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Effective Strategies Hawaiian Food Truck Owners use to Sustain Their Businesses

Eric J. Harring
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Eric J. Harring

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Matthew Knight, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. LeVita Bassett, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

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

Walden University
2025

Abstract

Effective Strategies Hawaiian Food Truck Owners use to Sustain Their Businesses

by

Eric J. Harring

MS, Central Michigan, 2020

BS, Wayland Baptist, 2018

Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2025

Abstract

Food trucks are popular choices for consumers seeking diverse cuisines and unique dining experiences, but running a successful food truck business presents significant challenges, including fluctuating customer preferences, regulatory hurdles, and intense competition. Addressing these obstacles is crucial for food truck owners to ensure the long-term viability of their enterprises. Grounded in contingency theory, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry research project was to explore the strategies employed by food truck owners to overcome these challenges and foster sustainable growth. The participants were six business owners of Hawaiian food trucks who sustained their businesses for at least three years. Data collection included semistructured interviews, reviews of publicly available business documents, and analyses of business websites. Through thematic analysis, three themes were identified: marketing strategies, customer-retention practices, and pricing approaches. A key recommendation is for Hawaiian food truck owners to distinguish customers' specific needs by providing personalized and individualized services. The implications for positive social change include the potential for Hawaiian food truck owners to minimize business closures, retain skilled employees, and strengthen local community support.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife Dr. Marvinna Harring and our children, Essence, Tsion, Ambience, Psalm, Solstice, Oracle (RIH) and Cypress. Your boundless love, laughter, and resilience have been a constant source of inspiration and joy, fueling my determination to succeed in this academic endeavor. Your patience, understanding, and unwavering support during times of intense study and research are deeply appreciated. Your belief in me has been a driving force behind my pursuit of excellence, and I am forever grateful for your unwavering presence in my life. Thank you for selflessly sacrificing countless hours of quality time throughout this journey to allow me to finish my endeavor. I am honoring my deceased grandparents Henry and Lillian Harring, who inspired me to pursue my educational goals and instilled within me the greatest gift: the spirit of excellence, will, determination, and dedication. This degree is for you. I also dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Rendia, my uncle Lanny, my siblings, Eugene, Shawntee and Sean, Father In-law Jerry Cobb SR. mother In-law Bernice Bethea, and brother In-law Jerry Cobb JR and Russell & Willie Mae Cobb (deceased) for their understanding, support, and encouragement throughout this process. I dedicate this study to my friends (Davidson & Renee McCreary, Louis Lamar, Deloney Denson, Reggie & Linda Reed, Jamie Collazo, Avery & Fran Douglass, Gennie Richmond (deceased) Bishop Howard and Ralphine Winston), and my academic colleagues who have supported, encouraged, and kept me uplifted in prayer throughout this journey.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Project

Background of the Problem

Food truck owners confront a significant obstacle stemming from the dynamic nature of consumer preferences (Choi et al., 2020). These preferences are subject to frequent shifts due to evolving culinary trends and changing dietary preferences among consumers. Consequently, food truck owners are compelled to continually revise their menus and offerings to ensure alignment with the evolving demands of their target audience.

Failure to stay abreast of these changes poses a risk of stagnation and potential loss of market share for food truck businesses (McNeil & Young, 2019). Therefore, there is a pressing need for research into practical menu innovation and consumer engagement strategies to equip food truck owners with the tools necessary to navigate this challenging landscape effectively. Food truck businesses are also subject to stringent regulatory requirements and permitting processes, which can vary significantly across different jurisdictions (Ghezzi et al., 2021). Navigating these regulatory hurdles can be time-consuming and costly, particularly for small-scale entrepreneurs. Researching best practices for regulatory compliance and risk management and optimizing operational processes through effective strategies are crucial for the success and sustainability of food truck businesses (Van Embden et al., 2022). This research aims to provide practical recommendations for success in the food truck industry.

Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

The specific business problem is that some Hawaiian food truck owners lack effective strategies to sustain their business beyond 3 years. This qualitative pragmatic inquiry will focus on food truck owners operating in Hawaii where there are diverse culinary landscapes. By focusing on individuals with sustained experience, the research aims to explore established business practices, resilience strategies, challenges and successes encountered within the first critical year of operation and beyond.

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project was to explore the effective strategies that Hawaiian food truck owners use to sustain their businesses. The population for this research project consisted of Hawaiian food truck owners who have been in operation for at least 3 years. These participants were expected to offer valuable perspectives on long-term sustainability and innovation in the local food truck sector. The project focused on identifying strategies that enable these business leaders to navigate the challenges posed by evolving consumer preferences, regulatory complexities, and operational inefficiencies.

For this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project, the population consisted of participants based on their demonstrated success in sustaining their businesses amidst challenges. The sample size included at least six participants to ensure depth and diversity of perspectives. Participant eligibility was determined based on the criteria of owning and operating a food truck business.

Access was facilitated through outreach and networking within the Hawaiian food truck community. Data sources included interviews and reviews of relevant publicly

available documents (as described by Campbell et al., 2020). The research drew upon contingency theory to identify effective strategies for sustaining food truck businesses.

This project aimed to uncover how food truck owners in Hawaii make decisions based on contingency theory. Contingency theory, developed by Fiedler (1964) and later expanded by Burns and Stalker (Su, 2024), was used as the conceptual framework for exploring how food truck owners adapt their strategies in response to changing environmental factors. The research focused on strategies related to menu innovation, regulatory adherence, and operational efficiency (as described by Lichy et al., 2022).

By equipping food truck owners with essential insights and support, this project aimed to empower them to overcome industry challenges and establish enduring success. Through a comprehensive approach, this research endeavored to offer food truck entrepreneurs the tools and understanding needed to thrive in the competitive culinary landscape. This research explored effective strategies for menu innovation that balance creativity, customer preferences, and cost-effectiveness. The project analyzed food truck entrepreneurs' regulatory compliance challenges and identified strategies to overcome them (as described by Zainal & Mohd Matore, 2021).

I investigated the operational practices that lead to efficient and profitable food truck businesses. This research endeavored to equip food truck entrepreneurs with the necessary resources and understanding to help sustain the industry's longevity. Through actionable findings, this project aimed to foster the sustained success of food truck businesses by empowering owners with essential tools and expertise.

Research Question

What effective strategies do Hawaiian food truck owners use to sustain their business?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are statements that people use or accept, often implicitly, and on which their assertions are based (Sbisà, 2021). Establishing and validating the underlying assumptions that form the basis of the results is crucial for ensuring accurate and reliable project findings. This is essential for upholding the project's integrity and credibility.

The present project was based on several assumptions. First, I assumed that all participants would provide honest responses to each interview question. Second, I assumed that the participants have sufficient knowledge to answer the interview questions. Third, I assumed that the participants' responses will lead to improved strategies, resulting in a more efficient approach to enduring challenges in the food truck industry.

Limitations

Limitations are essentially potential weaknesses of the project that are beyond the researcher's control (Ross & Zaidi, 2019). In every research project, inherent limitations need to be identified to properly assess the resulting findings. Identifying and acknowledging these limitations is essential for maintaining the integrity and validity of the project results. One limitation of qualitative research methods, such as interviews, was the potential for bias. The second limitation resource constraints and social

desirability bias could limit the research. The third limitation was external factors like regulation changes that may affect its relevance over time.

Transition

The problem facing food truck owners is multifaceted, covering evolving consumer preferences, regulatory complexities, and operational inefficiencies (Koay et al., 2023). Food truck business owners are integral to the U.S. economy, yet a research gap exists regarding understanding their sustainable business strategies (Azizi Fardkhales & Lincoln, 2021). Exploring the impact of internal and external factors, particularly managerial knowledge and business proficiency, can enhance the identification and effective strategy for sustainability.

Section 1 covered the background, problem statement, purpose statement, research question, assumptions, and limitations. In Section 2, I analyze the literature on strategies employed by Hawaiian food truck owners to sustain their businesses. These included systemic integration, strategic planning, and sustainable entrepreneurship, framed by contingency theory. In Section 3, I cover the research methodology, including design, analysis, data collection techniques, and strategies for project completion. It also details project findings and their practical applications. In Section 4, I offer a comprehensive discussion of the project's findings and their implications for professional practice.

Section 2: The Literature Review

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

This literature review was conducted to address the following research question: What strategies do Hawaiian food truck owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 3 years? To address this research question, I conducted a comprehensive review of scholarly sources accessed primarily through the Walden University library. This included journal articles, dissertations, and literature focused on small businesses, with an emphasis on food truck enterprises and small business management in general.

In addition to the Walden University library resources, I utilized multiple academic databases and platforms such as SAGE Publications, ScienceDirect, ProQuest, Emerald Management Journals, EBSCOhost, Management and Organization Studies, government databases, and LexisNexis Academic. The literature review process involved reading, analyzing, and synthesizing research findings from peer-reviewed journals, books, and reports. To ensure relevance, I applied specific keywords including *food truck management*, *business sustainability*, *absenteeism*, *operational efficiency*, and *menu optimization*. This synthesis of existing research establishes a foundational understanding for the project. The literature review is organized around four main areas: (a) conceptual framework, (b) analysis of supporting theory, (c) analysis of potential themes and phenomena, and (d) the relationship between this project and prior research.

Contingency Theory

In 1964, Fred E. Fiedler published their influential work on the contingency model of leadership effectiveness, which has significantly impacted leadership studies.

This literature review aims to provide an overview of Fiedler's model, its key concepts, empirical support, criticisms, and its relevance in contemporary leadership research.

Fiedler's (1964) contingency model suggests that leadership effectiveness depends on the interaction between leadership style and situational favorableness.

Fiedler's (1964) contingency theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how situational factors influence leadership effectiveness. Fiedler identified two primary leadership styles as task-oriented and relationship-oriented and proposed that leadership effectiveness depends on how well these styles align with situational favorableness. This is determined by leader-member relations, task structure, and positional power. Research has tested the validity of this model, with some studies supporting the importance of situational alignment, while others have produced mixed or inconclusive results (Gould, 2024).

Fiedler's (1964) contingency model has faced criticism for its rigid classification of leadership styles and its exclusive focus on situational variables while neglecting factors such as follower characteristics and organizational culture. Scholars have questioned the model's reliance on self-report measures and its, arguing that leadership effectiveness requires more flexibility and adaptability (Fiedler, 1966). Modern research continues to refine the model by improving measurement techniques and expanding its applicability to different organizational contexts.

This project applied contingency theory to investigate how food truck owners adapt their business strategies in response to environmental and internal organizational factors. By examining variables such as market competition, regulatory constraints, and

customer preferences, the project aimed to explore how external forces shape strategic decision-making. In this project I assessed the impact of leadership styles, organizational structures, and resource availability on business operations.

Contingency theory emphasizes that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to management, as organizational effectiveness depends on aligning strategies with specific circumstances (Fiedler, 1964). This perspective highlights the importance of flexibility in responding to environmental changes. (Childs et al., 2022). The next phase of this research employed a contingency theory framework to guide data collection and analysis. The methodology section outlined the research design, sampling strategy, data collection methods, and ethical considerations, ensuring a structured approach to investigating adaptive business strategies among food truck owners. The following section explores the concept of leaders.

Leaders

The food truck industry has grown rapidly in recent years, and leadership has become crucial for their success (Andersen et al., 2017). Effective leadership is now crucial for their success (Moore & Hanson, 2022). Servant leadership prioritizes serving others' needs, empowering team members, and creating a supportive environment. It fosters a positive work culture and leads to better performance (A. Iqbal et al., 2022).

Leadership is critical for food truck success (Ekiyor & Dapper, 2019). Owners have various roles and responsibilities. The adopted leadership style defines strategy, influences decision-making, and affects the work environment (Fahlevi et al., 2019).

Different styles impact commitment and productivity. Ineffective leadership is the main issue.

Transformational leaders inspire and motivate followers by articulating a compelling vision, encouraging innovation, and promoting individual growth as highlighted by Xie (2020). Growth drives performance excellence and adaptability in response to market demands. Both leadership styles prioritize employee development and organizational learning but operate through distinct mechanisms (Ekiyor & Dapper, 2019).

Servant leaders foster collaboration and trust, while transformational leadership drives innovation and goal attainment (Erden & Yaşlıoğlu, 2020). Drawing from Xie's (2020) research, both servant leadership and transformational leadership offer valuable frameworks for fostering learning organizations and driving performance within the food truck industry (Fahlevi et al., 2019). Food truck owners can use different leadership styles to promote teamwork, innovation, and customer satisfaction for growth and success in a competitive market (Khatri et al., 2024). The following section explores empowerment.

Empowerment

The implementation of transformational leadership and psychological empowerment can significantly impact employee satisfaction levels (Al Saed & Al Saed, 2023). It is worth noting that the connection between leadership, empowerment, and meaningful work is influenced by the organizational culture (Pasha & Muhammad, 2020). By creating a work environment that values transformational leadership, psychological empowerment and positive organizational culture, food truck owners can

significantly improve employee engagement, job satisfaction and overall business performance (Ayu Dina & Tjahjono, 2023).

Transformational leaders inspire employees to strive for excellence, while psychological empowerment enhances their confidence and motivation (Pasha & Muhammad, 2020). Additionally, fostering a positive organizational culture promotes a sense of belonging and encourages teamwork among employees (Yue et al., 2019). Therefore, a holistic approach that integrates these elements can contribute to the long-term success of food truck businesses, resulting in happier employees and a thriving business Schaufeli (2021). The following section explores challenges.

Leadership Challenges

Boonjubun (2022) explored the challenges faced by street food vendors, focusing on regulatory hurdles. The study provides insights into the obstacles impacting these vendors and offers valuable lessons applicable to food truck owners. Boonjubun highlighted that street food vendors often confront stringent regulations, varying from one municipality to another, including constraints on operating hours, designated vending zones, health and safety standards, and waste management requirements.

Navigating these regulatory frameworks is crucial for compliance and operational smoothness (Boonjubun, 2022). Understanding local regulations and engaging with municipal authorities can help food truck owners secure necessary permits and operate smoothly. The study discusses the challenges of finding prime vending locations for street food vendors, particularly food truck owners. Boonjubun emphasized the importance of location analytics, alternative vending spots, and building relationships

with event organizers to secure lucrative spots at festivals and markets. The research also highlights the economic vulnerabilities of street food vendors, including fluctuating customer demand and high operational costs.

Developing a resilient business model is essential for sustainability, including diversified revenue streams and cost management strategies. Boonjubun (2022) emphasized the significance of community engagement and social networks for street food vendors to build a loyal customer base and receive community support during challenging times. For food truck owners, fostering strong community ties through social media engagement and collaborations with local businesses is essential for enhancing visibility and customer loyalty Kahn (1990).

Boonjubun (2022) found the struggles of street food vendors in Helsinki not only offer valuable insights into the regulatory, operational, and socio-economic challenges faced by food truck owners but also provided crucial recommendations. By understanding and implementing these recommendations, food truck owners can significantly enhance their business resilience and success. In the following subsection I explore the food truck industry.

Food Truck Industry

Alfiero et al. (2017) explored the emergence and growth of food trucks as a dynamic and innovative sector within the street food industry. They examined how food trucks have leveraged innovation to distinguish themselves in a competitive market and meet evolving consumer preferences. Innovation in the context of food trucks refers to

the introduction of new ideas, methods, and products that enhance overall consumer experience and operational efficiency (Li et al., 2019).

Alfiero et al. (2017) highlighted several key areas where food trucks have innovated, including menu offerings, service delivery, and marketing strategies. For food truck owners, continuously innovating in these areas is crucial to staying relevant and attracting a diverse customer base. One significant area of innovation is the diversification of menu offerings. Food truck owners often experiment with fusion cuisines, unique ingredients, and seasonal specialties to create distinctive and appealing menus.

The approach attracts food enthusiasts seeking novel dining experiences but also allows food trucks to differentiate themselves from traditional restaurants and other street food vendors. For instance, a food truck might offer a rotating menu that incorporates local ingredients or collaborates with local chefs to create exclusive dishes, thereby maintaining consumer interest and driving repeat business. Service delivery innovation is another critical factor discussed by Alfiero et al. (2017). Food truck owners have embraced technology to enhance customer experience, such as through mobile ordering apps, digital payments, and real-time location tracking via social media.

These technological advancements streamline operations, reduce wait times, and provide convenience to customers, thereby improving overall satisfaction (Schifeling & Demetry, 2021). Additionally, food truck owners often participate in local events, markets, and festivals, strategically positioning themselves to maximize visibility and

reach. Marketing strategies have also seen significant innovation within the food truck industry (Araral, 2020).

Alfiero et al. (2017) noted that food trucks use social media platforms extensively to build their brand, engage with customers, and promote their unique offerings. Effective use of social media allows food trucks to create a loyal online following, announce locations and menu updates, and interact with customers in real time. This direct engagement fosters a sense of community and loyalty among patrons.

Alfiero et al. (2017) also addressed the importance of sustainability as an innovative practice in the food truck industry. By adopting sustainable practices such as using eco-friendly packaging, sourcing ingredients locally, and minimizing food waste, food trucks can appeal to environmentally conscious consumers (Loots et al., 2024). These practices not only enhance the brand image but also contribute to broader environmental goals.

The research by Alfiero et al. (2017) underscores the pivotal role of innovation in the success of food trucks. By continuously evolving their menu offerings, service delivery, and marketing strategies, food trucks can effectively meet consumer demands and stand out in a competitive market. Additionally, incorporating sustainable practices can further enhance their appeal and ensure long-term success. For food truck owners, embracing innovation is essential to thrive in the dynamic street food industry. The following section explores resilient leaders.

Resilient Leadership

The food truck industry faces various challenges such as changing consumer preferences, economic downturns, or unforeseen events (Jagtap et al., 2020). Leadership plays a vital role in fostering organizational resilience (Roberson & Perry, 2021).

Resilient leaders in the context of food truck operations, draws insights from factors influencing organizational resilience according to Țiclau et al. (2021). Resilient leadership involves agility, optimism, and decisiveness, enabling leaders to navigate uncertainty and lead their teams through challenging times.

In food trucks, resilient leaders foster adaptability, innovation, and sustained performance (Țiclau et al., 2021). Factors influencing organizational resilience in food trucks include proactive risk management, robust communication channels, agile decision-making processes, and a culture of learning and collaboration (Jagtap et al., 2020). Resilient leaders foster adaptive responses to adversity by promoting a growth mindset, encouraging experimentation, and fostering a culture of innovation (Țiclau et al., 2021).

Țiclau et al. (2021) leveraged adversity to explore new menu offerings, optimize operational processes, and diversify revenue streams. Resilient leadership enhances organizational resilience and adaptive capacity in the food truck industry (Engelbrecht, 2002). By fostering a culture of resilience, agility, and innovation, food truck leaders can position their businesses to thrive in a dynamic and competitive market environment (Țiclau et al., 2021). Therefore, food truck owners need to focus on developing resilient

leadership strategies that can help them navigate the market challenges while fostering an agile and innovative culture within their organization (Țiclaeu et al., 2021).

These practices include strategic planning, resource allocation, innovation management, and performance measurement. By implementing these practices, food truck businesses can streamline operations, reduce costs, and maximize profitability. Strategic management principles also improve operational efficiency, customer satisfaction, and financial sustainability, positioning food truck businesses for long-term success. In the following subsection I explore strategic initiatives.

Strategic Initiatives

Tolici (2021) identified several strategic management practices as effective ways to enhance organizational performance in the food truck industry. These practices, such as strategic planning, resource allocation, innovation management, and performance measurement, play a vital role in helping food truck business leaders achieve their goals, remain competitive, and achieve success. Strategic planning is an essential practice that involves setting specific goals, identifying target markets, and developing effective marketing and operational strategies that can give food truck businesses a competitive advantage.

By creating a strategic plan, food truck business leaders can align their resources and efforts towards achieving their goals (Tolici, 2021). Resource allocation is another essential practice that involves making budgeting and staffing decisions to optimize operational efficiency and ensure the effective use of available resources. By allocating

resources effectively, food truck businesses can reduce costs, increase productivity, and improve customer satisfaction (Gopi & Samat, 2020).

Innovation management is also a key practice that fosters creativity and adaptability, enabling food truck owners to differentiate their offerings, respond to changing consumer preferences, and capitalize on emerging trends. By embracing innovation, food truck businesses can stay ahead of competitors and maintain a competitive edge in the industry. Performance measurement is another important practice that enables food truck businesses to track key performance indicators (KPIs), assess progress towards strategic goals, and identify areas for improvement (Janah et al., 2022).

By measuring performance, food truck business leaders can identify their strengths and weaknesses and make informed decisions to improve their overall performance (Kurniawati et al., 2020). Overall, implementing strategic management practices can significantly enhance organizational performance in the food truck industry. By adopting a systematic approach to strategic planning, resource allocation, innovation management, and performance measurement, food truck businesses can streamline operations, reduce costs, and maximize profitability. The following section explores business sustainability.

Business Sustainability

Business sustainability means operating without harming the environment, community, or society. It involves reducing waste, conserving energy, using eco-friendly materials, and promoting social responsibility (Lichy et al., 2022). Prioritizing sustainability can improve a company's reputation and bottom line in the long run.

Lichy et al. (2022) examined the ways in which food truck owners are utilizing technology to stay competitive in today's digital world. By integrating technology, food truck business owners can streamline their operations, improve efficiency, and provide better customer convenience. Moreover, food truck owners can benefit from adopting data analytics tools which help them gain valuable insights into customer preferences, purchasing behavior, and market trends (Najib et al., 2021).

These data allowed owners to customize their menu offerings and marketing strategies accordingly. In addition, technology is a powerful tool for social engagement and community building within the food truck industry (Lichy et al., 2022). Social media platforms enable food truck owners to interact with their customers more easily, share real-time updates on their locations and menu offerings, and request feedback and reviews. This fosters a sense of community and loyalty among customers. The following section explores absenteeism.

Absenteeism

Absenteeism includes disengagement, burnout, and workplace dissatisfaction that can significantly impact business operations and customer experience (Løkke, 2022). Effective leadership practices are crucial in food truck operations as they are the foundation for managing absenteeism and engaging employees (El Bedawy et al., 2017). Leaders can foster employee satisfaction, performance, and commitment through transparent communication, constructive feedback, and involving team members in decision-making (Løkke, 2022).

Establishing strong and effective leadership is paramount for the success of food truck businesses (Moore & Hanson, 2022). It is pivotal in nurturing a work environment that encourages creativity, proactiveness, and adaptability, empowering enterprises to tackle obstacles and capitalize on prospects (El Bedawy et al., 2017). Conversely, absenteeism among employees can disrupt business functions and impact customer satisfaction (Løkke, 2022).

To address this challenge, food truck owners can create a positive work environment, offer career growth opportunities, prioritize staff welfare, and take a comprehensive approach to employee management (Razak et al., 2022). This strategy can help reduce absenteeism and ensure the business's long-term success.

Business Strategy

Achieving and sustaining a competitive advantage is crucial for food truck businesses operating in a dynamic and competitive environment. Farida and Setiawan (2022) delved into the strategies and innovation that can help businesses achieve and sustain competitive advantage. While their study encompassed various industries, their findings are particularly pertinent to food truck businesses, which operate in a fiercely competitive and ever-changing market.

Farida and Setiawan (2022) defined competitive advantage as a business's ability to outperform its rivals through unique strategies and innovations that deliver more value to customers. Food truck owners can achieve this through differentiation, cost leadership, and innovation. Differentiation includes unique menu offerings, exceptional customer service, and distinctive branding (Farida & Setiawan, 2022). Innovation, such as new

product development and technology adoption, drives business performance and maintains relevance. Leveraging mobile ordering apps, digital payment systems, and social media marketing can enhance customer experience and streamline operations for food truck owners.

Farida and Setiawan (2022) also discussed the importance of performance measurement in sustaining competitive advantage. The authors argued that businesses must continuously monitor and evaluate their performance to identify areas for improvement and adapt to changing market conditions. This could involve tracking KPIs such as sales, customer satisfaction, and operational efficiency for food truck owners. By analyzing these metrics, food truck owners can make data-driven decisions to optimize their business strategies and improve overall performance.

Farida and Setiawan (2022) emphasized the importance of strategic partnerships and collaborations for food truck businesses to enhance their competitive advantage. Farida and Setiawan highlighted the significance of business strategies, innovation, and performance measurements in achieving and sustaining competitive advantage for food truck owners. Implementing continuous innovation, effective performance management, and strategic partnerships can help food truck business owners adapt to market changes and secure long-term success. The next section will explore how location is key for success.

Location Strategy

Adaptability is crucial for food truck businesses, as they encounter challenges similar to those faced by independent restaurants, especially during times of crisis Ayu

Dina and Tjahjono (2023). The authors provided valuable insights for owners who want to improve their operations in a competitive market. Unlike traditional restaurants, food trucks can serve different customer segments in various locations because they are mobile.

However, this mobility also presents a strategic challenge: identifying the best locations that balance high foot traffic, target demographics, and favorable business environments (Tolici, 2021). Successful food truck owners conduct thorough market research to understand potential locations' dynamics, including customer preferences, local events, and competitor presence (Gopi & Samat, 2020). Owners can use location analytics and data-driven decision-making to enhance their site selection process and apply these findings to the broader food truck industry.

Utilizing GPS tracking and customer data analytics tools can assist food truck owners in identifying high-traffic areas and customizing their schedules to maximize exposure and sales (Artz et al., 2019). Participation in local events, festivals, and markets can also offer valuable opportunities for brand-building and customer engagement. Artz et al. (2019) emphasized the significance of a clear business structure for food trucks, which include defined roles, scalable processes, and strong branding. The next section will explore how adaptability is crucial for efficiency.

Operational Efficiency

Adaptability is crucial for food truck businesses, as they encounter challenges like those faced by independent restaurants, especially during times of crisis (Brizek et al., 2021). Both traditional restaurants and food trucks faced disruptions and had to innovate

rapidly to survive. The pandemic affected food truck owners due to decreased customer footfall and supply chain disruptions.

Brizek et al. (2021) stressed the importance of agility and flexibility in business, citing how independent restaurants that adapted quickly were more likely to survive the pandemic. Food truck owners adapted by changing locations, offering delivery and takeaway services, and collaborating with local businesses. They highlighted how technology can help food trucks attract and retain customers by embracing digital solutions and active social media engagement.

Brizek et al. (2021) emphasized the role of community and customer relationships in sustaining business during challenging times. Many independent restaurants leveraged their community connections and focused on building solid customer relationships. Food truck owners can apply this strategy by participating in local events, supporting community initiatives, and providing personalized customer service (Adhikari et al., 2019). Building a solid community presence helps in tough times and fosters long-term loyalty and word-of-mouth promotion.

Brizek et al. (2021) stressed the importance of financial management for food truck owners. Owners should seek financial support, optimize cost structures, and plan for resilience. Insights from a study on independent restaurant owners' responses to the pandemic highlight the need for agility, technology use, community relationships, and sound financial management for food truck businesses (Parast & Safari, 2022). The next section will explore how competitive edge is a must for food truck businesses

Competitive Advantage

Gaining a competitive edge in the food truck industry depends on delivering superior products or services compared to competitors, leading to higher sales and improved market positioning (Weil, 1985). Loh and Hassan (2021) explored the factors influencing consumer repurchase intentions in the context of food trucks. The authors provided valuable insights into how consumer perceptions of risks and benefits and their attitudes impact their willingness to repurchase food truck products.

These insights are highly relevant for food truck owners aiming to build customer loyalty and enhance business sustainability (Gopi & Samat, 2020). As per Loh and Hassan (2021), consumer attitudes encompass assessments and emotions towards food truck products, which can range from positive to negative. Factors such as food freshness, taste, menu creativity, convenience, and overall customer satisfaction shape positive attitudes (Loh & Hassan, 2021).

Food truck owners can leverage these factors by consistently delivering high-quality, fresh, and flavorful food and creating an atmosphere that leaves a lasting impression on customers. To enhance consumer attitudes, food truck owners should personalize interactions, remember customer preferences, assess and maintain a visually appealing truck (Shin et al., 2019a). They can also emphasize unique offerings and strategically position the truck in high-traffic areas or during popular events. The following section explores recognition.

Recognition

Kraus et al. (2022) examined how adaptability is essential for food truck businesses, as they face challenges similar to those experienced by independent restaurants, particularly in times of crisis. This demographic is known for its distinct preferences and consumption behaviors. The study offers valuable insights into how food trucks can leverage specific attributes to attract and retain this significant customer segment.

Kraus et al. (2022) defined millennials as individuals born between 1981 and 1996, highlighting their unique characteristics, such as tech-savviness, value-consciousness, and a preference for experiences over material goods. These traits not only influence their dining choices but also present a unique opportunity for food trucks to cater to their preferences, offering unique culinary experiences in a convenient and often trendy format (Peesker et al., 2019).

Kraus et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of leveraging technology to engage millennial customers. This demographic extensively uses social media and mobile apps to discover, evaluate, and share dining experiences. Food truck owners can capitalize on this by maintaining an active presence on social media platforms, such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, where visually appealing content can attract interest (Vespestad & Clancy, 2021). Mobile apps for ordering and payment can also enhance convenience, aligning with millennials' expectations for seamless and efficient service.

Vespestad and Clancy (2021) also discussed the role of authenticity and uniqueness in attracting millennials. This generation values authentic experiences and

unique, high-quality products. By offering distinctive menu items that reflect culinary creativity and cultural diversity, food trucks can cater to these preferences. Emphasizing locally sourced ingredients and sustainable practices can further appeal to millennial values of environmental consciousness and social responsibility (Janah et al., 2022).

Vespestad and Clancy (2021) emphasized the experiential aspect of dining for millennials. Food truck owners can enhance their appeal by creating engaging atmospheres through live music, interactive events, or visually striking designs. Vespestad and Clancy highlighted the importance of community engagement, since millennials are more likely to support businesses that are active in their communities and contribute to social causes. The next section will explore optimization techniques.

Menu Optimization

Sustainability is crucial for food truck owners wanting to enhance their operations and attract eco-conscious customers (García-Leal et al., 2023). García-Leal et al. (2023) definition of sustainable food services involved minimizing environmental impact, optimizing resource use, and promoting social responsibility while maintaining economic viability. These principles can guide food truck owners in their journey towards sustainability, appealing to the growing market of eco-conscious consumers.

García-Leal et al. (2023) stressed the importance of sourcing ingredients locally and seasonally to reduce emissions and support local economies. Food truck owners can partner with local farmers and suppliers to enhance the freshness and quality of their offerings (García-Leal et al., 2023). Additionally, accurate demand forecasting and flexible menu planning based on available ingredients can help reduce food waste.

García-Leal et al. (2023) expressed the importance of energy efficiency in sustainable food services. Food trucks, which often rely on generators and fuel, can benefit from using renewable energy sources such as solar panels or more efficient cooking and refrigeration equipment. García-Leal et al. suggested that energy audits can help identify areas for improvement, allowing food truck owners to reduce their carbon footprint and operational costs simultaneously.

García-Leal et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of water conservation and waste management in food truck operations. Implementing water-saving technologies and zero-waste practices can significantly reduce water usage and minimize waste generation. Educating staff and customers on sustainability initiatives can foster a culture of sustainability and attract environmentally conscious consumers (Raykov, 2023). The next section will explore strategies employed by food truck owners to appeal to employees.

Employee Engagement

According to Kahn (1990), employee engagement involves employees fully investing themselves in their work roles, expressing themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during their performances. Reissová and Papay (2021) explored the complex connections between employee engagement, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions within the food truck industry. Reissová and Papay defined employee engagement as emotional and cognitive commitment to the organization, which in turn leads to increased job satisfaction and reduced turnover.

In the workplace, the level of engagement experienced by employees is influenced by a multitude of factors (Razak et al., 2022). Work meaningfulness, growth opportunities, recognition, and work environment positivity (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). Eliyana et al. (2019) underscored the significance of employee satisfaction, indicating that it can lead to favorable outcomes such as heightened productivity and a decrease in turnover rates.

To retain employees in the food truck industry, it is crucial to address turnover causes such as lack of engagement and job satisfaction (Marufu et al., 2021). Research shows that creating a positive work environment, offering fair compensation, opportunities for growth, and supportive working conditions are essential for long-term success (Hilton et al., 2021). Focusing on these aspects can increase retention, boost morale, and enhance overall performance (Madhani, 2022). The next section will explore community engagement.

Community Engagement

Adhikari et al. (2019) discussed principles of community engagement in global health research. While Adhikari et al. focused on health research, these principles are highly relevant to the food truck industry, providing a foundation for improving community relations and ethical business practices. Adhikari et al. defined community engagement as a process that can benefit food truck owners by building meaningful relationships with community members and incorporating their needs and perspectives into projects.

This approach can lead to stronger community ties, improved business outcomes, and a heightened sense of social responsibility in the food truck industry. Community engagement in the food truck context can be achieved by incorporating community feedback into business operations (Adhikari et al., 2019). Food truck owners can gather feedback through social media, surveys, or direct conversations at the truck to better tailor their offerings.

Transparency in sourcing practices, ingredient quality, and pricing helps build consumer trust and attract a customer base that values ethical consumption (Fleming & Millar, 2019). Another significant point from the project is the value of mutual benefits in community engagement. Adhikari et al. (2019) argued that engagement should be a two-way street where the community and the business benefit.

Engagement could involve participating in community events, supporting local charities, or collaborating with other local businesses (Adhikari et al., 2019). Such activities provide visibility and marketing opportunities for the food truck and demonstrate a commitment to the community's well-being, fostering goodwill and a positive brand image.

Adhikari et al. (2019) also highlighted the role of cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in effective community engagement. Food truck owners can apply this by ensuring their menus and business practices are inclusive of diverse cultural preferences and dietary needs. Offering various menu options catering to different cultural tastes and dietary restrictions can attract a broader customer base and show respect for the community's diversity.

The principles of community engagement outlined by Adhikari et al. (2019) can significantly enhance the operations of food truck businesses. Food truck owners can build strong, trust-based relationships with their communities by incorporating community feedback, fostering mutual benefits, and being culturally inclusive (Dow & Downton, 1974). These practices contribute to ethical business operations and drive customer loyalty and long-term success in the competitive food truck industry.

Marketing

Shafieizadeh et al. (2021) investigated the impact of perceived authenticity and quality on customer dining experiences and their likelihood to recommend food trucks. Their findings offer critical insights that food truck owners can utilize to enhance customer satisfaction and drive positive word-of-mouth. Shafieizadeh et al. defined authenticity as the perception that a food truck offers genuine and unique culinary experiences that reflect cultural or personal authenticity.

Authenticity is increasingly valued by consumers who seek distinctive and memorable dining experiences (Tarinc et al., 2023). For food truck owners, emphasizing authentic elements such as traditional recipes, unique culinary techniques, and storytelling about the origins of their dishes can significantly enhance perceived authenticity. This can be achieved through marketing materials, social media engagement, and direct interactions with customers, thereby creating a deeper connection with patrons.

Tarinc et al. (2023) discussed quality perceptions and perceived risk in the food truck industry. Tarinc et al. emphasized the importance of high-quality ingredients,

consistent food preparation, and exceptional customer service in shaping consumer perceptions (Shin et al., 2019b). To mitigate perceived risk, food truck owners should communicate adherence to health and safety regulations and maintain clean food preparation areas (Ghezzi et al., 2021). Balancing authenticity and quality while managing perceived risks can lead to more memorable dining experiences and positive recommendations, contributing to sustained success in the competitive food truck industry (An et al., 2023). The next section will explore mobile ordering.

Food Truck Mobile Ordering

Kalra et al. (2022) explored using coalition game theory to optimize the locations of food trucks. This approach can identify the best locations by considering customer density, competitor presence, and potential revenues. Food truck owners can strategically choose where to park their trucks to maximize visibility and customer foot traffic, resulting in tangible business growth. The study highlights the importance of collaboration, where multiple food trucks can work together to occupy space more effectively. By combining coalition game theory with modern data analytics and mobile technologies, food trucks can improve their adaptability and responsiveness to changing market conditions.

Kalra et al. (2022) also addressed the potential for reducing operational costs through optimized location strategies. Food truck owners may lower fuel expenses and enhance overall efficiency by minimizing time spent in less profitable locations and cutting down on unnecessary travel. Kalra et al. offered a comprehensive framework for applying coalition game theory in optimizing food truck locations. Through cooperative

strategies and advanced data analytics, food truck owners can improve their visibility, attract customers, and boost sales, ultimately enhancing the efficiency and profitability of food truck services. In the next subsection I will explore technological use.

Technology Adoption

Loh and Hassan (2021) explored factors influencing customers' decisions to purchase from food trucks. The authors found that positive attitudes towards food truck products are crucial for encouraging repeat purchases. Owners can cultivate positive attitudes by ensuring consistent quality, offering unique menu items, and providing excellent customer service, leading to increased repurchase likelihood (Parast & Safari, 2022).

The perceived risks of purchasing food truck products include concerns about food safety, hygiene, and consistency, which can deter customers from making repeat purchases. To mitigate these risks, food truck owners should emphasize their commitment to health and safety standards (AlHazmi et al., 2021). On the other hand, perceived benefits such as convenience, novelty, and value for money can enhance repurchase intentions. Highlighting these benefits and positive attributes can increase the likelihood of repurchase.

Loh and Hassan (2021) suggested that personalized marketing strategies can enhance repurchase intentions. By understanding the preferences and behaviors of their customers, food truck owners can tailor their offerings and promotions to meet specific needs and preferences. Customer feedback and data analytics can provide insights into popular items and customer demographics, enabling more targeted and effective

marketing efforts. Loh and Hassan explained how food truck owners can increase customer loyalty and encourage repeat business by reducing perceived risks, emphasizing benefits, and fostering positive consumer attitudes. Implementing these strategies can lead to sustained success and competitive advantage in the food truck industry. The next section will explore sustainability.

Entrepreneurial Sustainability

Matzembacher et al. (2020) explored how innovative business models can help food truck owners integrate sustainability into their practices while remaining profitable. The authors define hybridity-related tensions as conflicts that arise when businesses balance social impact, environmental sustainability, and financial viability. They suggested innovative business models can align sustainability goals with business operations and customer value propositions to manage these tensions (Mohammed & Al-Abrrow, 2023).

Matzembacher et al. (2020) discussed critical innovations for food truck businesses, including integrating circular economy principles, community engagement, and flexibility in business models. Integrating sustainable practices can reduce environmental impact and attract environmentally conscious consumers. Engaging with local communities and adapting to changing preferences and market conditions can also drive repeat business and enhance customer engagement (Jazairy et al., 2023).

Collaborative networks play a vital role in helping food trucks navigate the challenges associated with their hybrid nature (Matzembacher et al., 2020). The owners can benefit from shared marketing efforts, bulk purchasing discounts, and joint events by forming

alliances with other food trucks, restaurants, and local businesses. These partnerships reduce costs, expand their customer reach, and foster a supportive business ecosystem.

Matzembacher et al. (2020) underscored the crucial role of transparency and communication in sustainable business models. For food trucks, openly sharing their sustainability practices can establish trust with customers. Engaging in storytelling about ingredient sourcing and waste reduction efforts can create a strong connection with consumers who prioritize sustainability. Food trucks have the potential to thrive by adopting principles of the circular economy and actively involving the local community. This approach can help in fostering strong consumer relationships, leading to long-term success (Q. Iqbal & Ahmad, 2020). In the following subsection I explore safety and hygiene.

Safety and Hygiene Strategies

AlHazmi et al. (2021) provided a significant contribution to the food truck industry. AlHazmi et al. examined the levels of food safety awareness and the implementation of hygiene practices among street food truck vendors. The authors stressed the importance of food safety and hygiene in maintaining public health and consumer trust.

Food safety knowledge refers to understanding and applying principles and practices that prevent foodborne illnesses (Okumus et al., 2019). According to AlHazmi et al. (2021), adequate knowledge of food safety is crucial for food truck owners to ensure the safety of the food they serve. This includes understanding proper storage

temperatures for different types of food, preventing cross-contamination, and thorough cooking methods.

Continuous education and training on food safety standards for food truck vendors can significantly reduce the risk of foodborne illnesses and enhance customer confidence (Wan Nawawi et al., 2022). Food hygiene is crucial for both food preparation areas and staff. Due to their limited space and mobile nature, food trucks face unique challenges in maintaining hygiene standards.

It is important to address gaps in food safety knowledge and hygiene practices among food truck vendors through improved training and regulatory oversight. (Ghezzi et al., 2020). Regular staff training, internal audits, and staying updated with health department guidelines can help food trucks maintain high standards (AlHazmi et al., 2021). AlHazmi et al. (2021) stressed the importance of food safety and hygiene for food truck owners.

Measures such as investing in handwashing stations, using color-coded cutting boards, and displaying health certifications are crucial (Ghezzi et al., 2021). Customer trust can be enhanced by openly communicating a commitment to food safety and engaging with them through social media (AlHazmi et al., 2021). Prioritizing food safety and hygiene is essential for preventing illnesses, complying with regulations, and ensuring long-term business success. In the next subsection, I will explore financial strategies.

Financial Management Strategies

Rao et al. (2021) examined financing options for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The authors analyzed the challenges SMEs face in accessing capital and innovative financing solutions. The insights are relevant to food truck owners, who often face similar financial constraints.

SME financing includes traditional bank loans, venture capital, crowdfunding, and government grants. Access to finance is a significant barrier for SMEs, affecting their ability to grow and maintain operations (Rao et al., 2021). For food truck businesses, obtaining sufficient financing is crucial for initial startup costs, daily operations, and potential expansion.

Traditional bank loans may be difficult to obtain due to strict credit requirements and the perceived high risk associated with food trucks. Rao et al. (2021) discussed alternative financing options like crowdfunding and peer-to-peer lending, which are popular among SMEs. Successful crowdfunding can provide funds for equipment, permits, and marketing.

The approach underscores the pivotal role of government grants and subsidies in supporting small businesses like food trucks (Dilger & Lowry, 2021). This financial aid can be utilized for various purposes, such as procuring eco-friendly equipment or funding sustainability initiatives (Carpenter & Sweetland, 2023). Food truck owners are encouraged to explore local and national government programs that offer financial assistance or tax incentives.

Financial literacy and planning are crucial for SME success, empowering owners to make informed financing decisions (Rao et al., 2021). Networking and partnerships improve financing access for food truck businesses. Collaborating with suppliers and exploring alternative financing options can help achieve sustainable growth. The next section will explore challenges.

Entrepreneurship Challenges

Najib et al. (2021) explored how financial technology (FinTech) is transforming traditional financial practices in small food businesses. This project has significant implications for food truck owners, as FinTech provides opportunities to simplify payment transactions, manage cash flow, and access capital more effectively than traditional banking methods. The research highlights the potential of FinTech to address financial challenges faced by small food businesses, including food trucks.

Food truck owners can use mobile payments, digital wallets, and peer-to-peer lending to reach more customers and increase sales. FinTech allows real-time financial data management for informed decision-making (Najib et al., 2021). Najib et al. (2021) highlighted that integrating FinTech into small food businesses fosters an open innovation ecosystem.

This collaboration provides tailored solutions like loyalty programs and digital marketing to improve operational efficiency and customer engagement. Regulatory support and data security are crucial for FinTech adoption (Najib et al., 2021). FinTech can enhance financial accessibility, operational efficiency, and innovation for food truck

owners, but they need to consider regulatory frameworks and data security. In the next subsection I will explore business failure.

Business Failure

Choi et al. (2020) conducted a detailed analysis of the various factors influencing the decision-making process of food truck customers. Their research highlighted the critical role of customer segmentation in understanding customers' diverse and changing needs and how this understanding can improve business strategies for food truck owners. Choi et al. identified crucial factors in customers' decision-making when choosing food trucks.

The factors included food quality, menu variety, pricing, service quality, and overall experience. The authors emphasized the practical implications of customer segmentation, stressing the importance of targeting and catering to different market segments (Choi et al., 2020). This approach can help food truck owners tailor their offerings to align with customer preferences, ultimately boosting customer satisfaction and loyalty. The project emphasized the importance of effective marketing and operational efficiency for the success of food truck businesses in a competitive market.

Transition

In Section 2, I explored the effective strategies employed by Hawaiian food truck owners to sustain their businesses. The approach integrates systemic planning, strategic decision-making, and entrepreneurship sustainability, guided by contingency theory as the conceptual framework. Hawaiian food truck owners face several challenges, including limited education, credit access difficulties, unfavorable business locations,

scarce financial assistance, insufficient government support, and discrimination. To address these obstacles, successful strategies include fostering strong relationships, leveraging human capital, adopting community-focused practices, embracing technology, engaging in mentorship and networking programs, advocating for government intervention, enhancing marketing through cultural competence, and driving innovation.

In Section 3, I present the research methodology, the researcher's role, and essential components such as methods, design, analyses, and data collection techniques that shape the project. It also describes the strategies used to ensure the research's successful completion. In Section 4, I offer a comprehensive discussion of the project's findings and their implications for professional practice.

Section 3: Research Project Methodology

In this Section, I outline the project's methodology, including the population, sampling methods, and participant characteristics. I also describe the data collection methods, such as surveys and interviews, and specify the interview questions used. The organization and analysis of the data are briefly explained, along with the strategies for ensuring the project's reliability and validity while minimizing bias.

Project Ethics

In this pragmatic qualitative inquiry project, my role as the primary data collection instrument involved developing, designing, and planning the project, collecting interview responses from participants, analyzing the data, and presenting the results without bias. Mackieson et al. (2019) emphasized that it is the researcher's responsibility to critically analyze and apply information from the literature to advance the research method and design, select participants, collect data, explore phenomena, present findings, and draw conclusions from various data sources. I have no prior relationship with the topic, participants, or research area.

The researcher's role in a project also involves ethical engagement and compliance with *The Belmont Report* (Beauchamp, 2020) research protocol. Pritchett et al. (2022) pointed out that *The Belmont Report* comprises ethical guidelines and principles for researching human subjects. According to *The Belmont Report* protocol, researchers must adhere to moral obligations to respect people, avoid harm, and ensure justice in dealing with human subjects (Pritchard, 2021).

I requested approval from the Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB) for ethical review before commencing my research. The Walden IRB approval number is 07-18-25-1181198. This process ensures that the research aligns with the ethical guidelines outlined in *The Belmont Report* (Gupta, 2022). Throughout the research process, researchers must continuously monitor and address ethical concerns. This includes updating consent forms, responding to adverse events, and making necessary adjustments to safeguard participants (Wied et al., 2019).

Researchers are expected to conduct their research with transparency and integrity. This includes honest reporting of findings, avoiding conflicts of interest, and ensuring the credibility of the research process (Shaheen et al., 2023). By adhering to the principles of *The Belmont Report* respect for persons, beneficence, and justice researchers ensure that their work is ethically sound and that the dignity, rights, and welfare of participants are protected. This commitment to ethical research not only advances scientific knowledge but also upholds the public's trust in the research process.

In conducting the research project, my primary focus was on safeguarding participants from harm and ensuring that informed consent was obtained prior to the project's commencement of both crucial aspects of research ethics. Ethical research demands that researchers secure voluntary participation, with each participant fully informed about the project. I ensured careful measures to protect the confidentiality and privacy of every participant.

During my initial interactions, I thoroughly explained the interview process and informed consent to make sure each participant is comfortable with both the project's

nature and its subject matter before asking them to consent to the Informed Consent Form. Each participant receives an Informed Consent Form, along with detailed documentation that explained the project's purpose and outlined any potential risks or benefits. Participants were not offered any incentives for their involvement. I followed the guidelines and commitments outlined in the Informed Consent Form.

Relationship of this Project to Previous Research

In this pragmatic qualitative inquiry project, the primary objective was to explore the effective strategies employed by Hawaiian food truck owners to extend the sustainability of their businesses. Peer-reviewed literature revealed a gap in understanding the strategies vital for the sustainability of Hawaiian food truck, often leading to the failure of these businesses. While various studies explore aspects of small business ownership, there is a lack of research focused on the unique challenges and strategies employed by Hawaiian food truck owners (Lusiantoro et al., 2021). This research aimed to bridge this gap by shedding light on the intricacies of business sustainability within the Hawaiian Islands, ultimately contributing understanding how entrepreneurs navigate these complexities.

The significance of the project by Lusiantoro et al. (2021) lies in its potential to benefit Hawaiian entrepreneurs. By uncovering and analyzing the effective strategies used by food truck owners within this community, the project offers valuable insights that may empower Hawaiian entrepreneurs to enhance their businesses' sustainability. The findings contribute to the broader knowledge base on business sustainability within

diverse communities, bridging the gap between existing research and the practical approaches needed to support the long-term success of Hawaiian-owned businesses.

Lusiantoro et al. (2021) acknowledged the presence of some sustainability research focused on Hawaiian small businesses, it emphasizes the limited nature of this research. Previous studies, such as Lo and Liao (2021), touched upon small business sustainability and effective strategies. However, there is a need for research that explicitly addresses the unique challenges and strategies required to sustain Hawaiian-owned food truck businesses.

This highlights the importance of this project in addressing the specific dynamics of food truck businesses within these demographic and tailoring strategies for their success. This research may fill a knowledge gap by investigating effective strategies for sustaining Hawaiian-owned food truck businesses beyond 3 years. The study by Lusiantoro et al. (2021) has the potential to empower entrepreneurs in this community by providing insights that enhance business sustainability. It contributes to a broader understanding of sustainable business practices across diverse communities, making it a valuable and impactful endeavor.

The role of researchers in ensuring ethical conduct in research, especially in studies involving human subjects, is of utmost importance. *The Belmont Report* serves as a fundamental guide for ethical research practices (Anabo et al., 2018). This report outlines three essential principles that researchers must adhere to: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.

Respect for persons means researchers must obtain informed consent from participants, ensuring that they are fully aware of the project's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits. This principle emphasizes that participants must voluntarily consent to participate without coercion (Millum & Bromwich, 2021). Respecting participants' autonomy is crucial. Researchers must honor individuals' rights to decide about their participation, giving special consideration to vulnerable populations such as children or those with cognitive impairments (Wied et al., 2019).

Benevolence implies researchers are responsible for designing studies that maximize potential benefits while minimizing potential participant risks. This involves careful risk assessment and implementing protective measures to ensure participant safety (Kisselburgh & Beever, 2022). Protecting the confidentiality of participants is an essential aspect of benevolence. Researchers must ensure that personal data is securely managed, and privacy is respected throughout the research process (Kasperbauer et al., 2021).

Justice indicates researchers must ensure the equitable selection of participants, avoiding exploitation of vulnerable groups. The principle of justice demands that the benefits and burdens of research be distributed fairly across different populations (Millum & Bromwich, 2021). Researchers should ensure that the benefits of research are accessible to all relevant groups, particularly those who are disadvantaged or marginalized, thereby promoting equity in the distribution of research outcomes (Edelman, 2023).

Nature of the Project

Pragmatic qualitative inquiry is an approach that combines the flexibility of qualitative research with a focus on practical outcomes and real-world applications (Powell, 2010). Rooted in the philosophical tradition of pragmatism, this method prioritizes the utility and relevance of research findings over adherence to specific methodological doctrines. Pragmatic qualitative inquiry emphasizes the importance of choosing research methods and strategies best suited to address the research questions and achieve the desired outcomes (Patton, 2022). This approach is valuable in applied research fields, such as education, healthcare, and organizational studies, where the primary goal is to inform practice and decision-making.

One of the central features of pragmatic qualitative inquiry is its flexibility in data collection and analysis. Researchers using this approach are encouraged to adapt their methods as the project progresses, responding to emerging insights and the evolving needs of the research context (Morgan, 2022). This might involve combining interviews, focus groups, and document analysis to understand the research problem comprehensively. Pragmatic qualitative inquiry identifies patterns, themes impacting practice, generating practical knowledge to solve real-world problems, bridging theory and practice (Waalkes et al., 2024).

Population, Sampling, and Participants

The project focused on food truck owners in the Hawaiian Islands who had successfully operated their businesses for over 3 years. Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants, leveraging existing respondents to identify additional suitable

participants and enhance participation rates (as described by Heeler, 2024). Purposive sampling was another tool to select participants based on their expertise and relevance to the project, ensuring comprehensive and credible data collection.

I selected six food truck owners for my purpose and utilized purposive and snowball sampling methods to engage. To gain access to participants, I used appropriate recruitment methods such as referrals, outreach through relevant organizations, and clear communication of the project's purpose to encourage participation. Once access was secured, I established solid and cohesive relationships by transparently explaining the project's intentions and objectives. Additionally, I set clear expectations to ensure participants understand their role before obtaining their informed consent for this qualitative inquiry.

All virtual meetings were conducted with strict confidentiality to ensure participants' privacy and security. Maintaining confidentiality helps create a secure environment for open discussions (Zhao et al., 2020). Data saturation is achieved when additional data collection no longer contributes new insights to the project. Naeem et al. (2024) emphasized that data saturation involves gathering data that meets the research requirements.

To achieve data saturation, I analyzed participants' responses during interviews. I adapted my inquiries as participants provide new insights, norms, and constructs related to the research topic. This iterative process continued until no new data was extracted, allowing me to reach data saturation with a sample size of six participants. Since data

saturation was achieved with six participants, I did not continue to recruit and interview participants.

Data Collection Activities

In this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project, I functioned as the primary data collection instrument, utilizing both online and face-to-face semistructured interviews to gather data. The research began with interviews of food truck owners on the Hawaiian Islands, focusing on their business strategies and experiences. Data collection procedures included developing interview questions, reviewing publicly available archival documents, and analyzing the collected data. Integrating archival documents as supplementary materials enhances methodological rigor and aligns with the principles of methodological triangulation (Tarnoki & Puentes, 2019).

During the semistructured interviews, I presented participants with seven open-ended questions, supplemented by additional clarifying inquiries as necessary (see Appendix A). Open-ended questions were the main method for uncovering insights that closed-ended questions might miss (as recommended by Smith et al., 2022). This information was vital for developing a delicate understanding of the project's phenomena. An interview protocol ensured that all participants responded to a consistent set of questions, allowing both the researcher and interviewees to stay focused on key topics (see Appendix A).

Data were collected from participants' encounters to identify strategies that food truck owners use to sustain their businesses. Interviews typically lasted between 30 to 60 minutes, with flexibility (as described by Deterding & Waters, 2021). Choosing a

convenient and comfortable interview location is essential to gain accurate data collection, as participants are more likely to provide deep feedback when they are comfortable (Dolczewski, 2022). To create a supportive environment, I reassured participants of their freedom to speak openly about their experiences and remind them of their right to withdraw from the project by emailing me at any time if they feel uncomfortable. I obtained consent from each participant to audio-record the interviews, which ensures transparency and accuracy through detailed transcription (as described by Deterding & Waters, 2021). Open-ended questions encourage comprehensive and detailed responses, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the data collection process (Ganesha & Aithal, 2022).

Audio recordings of the semistructured interviews were transcribed using NVivo 14 software to facilitate accurate data analysis. Additionally, I took notes in a journal during interviews to document participant reactions, minimize preconceptions, and mitigate interview bias. Recognizing that misunderstandings and biases can undermine the trustworthiness of research findings (Nelson & Zippel, 2021). I strove to avoid leading questions during notetaking and recording to minimize potential bias.

I conducted a comparative analysis between themes identified in existing literature and those extracted from interview transcripts, as supported by Harper et al. (2023). This approach, combined with the use of archival records, helps identify effective small business strategies (Laakel Hemdanou et al., 2024). Archival documents were employed as secondary data sources, enriching the data pool by providing information

that may not be captured through interviews (as described by Tracy & Gist-Mackey, 2024).

This approach allowed for cross-validation of collected data with other research instruments (Silverman et al., 2021). To enhance my ability to detect changes in participant behavior, I took steps to minimize distractions during interviews. Reducing distractions is crucial for researchers when observing participants to ensure data accuracy (Silverman et al., 2021).

To further enhance the credibility of the research, I employed member checking as a quality control mechanism to prevent misinterpretation. Member checking involves sharing with the participants my interpretations of their responses to the interview questions to gather their feedback and clarify misunderstandings. This helps ensure accurate recording of findings. Data saturation occurs when no new themes emerge, which signals the end of data collection (Naeem et al., 2024). In this project, saturation was reached with six participants; no additional participants were needed.

Interview Questions

Q1: How did you address the challenges of sustaining your Hawaiian food truck business?

Q2: Can you describe the key strategies you've implemented to differentiate your food truck from competitors and maintain a sustainable business?

Q3: How do you utilize data or customer feedback to inform your business decisions and refine your strategies over time?

Q4: How do you utilize data analytics and customer insights to inform your decision-making processes related to menu adjustments, pricing strategies, and expansion opportunities?

Q5: How do you adapt your business strategies to respond to changing consumer preferences or market trends?

Q6: Please describe how you prioritize fostering a positive work culture and ensuring operational efficiency within your food truck business, including attracting and retaining talented staff?

Q7: What additional information would you like to add regarding strategies you have used to sustain your business?

Data Organization and Analysis

Al-Okaily et al. (2023) indicated that effective data organization techniques allow researchers to access recorded data easily. Methods such as labeling participants' responses in audio interviews help maintain the originality of collected data. In my project, I used cataloging to track data and emerging insights. Each participant's file contains the date and time of the interview, relevant business documents, interview transcripts, and informed consent forms.

To protect the identities of the Hawaiian food truck owners in this project, I assigned pseudonyms: P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6. I organized the transcribed data using tables in NVivo, categorizing and labeling the data from each interview question. Code numbers were assigned to identify emerging themes, assisting in the analysis and interpretation of the data. Throughout the interviews, I maintained a logbook to record

notes and observations. After collecting primary data through semistructured interviews with Hawaiian food truck owners, I analyzed, transcribed, and interpreted the findings.

Thematic analysis involves coding, grouping, and theme creation. Braun and Clarke (2022) outlined six key steps: data familiarization, initial coding, theme identification, theme refinement, theme description, and report generation. Throughout the coding process, I referred to participants' responses to maintain data accuracy and validity. Ensuring validity is crucial in qualitative research to confirm the appropriateness of tools, procedures, and data (Coleman, 2021).

To strengthen the data analysis, I used methodological triangulation, comparing the collected data with existing literature to identify strategies Hawaiian food truck owners use to sustain their businesses. The thematic analysis involves integrating data from various sources, including interview transcripts, field notes, and business documents, to classify critical themes and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The coding process was rigorous and consistently applied, addressing concerns around validity and reliability in qualitative research. I identified common strategies and themes by combining field notes, interview transcripts, archival data, and literature.

For data organization and management, I employed NVivo 14 software. This software provides a secure platform for storing and analyzing interview data, ensuring confidentiality (Allsop et al., 2022). The data included open-ended interview questions, participants' responses, and observations. While I manually categorized, coded, and derived themes to extract meaningful insights, NVivo supported the overall data management.

As the researcher, I explored the similarities and differences in the data to develop codes and identify overarching themes. I used both verbal and visual responses from the interviews to generate themes and codes (as described by Azad et al., 2021). To enhance the project's comprehensiveness, I incorporated secondary data sources for triangulation, providing a broader understanding of Hawaiian food truck owners' strategies to sustain their businesses. This approach involved integrating interview data and online resources, such as business websites, into a single database. QSR NVivo 14 software helps qualitative researchers organize, evaluate, and store data efficiently (Allsop et al., 2022). I used NVivo 14 software to store and manage data. I implemented a data plan that identified where, how, and how long the data will be stored and who will have access to it. After 3 years, I will shred the research data containing the 32-gigabyte flash drive and all physical documents.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Data are reliable when they are comprehensive, accurate, and free from bias or significant mistakes (Coleman, 2021). To enhance reliability, I respected candidates and used an Informed Consent Form to secure candidates understanding of informed consent prior to conducting interviews. The candidates' Informed Consent Form ensured clear communication, while straightforward interview questions (see Appendix B) and a structured interview protocol (see Appendix A) enhanced the project's reliability and validity.

Ensuring dependability and reliability is critical in qualitative research, as it validates the findings and ensures they are credible for future use (Shamim et al., 2023). This project employed two main strategies to achieve these goals: member checking and a structured interview protocol. These approaches were instrumental in enhancing the collected and analyzed data's accuracy, reliability, and overall quality.

I used an audio recording device to accurately capture participant responses and to enhance reliability. Additionally, semistructured interviews, organizational documentation, and artifacts were incorporated to reinforce data consistency. The semistructured interview approach helped ensure the systematic collection of core information while allowing flexibility to explore practical strategies Hawaiian food truck owners use to sustain their businesses.

Validity

Validity in research determines the accuracy of measuring the intended factors and the integrity of research outcomes (Verbeij et al. (2021). Credibility, confirmability, and transferability were enhanced by accurate analysis. Participants were requested to confirm my interpretations of the participant's responses to the interview questions. The findings and results were compared based on responses given by the participants. According to B. Xu (2024), credibility supports interpreted data with applicants encounters.

Member checking involves providing participants with interpretations of their responses to verify accuracy and credibility (Birt et al., 2016) As Ankeny and Leonelli (2024) noted, member checking is a vital component of qualitative research, helping to

validate researchers' interpretations and ensuring that the participants' perspectives will reflect accurately. Member checking reduces the risk of bias and misinterpretation by allowing participants to confirm or clarify the information provided during interviews (Motulsky, 2021). This process ensures data accuracy and engages participants to provide additional insights, enhancing research findings' depth. Recent studies confirm the importance of member checking in qualitative research (Lanka et al., 2021).

According to De Loyola González-Salgado et al. (2022), member checking is crucial for reinforcing a project's credibility by confirming that the explored phenomena are accurate. Hitchcock and Onwuegbuzie (2019) highlighted that allowing participants to review and provide feedback on the interpretations strengthens the project's dependability, bolstering the validity of the qualitative inquiry process. I implemented member checking by sharing interpreted responses with participants and soliciting their feedback. This verification process ensured that the findings accurately reflected participants' intentions, thus enhancing the project's dependability and credibility (as described by Joseph et al., 2021).

Structured interview protocols play a significant role in ensuring consistent collection and analysis of data. Dolczewski (2022) emphasized that a well-designed interview protocol is essential for collecting data that directly addresses the research questions, thereby minimizing bias. Similarly, Locke et al. (2020) asserted that structured protocols provide a consistent framework for interactions between researchers and participants, reducing the variability that could otherwise lead to inconsistencies. This

approach is critical in maintaining data collection reliability during qualitative studies (Dolczewski, 2022).

I utilized a structured interview protocol to facilitate a systematic approach to data collection. This involved standardized consent form, straightforward interview questions, and a defined interview protocol to ensure consistent communication. The consistent application of these elements across all interviews helped maintain high reliability and validity. Audio-recording devices during semistructured interviews help ensure the accurate capture of participants' responses, providing a comprehensive and precise data set for analysis (Dolczewski, 2022).

The structured design of these protocols ensures that all participants receive the same treatment, enhancing the overall reliability of the research findings (Edlund & Nichols, 2019). Enhancing data reliability through triangulation, qualitative research ensures depth and precision in the information collected, minimizing errors and biases. (Smith et al., 2022). Multiple data sources, such as organizational documents, artifacts, and archival data, are crucial for this reliability (Shakman et al., 2017). This approach helped to ensure a robust, well-documented data collection process to enhance project dependability.

The concept of transferability will support the applicability of the methods and procedures employed in this project to broader research settings. Transferability can be pursued by systematically comparing the contextual elements of this research with established assumptions and findings from related disciplines (Munthe-Kaas et al., 2020).

This comparative approach facilitates informed judgments regarding the relevance and adaptability of the project's methods to other contexts and populations.

I implemented methodological triangulation alongside member checking to bolster reliability. Triangulation involves using various data sources or methods to validate findings, enhancing the project's validity (Motulsky, 2021). I ensured that findings are consistent, reliable, and unbiased by cross-referencing interview data with organizational documents and archival materials. This approach provided a comprehensive view of the investigated phenomena, adding depth and richness to the project's conclusions.

Confirmability pertains to the degree to which external individuals can validate the research and its findings as originating from the data (Alonzo & Teng, 2023). Researchers use confirmability and triangulation to reduce bias and ensure replicability data validation through NVivo, online tools, and secure record-keeping to improve reliability. Triangulation and NVivo-generated reports were used to enhance confirmability and minimize bias in the project. Confirmability was improved by connecting the findings to the conclusions, allowing other researchers to replicate the project. Methodological triangulation was employed to ensure confirmability.

Using detailed notes and electronic journal entries during participant interviews added another layer of data, supporting the analysis and interpretation process (as described by Skinner et al., 2020). Upholding ethical standards and research integrity ethical considerations are paramount in qualitative research, as they directly impact the reliability and dependability of the findings (Jahja et al., 2021). Following ethical

guidelines rigorously ensures the research process's integrity and protects participants' rights and confidentiality (Shakman et al., 2017). I used an Informed Consent Form to inform participants of the research process and their roles, thereby upholding ethical standards.

I am committed to handling data with utmost care, ensuring that the confidentiality and privacy of all participants are safeguarded throughout the project. Overall, the dependability and reliability of this qualitative research was reinforced through member checking, structured interview protocols, and ethical research practices. Implementing these strategies ensured that the project's findings are credible, accurate, and applicable for future research endeavors (as described by Lim, 2024).

The systematic data collection approach and the verification of findings through member checking and triangulation provided a strong foundation for the project's validity (as described by Motulsky, 2021). Qualitative research employs methods such as in-depth interviews, observation of situations, and analysis of written materials to gain a comprehensive understanding of a subject (Mohajan, 2020). This thorough approach uncovers insights that quantitative methods might overlook, leading to reliable and valuable research results for academics and professionals in the field.

Transition

This pragmatic qualitative inquiry project explored the effective strategies employed by Hawaiian food truck owners to sustain their businesses. In Section 3, I outlined the various elements that supported the completion of this project, encompassing the researcher's role, participant involvement, and the chosen research methodology and

design. Two subsections within Section 3 were dedicated to the topics of research participants and ethical considerations, encompassing ethical research practices and details related to the project's population and sampling. The remaining three subsections in Section 3 explored discussions concerning data collection, techniques for data analysis, and considerations regarding the project's reliability and validity. In Section 4, a review of the research findings from the pragmatic inquiry is presented, evaluating the practicality and applicability of the conclusions and findings, potential implications for social change, actionable recommendations, and suggestions for future research endeavors.

Section 4: Findings and Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project was to explore the effective strategies that Hawaiian food truck owners use to sustain their businesses. This project aimed to answer the following research question: *What effective strategies do food truck owners use to sustain their businesses beyond 3 years?* I conducted semistructured interviews with six food truck owners who had successfully operated their businesses for over 3 years. Each participant was assigned a numeric code—P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6—during the interview process to maintain confidentiality. According to Campbell et al. (2020), researchers must have a clear understanding of comprehensive themes, conclusions, and study analysis to identify and interpret themes effectively. After I manually created the initial codebook, NVivo 14 was used to organize the collected data and conduct a thematic analysis. This process included importing transcripts, reassigning codes, categorizing content, and identifying patterns and themes within similar contextual groupings. Three primary themes emerged from the analysis: (a) marketing, (b) customer retention, and (c) pricing. These findings are aligned with the project's conceptual framework and supported by existing peer-reviewed literature.

Presentation of the Findings

The findings from participant interviews revealed three main themes that contribute to the sustainability of food truck businesses: marketing, customer retention, and pricing. Each theme reflects the strategies food truck owners employ to navigate competitive environments and ensure long-term viability. Collectively, these results align

with existing peer-reviewed literature and are supported by the principles of contingency theory and sustainable entrepreneurship.

Participants consistently identified marketing as a vital strategy for growth and sustainability. Social media outreach, culturally relevant branding, and participation in community events were emphasized as effective methods for increasing visibility and attracting diverse customer bases. These findings align with prior studies that recognize the importance of adaptability, innovation, and customer engagement in small business success (Choi et al., 2020; McNeil & Young, 2019). From a contingency theory perspective, marketing reflects the interconnectedness of customer expectations, cultural competence, and business planning, highlighting how each component reinforces the overall system of operations.

Retaining customers was described as equally important to attracting them. Participants highlighted loyalty programs, personalized service, and consistent product quality as key practices for fostering repeat business. Such approaches reinforce customer trust, strengthen credibility, and contribute to brand loyalty. These insights are consistent with literature that underscores the role of ethical and client-focused practices in building sustainable small businesses (Van Embden et al., 2022). Participants noted the value of mentorship and collaboration within the food truck community, reflecting how supportive networks contribute to knowledge sharing and long-term business resilience.

Contingency theory is evident here as the theme of customer retention demonstrates how stable, ongoing relationships within a system enhance interconnected growth. Although discussed less frequently than marketing and retention, pricing was

acknowledged as a significant factor in business strategy. Participants explained that pricing strategies required balancing affordability for customers with profitability for their businesses.

Adjustments often included bundle deals, seasonal specials, or value-driven offers to maintain competitiveness without eroding margins. This finding aligns with scholarship that emphasizes the adaptability of small businesses in responding to shifting market conditions (Ghezzi et al., 2021). Pricing decisions also reflect sustainable entrepreneurship principles, as owners recognized the dual responsibility of maintaining financial resilience while ensuring food accessibility within their communities.

Overall, the integration of marketing, customer retention, and pricing illustrates how Hawaiian food truck owners employ interconnected strategies that reinforce one another. These practices resonate with contingency theory by emphasizing the importance of structured process cares, trust-building, and cultural competence in sustaining operations. At the same time, the practices align with sustainable entrepreneurship by demonstrating how small businesses balance profitability with community engagement and broader societal impact. Together, these findings enhance the understanding of how food truck owners achieve long-term sustainability in a competitive and dynamic market.

Theme 1: Marketing

Strategy 1: Social Media Campaigns

Marketing is crucial for attracting and retaining customers buy in, as stated by multiple participants who expressed its importance in relation to characteristics like

retention and pricing. P1 said, “I use flavors and dishes that my customers crave as part of my marketing strategy.” This adaptive marketing approach is designed to attract repeat customers and maintain competitiveness in Hawaii’s dynamic food truck industry.

Aligning menu offerings with consumer demand not only enhances customer satisfaction but also strengthens brand identity and loyalty, key factors in long-term business sustainability. Food truck owners can increase their business by utilizing social media platforms to engage with customers to showcase their offerings (Lichy et al., 2022).

P5 said, “Word of mouth is a great marketing strategy, along with the importance of consistency.” This insight underscores how dependable service and product quality foster customer trust, encouraging repeat business and organic referrals. Consistency in both operations and customer experience strengthens credibility.

At the same time, positive word of mouth amplifies visibility within the local community, a key component for sustaining long-term success in the competitive food truck industry. Adapting strategies to meet shifting consumer preferences is essential for increasing business growth. Marketing surfaced as a notable theme.

Five participants expressed its importance in attracting and sustaining customer interest. Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 all highlighted the role of marketing, although each tied it to different contexts, such as retention or pricing as shown in Table 1. Marketing was frequently framed as essential for business growth, with participants recognizing that visibility strategies must adapt to changing consumer preferences.

Strategy 2: Referral Incentives

Food truck owners can improve their chances of long-term success by offering referral incentives that enhance exceptional, personalized service (Wang & Chen, 2022). Participants noted that when customers feel valued through a personalized experience, they are more likely to recommend the business. A safe and comfortable environment enhances the overall customer experience, making patrons more likely to recommend the food truck to others (Van Embden et al., 2022). Incentives, such as discounts or rewards for repeat customers, serve as tangible acknowledgments of customer loyalty and help to expand a business's reach. By maintaining a consistent positive atmosphere, food truck owners can enhance their reputation and grow in a competitive market (Wang & Chen, 2022).

Linking Marketing to Contingency Theory

Marketing is vital for food truck owners, reflecting contingency theory, which states that success depends on adapting strategies to specific situations (Fiedler, 1964). Participants noted the significance of social media campaigns in attracting and retaining customers in a competitive market. This enables owners to display their products and modify marketing strategies according to customer preferences. Equally important is the role of incentives in rewarding loyal customers who refer to the business to others, a strategy that significantly enhances overall satisfaction and customer loyalty (Lichy et al., 2022). Adaptive approaches show how owners respond flexibly to environmental demands, ensuring long-term sustainability.

Connecting Marketing to Literature

In exploring effective strategies used by Hawaiian food truck owners, the connection between marketing and client-focused approaches is strongly supported in recent research (Guimarães et al., 2024). Marketing grounded in personalized service reflects the importance of acknowledging diverse cultural perspectives and fostering lasting relationships with customers (Schifeling & Demetry, 2021). By adopting client-centered strategies, owners add insights from studies that emphasize strong leadership and community engagement as essential for sustainable business models. Tailoring services to customer preferences demonstrates how strategic planning aligns business practices with consumer needs, ultimately enhancing satisfaction and contributing to community support.

Honesty, transparency, and fairness in messaging contribute to value creation and stronger stakeholder relationships of ethical marketing communication (Friedmann et al., 2024). Reji et al. (2025) highlighted that when businesses engage with their communities, they build trust and long-term loyalty. This alignment of ethical business practices, client-centered marketing, and community engagement highlights sustainable models based on leadership, trust, and empowerment (Schifeling & Demetry, 2021).

Table 1*Marketing – Frequency by Participant*

Participant	Frequency
P1	20
P2	18
P3	20
P4	25
P5	15
P6	18

Theme 2: Customer Retention***Strategy 1: Implement Loyalty Rewards to Incentivize Repeat Purchases***

Implementing loyalty rewards for food truck owners is integral for sustained success. This commitment enables the owners to strengthen customer relationships, encourage repeat business, and build long-term trust with their customers (Loh & Hassan, 2021). P1 said, “Utilizing feedback helps them understand what's popular and what they really like, especially when my hours coincide with gaining more customers.”

P4 emphasized “that ensuring there is something for everyone is key.” If you have three personnel and one is vegetarian, ensure your menu supports them all; otherwise, instead of losing one, you'll lose all three. By providing incentives such as discounts, free items, or exclusive offers, owners create a sense of value and appreciation among customers, which directly supports customer retention (Issariyakulkarn et al., 2024). This proactive approach not only enhances customer satisfaction but also contributes to the overall sustainability and competitiveness of the business.

Customer retention was mentioned by 5 participants, highlighting its critical role in sustaining business operations. Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 stressed building loyalty programs and cultivating long-term relationships with customers. Participant 2 associated retention with pricing, showing how affordability affects loyalty, while Participant 4 linked it to marketing as shown in Table 2. This highlighted the connection between acquisition and retention. Retention practices aligned with prior research on sustaining customer trust and repeat business (Loh & Hassan, 2021).

Strategy 2: Personalize Customer Interactions to Strengthen Long-Term Relationships.

Making interactions with customers more personal is vital for nurturing lasting relationships and achieving success in the long run (Becerra et al., 2025). P6 said, “Supporting the local community helps build trust with customers and creates a welcoming environment.” By greeting customers by name, remembering their preferences, or tailoring recommendations, food truck operators demonstrate attentiveness and care that differentiate them from competitors.

Personalization not only enhances customer satisfaction but also builds trust and emotional attachment, both of which are critical for retention in highly competitive markets (Loh & Hassan, 2021). For food truck owners, these personalized practices are not simply customer service gestures but strategic approaches that adapt to the unique expectations of their community. Personalizing customer interactions is that it deepens loyalty, strengthens brand reputation, and ensures that food truck businesses remain sustainable by fostering long-term customer relationships (Silverman et al., 2021).

Linking Customer Retention to Contingency Theory

Customer retention is all about understanding that there is no single recipe for success, which is a key idea in contingency theory. For food truck owners, this means that keeping customers happy requires a personalized touch (Becerra et al., 2025). It is important to adjust their strategies based on things like who their customers are, what flavors and the competition in the area, and their location. By being flexible and attentive to these factors, food truck owners can create a loyal customer base (Loh & Hassan, 2021).

Participants in this project emphasized that strategies like loyalty programs, referral incentives, and personalized service were most effective when adapted to the unique needs of their communities. This really highlights the heart of contingency theory. The success of keeping customers loyal depends on how well strategies adapt to the specific situation instead of using a one-size-fits-all method (Loh & Hassan, 2021). By tuning their retention strategies to what their unique surroundings need, food truck

owners can build strong, lasting relationships with their customers and boost their chances for long-term success (Kraus et al., 2022).

Connecting Customer Retention to Literature

Customer retention is super important for keeping a business thriving (Loh & Hassan, 2021). Strategies like loyalty programs, personalized interactions, and referral rewards can help keep customers coming back. Loyalty really comes down to consistent quality, trust, and value (Kraus et al., 2022). Keeping existing customers is not only easier but also more cost-effective for truck owners than finding new.

When food truck owners focus on their current customers, it can lead to wonderful benefits (Becerra et al., 2025). Happy customers come from not just offering delicious food but also understanding and connecting with their cultural and social vibes. By building strong relationships with your customers through caring and ethical practices, you can boost loyalty, strengthen community connections, and enjoy sustainable growth (Issariyakulkarn et al., 2024).

Table 2*Customer Retention – Frequency by Participant*

Participant	Frequency
P1	33
P2	20
P3	20
P4	25
P5	25
P6	17

Theme 3: Pricing***Strategy 1: Bundle Deals***

Pricing was acknowledged as a significant factor in business strategy (Bandi et al., 2024). Participants explained that pricing strategies required balancing affordability for customers with profitability for their businesses as shown in Table 3. P5 said, “People prioritize good pricing over going green, as long as it doesn’t affect value; they are concerned about costs.” Businesses often adopted attractive adjustments, such as value-packed bundled deals and seasonal specials, to stay competitive while protecting their profit margins (Kraus et al., 2022).

Bundle deals for food truck owners are crucial for achieving sustained success. This strategy enables owners to boost sales volume, attract price-sensitive customers, and provide added value through strategic product pairings. P3 said, “In order to maintain

competitive pricing, I minimize spending on advertising and primarily depend on word-of-mouth referrals.” By offering combinations, such as specialties paired with sides or drinks at a discounted price, owners can encourage larger purchases while keeping customers satisfied (Van Embden et al., 2022).

Recent studies indicate that bundle pricing not only attracts new customers but also enhances customer loyalty by providing convenience and perceived savings (Gruss et al., 2024). Bundle deals enable business owners to promote underperforming items while also focusing on increasing inventory turnover. Implementing strategies to reduce waste from unsold or expired products can address environmental concerns for food truck businesses. This helps to increase profitability, customer trust and contributes to long-term sustainability (Van Embden et al., 2022).

Strategy 2: Seasonal Discounts

Seasonal discounts can be a fantastic way for food truck owners to boost their long-term success (Kraus et al., 2022). By tapping into changing consumer demand, food truck owners can attract new customers and keep your regulars coming back for more. Offering special promotions on popular items during holidays, festivals, or those quieter sales periods not only creates a sense of excitement but also encourages repeat visits. P1 said, “Occasional seasonal discounts were used primarily as a way to show appreciation to loyal customers, typically around Christmas or other holidays.”

Seasonal discounts help owners manage their inventory more effectively, reducing waste by promoting surplus or seasonal ingredients. Research indicates that aligning pricing strategies with seasonal trends provides businesses with greater

flexibility and resilience in competitive markets (Van Embden et al., 2022). For food truck owners, discounts are powerful strategies that go beyond simple short-term sales tactics. P6 said, "Seasonal discounts encourage repeat customers, fostering loyalty that outlasts the short-term promotional period."

Owners build long-lasting customer trust, elevate market positioning, and drive business sustainability. By implementing seasonal discounts, food truck owners can significantly boost profitability and strengthen customer loyalty (Loh & Hassan, 2021). This proactive approach ensures that food truck businesses remain competitive and resilient in an ever-evolving marketplace.

Linking Pricing to Contingency Theory

Pricing strategies are aligned with contingency theory, which emphasizes that no single approach to management or decision-making is universally effective. Success depends on adapting strategies to specific circumstances. For food truck owners, pricing decisions must reflect situational factors such as customer demographics, location, competition, and seasonality (Gruss et al., 2024).

Participants stated that flexible pricing, discounts and bundle deals are essential for competitiveness and profitability. This shows how contingency theory works as business owners adjust their pricing strategies based on consumer desires. By tailoring pricing strategies to the context in which they operate, food truck owners enhance customer satisfaction, optimize revenue, and reinforce their ability to sustain business success.

Connecting Pricing to Literature

This project highlights the importance of effective pricing strategies for the sustainability and long-term success of food truck businesses. Participants reported that smart pricing decisions have a direct impact on customer retention and profit margins, aligning with findings in the literature that identify pricing as a key tool for small businesses in competitive markets. For food truck owners, striking a balance between affordability and profitability is crucial for ensuring customer satisfaction and driving growth.

Flexible pricing models are essential for mobile businesses, allowing operators to adjust prices based on seasonal demand and maximize sales while minimizing waste (Jiang et al., 2021). Temporary promotions and discounts also create urgency, enhancing customer loyalty (Loh & Hassan, 2021). Promotions and flexible pricing boost customer loyalty. Food truck owners can stand out by aligning prices with customer expectations, enhancing repeat business and overall value.

Table 3

Pricing – Frequency by Participant

Participant	Frequency
P1	9
P2	15
P3	10
P4	10
P5	12
P6	11

Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice

The results of this project could be useful for food truck owners, as they provide valuable insights on how to thrive and grow in today's competitive and ever-changing markets. Running a food truck comes with its own set of challenges, like keeping up with changing customer demands, working within limited space, navigating regulations, and dealing with seasonal sales ups and downs (as described by von Schönfeld & Bertolini, 2017). This research shares helpful strategies to not only overcome these hurdles but also ensure your business stays strong and successful in the long run.

This project offers some great insights for food truck owners, focusing on how it is important to adopt strategies that fit with their unique environments and situations. Using marketing effectively, especially through social media and engaging with the local community, can help build brand loyalty, and strengthen relationships with customers (Sansone et al., 2024). Tailoring pricing strategies, like offering seasonal discounts and bundle deals, allows owners to respond to what customers want while keeping inventory under control. Taking a supportive approach to leadership, one that encourages employee involvement and innovation can lead to better operations and happier customers.

Overall, this research shows that for a food truck to thrive, it is not just about serving amazing food; it is also about how well the owner can weave together management, marketing, and innovative strategies. Based on these findings, several recommendations can strengthen professional practice. Food truck owners should invest in digital engagement strategies by maintaining active social media campaigns and personalized customer interactions, ensuring consistent visibility and customer retention.

Owners are also encouraged to apply adaptive pricing models, including discounts, referral incentives, and flexible menu pricing, to attract new customers while retaining loyal ones.

Operators should foster a culture of empowerment and innovation within their teams by encouraging staff to contribute ideas for menu development, service improvements, and customer engagement. Finally, building community partnerships with local events, farmers' markets, and small businesses can increase visibility, reduce costs through collaboration, and reinforce trust within the community. Food truck owners who integrate these strategies will be better positioned to achieve long-term sustainability (Jiang et al., 2021). By adopting a pragmatic, adaptive, and customer-focused approach, owners can enhance their competitiveness, maintain operational resilience, and contribute to the overall growth of the mobile food industry.

Implications for Social Change

Food trucks are not only providers of flavorful cuisine but also valuable contributors to local and social development (Schifeling & Demetry, 2021). Food truck owners create employment opportunities and strengthen regional supply chains by using locally sourced ingredients. Food trucks are amazing hubs for cultural exchange (Gruss et al., 2024). They offer a delightful blend of traditional and innovative dishes that celebrate cultural identity and promote diversity. When owners join community events and festivals, they create warm and inviting spaces where everyone can come together to share the joy of food and cultural pride.

The project reveals that food truck owners who focus on creativity and customer engagement are more likely to succeed longevity (Khashan et al., 2024). These strategies help owners become more resilient and adaptable, fostering a vibrant entrepreneurial spirit within our community. Sustainable food trucks do so much more than just serve tasty meals; they encourage healthier eating and celebrate the wonderful diversity of our cultures, all while contributing to our local economy. When successful, food trucks foster cultural exchange and economic growth, bringing about positive change in Hawaii and beyond.

Recommendations for Further Research

This project offers valuable insights into the strategies employed by Hawaiian food truck owners to sustain their businesses. Certain limitations create opportunities for further exploration. Research can expand knowledge of this topic by incorporating broader perspectives and alternative methodologies that enhance the understanding of the food truck industry and its role in promoting small business sustainability.

This project expands the research and knowledge of effective strategies Hawaiian food truck owners use. By exploring these challenges in greater detail, future research can expand our understanding of the food truck industry and its significant role in enhancing small business sustainability. Incorporating a wider range of perspectives, including those of customers, local communities, and policymakers, can provide a more comprehensive view of how food trucks contribute to the local economy and culinary landscape.

I make the following recommendations to address these limitations and enhance the rigor of future research. Expanding the sample size is essential for improving the generalizability of the findings (Mthuli et al., 2021). By including a more diverse group of food truck owners from different regions, researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of the various strategies employed by these businesses, thus enhancing the external validity of the project.

A mixed-methods approach is also recommended to address potential limitations related to the accuracy of participants' recollections. Researchers can validate and triangulate data by combining qualitative and quantitative research methods (Chudzik & Corr, 2025). Incorporating surveys, interviews, and observational techniques can provide a more robust and nuanced perspective on effective business strategies.

Real-time assessments and follow-ups can provide valuable insights into the operations of food trucks. By addressing these limitations with the suggested strategies, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of effective business practices for sustaining Hawaiian food truck businesses. This will offer important insights for both academic scholars and industry experts.

Conclusion

In this qualitative pragmatic inquiry, I explored the strategies that Hawaiian food truck owners employ to maintain business operations and achieve sustainability beyond the 3 years. Research consistently shows that a significant proportion of small businesses are unable to survive their first 3 years, often due to challenges related to limited resources, competition, and market volatility (Noer et al.,

2025). Food truck businesses have the potential for significant success, but they currently face higher closure rates than many other small business sectors.

This situation highlights the challenges related to mobility, regulatory complexities, and varying consumer demands (Lohani Harjani & Batra, 2025). Recent research suggests that many of these businesses could benefit from developing adaptive and practical sustainability strategies tailored to the unique circumstances of the food service and mobile business industries (Upadhyay et al., 2024). By focusing on these innovative strategies, food truck entrepreneurs can enhance their resilience and improve their chances of long-term success. Gaining a deeper understanding of the successful practices of Hawaiian food truck owners who have sustained their ventures for over 3 years offers valuable insights for entrepreneurial research.

This project offers practical guidance for enhancing the resilience of small businesses in this rapidly growing sector. This information is highly beneficial for Hawaiian food truck owners and for organizations that support public services. Insights gathered from semistructured interviews and document analysis shed light on effective business practices. As highlighted by Farquhar et al. (2020), by employing methodological triangulation, the credibility of these findings was significantly enhanced with saturation reached after interviewing six participants.

The analysis highlighted three key themes that contribute to sustainability: marketing, customer retention, and pricing. These findings reflect contingency theory, showing that effective management requires aligning strategies with specific circumstances. By embracing and leveraging these distinct strengths, food truck owners

can strengthen their resilience and create a path for long-term success.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

You are invited to participate in a research project about effective strategies that Hawaiian food truck owners use to sustain their businesses. The research project focuses on effective strategies that Hawaiian food truck owners use to sustain their businesses. The researcher is inviting five food truck owners who have effectively sustained their company for more than 3 years to be in this project. This form is part of the “informed consent” process to allow you to understand this project before deciding whether to take part. The researcher conducting this project is Eric Haring, a Walden University doctoral student.

Background Information

The purpose of this project is to explore effective strategies that Hawaiian food truck owners use to sustain their businesses.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this project, you will be asked to Participate in an audio-recorded interview lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes.

Upon conclusion of the interview, I will follow up with you as the participant, ensuring I understand the feedback and responses you provided during the interview. This is also included within the 60- to 90-minute timeframe for interviews with each participant but separate from the interview. This follow-up will last 15 minutes.

Here are some sample questions:

- How did you address the challenges of sustaining your Hawaiian food truck business?
- How do you utilize data or customer feedback to inform your business decisions and refine your strategies over time?
- What additional information would you like to add regarding strategies you have used to sustain your business?

Voluntary Nature of the Project:

This project is voluntary. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. If you decide to be in the project now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

- Q1: How did you address the challenges of sustaining your Hawaiian food truck business?
- Q2: Can you describe the key strategies you've implemented to differentiate your food truck from competitors and maintain a sustainable business?
- Q3: How do you utilize data or customer feedback to inform your business decisions and refine your strategies over time?
- Q4: How do you utilize data analytics and customer insights to inform your decision-making processes related to menu adjustments, pricing strategies, and expansion opportunities?
- Q5: How do you adapt your business strategies to respond to changing consumer preferences or market trends?
- Q6: Please describe how you prioritize fostering a positive work culture and ensuring operational efficiency within your food truck business, including attracting and retaining talented staff?
- Q7: What additional information would you like to add regarding strategies you have used to sustain your business?