). Mangum (2020) determined that the success of African American small business owners depends on sales and employees. Wu and Liao (2021) maintained that sales and employment disparities persist, although African American business owners increased markets. From 2007 to 2012, African American business owners augmented employment and increased sales; however, sales disparities persist, confirming a necessity for additional exploration (SBA, 2018c). African American small food service business owners who employ the effective business strategy of identifying and controlling disparities could maintain sustainability beyond 5 years.

African American small business owners fail at disproportional rates compared to non-minority business owners, despite the number of small businesses maintained by African Americans increasing yearly (Toussaint-Comeau et al., 2020). African American small business owners have an increased probability of failure; however, they continue to increase employment rates (Toussaint-Comeau et al., 2020). Mangum (2020) contended that a limited representation of African American small business owners in the literature



exists compared to other ethnicities. In addition to African Americans owning fewer businesses than non-minorities, they own fewer businesses than other minority small business owners despite representing the largest minority group in the United States (Fullerton et al., 2019).

Parasuraman et al. (2021) evaluated African American business proprietors' involvement in major industries to measure profit-generating implications and recruit talent. Parasuraman et al. furthered that African American small business owners' social and economic contribution to African Americans increased; however, inadequate access to capital for African American small business owners persists. African American small business owners encounter more rigid business impediments than non-minority small business owners (Parasuraman et al., 2021). Mangum (2020) also noted that affluence gaps in specific industries impede African American small business opportunities. African Americans who implement the effective business strategy to diagnose causal agents of existing disparities and formulate prescriptions to control them could extend business sustainability beyond 5 years.

### **Transition**

African American small business owners maintain and stimulate the U.S. economy. Gaps exist in the literature concerning effective business strategies that determine African American business sustainability. Pertuz and Miranda (2022) asserted that African American business owners' external and internal influences and environment govern their knowledge to construct effective business strategies that extend sustainability. African American small food service business owners must execute

effective business strategies (Tawse & Tabesh, 2021). Reimann et al. (2022) indicated that for African American small business owners to evaluate competitive environments to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years, employing an effective business strategy is fundamental. Literature regarding African American business ownership, effective business strategy, and African American food service business owner employment of an effective strategy to sustain their business beyond 5 years exists. Wankhede and Vinodh (2022) determined that a relationship exists between successful small business owners, management knowledge, and business strategy proficiency. Augmenting existing information regarding African American small food service business owners' employment of effective business strategies could stimulate African American small business owners to forecast progression, maintenance, and sustainability beyond 5 years.

In Section 1, the review aligns with the background of the problem statement, the purpose statement, the study's nature, and the conceptual framework. Section 1 contained information regarding the research question, operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, and study delimitations. This section also included the identification of the interview questions. The review of the literature included exploring the effective strategies African American small food service business owners used to extend sustainability beyond 5 years. Section 2 explains the researcher's role and offers intricacies regarding methodologies, design, analyses, and collection techniques that drove the study, including further study completion strategies. Section 3 details the study findings and their contribution to professional application.

## Section 2: The Project

Garrido-Prada et al. (2021) asserted that SME owners generate jobs and stimulate the economy. Small business owners account for 99% of aggregate proprietors, 50% of the independent workforce, and more than 50% of the aggregate private gross domestic product (GDP) in the United States (Ertel, 2019). Few small business owners exceed 5 years of business sustainability. Effective business strategies could further African American small food service business owners' ability to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. This section includes the purpose of the study, my role as the researcher, the participants, the research method and design, the population and sampling process, the ethical procedures, the instruments and techniques for data collection, the data organization technique, and the method of data analysis, including the process to establish study validity and reliability.

### **Purpose Statement**

This qualitative, explorative multiple case study aimed to explore effective business strategies that African American small food service business owners use to sustain their businesses successfully beyond 5 years. The target population consisted of successful African American food service business owners from the United States' southeastern region who employ effective business strategies to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. Identifying effective business strategies that African American small food service business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years could influence social change through job creation and economic stimulus.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Prasad (2019) explained that the researcher is a qualitative study's central data collection instrument. To establish outcome accuracy, a researcher must control bias throughout data collection and analysis (Li & Cornelis, 2021). Pérez-Samaniego et al. (2019) asserted that the researcher's objective is to construct a plausible and definitive interpretation of the explored phenomena. Achieving the research objective includes constructing a credible and substantial interpretation of the research findings. Russell-Bennett et al. (2020) indicated that qualitative researchers must identify and isolate bias, manage personal perception influence throughout participant interactions, and interpret implications. The research topic of African American small food service business sustainability beyond 5 years compelled my interest because the potential information presented from conducting the research could improve social change. No prior relationship existed to the study topic or participants, excluding residing in the general geographic region where study participants conducted business. Study findings could present critical information to prospective African American small food service owners desiring to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years.

Russell-Bennett et al. (2020) asserted that a researcher's role is to analyze and apply the information presented in the literature to progress the research method and design, select participants, collect data, explore phenomena, present findings, and formulate conclusions derived from a mass of data sources. A method of data collection included employing semistructured interviews. Meyer et al. (2023) posited that researchers must prepare, organize, listen reflectively, and establish interview

authenticity through audio-recording while conducting qualitative interviews. In addition to interview data, participant websites and social media platforms underwent evaluation.

Authors at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services outlined ethical conduct and integrity considerations to protect human participants in *The Belmont Report* (1979). The Belmont Report indicates that researchers must manage participants respectfully, control participant risk, and establish integrity by objectively employing consent forms and managing processes (Adashi et al., 2018; Friesen et al., 2017). As indicated in *The Belmont Report*, practicing the principles of ethical conduct and integrity includes securing research participant objectives and establishing research participant function.

Richard et al. (2021) indicated that qualitative researchers must acquire participant information and anticipate and prepare for unexpected conditions. Meyer et al. (2023) mentioned three interview approaches accessible to researchers. The structure of the interview determines the role of a researcher. Meyer et al. asserted that the first interview approach included structured interviewing. González Rey (2020) stated that when researchers employ the structured interview method of data collection, participants respond to identical questions in uniform progression. González Rey confirmed that researchers employ structured interviews to standardize information and analyze inconsistent data.

Richard et al. (2021) asserted that the second interview approach is semistructured. Blair et al. (2019) indicated that researchers depend on an arranged number of questions when conducting semistructured interviews and govern the

conversation centered on the prescribed or an analogous set of exploratory questions. Interviewers employ a semistructured interview approach to explore applicable information while meeting research objectives. The semistructured interview method offers a comprehensive approach to attaining relevant information from participants concerning a research topic.

*Bracketing* controls personal bias and subjectivity (De Carvalho & Dumke de Medeiros, 2022). Bürkland et al. (2019) indicated that bracketing excludes preconceptions, influences, and persuasiveness when conducting research. De Carvalho and Dumke de Medeiros (2022) asserted that bracketing includes documenting audio-recorded semistructured interview data and generating an exact transcription. The use of email and the telephone functioned to ensure that participants met the purposive sample's criteria. In addition, establishing a relationship and disclosing the purpose of the research study with respective participants included building rapport when contacting participants via phone and email.

Abu Arqoub et al. (2019) stated that consent requires participant agreement to participate. Obtaining permission for an audio-recorded semistructured interview, including member checking, included providing a consent document to respective participants. The open-ended interview questions employed for this research are in the Appendix. Before I collected the data, the respective participants received a consent document. Acquiring participants' consent included maintaining participants' confidentiality and permitting respective participants to withdraw from participating in the study at any time before the publication of study findings. Receiving a request to

withdraw from the research study from a respective participant would immediately dispose of all data collected for the study and remove individual participant information. Archived signed consent documents from each participant will remain on a secure flash drive in a secure location for a minimum of 5 years. Subsequently, I will destroy the flash drive containing participant information.

The semistructured interview process cataloged in the interview protocol (see Appendix) comprised identical questions arranged in uniform consecution that necessitated a response from respective participants. Controlling bias included using an audio-recording application to collect the semistructured interview data. Restating the interview objective and rationale, including communicating the interview protocol to respective participants, occurred before initiating the audio-recorded semistructured interviews. Hu et al. (2021) noted that generating an exact transcript following each interview is essential to theme development. Each interview resulted in generating an exact transcription. To confirm data analysis and interpretation accuracy, transcribing the semistructured interview data occurred within 48 hours. Naidu and Prose (2018) asserted that member checking throughout qualitative research enhances data collection integrity, thus facilitating data saturation. Data coding and theme identification included member checking acquired interview data with respective participants and subsequent data uploading using the qualitative analysis software QSR NVivo 12. The themes that emerged from the coded data may provide insights to existing and forthcoming African American small food service owners who aspire to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years.

## Participants

Research participant selection is integral to data results (Gadomska-Lila, 2020). Selecting participants included employing the purposive sampling method. Sawarni et al. (2021) asserted that, regarding a phenomenon, the purposive sampling process facilitates researcher assertion when collecting exploratory data from experienced participants in their natural environment. Researchers employ a purposive participant sample when collecting consummate information from participants who meet specific criteria. This study's population included African American small food service business owners over 18 years of age in the United States' southeastern region who had sustained their businesses beyond 5 years. This study's purposive sample comprised African American small food service business owners who met the selection criteria. Purposive sampling can increase relevant information from each participant because of the alignment of participants to the study.

Participant access was an important part of this study. Accessing potential participants included conducting internet searches for participants through Google, Facebook, and city and county business listings. Beginning the Zoom audio-recorded semistructured interview at each African American small food service business owner's establishment included confirming that the business owner qualified for the study. Requesting word-of-mouth referrals from Facebook contacts and searching for restaurateurs with Facebook business listings functioned to identify other qualified participants. Telephone, email, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp functioned as methods of communication to personally invite each participant and explain the study to



them. Sending a corresponding email functioned as the method of communication to deliver the informed consent form to the participants who elected to participate. The Zoom application functioned to facilitate the site of the audio-recorded semistructured interview. Ensuring the protection of human participants with ethical actions and approaches included obtaining approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The respective participants' identity remains confidential, within the limits of the law. The personal information of respective participants functioned for this research project exclusively. In addition, no names nor identifying information of the respective participants exist in the study reports. All research records exist in a folder that uses codes in place of names on a secured, encrypted, password-protected flash drive. The list matching codes to names exists on the same device in a separate folder from the coded data. The research data will remain secure for at least 5 years.

### **Research Method and Design**

This qualitative multiple case study explored effective business strategies for African American small food service business owners residing in the United States' southeastern region to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The subsequent section includes a justification for the method and design.

#### **Research Method**

The research method provides the researcher with a suitable strategy for appropriately answering the research question. Yilmaz (2013) indicated that academic research methods include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Cai and Choi (2021) asserted that variances concerning quantitative and qualitative research methods

subsist when addressing diverse research questions. The qualitative method was appropriate for this study because the purpose of the study was to determine the effective business strategies that successful African American small food service business owners implemented to increase sustainability beyond 5 years. The research question, methodology, and conducted research share a common thread of effective African American small food service business sustainability strategies.

Cao (2020) suggested that the quantitative research approach fails to suit the research objective because this approach involves using statistical data to examine relationships among variables. Quantitative research excludes exploring African American small food service business owners' experiences regarding effective business strategies that may successfully sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. Goertzen (2017) mentioned that quantitative research is appropriate when the researcher's objective requires utilizing statistical procedures to examine variable relationships. Hughes et al. (2020) asserted that quantitative researchers exclude exploring or analyzing human experiences. Goertzen (2017) indicated that researchers use quantitative research to examine variances among samples acquired from diverse populations. Hughes et al. contended that a quantitative approach lacks appropriateness when exploring a phenomenon that covers contextual conditions and answers *how* and *why* questions. Through this study, I intended to explore a small participant group, cover contextual conditions, and answer *how* and *why* questions, rendering a qualitative approach appropriate for this study.

Goertzen (2017) indicated that researchers use a qualitative approach to explore individual experiences that influence phenomena. Hughes et al. (2020) indicated that statistical methods fail to suit this study, rejecting quantitative and mixed methods approaches. A qualitative approach was appropriate for this study (Cao, 2020).

### **Research Design**

Camacho et al. (2021) asserted that selecting a research design is essential to developing a research study that connects the research question, conceptual framework, and research method. Merethe Oftedal et al. (2021) indicated that researchers adopt a research design to integrate a plan for collecting, organizing, and analyzing data related to a research question. Merethe Oftedal et al. stated that researchers have the discretion of study design when conducting a qualitative study. The central research designs for this qualitative research required meticulous consideration. Newman et al. (2021) indicated that the prominent research designs for qualitative research comprise (a) phenomenology, (b) ethnography, and (c) case study. A case study functioned as the appropriate research design for this study.

When implementing a phenomenological design, Nicholas and Foote (2021) asserted that researchers emphasize the lived experiences of study participants. In addition to exploring lived experiences, Van Manen (2017) suggested that researchers use phenomenological design to explore the relationships of individuals who experience analogous phenomena. When applying a phenomenological design, the emergence of common themes includes theme relevance for describing phenomena.

Towers et al. (2020) asserted that diverging from a quantitative analysis of experiences; phenomenological investigators explore participant experiences' influence on phenomena. Nicholas and Foote (2021) posited that researchers adopt a phenomenological approach to gain exhaustive construal and perception of problems emerging from lived experiences. Nicholas and Foote furthered that phenomenological research expounds on respective experiences and interpretations. Yap et al. (2020) indicated that phenomenological researchers aim to acquire exhaustive intelligence regarding participant interactions with respective counterparts and ecosystems. To explore core denotations of lived experiences, Klein and Milner (2019) suggested that researchers adopt a phenomenological design that integrates interviews relevant to the phenomenon under study. I did not select a phenomenological design for this study, as it lacked appropriateness for exploring the potential scope of this research topic. A small participant group might have failed to satisfy the explorative conditions for a phenomenological design.

Doan et al. (2021) indicated that researchers adopt the ethnographic design to explore behavior patterns and distinct cultural languages. When employing an ethnographic design, Sharman (2017) asserted that researchers perform a comprehensive study of participants' observations to acquire a cultural group's perceptive understanding. Pekkanen (2021) furthered those ethnographic researchers conducting observations of individuals in civilizations and environs. The ethnographic design did not suit this study because the research excludes ethnological observations. I explored appropriate, effective

business strategies that African American small food service business owners employ to maintain sustainability eclipsing 5 years.

A case study design is adaptable when exploring communal and progressive disciplines (Sivaraman & Varadharajan, 2021). Lespay and Suchan (2021) stated that researchers employ a case study research strategy to comprehensively collect data from respective participants to interpret a described occurrence. Mousavi and Amiri Aghdaie (2021) asserted that data collection techniques adopted in case study research are (a) interviews, (b) archived data, (c) company documents, (d) procedural observations, (e) participant observation, and (f) physical artifacts. Researchers employ the case study approach by integrating single or multiple cases with analogous time and location constraints (Villarreal Larrinaga, 2017). Lespay and Suchan (2021) furthered that case study designs involve investigators collecting data from at least two sources. Inti and Anjan Kumar (2021) indicated that employing a case study design includes conducting semistructured interviews to acquire participants' perceptions regarding the study focus. Additional data acquired included organization documentation, company websites, and business Facebook social media pages.

Multiple case study researchers explore case studies to collect data over time and to explore noticeable facts across different cases (Yin, 2018). Yin explained that researchers benefit from the multiple case study approach when the research focuses on how and why. The multiple case study design functioned appropriately because it suits the focus of the study exploring the effective business strategies African American small food service business owners employed to extend sustainability beyond 5 years.

## **Population and Sampling**

Flagstad et al. (2022) indicated that sampling is a process that involves a researcher selecting a subsection of a population to research. McGowan (2021) indicated that the central objective of sampling in qualitative research is to establish sample size efficacy to maintain a comprehensive analysis of the respective participant experience. McGowan furthered that employing inordinate sample sizes could generate redundant data. Using purposive sampling may suit this study. Connery et al. (2021) indicated that researchers employ purposive sampling to select cases comprising the most comprehensive information. Chandra et al. (2021) maintained that a purposive sample involves individuals who could potentially preserve relevant information that develops a comprehensive study.

Purposive sampling allows a researcher to select the most appropriate objects based on their knowledge and ability to reply to the study (Saldana et al., 2019). Researchers adopt a purposive sampling structure to confirm that the selected sample generates credible, comprehensive, and applicable information that addresses the research question (Sawarni et al., 2021). Purposive sampling functioned to make my sample selection.

The population consisted of African American small food service business owners in the southeastern United States who implement effective business strategies to extend their business sustainability beyond 5 years. My purposive sample consisted of seven African American small food service business owners in the southeastern United States who employ effective business strategies to extend their business sustainability beyond 5

years. Determining the effective business strategy African American small food service business owners employed to sustain their business beyond 5 years successfully could improve the sustainability of existing African American small food service business owners and offer direction to aspirant African American small food service business owners, supporting the need for additional exploration.

Data collection included Zoom audio-recorded semistructured interviews. Baker et al. (2020) asserted that an applied approach to collecting data is audio-recorded semistructured interviews. Employing an audio-recording application throughout the semistructured interviews may potentially maintain interview integrity. Scheduling individual audio-recorded semistructured interviews involved requesting a time suitable for individual participants.

The research aims to identify effective business strategies African American small food service business owners employed to maintain sustainability exceeding 5 years. In qualitative studies, scholars express diverse perspectives concerning the appropriate number of participants. Ebekoziem (2021) indicated that when implementing the interview process of qualitative research, the sample size must maintain adequacy and comprehensiveness to achieve data saturation. Additional factors that could influence the sample size necessary for data saturation include (a) the topic of research, (b) the research participants, (c) the presence of a reputable theory, (d) the method of data collection, and (e) the method of data analysis (Ebekoziem et al., 2022).

Kozleski (2017) indicated that a single case study or interview lacks adequate information because data saturation only occurs after a minimum of two cases. Anderson

(2017) suggested that two to three participants occupy the smallest sample size allowable for multiple case studies. Cassell et al. (2020) indicated that to conduct research appropriately and establish an exhaustive discovery, the proposed number of participants should exceed eight. Interviews concluded when data saturation occurred. Consistent with the theory and perceptions acquired during data collection, Van Rijnsoever (2017) indicated that the researcher maintains the discretion of the sample cases. Van Rijnsoever concluded that the minimum sample size required to attain data saturation is indeterminate. The conducting of Zoom audio-recorded semistructured interviews with African American small food service business owners continued until new information failed to emerge.

Data saturation occurs when emerging applicable themes cease during the data collection. Employing thematic data saturation included consideration (Goworek et al., 2020). Bevacqua et al. (2020) indicated that researchers must use sampling because it is fundamental for describing a business's viability. Bevacqua et al. added that quantitative researchers employ power analysis to generate appropriate sample sizes; however, no analogous formula for qualitative research exists. Runciman (2020) furthered that a researcher explores the participants' experiences and perceptions when conducting a qualitative study. Data saturation, acquiring comprehensive accounts of information included conducting audio-recorded semistructured interviews and subsequently member checking with respective participants.



### **Ethical Research**

Kroll and Stieglitz (2021) indicated that researchers must maintain confidentiality and the participants' general welfare. The guidelines of ethical research assert that researchers must establish (a) participant selection efficacy, (b) informed participant consent, (c) data collection integrity, and (d) data saturation. The informed consent process requires researchers to provide participants with the subsequent written documents (a) a comprehensive description of the study's objective, (b) a statement allowing discretion to discontinue study participation at any point before the publication of study findings, (c) a thorough explanation of potential participant risk, and (d) a comprehensive confidentiality contract that secures participant identity (Gist-Mackey & Kingsford, 2020). Before commencing individual interviews, respective participants received the written document. Respective participant participation excluded incentives.

Before data collection, a request for approval from the Walden University institutional review board (IRB) proceeded. Respective study participants required a signed consent document before commencing a semistructured interview. The research data remains secure for 5 years to maintain participant confidentiality.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Pozo et al. (2019) indicated that when employing interview techniques to collect data, superior qualitative research depends on the researcher's knowledge, expertise, and meticulousness. Prasad (2019) posited that the researcher is the primary data-collecting instrument. The researcher was the primary data collection instrument for this explorative qualitative multiple case study.

Qualitative researchers should consider the research perspective's influence and standpoint on the research process and potential outcome (Anderson, 2017). Researchers use diverse methods to collect data in qualitative research, including conducting semistructured interviews and viewing company documents (Ajgaonkar et al., 2022). Yin (2018) stated that the six sources progressing researchers with data collection include (a) documents, (b) archives, (c) interviews, (d) direct observations, (e) participant observation, and (f) physical artifacts. Yin furthered that, of the six sources, researchers must use a minimum of two sources to collect data appropriately. This study's data collection included information from semistructured interviews, company Facebook social media information, and company website material.

Meyer et al. (2023) posited that increasing the reliability of interview protocols enhances the fitness of the data acquired from research interviews. Varesco Kager et al. (2022) indicated that open-ended interview questions forged from previous knowledge and interview protocols maintain comprehensive participant responses. Researchers must select the most suitable data collection method to enable them to achieve the goal of their study (Szulc, 2022). Establishing data collection efficacy and permitting flexibility for the participants to give detailed spontaneous narratives and descriptions included participants undertaking a 45-minute audio-recorded semistructured interview comprising open-ended interview questions. The researcher collected data from semistructured interviews governed by the open-ended questions in the interview protocol (see Appendix).

Qualitative researchers use additional data sources to strengthen, and crosscheck acquired data (Ajgaonkar et al., 2022). Ritson (2020) indicated that exploring documentation and interview data reinforces data triangulation. Using documents to collect data expands and validates the accuracy of findings (Padi et al., 2022). Additional information related to participants includes collecting data from company documentation such as business Facebook social media site information and company website information.

Actively listening to participants throughout the interview process increases the researcher's understanding of the participant's perspectives (Hicken et al., 2022). Alabood et al. (2023) asserted that in a qualitative study, emotional and interpersonal skilled researchers succeed in their data collection process. Researchers with superior command during interviews could attain successful data collection. Actively listening and engaging with participants established rapport. In a qualitative study, the researcher's key interests are interpreting the meaning of responses, descriptive data, and specific variables (Szulc, 2022).

Establishing interview process flexibility included asking six semistructured interview questions in a researcher and participant scheduled Zoom audio-recorded interview (see Appendix). This study included interviewing seven African American small food service business owners (participants) in the southeastern United States to determine the effective business strategies to sustain business operations beyond 5 years. Member checking and the feedback-driven exploration technique enable researchers to prove the validity of the research findings (Naidu & Prose, 2018). To ensure clarity of the

transcript obtained from participants' responses to the research questions and to achieve accuracy and robust information in the research findings included using member checking and the feedback-driven exploration technique. After conducting audio-recorded semistructured interviews, participants received verbatim transcripts, including researcher interpretations of interview question responses, with the request to member check the collected data to authenticate the validity and accuracy. To reinforce the research findings, the researcher considered the output of the interview process valid.

In qualitative research, applying multiple sources of data (data triangulation) influences data saturation, data reliability, data validity, and research result accuracy (Mwita, 2022). The researcher analyzed participants' organizational documents, including company websites and business Facebook social media sites, before conducting Zoom audio-recorded semistructured interviews. In qualitative research, saturation is a method researchers use to desist data collection (Chitac, 2022). Data saturation influences research integrity (Mthuli et al., 2022). Chitac (2022) indicated that the researcher attains data saturation when new information fails to emerge. Achieving data saturation during the interview process included recruiting participants until new data emergence ceased.

Reliability is the extent to which a measurement of a phenomenon provides a stable and consistent result (Díaz et al., 2023). Rainer and Wohlin (2022) claimed that reliability in qualitative research is the researchers' ability to control bias and produce consistent outcomes in the analytical processes. Reliability enables the researcher to establish credible data findings (Díaz et al., 2023). Rainer and Wohlin (2022) determined that in qualitative research, the rate of dependability, credibility, conformability, and

transferability of results is research validity. Researchers ensure that research results reflect data accurately to achieve validity (Bergkvist & Langner, 2022). For this study, the researcher used multiple sources of data collection, including audio-recorded semistructured interview information, company website data, and business Facebook social media site information, provided evidence, and ensured that all participants confirmed interview data to achieve validity.

### **Data Collection Technique**

To collect data, qualitative researchers use different techniques (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) posited that collecting data involves gathering information from research participants. Researcher knowledge and proficiency are fundamental to reporting findings appropriately (Reit, 2022). Researchers must determine the best method to collect data in a qualitative research study (Prasad, 2019). Researchers collect comprehensive data to answer research questions through data collection techniques (Chitac, 2022). In case studies, interviews and reviewing company documents are researchers' key data collecting sources (Mwita, 2022). The most common approach to collecting data among participants includes interviews, company documents, participant observation, and audio recordings (Szulc, 2022). In this study, the data collection technique consisted of interview data and company documentation information.

Jenner and Myers (2019) established that conducting audio-recorded semistructured interviews at a participant's desired time establishes comfort. Gulino et al. (2020) contended that researchers employ interviews to identify and sequester comprehensive heuristic data. A potential benefit of conducting audio-recorded

semistructured interviews is participant allowance to regulate precision throughout the interview. Ward and Given (2019) postulated that audio-recorded interviews are adaptable, allowing respective participants to confirm their responses.

Baker et al. (2020) indicated that the data collection process requires the researcher to audio-record the duration of semistructured interviews. Dalla Costa Ames and Serafim (2023) specified that the interviewing process is acquiring data from participants by orally posing probing questions and receiving verbal responses. Christopher (2020) indicated that researchers employ interviews to acquire a comprehensive construal of the intended research. Dalla Costa Ames and Serafim (2023) determined that researchers use (a) homogeneous, (b) informal, and (c) universal interviewing approaches to acquire data when conducting qualitative interviews. Ferreira-Neto (2018) concluded that the semistructured interview method appropriately permits researchers to address the central research question in qualitative research.

The data collection process included extending invitations and receiving consent to participate in this study. The researcher conducted Zoom audio-recorded semistructured interviews and ensured that the organizational documents addressed the central research question: What are the effective business strategies African American small food service owners employed to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years?

An interview is a qualitative study's primary data collection method (Mwita, 2022). Mwita (2022) noted that interviews offer numerous benefits, including enabling researchers to access a depth of personalized information. Contacting suitable African American small food service business owners in the southeastern United States began

after obtaining IRB approval (IRB# 11-02-21-0629594). Mthuli et al. (2022) noted that researchers use interview protocols to govern interview duration and to ensure ethical and effective interaction with the interviewee. The researcher used an interview protocol (see Appendix) to administer the interview process. Contacting the pool of potential participants included sending an email that included the study's objective and an informed consent request. After obtaining consent, the researcher scheduled Zoom audio-recorded appointments with participants. Each participant received a copy of the research questions to establish familiarization. The researcher acknowledges that participants received no form of incentive.

Other data collection techniques considered essential in qualitative research are note-taking of inconsistencies like participants' body language, long pauses, and gestures during the interview process (Chitac, 2022) and internet site visits to access companies' documents to establish more information regarding the research phenomenon under study (Naidu & Prose, 2018). Researchers use organizational document analysis and other data collection techniques, such as semistructured interviews, to comprehensively explore the research phenomenon and obtain essential data regarding participants' views (Padi et al., 2022). Before conducting interviews, the researcher analyzed organizational documents such as company websites and business Facebook social media sites. Allowing participants to indicate their agreement with the research information collected ensured confidentiality and established analysis validity (Szulc, 2022). The interview questions (see Appendix) attached to the interview protocols (see Appendix) include six open-ended interview questions for data collection. Qualitative researchers need to use

member-checking strategies to accurately interpret data collected from the interview (Alabood et al., 2023). The researcher provided the interview data to each participant to confirm the validity and accuracy of the responses gathered during the interview.

### **Data Organization Technique**

Determining the best method for organizing the data for effective analysis followed the conclusion of data collection. Moreover, detailed and well-organized data regarding a phenomenon will enable researchers to obtain accurate results (Alabood et al., 2023). Researchers use different data organization techniques, such as attaching labels to participants' responses on audio-recordings of interviews to safeguard the originality of the data collected (Ajgaonkar et al., 2022; Padi et al., 2022). Collecting data in qualitative research is critical for researchers because of the role it plays in analyzing, reviewing, and accurately reporting interview results (Yin, 2018). Padi et al. (2022) indicated that effective data organization techniques enable the researcher to access all recorded data easily.

As this study's primary data-collecting instrument, the researcher was responsible for all data collection and organization. Each participant's file contained the date and time of the interview, the company documents, transcripts from the interviews, and the informed consent. Gao and McDonald (2022) asserted that researchers must maintain the confidentiality of participant information. Using a pseudonym for research participants enables the researcher to maintain confidentiality (Farquhar et al., 2020). In this study, the researcher used pseudonyms such as P01, P02, P03, P04, P05, P06, and P07 to represent the seven participants. The researcher created a Microsoft Word and Excel file



for each interview question to categorize and label all transcribed data. For effective data organization, the researcher identified themes using code numbers to analyze and interpret data. Additionally, the researcher maintained a logbook to draft notes during the interview.

The qualitative analysis software QSR NVivo 12 functioned to store and organize data. QSR NVivo 12 software helps qualitative researchers organize, evaluate, and store data efficiently (Mwita, 2022). NVivo 12 software facilitated efficient data organization. Yin (2018) advised researchers to implement a data plan that identifies where, how, and the duration to store the data and who has access to the information. The researcher maintains all physical documents in a file cabinet, and all electronic data remains on a secure 32-gigabyte flash drive for 5 years. After five years, the researcher will shred the research data containing a 32-gigabyte flash drive and all physical documents

### **Data Analysis**

Yin (2018) outlined a general framework for designing a qualitative research study: collect and record data, analyze the data, display, and disseminate your findings. Qualitative data analysis includes five steps: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding.

#### **Compiling**

Each interview lasted 45 minutes. The researcher audio-recorded interviews and maintained the interview data from each participant. Respective interviews took place at the participants' business or another place of their choice (Yin, 2018). A transcription of the interview generated subsequently. Transcribing the interview within 24 hours helped

me familiarize the data intimately after compiling it by maintaining this consistent and organized format and disassembling the data incurred to discover its components.

### **Disassembling**

After compiling and organizing the collected information, disassembling the data incurred, disassembling the data involves taking the data apart and creating meaningful groupings (Yin, 2018). The qualitative analysis software QSR NVivo 12 functioned to group the disassembled data by codes. According to Yin (2018), coding, in the realm of qualitative research, is the process by which raw data gradually converts into usable data by identifying themes, concepts, or ideas that connect. Coding involves identifying similarities and differences systematically across the data set (Saldana et al., 2019). Qualitative data analysis is inductive, allowing meaning to emerge from the data (Yin, 2018). Yin continued that the meanings that emerge from the data are disassembled and coded. QSR NVivo 12 qualitative analysis software functioned to facilitate data coding. Reassembling the coded data functioned to develop themes.

### **Reassembling**

The codes that each concept mapped are put into context with each other to create themes (Yin, 2018). Saldana et al. (2019) indicated that the theme captures something important about the data related to the research question and represents some patterned response or meaning within the data set. Themes are patterns in the codes (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) continued those two common ways qualitative researchers put the data back together within themes: hierarchies and matrices. The QSR NVivo 12 matrix tool functioned to develop matrices by reassembling data within the themes.

Matrices included arranging participant roles, themes, variables, emerging concepts, and data sources into rows and columns to provide a broad visual representation that grounds findings in the data and context. Reassembly included gathering all relevant data for each potential theme and continuously reviewing each theme to determine if the obtained information was robust concerning the identified codes in the data set. In this step, the information attained from the reassembly process enhances my ability to defend interpretations and conclusions.

### **Interpreting**

After developing themes by reassembling the data, I extracted excerpts from the data and viewed them as related (Yin, 2018). Doing so allowed the ability to focus on interpreting what was happening within and across varied experiences, beliefs, and histories, thus identifying thematic patterns across the data. Saldana et al. (2019) suggested that the themes developed will capture the essence of the phenomenon under investigation concerning the research question.

How the themes relate to each other was the starting point for interpreting. Being cautious not to restate codes and themes as interpretations, Yin (2018) suggested that interpretations are at higher levels than themes. Interpretations included discussions of relationships between themes and more global findings in the context of all codes. My interpretations arose easily from the data and became the foundations for my conclusions.

### **Concluding**

Codes emerge from raw data, and themes emerge from codes (Yin, 2018). Identifying and defining these themes leads to interpretations and conclusions (Saldana et

al., 2019). Conclusions directly address the research question (Yin, 2018). My research began with a reasonable research question. Conducting a comprehensive data analysis process that included a detailed description of coding procedures and criteria and a detailed description of how the codes and the patterns of codes led to themes and resulting interpretation functioned to answer the research question (Yin, 2018). My research yielded results open for scrutiny into my decision-making throughout the analysis process.

Farquhar et al. (2020) indicated that four types of triangulations include (a) data triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) methodological triangulation. Researchers use methodological triangulation to reduce and construe two or more data sources to make connections (Ben-Hador et al., 2020).

Grainger-Brown et al. (2022) indicated that researchers use multiple methods to increase the study's validity. Saldana et al. (2019) indicated that data drawn from multiple sources broadens researcher insight into the different issues underlying the phenomena studied. Methodological triangulation enhances the analysis and interpretation of findings. As the primary research instrument, study methodological triangulation includes audio-recorded semistructured interview data, Facebook social media sites, and company website information.

Interviews are one method a researcher's study results reach data saturation. According to Guest et al. (2020), the first five to six interviews produced most of the new information in a dataset, and that little new information emerged as the sample size approached 20 interviews. Across four datasets, 80% to 92% of all concepts identified

within the dataset emerged within the first ten interviews. Similarly, Guest et al. conducted an inductive thematic analysis of 60 in-depth interviews among female sex workers in West Africa. They discovered that 70% of all 114 themes emerged in the first six interviews, and 92% identified them within the first 12 interviews. My approach to data saturation consisted of three distinct elements (a) the base size, (b) the run length, and (c) the relative amount of incoming new information or the new information threshold (Guest et al., 2020).

### ***Base Size***

Base size refers to how one circumscribes the body of information already identified in a dataset to subsequently use as a denominator (Guest et al., 2020). In other words, the base size determined the minimum number of data collection events to analyze to calculate the amount of information already gained. The researcher began conducting consecutive interviews and developed a base with four interviews to calculate the total of unique themes used in the saturation ratio denominator. The items of analysis were unique codes representing themes. The unit of analysis for base size was 117 in the data collection event.

### ***Run Length***

The run length is a set of consecutive events or observations, in this study, interviews (Guest et al., 2020). The run length is the number of interviews conducted after the base set, within which I looked for and calculated new information. The number of new themes found in the run defines the numerator in the saturation ratio. To ensure a

new information threshold occurred, I conducted three additional interviews after the base set of four to assess zero new themes for the numerator.

### ***New Information Threshold***

The units of analysis for the numerator were zero, and the denominator 117 determined the proportional calculation. The proportional calculation included two levels of new information determinants:  $\leq 5\%$  new information and no (0%) new information. My proportional calculation generated 0% of new information emergence and subsequently functioned as evidence of data saturation.

The lower the new information threshold, the less likely an important number of themes will remain undiscovered in later interviews if data collection stops when the threshold is reached (Saldana et al., 2019). The concepts of base size, run length, and new information threshold allowed the ability to choose the confidence level of data saturation occurrence for the study (Guest et al., 2020).

The unique codes and themes gathered from the first four interviews were the base for information identified in a dataset. Conducting three additional interviews functioned to identify and calculate any new information. Conducting three additional interviews yielded a point in data collection of (0%) new information emergence. Therefore, saturation conceptualized as a relative measure. Maintaining saturation as a relative measure neutralizes differences in coding granularity among researchers, as the method affects both the numerator and denominator (Guest et al., 2020). Using the questions developed from my interview protocol facilitated conducting seven in-depth

interviews. As the protocol suggests, interviews begin by asking main questions and then supplementing these questions with follow-up questions and probative questions.

Researchers use qualitative analysis methods to organize data that simplifies coding and triangulation (Gioia, 2021). QSR International NVivo 12 qualitative analysis software facilitated theme identification from amassed data. NVivo 12 software analyzes and classifies raw data (QSR International, 2021). The data analysis process included (a) generating verbatim transcriptions of respective interview information, (b) devising a unique code to identify individual participants, (c) formulating a unique code to arrange interview data, and (d) deploying codes to generate themes (Grainger-Brown et al., 2022). Grainger-Brown et al. (2022) suggested that performing such protocols will identify central themes. Potential theme emergence could classify components that extend African American small food service business owners' sustainability beyond 5 years. Establishing a thematic connection included integrating key themes with recent studies, the conceptual framework, and the raw data obtained from audio-recorded semistructured interviews. Connecting themes that emerged from conducting this study's research, the conceptual framework, and any new or related articles regarding the participant underwent review and approval for publication after this study.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Bevacqua et al. (2020) asserted that the process must be systematic to establish the reliability and validity of the study. Bevacqua et al. continued that reliability and validity purpose to enhance rigor in qualitative research. In qualitative research, reliability and validity maintain diverse meanings. Harrison et al. (2020) asserted that

researchers employ qualitative research to compose semistructured interview protocols to achieve cohesion and reinforce data validity, consistency, and reliability. Garaba (2018) contended that data collection instruments must be valid and reliable when collecting scientific research data. Bevacqua et al. indicated that reliability and validity remain central concerns of respective analyses and are appropriate for exploring, collecting, and reporting research data. Qualitative studies must be dependable, credible, transferable, and confirmable. A qualitative study must meet all these criteria to maintain relevant and trustworthy.

### **Reliability**

Dependability is the consistency and reliability of the study (Omanović & Langley, 2023). Additionally, dependability is continuous performance over time (Cypress, 2017). Garaba (2018) determined that including reliability and validity in a study institute objectivity and integrity by establishing consistency in a study technique over time. The researcher used member checking and methodological triangulation to increase the reliability and validity of the study. Member checking is a technique researchers use to validate acquired data and confirm interpretation accuracy (Thomas, 2017). Naidu and Prose (2018) suggested that member checking should allow participants to confirm the integrity of transcripts generated from acquired data, including interpretation accuracy. The researcher used member checking to confirm the integrity of interview data with each participant.

To establish study integrity, Gioia (2021) suggested that qualitative researchers (a) eradicate personal biases that could influence findings, (b) maintain detailed records,



(c) reproduce verbatim descriptions when reporting findings, (d) establish data analysis and interpretation precision, and (e) triangulate data. After interviewing each participant, the participant received a transcript of the interview to review for accuracy. Ensuring an accurate transcription of the interview and controlling personal biases are imperative. After transcription approval of the respective interview, coding themes from the interview and analyzing the three data sources functioned to connect the themes and triangulate the data. The interview protocol established the study's reliability (see Appendix). Collecting data from participants maintained consistent to control bias and reduce error. Maintaining finite knowledge regarding establishing an African American small food service business controlled related experience biases.

Gioia (2021) asserted that researchers must evaluate and consider the reliability of study findings, application, relevance of performed measures, and the findings' credibility when acquiring study data. Cypress (2017) asserted that reliable research indicates that forthcoming researchers could reproduce the study design by employing identical procedures and research protocols to address homogenous phenomena. Campos Oliveira et al. (2020) furthered that the appropriate reliability strategy governs the research's consistency and continuity. Employing diverse data collection sources augments case study reliability (Bevacqua et al., 2020). Ridder (2017) indicated that qualitative researchers cataloged steps and procedures to establish reliability. Documenting performed actions and processes maintained as outlined in the interview protocol found in the Appendix. Hu et al. (2021) indicated that member checking enhances qualitative research precision and consistency and is an appropriate technique to confirm

phenomena' descriptions and interpretations. Employing member checking established data authenticity.

### **Validity**

Validity determines whether the research accurately measures the intended and the integrity of research results (Mazerolle & Eason, 2018). Campos Oliveira et al. (2020) suggested that validity in qualitative research addresses research instruments' appropriateness, protocols, and data collection. To formulate an accurate analysis, qualitative researchers must assess their study's credibility, confirmability, and transferability (Farquhar et al., 2020).

Omanović and Langley (2023) indicated that credibility denotes the interpreted data's congruence with participants' actual data. Member checking increased the credibility of the research because the researcher and the participants participated in the study (Iivari, 2018; Madill & Sullivan, 2017). Farquhar et al. (2020) maintained that researchers using the qualitative methodology must include data triangulation to increase study credibility.

Data triangulation establishes validity by converging data from diverse sources (Ben-Hador et al., 2020). Gioia (2021) indicated that data triangulation involves diverse data sources and sampling methods to measure conditions, scope, or individuals. Ebekoziem (2021) determined that researchers employ conjunct data analyses when applying data triangulation to establish validity and reliability collectively. Data triangulation functioned as the intended technique to establish this study's content validity by comprising collective assessments from diverse data sources. This study's

credibility increased by exploring information derived from audio-recorded semistructured interviews and organizational documentation, including organizational website information and business Facebook social media site material. Data triangulation established the study's credibility (Mazerolle & Eason, 2018).

Subramanian et al. (2022) indicated that confirmability denotes the ability to replicate a research study by controlling potential researcher bias. Researchers use confirmability and triangulation to reduce bias and to ensure the study is replicable (Abdalla et al., 2017). Researchers need to control bias, present a replicable study, and have confirmability. Data triangulation between audio-recorded semistructured interview data, company Facebook social media sites, and company websites functioned to increase this study's confirmability.

Transferability refers to the applicableness of study findings in similar conditions, locations, eras, and populations (Daniel, 2019). Member checking engagement is important to qualitative studies because of the ability to ensure transferability (Naidu & Prose, 2018). Researchers use triangulation to increase the transferability of qualitative research because researchers use multiple data sources to explore outcomes (Mikacic, 2015). Triangulation between audio-recorded semistructured interview data, company website information, and business Facebook social media site data established this study's transferability.

Credibility, confirmability, and transferability are components of quality qualitative research (Omanović & Langley, 2023). To attain data saturation, the researcher finds no new information or themes (Mthuli et al., 2022). The criterion for a

valid study includes attaining credibility, confirmability, transferability, and data saturation (Zehrer & Leiß, 2020). Ensuring this study's validity included audio recording seven semistructured interviews, transcribing the seven interviews appropriately, member checking to confirm interview data, and analyzing organizational documents, including company websites and business Facebook social media pages.

### **Transition and Summary**

Section 2 comprised the study's purpose, the researcher's role, research method, design, and rationale for selecting a multiple qualitative case study approach to explore factors relevant to effective business strategies African American small food service business owners employ to extend sustainability beyond 5 years. Section 2 further described the potential participant group and the purposive sampling technique. Section 2 includes the potential data collection process and a description of ethical research considerations. Section 3 includes triangulated data, an introduction of study findings, an explanation of the research related to professional practice, implications to social change, recommendations for further research, and a reflection of the study's outcome relevance to existing literature.

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

#### **Introduction**

Through this qualitative, explorative multiple case study, I aimed to explore the effective business strategies that African American small food service owners used to sustain their businesses for over 5 years. Completing interviews with seven African American small food service business owners in the southeastern region of the United States allowed me to gain deeper insight into the effective business strategies African American small food service businesses use to maintain sustainability beyond 5 years. The purposive sampling facilitated my selection of seven small African American small food service business owners. Locating qualified participants involved utilizing internet searches with tools including Google, Facebook, and city and county business listings.

My search included looking for qualified participants through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling increased relevant information from each participant because of the alignment of participants to the study (Gist-Mackey & Kingsford, 2020). Purposive sampling functioned to facilitate obtaining credible information from study participants (Sawarni et al., 2021). After obtaining approval from the IRB and compiling the participant list, potential participants received notification regarding their participation in the study. Gist-Mackey and Kingsford (2020) found that purposive sampling increases a study's validity and generates rich and relevant triangulation. Participants' names were given continued anonymity. Guest et al. (2020) suggested that researchers identify study participants in a manner that does not reveal their true identities.

After I had attained data saturation, I analyzed the data in NVivo 12 using QSR qualitative analysis software to identify effective business strategies to answer the research question. Methodological triangulation included interview data and organizational documents such as company website information and company Facebook social media pages. Three thematic categories emerged from data analysis data regarding how African American small food service business owners used effective business strategies to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years: (a) developing strong customer and employee relationships, (b) building a robust business network, and (c) developing an operative pricing strategy.

Analysis of the interview data indicated effective business strategies that successful African American small food service business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. The analysis suggested that (a) developing strong customer relationships, (b) building a robust business network, and (c) strategic pricing are essential for African American small food service firm owners to realize profits and sustain their businesses in the long term. African American small food service business owners could realize greater success and improved sustainability by applying the effective business strategies discovered from the study data.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

This subsection contains the three thematic categories that emerged from the qualitative data analysis that answer the central research question: What are the effective business strategies that African American small food service business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years? The three themes were building a robust

business network, strategic pricing, and maintaining strong customer and employee relationships. After I transcribed participants' verbatim interview responses, input the interview data into NVivo 12 analytical software, completed member checking, and conducted methodological triangulation, data saturation eventuated because no additional themes or patterns emerged.

### **Theme 1: Building a Robust Business Network**

The first major theme that emerged from the interviews and documentation review, such as Facebook social media sites and business websites, was the need for African American small food service business owners to build a robust business network (see Table 1). Networking is the development of long-lasting and beneficial relationships through contact with others (Ong et al., 2022). Cisi and Sansalvadore (2022) posited that multidimensional analyses of business networks go beyond the current models of formal networking, distinguishing between rigid networks for sharing, flexible networks for sharing, and quasi-informal networks. Small food service business owners who build robust business networks with others learn about new products and services that are beneficial when growing their businesses.

**Table 1***Building a Robust Business Network*

Networking	Number of participants	Percentage
Networking with peers	7	100%
Business relationships	7	100%

P01, P02, P03, P04, P05, P06, and P07 discussed the importance of building a robust business network. P01 confirmed that networking with other small food service business owners led to business growth. P01 mentioned, “we would be totally lost without word-of-mouth networking.” P02 stated, “communication and word of mouth. It is very powerful in the industry.” P03 found that attending workshops helped expand the firm’s business network. P04 noted that the “resources that got [him] where [he is] today [are] looking at Cozy Brown and talking to different entrepreneurs to see how what they did to stay in business and see what I have to do.” P05 indicated that “spending [...] a lot of time with successful business owners” helped the business build a robust business network. P06 asserted that maintaining superior credit with vendors helps establish a robust business network. P07 stated, “having family, you know, I have my mom, my dad. You know, they are always there to lend a helping hand.” African American small food service business owners who build robust business networks can implement new practices and develop relationships that lead to new opportunities.

African American small food service business owners who develop relationships with other business owners can gain valuable information that helps sustain their business. Oraedu et al. (2021) suggested that harnessing word-of-mouth relationship-



building strategies could increase customer retention. All participants reported that networking helped them grow and remain in business for over 5 years. P04 asserted that networking was critical to business success, mentioning, “I would have to say word of mouth. Dealing with the right people that has been in business for, you know, over 5 and 10, 15 years, help me to grow and get better.” African American small food service business owners learn about useful tools and how to apply them when managing their small businesses by learning from others in similar businesses.

Networking and business development workshops could be a feasible and more affordable option for small business owners who lack the resources to employ the services of professional advisors (Iwara & Adeola, 2021). Jha and Alam (2022) noted that networking, training, and development significantly positively influence the performance of entrepreneurs. African American small food service business owners could benefit from the information they collect from networking and business development workshops when managing their businesses. P05 stated, “surround yourself with good people because you cannot do it alone. It takes a team.” P03 mentioned that attending business development seminar networking increases business owner aptitude, a key aspect of remaining successful in business. Masses of African American small food service business owners could remain successful in the long term by applying principles, and tips learned through networking and business development workshops. P06 conveyed, “I was trained by a chef.” Each participant identified networking as an essential component of long-term business success. Wu and Qu (2021) maintained that small business owners might gain useful knowledge about increasing profitability and

sustainability by interacting with other small business owners at social and professional events.

Each African American small food service business owner verified during interviews that community networking, involvement, and engagement were essential to their business's success. P01 proclaimed, "establish a positive repertoire, not only with your customers and with the community." P02 mentioned that business innovation and growth were the results of networking. P03 stated, "and in order for us to continue to have small businesses, Black businesses in the community, I feel that we need to start with education of our very young about business." P04 indicated, "different managers I seen, I seen what they did to grow their business and to grow other people businesses." P05 expressed that "having the right people in place there to execute the vision" increased the organization's scope. P06 revealed that vendor networking helped reduce business costs. P07 indicated that networking with community college personnel increased business owner competence.

Through networking platforms, African American small food service owners and potential clients-built trust that led to business sustainability. The theme regarding networking aligned with the literature and systems theory in that networking involves diverse components of daily business operations between small business owners and the outside environment. The implications of these findings rely on the interconnectedness of business expectations and activities that lead African American small food service business owners to business sustainability and growth.

## Theme 2: Strategic Pricing

The second major theme that emerged from the interviews and review of organizational documents, such as Facebook social media sites and company websites, was strategic pricing (see Table 2). The presentation of prices influences consumer perception when upgrading. (Kim et al., 2022). Hodges and Chen (2022) highlighted those pricing decisions should involve more than just determining the magnitude of the optimal price; marketers must also decide what type of digits to use to achieve price optimization. Maintaining an operative pricing strategy was important to African American small business owners when managing a food service business.

**Table 2**

*Strategic Pricing*

Pricing strategies	Number of participants	Percentage
Operative price management strategy	7	100%

Small business owners who price strategically clearly define their business's mission while assessing the current landscape of the business (Van Scheers & Makhvitha, 2016). P04 indicated "bottled water \$1" on the menu. P05 stated, "Chicken Fingers (5pc) \$7" as a menu item. By strategically pricing, African American small business owners could better grasp their business. Key components of strategic pricing practices are assessing the current business situation and making positive changes when necessary to the organization's environment (Ohlwein & Bruno, 2022). All participants agreed that strategic planning helped them remain in business longer than 5 years. African American

small food service owners who implemented effective strategic pricing practices transformed their businesses and moved toward growth and progress.

A fundamental component of strategic pricing was understanding taxation regulations. Santos and Cincera (2022) determined that business owner understanding of tax and pricing enhances financing for growth ambitions. Understanding taxation regulations as an integrant of strategic pricing might help African American small firm owners achieve success. P01 stated, “keep up with the different tax changes and tax laws routinely because we must stay educated.” P03 mentioned, “prices are constantly increasing because of inflation; we must be very clever and unique on sustaining great prices for our customers.” P06 asserted that utilizing small business tax exemptions was a key attribute of an operative price strategy. Vadakkepatt et al. (2022) advised that organizations run by leaders who employ an operative price strategy perform better than organizations with a strategic pricing process. All the participants introduced strategic pricing processes to set goals and move their businesses positively.

Kleinaltenkamp et al. (2022) claimed that owners and managers of new ventures must decide whether to include taxation as a component of the operative pricing strategy for their business. The type of venture and owner characteristics could determine a business owner’s decision to include taxation regulation in preparing an operative pricing strategy (Dearman et al., 2018). Effective business practices involve performance assessments and revised practices based on existing and emerging price and tax regulations (Formisano et al., 2021). African American small food service business owners who employ strategic pricing practices help sustain their firms.

Strategic pricing is important when managing the finances of a small business. Suitable funding and implementing fiscal management procedures can support small food service business owner sustainability (Parast & Safari, 2022). P05, P06, and P07 agreed that a price strategy, including budgeting, was important. P05 determined that constraints on the budget increase business efficiency. P06 stated, “just stay focused on the budget; stick to the budget or less and nothing more.” P07 indicated, “put all that pricing aside. So, to see what you are making.” Small business owners should budget to have firm success (Maduku & Kaseeram, 2021). Chen and Chou (2019) found that maintaining an operative price strategy increases business performance. African American small food service business owners employed effective price strategy practices, including economic management, to keep their businesses sustainable in the long term. African American small food service business owners who employed an operative pricing strategy to forecast future performance and measure the financial fitness of their businesses experienced long-term success.

### **Theme 3: Building Strong Customer and Employee Relationships**

The third major theme that emerged from the interviews and review of business documents, such as organizational websites and Facebook social media sites, was the need for African American small food service business owners to build strong relationships with employees and customers (see Table 3). Small business growth and success depend on new customers (Woo et al., 2021). Ohlwein and Bruno (2022) determined that small business owners align products with strategy, including customer expectations. Customer focus and inclusion enhance small businesses' stability,

profitability, and survivability (Parast & Safari, 2022). African American small food service business owners who provide good customer service kept customers supporting their businesses, leading to increased profits. Business internationalization, customer inclusion, and focus satisfy customers' expectations and are critical for small business owners' success (Formisano et al., 2021). Small business owners who developed customer relationships positively impacted the sustainability of their businesses (Ayachi et al., 2022).

**Table 3**

*Building Strong Customer and Employee Relationships*

Building relationships	Number of participants	Percentage
Customer relationships	7	100%
Employee relationships	7	100%

Sashi and Brynildsen (2022) claimed that small business owners offer good service to stimulate customer-to-customer interaction and word-of-mouth communication to retain loyal customers. African American small food service business owners must provide good customer service when their goal is to sustain a successful business in the long term. Participants P01, P03, P04, and P05 owned brick-and-mortar establishments where customers go to the business to procure products and services. The four participants mentioned that having brick-and-mortar establishments allowed them to interact better with their customers. P05's establishment included a lobby with tables and chairs to make customers feel at home when visiting.

In a Facebook social media review, one customer wrote, “just clean, good fun, food, and people. Great atmosphere.” Another customer wrote, “courtyard during the day. A beautiful space on Dauphin Street.” P01’s business also featured amenities, including wall-mounted television, snacks, and beverages arranged to enhance customer experiences. P04 incorporated a seating area and vending machines into their establishment to create a comfortable environment for customers visiting the business and keep them coming back. In a social media review, one customer wrote, “I love the wings. Cozy atmosphere. Great food. Child-friendly.” All participants indicated that good customer service was the key to owning a successful business. Implementing customer success management that relates to small business owners who recognize, and address customer relationship value generates additional business and builds stronger customer relationships (Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2022). P03 stated, “being there for your customer. Selling them what they need and not what they want.”

Successful African American small food service business owners must provide responsive and responsible customer service that is timely, professional, and courteous to all customers. P02 stated that “giving great customer service was listening to the customer, giving the customer what they want, and sometimes doing a little extra.” Each participant recognized that satisfied customers kept their businesses open and thriving. P06 indicated, “I try to please the client as much as I can get, you know, make sure they are satisfied.” Small food service business owners focusing on customer satisfaction and quality management could improve their business's performance (Soares Ito et al., 2022). Customer priority consistency enhances customer relationships and drives business

performance (Vadakkepatt et al., 2022). Successful African American small food service business owners must prioritize customer expectations consistently to build positive employee and customer relationships and increase business performance. P07 stated that “being consistent on your menu” and “food being consistent” were important for business growth. P04 mentioned that “consistency, yes, staying consistent” improved business performance.

Madhani (2022) asserted that customer priority consistency improved internal customer satisfaction, employee motivation, and job satisfaction. Successful African American small food service business owners must maintain customer and employee job satisfaction to improve business performance. P05 stated that “personnel and having the right people in place” increased business longevity. P03 determined that “having integrity, having integrity with your employees, having integrity with your suppliers” builds customer and employee relationships and drives business success. African American small food service business owners focusing on building customer and employee relationships extended their business sustainability beyond 5 years.

All participants understood the importance of maintaining good customer service and employing practices that increase customer retention. Building and supporting positive customer and employee relationships have considerable advantages. The study participants presented a compelling argument for developing and sustaining good customer relationships. African American small food service business owners could extend the sustainability of their businesses beyond 5 years if good customer service translates to all business components. The African American small food service business



owner must focus on establishing business appeal to customers. Customers are critical to the growth and success of small African American food service business owners. Kim and Chung (2022) found that customer satisfaction and maintaining strong customer and employee relationships play important roles in business efficiency. African American small food service business owners that provided good customer service extended the sustainability of their businesses beyond 5 years.

The findings aligned with Madhani (2022), who found that successful managers (a) recognize employee abilities, (b) develop employee cognizance, and (c) build employee trust, which could increase employee and customer retention resulting in increased business performance. Benitez and Medina (2022) highlight the importance of noticing the dispersion in job satisfaction in work-units to understand the relationship between well-being and service quality resulting in improved business performance. P05's customer reviews, length in business, and interview data helped to determine the level of customer satisfaction received because of fostering good employee and customer relationships. P07 encouraged positive employee relationships by being present at the business while practicing the uniform policies and procedures that employees follow. P04 mentioned "getting people that want to work together" to nurture employee relationships. African American small food service owners that gain employee trust and loyalty by nurturing employee relationships extend their businesses beyond 5 years.

African American small food service business owners build strong customer and employee relationships related to the general systems theory because relationships are critical to growing and maintaining a successful small food service business. African

American small food service business owners that maintain employee and customer inclusion extend their business sustainability beyond 5 years. The general systems theory depends on diverse components of a system operating collectively. African American small food service business owners who built positive relationships through consistency and service quality help ensure that all business components operate collectively to extend business sustainability beyond 5 years.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

Seven African American small food service business owners in the southeastern region of the United States who sustained their businesses beyond 5 years shared three identified major themes. Existing and emergent African American small food service business owners could maintain their businesses and develop new strategies that lead to long-term sustainability by employing the findings from this study. Potential researchers could use study findings to shape the foundation of future recommendations for strategic business actions as well as further potential studies. Prospective African American small food service business owners could develop credible resolutions that address business needs by implementing the strategies identified through study findings.

African American small food service business owners could apply effective business strategies that assist them with remaining sustainable, thus adding revenues to local economies through the findings of this study. Potential African American small food service business owners and current business leaders could benefit from the information included in this discussion by applying such ideas to professional practice. African American small food service business owners might find the themes identified in

the study beneficial when establishing a small food service business in the southeastern United States.

### **Implications for Social Change**

More than 50% of small business owners experience failure within their first 5 years of operation (Small, 2020). The strategies reported in the current research study, shared by the interviewed African American small food service business owners, could invoke positive social change. Emergent and existing African American small food service business owners could have direction regarding effective business strategies to maintain a small food service business by employing strategies discovered through the study.

An implication for positive social change that could occur because of this study is a reduction of African American small food service business failures, which could result in skilled employee retention. By presenting prospective African American small food service business owners with effective business strategies, they could gain a deeper understanding of the importance of effective business strategies when maintaining a successful business in the long-term. Positive social change deriving from the study could lead to additional financial security for African American small food service business owners and employees, employment opportunities for local community members, and revenue in the local economy. African American small food service business owner success is more likely to occur when African American small food service business owners receive appropriate direction regarding managing and maintaining a small food service business. African American small food service business owners could use study

findings to employ the appropriate business strategy necessary to succeed in business for longer than 5 years.

### **Recommendations for Action**

A mass of African American small food service business owners experience issues sustaining their businesses for longer than 5 years. African American small food service business owners should take measures that facilitate the development of effective business strategies, which could increase the sustainability of their businesses. African American small food service business owners seeking to gain insight into the trajectory of their small food service business should use effective business strategies that include building a robust business network, strategic pricing, and strong customer and employee relationships. African American small business owners could use study findings to gain additional knowledge regarding business advancement and increase the probability of achieving long-term success. Aspiring and existing African American small food service business owners pursuing an understanding of drivers that propel the success of African American small food service business owners could benefit from using the findings of this study to extend their business sustainability beyond 5 years. African American small food service business owners who experience obstacles, seek to strengthen their businesses, and seek to improve in business will benefit from the collective experiences of the seven interviewed African American small food service business owners.

African American small food service business owners should explore effective business strategies' benefits over time. Entrepreneurs should continuously explore effective business strategies that lead to long-term sustainability. African American small

food service business owners who recognize challenges and employ effective business strategies could prevent business failure.

Recommended actions for African American small food service business owners include (a) realizing the value of robust business networking, (b) developing operative pricing strategies, and (c) understanding the value of building positive customer and employee relationships. Another recommendation for African American small food service business owners included considering the study results and realizing the likelihood of improving business performance. The findings offered additional insight, resources, and guidance to overcome diverse obstacles in opening and effectively sustaining a small food service business. African American small food service business owners could outperform their competitors by networking, pricing strategically, providing good customer service, and satisfying employees. The Mobile Area Chamber of Commerce and local business associations will receive a summary of the study's results.

Sharing the results with these agencies would introduce an opportunity for sharing study results at conferences and training events. Additionally, African American small food service business owners could benefit from study information while progressing business opportunities. The dissemination of study results could occur across peer-reviewed publications. The seven study participants might gain beneficial information from the study results. The seven participants will receive a summary of the published results for their records.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Recommendations for further research include potential researchers expanding the focus of the research to include African American small food service business owners who operate with more than 50 employees, operate in divergent industries, and operate in diverse geographical locations. The sample size limited the study and restricted the transferability of the findings. The information provided by study participants might not be applicable characteristics of all successful African American small food service business owners. Future researchers could increase transferability by expanding the focus of the research.

Another limitation of the study involved the responses of African American small food service business owners. African American medium and large firm food service owners might share comparable responses or behaviors to the African American small food service owner participants in the study. Only seven participants participated in the study.

Future researchers could explore the effective business strategies of African American small food service business owners who increase their profits and explore the importance of gender, firm size, and age variances among African American small food service business owners using mixed-methods and quantitative designs. Future researchers could identify additional areas to research by focusing on the specific themes identified through the study, including (a) building a robust business network with other successful African American small food service business owners, (b) strategic pricing, and (c) building strong customer and employee relationships. Another recommendation is

for future researchers to focus on the effective business strategies of successful African American small food service business owners and African American small food service business owners who failed to sustain their businesses for 5 years. Conducting additional research in such areas could afford business owners and government leaders the opportunity to continue supporting, augmenting resources, and bolstering local economies and communities.

### **Reflections**

The doctoral study process included developing my scholarly voice and improving my ability to conduct research as an independent scholar. Additionally, completing my doctoral study included obtaining comprehensive information regarding the effective business strategies African American small food service business owners in the southeastern United States used to sustain their businesses for longer than years. The process was lengthy, intricate, and arduous at times. The study's results functioned to provide an understanding of the influence and benefit of successful African American small food service business owners in the southeastern region of the United States. The information gained from the study's participants added to the existing literature regarding effective business strategies leading to African American small food service business sustainability beyond 5 years.

Functioning as the study's researcher included investing myself in the research process to maintain comprehensive study completion. Maintaining impartiality and relying on the collected data functioned as the approach to address the responses to the research question. The study participants were willing to share their lived experiences

related to the effective business strategies they employed to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. Maintaining neutrality throughout the data collection process established participant comfort. Bracketing functioned to reduce biases regarding the study's findings when analyzing the data to identify emergent themes. Zwaan et al. (2019) found that bracketing reduces researcher bias. Bracketing helps researchers mitigate assumptions about the focus of the research through subjective engagement with the study data (Bürkland et al., 2019). Bracketing functioned to lessen personal perceptions about the research data.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of the qualitative, explorative multiple case study was to explore the effective business strategies African American small food service business owners used to sustain their businesses for over 5 years. African American small food service owners contribute to the United States economy. Successful African American small food service business owners contribute to the economy through job creation, which leads to growing economies (Miller et al., 2022). Despite having a positive impact on local, national, and global economies, African American small food service business owners continue to face challenges related to sustainability (Aluko & Ntsalaze, 2022).

A greater comprehension of the effective business strategies that African American small food service owners employ to remain sustainable longer than 5 years is necessary if African American small food service business owners, potential African American small food service business owners, and public service organizations intend to improve the business potential of this group. The collected data included information



from semistructured interviews and data from organizational documents, including company Facebook social media pages and company website data. Koziel and Pietrenko-Dabrowska (2022) suggested that methodological triangulation helps researchers identify key themes. Methodological triangulation functioned to aid in identifying themes derived from multiple data sources. Toghroli et al. (2022) found that data saturation ensues when no additional information emerges. Data saturation occurred when no themes emerged after collecting data from four participants. Data collected from three additional respective participants functioned to augment data saturation.

Existing and future African American small food service business owners could apply the major themes discovered in the study to develop effective business strategies and realize success in their businesses. African American small food service business owners must employ effective business strategies to maintain a successful business. An in-depth review of study participants' responses and the cross-examination of the multiple data sources generated additional information regarding the effective business strategies African American small food service business owners employed to remain sustainable in business beyond 5 years. Through the outcomes deriving from the study, African American small food service business owners and potential researchers could benefit from the recommendations for action and future research. African American and non-African American small food service business owners could realize positive social change by utilizing study findings in their daily business operations.

Data analysis included identifying three major themes. Building upon the general systems theory, the research participants revealed that African American small food

service business owners placed significant value on the effective business strategies of maintaining a robust business network, pricing strategy, and good employee and customer relationships to extend the longevity of their businesses beyond 5 years.

Existing, emergent, and future African American small food service owners could benefit from understanding and employing the effective business strategies reported by the African American small food service owners who participated in the study to increase their business sustainability beyond 5 years.

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## Appendix: Interview Protocol

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/Time: \_\_\_\_\_

A. Introduce:

- a. Thank you for allowing this small business owner interview today
- b. Introduce self to the participant(s).
- c. The main Research question: What are the effective business strategies African American small food service business owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years?
- d. Present consent form, discuss contents and answer questions and concerns of participants.
- e. Participant electronically signs the consent document.
- f. Provide participants with an electronic copy of the consent document.
- g. Begin audio-recording the semistructured interview.
- h. Follow the procedure to introduce participants with the pseudonym/coded identification and note the date and time.
- i. Extend approximately 60 minutes for responses to the seven interview questions, including any additional follow-up questions.
- j. Begin the interview with question #1; continue to the final question.
- k. Summarize with additional questions.
- l. End interview session and conduct member checking with participants.

m. Thank respective participants for their part in the study and restate the participant's contact numbers to conduct follow up questions and address concerns.

n. End protocol.

#### B. Interview Questions

1. What challenges have you faced in sustaining your food service business beyond 5 years?
2. What do you believe is the single most essential business strategy an African American small food service business owner must use to construct a sustainable business?
3. How did you obtain the knowledge of effective strategies to sustain your food service business beyond 5 years?
4. What strategies attributed to your profitability, longevity, and ability to sustain your food service business beyond 5 years?
5. What resources do you attribute to sustaining your small food service business beyond 5 years?
6. What other information, if any, would you like to share regarding sustaining your small food service business?