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Addressing Challenges Faced by Small Business Immigrant Entrepreneurs in Houston, Texas

Yahya Alghafir
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Yahya Alghafir

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Dr. Jamie Klein, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Jorge Gaytan, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. James Savard, University Reviewer, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2017

Abstract

Addressing Challenges Faced by Small Business Immigrant Entrepreneurs in Houston,
Texas

by

Yahya Alghafir

LL.M Program Master of Law, Thomas Jefferson School of Law, 2012

Law School, Arab Beirut University, 1993

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Business Administration

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Abstract

Immigrant entrepreneurs play a significant role in the economic development of the United States. However, some small business immigrant entrepreneurs are less successful than small business nonimmigrant entrepreneurs. The purpose of this multicase study was to explore the strategies some small business immigrant entrepreneurs use to sustain and grow their businesses profitably. Using a purposeful sampling technique, the population for this study consisted of 5 small business immigrant entrepreneurs having sustained and grown businesses for a minimum of 5 years in Houston, Texas. The conceptual framework that grounded this study was a combination of Barney's resource-based theory and the Light's disadvantage theory of business enterprise. Data collection consisted of interviews, field notes about observations, and review of documentation related to business strategies. Data analysis involved a process of disassembling data into common codes, reassembling data into themes, interpreting meaning, and making conclusions. The following 4 themes emerged from data analysis: providing good customer service, offering lower prices than competitors, offering popular products, and keeping costs and expenses low. Results showed that small business immigrant entrepreneurs concentrate on differentiation and cost control to sustain and grow their businesses profitably. The implications for positive social change included the potential to provide small business immigrant entrepreneurs with knowledge to improve their business strategies, thereby enhancing their contribution to the prosperity of their families, their employees, and their local community.

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Dedication

I thank God, for giving me the determination necessary to complete my graduate studies. I am also thankful to my family, and I dedicate this accomplishment to them. I thank my beloved wife, Edlyn Bustamante Alghafir, and my dear children, Maryam, Jabriel, Obed, and Fatima, for constantly supporting me through the challenges of graduate school and professional life. Without their understanding and encouragement, this DBA study would never have come to completion. I also dedicate this work to my parents, Racheda Said and Abdulrahman Alghafir, whose academic and professional accomplishments have always inspired me to endeavor for excellence.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Immigrant entrepreneurship is a significant socioeconomic phenomenon that has played a central role in the economic and social development of nations (Aliaga-Isla & Rialp, 2013; Foreman-Peck & Zhou, 2013). International immigration has increased rapidly in developed countries (Zolin & Schlosser, 2013). Furthermore, the immigrant contributions to the socioeconomic growth and regional progress of developed countries were significant (Zolin & Schlosser, 2013). According to Aliaga-Isla and Rialp (2013), a systematic review of immigrant entrepreneurship literature revealed that researchers studying immigrant entrepreneurs mainly focused on their impact on labor markets as employees or entrepreneurs. However, researchers such as Fairlie and Lofstrom (2015) and Rubach, Bradley, and Kluck (2015) proposed that it was also necessary to explore the business practices of immigrant entrepreneurs to develop strategies to enhance their performance.

Background of the Problem

Small business immigrant entrepreneurs have made meaningful contributions to the U.S. economy (Aliaga-Isla & Rialp, 2013; Foreman-Peck & Zhou, 2013). However, Aliaga-Isla and Rialp (2013) and Fairlie (2012a) suggested that few researchers explored the advantages and disadvantages immigrant entrepreneurs face establishing their businesses. Zolin and Schlosser (2013) posited that research about the practices and strategies small business immigrant entrepreneurs implemented to sustain and grow their businesses was scarce. A more in-depth understanding of the business practices and strategies of small business immigrant entrepreneurs could uncover possible unexploited

potential in this group and determine whether their contribution to the U.S. economy could be even more significant (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Rubach et al., 2015).

Immigrant entrepreneurs have specific human, social, capital, and behavioral characteristics that influence and define their business practices and strategies in a different way than natives of the host country owning a business (Rubach et al., 2015; Zolin & Schlosser, 2013). The features and dynamics of businesses established by immigrant entrepreneurs also differ from the ones set up by native entrepreneurs (Foreman-Peck & Zhou, 2013; Zolin & Schlosser, 2013). It is important to take these differences into consideration when evaluating the performance and success of small business ventures (Foreman-Peck & Zhou, 2013; Zolin & Schlosser, 2013). More information about the dynamics of immigrant small businesses may assist government and private organizations in providing this population with proper assistance, thus promoting further economic growth and social integration (Foreman-Peck & Zhou, 2013; Zolin & Schlosser, 2013).

Problem Statement

Immigrant entrepreneurship played a significant role in the economic development of the United States (Aliaga-Isla & Rialp, 2013; Foreman-Peck & Zhou, 2013). The business formation rate among immigrants per month was 0.62% (620 out of 100,000) compared to a monthly business formation rate among nonimmigrants of 0.28% (280 of 100,000; Kulchina, 2015). However, immigrant businesses produced lower earnings and hired fewer employees than nonimmigrant businesses (Rubach et al., 2015). The general business problem is that some small business immigrant entrepreneurs are

less successful than small business nonimmigrant entrepreneurs. The specific business problem is that some small business immigrant entrepreneurs lack management strategies to sustain and grow their businesses profitably.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to explore strategies some small business immigrant entrepreneurs use to sustain and grow their businesses profitably. The targeted population consisted of small business immigrant entrepreneurs located in Houston, Texas, having sustained and grown businesses for a minimum of 5 years. Houston, Texas was an appropriate location for this study because Texas is one of the states with the highest levels of immigrant business owners in the United States (Kallick, 2012; Rubach et al., 2015). The positive social change potential for the study findings is providing small business immigrant entrepreneurs with the knowledge to improve their business strategies, thereby enhancing their contribution to the prosperity of their families, their employees, and their local community.

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative methodology for this study. The purpose of using the qualitative method is to understand a phenomenon from the point of view of the individual that experienced it (Bernard, 2013; Patton, 2002). According to Bernard (2013) and Patton (2002), researchers use the qualitative research method to attain the primary meaning that a person ascribes to a phenomenon or occurrence. The justification of my use of the qualitative method for this study resulted from my need to identify and

explore the strategies small business immigrant entrepreneurs use to sustain and grow their businesses profitably.

Conversely, the quantitative research method was not suitable for this study. The quantitative method is not conducive to capturing the meaning of a phenomenon from the study participants' points of view (Bernard, 2013; Paulus, 2013). According to Bernard (2013) and Paulus (2013), researchers using quantitative methods explain the experiences of individuals by representing people with numerical values and do not provide detailed and comprehensive descriptions. As a result, using a quantitative approach would not have enabled me to conduct an in-depth exploration of the different dimensions of the immigrant entrepreneurial experience.

The mixed methods methodology is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research strategies that enables researchers to gain a holistic understanding of a topic (Bernard, 2013; Paulus, 2013). Bernard (2013) and Paulus (2013) suggested mixed methods promoted the reduction of bias by balancing the weaknesses of one research method with the strengths of the other. The mixed methods approach was not appropriate for this investigation because its quantitative component did not facilitate further understanding of participants' perspectives about the phenomenon under study.

In this study, I used a multicase study design. According to Patton (2002) and Yin (2014), researchers employing the case study design examine an issue by developing comprehensive descriptions of cases and using them as concrete illustrations for analysis. The case study design was suitable for this study because developing comprehensive

descriptions of participants' business practices was conducive to understanding their business strategies.

On the contrary, the other qualitative research design options of grounded theory, phenomenology, ethnography, and narrative research were not suitable for this study. According to Bernard (2013) and Patton (2002), grounded theory entails systematic research to develop new theories to explain phenomena. However, my objective with this study was to describe the business strategies of small business immigrant entrepreneurs and not to develop new theories about their strategies. According to Bernard and Patton, researchers use phenomenology to explore the lived experiences and opinions of individuals regarding a phenomenon. However, my goal in this study was to explore business strategies, not lived experiences. Ethnography research is appropriate to study how a particular culture works (Bernard, 2013; Patton, 2002). My goal in this study was to explore business strategies and not a cultural background. According to Bernard and Patton, researchers who employ narrative research do not interact with the participants or ask questions, and thus cannot gain access to the in-depth perspectives of the participants. In this study, my goal was to understand business skills and strategies from the standpoint of the participants, not the investigator.

Research Question

The central research question I developed to guide this study was: What strategies do small business immigrant entrepreneurs use to sustain and grow their businesses profitably?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies do you use to sustain and grow your business?
2. How do you implement those strategies?
3. What barriers do you face to sustain and grow your business?
4. How do you address those barriers?
5. What *internal* resources do you use to sustain and grow your business?
6. How do you use those internal resources to sustain and grow your business?
7. What *external* resources do you use to sustain and grow your business?
8. How do you use those external resources to sustain and grow your business?
9. What type of business experience did you have before opening your current company?
10. What type of business training did you have before opening your current company?
11. What else would you like to share that I have not already asked?

Conceptual Framework

In this study, I combined the resource-based theory (RBT) and the disadvantage theory of business enterprise to develop a conceptual framework to describe the dynamics and performance of immigrant entrepreneurship. Barney (1991) developed the RBT with the central premise that managers developed and deployed business strategies in a way that leveraged internal and external resources that enhanced performance and promoted competitive advantage. Barney posited that resources such as capital, equipment, cash flow, assets, skills, and knowledge of employees were key performance determinants;

however, the managers' characteristics, experiences, capacity to learn, and abilities to manage resources effectively had a direct influence on the growth and sustainability of an entity. My rationale for applying RBT in this study was that when immigrant entrepreneurs sustained and grew their businesses, they needed to maximize the utility of their resources by implementing effective strategies (see Barney, 1991). If small business immigrant entrepreneurs used their resources effectively and efficiently, they could overcome the barriers in the business environment.

Light (1979) developed the disadvantage theory of business enterprise and argued that members of ethnic and racial minority groups often faced barriers to entering the economic mainstream and sought entrepreneurship as a means of independent livelihood. Light suggested immigrants were at a disadvantageous position to enter the general labor force of their host country due to barriers such as language, education, credentials, and discrimination; consequently, immigrants often opted for self-employment or informal commerce to earn a living. In this study, I applied the combination of the premises of RBT and disadvantage theory of entrepreneurship to understand the challenges and strategies of immigrant entrepreneurship.

Operational Definitions

American Community Survey (ACS): A household survey that contains information on business ownership, startup activity, and business income (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Kerr & Kerr, 2016).

Current Population Survey (CPS): A household survey that contains the most up-to-date estimates of the rate of business ownership in the United States. The CPS contains

information of all types of business ownership including incorporated, unincorporated, employer, and nonemployer business (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Kerr & Kerr, 2016).

Ethnic enclave: The residential concentration of conational or coethnic individuals in a specific urban area (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015).

Immigrant entrepreneurs: Individuals who have been outside their country of origin for at least 12 months and start a new business as a mean of economic survival in their new country (Martínez, Saiz-Alvarez, & Martínez, 2013; Rocio-Aliaga, 2013).

Self-employed business ownership rate: The ratio of the number of self-employed business owners to the total number of workers (Fairlie, 2012a).

Survey of Business Owners (SBO): A survey that contains information on business sales, employment, payroll, and exports. It also includes information regarding country of origin, skill level, state of residence, and industry of business. It is the most up-to-date and comprehensive dataset on ethnic or racial minority businesses for the United States (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Kerr & Kerr, 2016).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

As stated by Karlsen (2014) and Simon and Goes (2013), researchers must clearly identify and address the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of their investigations to prevent misrepresentation of data. Each assumption, limitation, and delimitation sets the framework for how the researcher should direct the study (Karlsen, 2014).

Consequently, in this subsection I will discuss the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of this study.

Assumptions

Assumptions are ideas that researchers assume to be true while completing an investigation but cannot be proven empirically (Karlsen, 2014; Simon & Goes, 2013). According to Gandy (2015) and Leedy and Ormord (2015), researchers identify the central assumptions of their studies to establish realistic expectations and enhance objectivity. In this study, I made five significant assumptions. The first assumption was that five immigrant small business immigrant entrepreneurs would be willing to participate in the study. My second assumption was that the data would be valid and reliable. Another assumption was that the study's participants would be honest in their answers to the interview questions. The fourth assumption was that study participants would be proficient in English and could provide in-depth answers. My final assumption was that the interviews would generate enough relevant information to identify themes and patterns that would describe the business practices of small business immigrant entrepreneurs in-depth.

Limitations

The limitations of a study are potential weaknesses that are out of the control of the investigator, given the choice of research design or other factors (Simon & Goes, 2013). According to Gandy (2015) and Leedy and Ormord (2015), researchers explain the limitations or potential problems of their studies in order to prepare for possible eventualities during investigations. A significant limitation of this study was that my extensive experience as an entrepreneur and businessperson could have potentially influenced my research approach and analysis of the data. The second limitation was the

possible difficulty engaging and recruiting small business immigrant entrepreneurs to participate in the study. The final limitation was the possibility that immigrant small business immigrant entrepreneurs could not have a conscious understanding of the strategies they applied to establish and maintain their businesses.

Delimitations

The delimitations of a study are the specifications or characteristics that define the scope and describe the boundaries of the investigation (Simon & Goes, 2013). The purpose of describing the delimitation of a study is communicating the boundaries of an investigation clearly (Gandy, 2015; Leedy & Ormord, 2015). The location boundary for this study consisted of the city of Houston, Texas. The knowledge, experience, and strategies of small business immigrant entrepreneurs shaped the performance of their enterprises, which influenced my discoveries in this study. The scope of this study only involved foreign-born small business entrepreneurs that had lived in the United States for at least 12 months. In this study, I excluded small business entrepreneurs who were born in the United States.

Significance of the Study

Small business immigrant entrepreneurs in Houston, Texas can use the findings from this investigation as guidelines to address the challenges of sustaining and growing their businesses profitably (see Aliaga-Isla & Rialp, 2013; Rubach et al., 2015). Furthermore, the findings of the investigation can assist the government, private organizations, and policymakers to promote and enhance immigrant entrepreneurship in the United States (see Abbasian & Yazdanfar, 2013; Aliaga-Isla & Rialp, 2013). Finally,

the findings could catalyze researchers to explore the differences and similarities between immigrant and nonimmigrant entrepreneurs; therefore, resulting in the development of better business practice guidelines for each type of entrepreneurial venture (see Aliaga-Isla & Rialp, 2013; Rubach et al., 2015).

Immigrant entrepreneurship is a significant socioeconomic phenomenon that plays a central role in the economic and social development of countries (Liñán, Fernández-Serrano, & Romero, 2013). Regarding economic development, immigrant entrepreneurship creates new jobs through new business ventures that contribute to wealth creation (Fairlie, 2012b; Zolin & Schlosser, 2013). Other potential positive noneconomic effects of immigrant entrepreneurship are the development of strong ethnic communities, social integration, recognition of immigrants, a nurturing of the entrepreneurial spirit, and providing role models for immigrants (Liñán et al., 2013; Zolin & Schlosser, 2013). However, despite its importance from the management perspective, success strategies of immigrant entrepreneurship are still unknown and need to be addressed (Fairlie, 2012b; Liñán et al., 2013; Zolin & Schlosser, 2013). A better understanding of the phenomenon of immigrant entrepreneurship could catalyze the application of business practices that strengthen these particular ventures resulting in economic growth and the enhancement of social integration. The results and conclusions of this study might contribute to positive social change by promoting the improvement of the financial status of small business immigrant entrepreneurs, and therefore, enhancing their quality of life and their contribution to the economy of their community.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

My primary focus in this study was to investigate the strategies that small business immigrant entrepreneurs in Houston, Texas use to sustain and grow their businesses profitably. My approach in this qualitative multicase study consisted of interviewing five small business immigrant entrepreneurs to understand their business strategies from their points of view. The foundation of the study included a combination of the premises of the RBT and the disadvantage theory of entrepreneurship. Consequently, I conducted a review of the literature on immigrant entrepreneurship, the RBT, and the disadvantage theory of entrepreneurship to inform my investigation.

The literature review included information from books, conference papers, peer-reviewed journals articles, dissertations, work papers, and government reports. My focus in this literature review was to compare and contrast scholarly contributions to the body of knowledge from 2013–2017 discussing immigrant entrepreneurship, and the theories previously mentioned. A critical analysis of the literature informed my research for this qualitative study and helped me better understand the dynamics of immigrant entrepreneurship. The specific themes that emerged from my review of the literature included the positive impact of immigrant entrepreneurship on the U.S. economy, different theories explaining the origin of immigrant entrepreneurship, distinct types of immigrant entrepreneurs, general characteristics of immigrant entrepreneurs, and their business performance in the United States. These scholarly contributions portrayed the status of immigrant entrepreneurship as well as how different forces within society and the business environment influenced the performance of immigrant-owned businesses.

However, during my literature review, I also uncovered a lack of studies examining the strategies that immigrant entrepreneurs applied to sustain and grow their businesses. Therefore, the results of this study will contribute to addressing this gap in the literature.

This literature review will include information on six main themes: (a) the RBT and the disadvantage theory, (b) theories of immigrant entrepreneurship, (c) types of immigrant entrepreneurs, (d) impact of immigrant entrepreneurship on the U.S. economy, (e) characteristics of immigrant entrepreneurship in the United States, and (f) performance of immigrant entrepreneurs in the United States. For a detailed investigation of the study topic, each main theme will include pertinent subthemes. The RBT and disadvantage theory subthemes are (a) central premises and assumptions and (b) evolution. The theories of immigrant entrepreneurship subthemes are (a) cultural theory, (b) the contextual approach, and (c) the integrated approach or mixed embeddedness theory. The types of immigrant entrepreneur subthemes are (a) necessity immigrant entrepreneurs and (b) opportunity immigrant entrepreneurs. The impact of immigrant entrepreneurship on U.S. economy subthemes are (a) business ownership, (b) business formation, (c) business income, and (d) employment. The characteristics of immigrant entrepreneurship in the United States subthemes are (a) education, (b) language, (c) access to capital, (d) business experience in home country, (e) ethnic enclaves, and (f) legal status.

To complete this literature review, I used the databases available through Walden's University Library and Google Scholar. My database searches of Business Source Complete, Academic Search Complete, ProQuest Central, and Sage Premier

provided source material for this literature review. To search the databases, I used different keyword combinations with Boolean phrases. I limited the search to full-text peer-reviewed articles published from 2013–2017. I later expanded the dates of the search to increase the number of articles identified on the topic. I also reviewed the reference lists of relevant articles to identify further articles on immigrant entrepreneurship and the pertinent theories. The keywords I used included *immigrant business*, *immigrant entrepreneur*, *immigrant entrepreneurship*, *immigrant ventures*, *resource-based theory*, and *disadvantage theory*. I organized the articles using Zotero software and a reference matrix contained in an Excel spreadsheet.

The total number of references for this study consisted of (a) 151 peer-reviewed journal articles, (b) four nonpeer-reviewed journal articles, (c) eight books, (d) four work papers, (e) two government papers, and (f) six dissertations. Of the 171 total study references, 151 (88.3%) are peer reviewed, and 155 (90.64%) were published within 5 years of expected Walden chief academic officer approval. The literature review contains 85 of the total 171 references for this study. Of the 85 literature review references, 78 (91.76%) are peer reviewed, and 77 (90.58%) were published within 5 years of expected Walden chief academic officer approval.

Application to the Applied Business Problem

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to explore the strategies small business immigrant entrepreneurs use in Houston, Texas to sustain and grow their businesses profitably. The potential for affecting positive social change through the completion of this study was in providing small business immigrant entrepreneurs with

the knowledge to improve their business strategies. With better business strategies, small business immigrant entrepreneurs can enhance their contribution to the prosperity of their families, their employees, and their local community.

Resource-Based Theory (RBT)

In 1991, the strategic management expert, Barney developed the RBT (Barney, 1991; Day, 2014; Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2015; O'Donnell, 2014). At that time, most strategic management researchers were trying to identify and understand the foundations of sustainable competitive advantage (SCA); however, Barney concluded that to produce a sustainable profit, small business immigrant entrepreneurs needed to acquire the right resources and secure them using sequestering devices to make those resources unique and limited within a particular industry (Barney, 1991; Day, 2014; Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2015; O'Donnell, 2014). This subsection will include an in-depth discussion of the premises and evolution of RBT.

Central premises and assumptions. Barney argued small business owners needed to concentrate on two primary objectives: (a) obtaining the necessary resources to gain competitive advantage and (b) enhancing the application of those resources to maintain competitive edge (Shirokova, Vega, & Sokolova, 2013; Silvio, Edward Rivera, & Walter, 2014; Thomason, Simendinger, & Kiernan, 2013; Tomczyk, Lee, & Winslow, 2013). A business entity achieves a SCA when it is generating more profit than the majority of the competitor companies in its industry (Kozlenkova, Samaha, & Palmatier, 2014). According to Barney (1991), firms accomplished SCA when business managers

applied strategies that competitors were not able to reproduce in an easy and quick manner.

In RBT, entrepreneurs utilizing a business process that involves resources and capabilities that are valuable, rare, inimitable, nonsubstitutable and well organized can achieve SCA over other companies within the same industry (Yorgova & Papazov, 2014). Resources are inputs into the business process such as capital, equipment, cash flow, assets, skills, and knowledge of employees (Grant, 1991). Capabilities refer to the capacity for a compilation of resources to perform some task or activity effectively and efficiently (Grant, 1991).

The RBT framework relies on two primary assumptions about firm-based resources to explain how they generate SCA. First, all firms possess different internal characteristics or distinctive resource and capability packages (Huesch, 2013; Kozlenkova et al., 2014). Some firms are better at accomplishing certain goals or functions because they possess unique resources and management capabilities that competitors lack (Devigne, Vanacker, Manigart, & Paeleman, 2013; Huesch, 2013; Kozlenkova et al., 2014; Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2015). Second, the differences in resources and capabilities among companies may stay consistent because of difficulties trading resources across firms (Huesch, 2013; Kozlenkova et al., 2014). In the RBT, if a firm has valuable resources that other firms find unreasonably difficult or expensive to obtain or imitate, then the firm controlling these resources likely can generate SCA (Barney, Ketchen, & Wright, 2011). However, Barney et al. (2011) argued that only resources that are simultaneously valuable, rare, inimitable, and nonsubstitutable could

promote SCA. A resource is valuable if it enables the firms to apply business strategies that reduce cost and increase profit place (Kozlenkova et al., 2014). A resource is rare if it is under the control of a small number of competitors (Kozlenkova et al., 2014). A resource is inimitable if it is too difficult or expensive for competitors to acquire or develop (Kozlenkova et al., 2014). A resource is non-substitutable if competitors cannot generate another resource that would take its place (Kozlenkova et al., 2014). Barney et al. also argued that even if the firm's resources meet the previously mentioned requirements, they would promote SCA only in the presence of effective management capabilities and strong human capital (Nyberg, Moliterno, Hale, & Lepak, 2014). If a firm has poor management, organizational processes, policies, and procedures, business leaders are unable to reach the full potential of strategic resources (Barney et al., 2011; Blackburn, Hart, & Wainwright, 2013; Nyberg et al., 2014).

Managers applying the RBT concentrate on how strategic resources and capabilities affect the business strategy of a firm (Barney 1991; Fung, 2014; Wernerfelt, 2013). The framework of RBT involves the internal resources and capabilities of business firms (Day, 2014; O'Donnell, 2014). According to Shaw, Park, and Kim (2013), RBT shifted the focus of strategic management from sources of competitive advantage being external factors, such as industry position, to idiosyncratic internal factors, such as human capital accumulations. Human resources are also strategically important when they are scarce, specialized, and hold vital knowledge as human capital is an essential component of the RBT (Nyberg et al., 2014; Popadiuk, Rivera, & Bataglia, 2014; Shaw et al., 2013). Furthermore, Tabares, Alvarez, and Urbano (2015) suggested that internal organizational

capabilities related to intellectual capital such as entrepreneurship, market knowledge, management skills, information technology capabilities, networks, technological innovations, and customer orientation are essential to take advantage of available resources successfully.

The central premise of RBT is that the controlled strategic resources and capabilities of a firm influence and shape the differences in growth and performance among competitors within the same industry (Devigne et al., 2013; Fung, 2014). With respect to RBT and resources, Warnier, Weppe, and Lecocq (2013) argued that RBT should expand and include ordinary and junk resources in addition to strategic resources. Warnier et al. argued that ordinary and junk resources are more available to most firms than strategic resources and may generate competitive advantage. Verbeke and Yuan (2013) echoed this sentiment stating that *slack resources* or resources that are commonly available in an industry can result in competitive advantage if the right managerial skills are present.

Companies are different from one another because organizational leaders manage organizational resources and capabilities in different manners (Blackburn et al., 2013; Hsiang-Han & Tsung-ting, 2016; Szymaniec-Mlicka, 2014). Thus, differentiating a business from its competitors by applying unique resources in distinctive ways is a good strategy to sustain and advance a firm (Barney, 1991). Business owners and managers can implement the RBT framework to assess the internal capacities of a firm and their ability to coordinate resources while considering the effect of external business environment conditions (Barney, 1991; Blackburn et al., 2013). The sustainability,

profitability, and growth of a small business depend on the manager's ability to maintain a balanced business environment by managing resources effectively and efficiently (Barney, 1991; Blackburn et al., 2013; Lonial & Carter, 2015; Webb, Morris, & Pillay, 2013). A business manager is capable of creating a SCA by bundling and using internal resources effectively (Abdelgawad, Zahra, Svejnova, & Sapienza, 2013; Barney, 2014; Barney et al., 2011). In RBT, the status of a business's entity is the result of a collection of productive resources and administrative organization; consequently, management has a crucial role in influencing the success of the enterprise (Blackburn et al., 2013; Jacobsen, 2013). Small and large business enterprises succeed under managers with competence and vision within evolving internal and external environments (Blackburn et al., 2013; Jacobsen, 2013). There is a positive relationship between entrepreneurial capabilities of managers and firm outcomes (Abdelgawad et al., 2013). Business managers possessing entrepreneurial capabilities can identify, choose, modify, and coordinate resources to promote competitive advantage (Abdelgawad et al., 2013; Barney, 2014; Barney et al., 2011; Blackburn et al., 2013).

According to Grant (1991), the RBT presents an inside-out process to formulate business strategies, which concentrates on the internal characteristics of a firm rather than the external business environment or the positioning of the firm in a particular industry. In the RBT, a business strategy is the result of an internal analysis that uncovers the strengths and weaknesses of the resources and capabilities available (Hsiang-Han & Tsung-ting, 2016; Wernerfelt, 2013). In RBT, business strategy formulation starts with business managers identifying potential or existing firm resources and capabilities that

could generate sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Grant 1991). The manager should confirm and classify the resources, compare their strengths and weaknesses with the competitors. Next, managers evaluate the resources regarding value, rarity, exclusivity, and nonsubstitutability. Subsequently, managers must apply their business knowledge and management skills to develop and implement strategies to protect those resources and coordinate them in a manner that promotes SCA and growth (Barney, 1991; Grant 1991). Finally, managers must identify resource gaps and consistently generate new resources to maintain SCA. The ability of a company to continue using resources that are rare, valuable, inimitable, and nonsubstitutable results in consistent business growth and sustainable competitive advantage (Barney 1991; Fung, 2014; Yorgova & Papazov, 2014). According to the RBT principles, small business immigrant entrepreneurs can establish and maintain their enterprises successfully despite economical barriers if they apply their available resources and capabilities strategically to achieve competitive advantage (Shinnar, Aguilera, & Lyons, 2011; Yang, Ho, & Chang, 2012).

Evolution. The RBT is a result of the evolution of the resource-based view (RBV) of the firm. Barney developed the RBT by building upon the works of scholars such as Ricardo in 1817, Penrose 1959, Porter in 1980, Nelson and Winter in 1982, and Wernerfelt 1984, who generated the RBV (Barney, 2014; Kozlenkova et al., 2014). Prior to the RBV of the firm, managers followed a business model in which industry level factors directly influenced and shaped the profit levels of firms (Kozlenkova et al., 2014). However, managers later shifted toward a model in which internal firm factors had a

direct influence on profit. In the RBV of the firm, the goal of the manager was to determine the economic value of a resource and predict the resource's contribution to the profitability of the firm (Barney et al., 2011). In the RBV, managers of business entities can generate SCA using internal tangible and intangible resources (Lockett & Wild, 2014). Supporters of the RBV also indicated that firm leaders obtain and create tangible and intangible resources to produce barriers to entry; that promote competitive advantages for the firms (Perrigot & Pénard, 2013). The RBV's main proposition was that the manager's abilities to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of their resources are central to gaining SCA (Seshadri, 2013).

The RBV evolved into a full-fledged theory because of the efforts of Lippman and Rumelt (1982) and Barney (1986). The resources of the firm according to RBT include people, organizational culture, and relationship with suppliers, and managerial goal commitments (Seshadri, 2013). Therefore, business managers should focus on generating and obtaining more resources to succeed (Seshadri, 2013). Finally, in 1991 Barney defined the central premises and characteristics of resources and sustainable competitive advantage.

Before the RBT was available, scholars applied the assessment or analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and, threats (SWOT) to examine the SCA of firms (Barney, 1991). The central premise of the SWOT analysis model is that all firms have comparable characteristics and that managers can enhance internal strengths by responding to external opportunities (Barney, 1991). Firm managers implement internal strengths to address external threats and balance flaws within the firm (Barney, 1991;

2014; Day, 2014; Kozlenkova et al., 2014; O'Donnell, 2014). SWOT and RBT present similar perspectives because the internal and external forces of SWOT align with internal and external resources (RBT).

Disadvantage Theory of Business

Light (1979) developed the disadvantage theory of the firm. Light suggested entrepreneurship often becomes the primary means of livelihood among immigrants and minorities during circumstances of urban and economic adversity. This subsection includes an in-depth discussion of the premises and evolution of the disadvantage theory of business.

Central premises and assumptions. Light (1979) argued that minorities and immigrants often have to choose between unemployment and self-employment as small-scale entrepreneurs because they face difficulties entering the mainstream job market in their host country. Immigrants often lack human capital such as language skills, education, and experience necessary to get mainstream jobs (Bates & Robb, 2013; Khosa & Kalitanyi, 2015). The lack of access to the labor market, discrimination, and limited opportunities for career development makes self-employment a more viable alternative than being a salaried employee (Bates & Robb, 2013; Boyd, 2015, Chaumba & Nackerud, 2013; Khosa & Kalitanyi, 2015; Lofstrom & Bates, 2013).

Light's disadvantage market theory of entrepreneurship is significant to research about business failure among minorities and immigrants (Bates & Robb, 2013; Boyd, 2015, Chaumba & Nackerud, 2013; Khosa & Kalitanyi, 2015; Lofstrom & Bates, 2013). Light (1979) suggested that cultural and socioeconomic factors such as social uniqueness,

discrimination, and poor integration are responsible for the difficulties that minority and immigrant groups face while running business firms. Light also stated that business abilities varied among small business owners depending on their race and cultural background. Light argued that barriers to good performance of immigrant business include lack of capital, lack of skills, lack of institutional support, excessive regulations, excessive compliance cost, high taxes, discrimination, language, and crime.

Evolution. The first theories about immigrant or ethnic entrepreneurship derived from the field of sociology. Initially, the leading explanation for immigrant and ethnic entrepreneurship was the cultural theory (Khosa & Kalitanyi, 2015). Supporters of this theory argued that cultural beliefs and values influence entrepreneurial behavior (Aliaga-Isla & Rialp, 2013). Certain ethnic groups possess cultural characteristics that predispose individuals to pursue a career as an entrepreneur (Aliaga-Isla & Rialp, 2013). On the contrary, some cultures do not value entrepreneurial behavior or consider business as an inappropriate occupation (Campbell, 2014; Khosa & Kalitanyi, 2015). Later, the approach towards immigrant entrepreneurship shifted from the cultural view to a disadvantage view. In general, immigrants need to obtain acceptable credentials to effectively compete in regional and local economies. However, discrimination often makes it difficult to gain employment matching their credentials. Thus, they turn to informal business for survival. Supporters of the disadvantage view claimed that immigrants have to find a way to survive in their host country. Thus, business initiatives become part of their culture (Khosa & Kalitanyi, 2015). Researchers established discrimination kept immigrants and minority small business owners from the labor and

business market (Kolivoski, Weaver, & Constance-Huggins, 2014; Porter & Bratter, 2015) by (a) limiting access to startup and working funds; (b) limiting entrance to education, skill growth, and training; (c) limiting and decreasing the size of businesses; and (d) increasing business failure (Bates & Tuck, 2014). The business world has exclusionary practices that demote and limit the success of minority business entrepreneurs (Campbell, 2014; Connor, 2015; Kolivoski et al., 2014; Porter & Bratter, 2015).

Theories of Immigrant Entrepreneurship

Business activity among immigrant groups increased in the United States and Europe during the 1970s. Consequently, the academic community started examining topics related to ethnic businesses and immigrant entrepreneurs. The different studies examining this field can be categorized into three approaches: the studies applying cultural approach, or cultural theory; the studies implementing a contextual approach, or disadvantage theory; and the studies using an integrated approach, or mixed embeddedness theory (Carbonell, Hernandez, Pedraz, García, & Lara, 2014; Rueda, Solé Parellada, & Rieta, 2010).

Cultural theory. Researchers following the cultural approach suggested that the common characteristics that immigrant entrepreneurs share are the result of the support immigrant entrepreneurs receive from their family and other individuals of the same nationality that help them to start up, develop, and finance their businesses (Carbonell et al., 2014; Rueda et al., 2010; Skandalis & Ghazzawi, 2014; Zelekha, 2013). The utilization of ethnic-cultural resources defines a business as ethnic. These resources can

be tangible, such as financing, or intangible, like information, guidance and advice (Rueda et al., 2010; Skandalis & Ghazzawi, 2014; Zelekha, 2013). Another factor that defines a business as ethnic is the degree in which the ethnic community participates in the development of the business as financier, consumer, or supplier (Rueda et al., 2010; Zelekha, 2013). Supporters of the cultural theory argue the critical factors for the survival of immigrant business include pre-immigration entrepreneurial skills, the social ethnic network, and the ethnic niche market (Adendorff & Halkias, 2014; Carbonell et al., 2014). A principle of the cultural theory is that national attitudes or cultural beliefs towards entrepreneurship influence whether individuals decide to pursue establishing a business and whether their community will support that pursuit (Luczak, Mohan-Neill, & Hills, 2014; Rubach et al., 2015). As a result, immigrants that come from a culture with a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship are more likely to pursue business than those coming from a culture with a negative attitude towards entrepreneurship (Luczak et al., 2014; Rubach, Bradley, & Kluck, 2015).

Contextual approach. Researchers following the contextual or structural approach argue that the rise of entrepreneurship among immigrants was a result of contextual factors in the receiving society or host country (Carbonell et al., 2014; Rueda et al., 2010; Skandalis & Ghazzawi, 2014; Zelekha, 2013). Immigrants did not enter business as a way of life, but rather as their best opportunity of making a living when life provided few alternatives. Immigrant entrepreneurship often appears to occur in circumstances of urban and economic adversity as the main means of livelihood (Skandalis & Ghazzawi, 2014). The lack of access to the labor market, discrimination,

and limited opportunities for career development makes self-employment a more viable alternative than being a salaried employee (Skandalis & Ghazzawi, 2014). The main barriers to the success of immigrant entrepreneurs are discrimination, and the lack of access to capital, the labor market and institutional support (Carbonell et al., 2014; Zelekha, 2013). The barriers to good performance of immigrant business include lack of capital, lack of skills, lack of support, excessive regulations, excessive compliance cost, high taxes, discrimination, language and crime (Carbonell et al., 2014; Zelekha, 2013). The argument of the disadvantage theory is that immigrants face difficulties that prevent them from entering the mainstream job market in their host country. As a result, immigrants face a situation in which self-employment becomes the only alternative for survival (Carbonell et al., 2014; Zelekha, 2013).

Integral approach. Researchers following the integral approach combine the cultural and contextual approach, combining the establishment of immigrant business through the interactions between the ethnic resources of the immigrant population and the structure of the opportunities of the host country (Carbonell et al., 2014; Rueda et al., 2010). Waldinger et al. developed the theory of interaction in 1990, which included three factors that defined immigrant entrepreneurship: group characteristics, structures of opportunities and ethnic strategies (Carbonell et al., 2014; Rueda et al., 2010). The group characteristics referred to the capacities of a group to mobilize resources. The structure of opportunities referred to market conditions for the existence of ethnic or nonethnic products and access to the conditions or facilities necessary to establish the business. The

ethnic strategies referred to the way in which ethnic resources are applied (Carbonell et al., 2014; Rueda et al., 2010).

Types of Immigrant Entrepreneurs

The motivations that drive immigrants to become entrepreneurs are of key importance for the performance and economic growth of the businesses they establish. As a result, it is imperative to differentiate between necessity entrepreneurship and opportunity entrepreneurship (Rubach et al., 2015). In some situations, immigrants may decide to become entrepreneurs out of necessity, or out of opportunity, or maybe a mixture of both opportunity and necessity; or temporally move fluidly between a necessity state and an opportunity state of entrepreneurship in different cycles (Guerra & Patuelli, 2014; Juhasz Liebermann, Suter, & Iglesias Rutishauser, 2014; Williams & Williams, 2014). The motivations of immigrant entrepreneurs shape the characteristics and dynamic of their businesses. Therefore, it is inappropriate to use the same performance indicators for different types of immigrant-owned businesses (Constant & Zimmermann, 2014; Liñón et al., 2013; Poschke, 2013).

The indicators of small business success include two main categories: survival indicators and growth indicators. Survival indicators, such as age and profitability, refer to the number of years the venture survives and whether the small business's income is enough to cover overall cost. The growth indicators refer to factors such as sales market share, net income and number of employees, return of investments and cash flow (Constant & Zimmermann, 2014; Liñón et al., 2013; Poschke, 2013). In general, most recent business research has concentrated on growth indicators to evaluate the

performance of small business failing to take into consideration the essential differences between necessity and opportunity entrepreneurs (Constant & Zimmermann, 2014; Liñón et al., 2013; Poschke, 2013). When choosing the right indicators to evaluate the success of immigrant-owned businesses, it is imperative to take into consideration what type of immigrant entrepreneurs they are.

Necessity immigrant entrepreneurs. Necessity immigrant entrepreneurs are immigrants that undertake business activities in their host country because they face various barriers that prevent them from incorporating to the mainstream job market of the host country (Cheung, 2014; Irastorza & Pena, 2013; Liñón et al., 2013; Skandalis & Ghazzawi, 2014). In general, necessity immigrant entrepreneurs decide to pursue business because of low family income, difficulty in finding employment, and for women, because of the need to have the flexibility to manage family issues while working (Rubach et al., 2015). The business ventures of necessity immigrant entrepreneurs are their sole source of income and means of survival in the host country (Abada, Hou, & Lu, 2014; Poschke, 2013; Skandalis & Ghazzawi, 2014). Sometimes, necessity immigrant entrepreneurs engage in the informal economy and destructive forms of entrepreneurship. Consequently, despite high rates of entrepreneurship among them, their economic growth is low. Necessity entrepreneurs do not have other means to provide for themselves and their families; thus, the pressure often push them to break the rules, which often results in undesirable economic and social consequences (Rubach et al., 2015).

In general, necessity immigrant entrepreneurs are not highly educated, have only

the education of their home country, poor language skills, low skill set, have limited professional experience and lack the necessary capital to start a business (Irastorza & Pena, 2013; Zolin & Schlosser, 2013). This type of entrepreneur has few or no inter-relationships with other entrepreneurs. Thus, he or she relies on family, friends, and their ethnic community for startup capital and has no access to formal financial resources (Rubach et al., 2015; Tata & Prasad, 2015). The ethnic community is critical for this group of entrepreneurs because it provides them with a market niche and coethnic employees who are willing to work hard for lower pay (Skandalis & Ghazzawi, 2014). The relationship between necessity immigrant entrepreneurs and their coethnic employees is one of solidarity and mutual benefit. Often, employees are family members (Williams & Williams, 2014; Zolin & Schlosser, 2013).

Opportunity immigrant entrepreneurs. Opportunity immigrant entrepreneurs are immigrants that freely chose to establish a business to take advantage of a business opportunity (Cheung, 2014; Fatoki, 2013; Hulten & Ahmed, 2013; Williams & Williams, 2014). In general, the goal of opportunity immigrant entrepreneurs is to produce more money with their business than what they are making with their regular jobs so that they can accomplish their dream of wealth and independence. Opportunity entrepreneurs identify good business opportunities, then accumulate the resources necessary, and finally deliver superior customer value (Ndofor & Priem, 2011). Opportunity immigrant entrepreneurs are highly educated and have a degree from the host country (Fatoki, 2013; Nkongolo-Bakenda & Chrysostome, 2013; Sahin, Todiras, Nijkamp, & Suzuki, 2012; Williams & Williams, 2014; Zolin & Schlosser, 2013). In contrast to necessity immigrant

entrepreneurs, opportunity immigrant entrepreneurs are fluent in the language of the host country (Fatoki, 2013; Nkongolo-Bakenda & Chrysostome, 2013; Williams & Williams, 2014). This type of immigrant entrepreneurs has good access to start-up capital from financial institutions and does not rely on an ethnic market for their business; instead, they pursue mainstream industries. Opportunity immigrant entrepreneurs often hire host-country employees rather than members of their ethnic community (Fatoki, 2013; Martínez, Saiz-Alvarez, & Martínez, 2013; Nkongolo-Bakenda & Chrysostome, 2013; Williams & Williams, 2014; Zolin & Schlosser, 2013).

Impact of Immigrant Entrepreneurship on the U.S. Economy

Entrepreneurship and small business ownership play a significant role in the economy of countries because they create new jobs, promote innovation, increase production, and decrease poverty (Hulten & Ahmed, 2013; Zelekha, 2013). High levels of immigration in a country have a significant positive effect on its level of entrepreneurship (Hulten & Ahmed, 2013; Zelekha, 2013). The positive effect of immigrants on entrepreneurship is stronger in countries that are urban in nature, competitive and open regarding ethnic, cultural and gender diversity (Hulten & Ahmed, 2013; Zelekha, 2013). The positive impact of immigration on entrepreneurship increases as the flow of immigrants grows (Hulten & Ahmed, 2013; Zelekha, 2013). Immigrants are nearly twice as likely to create new businesses as native-born individuals in the United States (Rubach et al., 2015). The growing immigrant population, alongside increasing rates of immigrant entrepreneurship, has resulted in a higher percentage of immigrant business owners in the United States (Tata & Prasad, 2015). For instance, in

2013 immigrants constituted 24% of all start-up businesses compared to 14% in 1996 (Tata & Prasad, 2015). Immigrant entrepreneurs and business owners have a substantial impact on the U.S. economy as contributors to business ownership, business formation rate, employment and business income (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016; Kerr & Mandorff, 2015).

Business ownership. The business ownership rate consists of the ratio between the number of self-employed business owners and the total number of workers. Data indicates that business ownership rate is about 15% higher among immigrants than among U.S.-born (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). Results from the 2006-2010 American community survey (ACS) and the 2010 current population survey (CPS) indicated that 11% of immigrants own a business compared to 9.6% of U.S.-born (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). About 18.2% of all business owners in the United States are immigrants, with 2.4 million immigrant business owners. The business formation rate is a good representation of the supply of business owners in the economy at a particular point in time; however, it does not reflect the dynamics of business formation (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016; Kerr & Mandorff, 2015).

Business formation. Entrepreneurs promote the economic growth of developed and developing countries (Rubach et al., 2015). Often, business start-up activity is a good measure of economic growth, job creation, and innovation. It is important to examine business formation rates among immigrants because they indicate their business startup potential (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). Data from the

2007–2011 CPS indicated that 24.9% of the new business owners in the United States are immigrants. Higher levels of startup activity among immigrants result in higher rates of business formation (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016).

Immigrants' business formation rate per month in the United States is 0.51%, which means that of 100,000 immigrants, 510 start a business each month. The business formation rate among immigrants is higher than the U.S.-born rate of 0.28% (of 100,000 U.S.-born individuals, 280 start a business each month; Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016).

Business income. Data from the ACS indicate that 15% of all the business income in the United States comes from immigrant businesses. Immigrant business owners contribute nearly \$121 billion to the U.S. business income (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). Data from the 2007 survey of business owners (SBO) indicated that firms classified as fully foreign-owned businesses generated 10% of total sales (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). Firms classified as 50% foreign-born and 50% U.S.-born owned generated 1.3% of the total sales. After adding the firms that are 51% foreign-owned, 15% of the total sale shares in the United States come from businesses that have 50% or more foreign-born ownership (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016).

Employment. Immigrant-owned businesses make significant contributions to total employment in the United States. Data from the 2007 SBO indicate that immigrants own 14% of the businesses hiring employees (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). Immigrant-owned businesses hire about 10% of all employees in the

United States that work for identifiable firms. On average, each immigrant-owned business has eight employees (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016).

The contributions of immigrant business owners are more significant in particular sectors of the U.S. economy. For instance, immigrant entrepreneurs own more than one-quarter of all businesses in industries such as entertainment, recreation, accommodation and transportation (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). Additionally, immigrant-owned businesses constitute 22.6% of retail trade, 20.3% of wholesale trade, and 20% of health care and social assistance ventures. Immigrant entrepreneurs also play a significant role in the innovation and high-tech sector (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). In the 1980s and 1990s, immigrants established about one-quarter of the high-tech firms in Silicon Valley. Another area where immigrant-owned businesses significantly contribute to the U.S. economy is exports. Immigrant-owned businesses are more likely to export than native-owned businesses. About 7.1% of immigrant businesses export compared to 4.4% of the non-immigrant businesses (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015). Immigrant-owned businesses comprise about one-quarter of all business with exports that constitute 20 to 49% of total sales. Moreover, immigrant-owned businesses constitute 35.1% of all businesses of which exports compromise 50 to 99% of their total sales, and 50% of all businesses with exports that represent 100% of their total sales. Immigrant businesses have high levels of exportation because they have business networks in their home countries; they share similar languages and culture (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015).

The contribution of immigrant business owners is also more considerable in some geographical areas of the United States than others. The vast majority of immigrant business owners live in Texas, California, Florida, and New York (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015). In Texas and Hawaii about, one-quarter of all business owners are immigrants, in California about 37% and in New York, Florida, and New Jersey about 30%. As a result, immigrant business owners contribute more heavily to the economies of these states (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015).

Characteristics of Immigrant Entrepreneurship in the United States

The population of immigrant entrepreneurs in the United States is diverse, with significant representation from over 20 different countries. However, the level of participation varies among different ethnic groups. About a quarter of all immigrant business owners in the United States is from Mexico (23.4%). However, the business ownership rate among Mexican immigrants is 8.4%, which is below the national rate of 9.8% (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015). Consequently, the high number of Mexican business owners in the United States is the result of the large share of Mexican immigrants in the United States, rather than higher rates of business ownership in this group (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015). On the other hand, immigrants from Korea represent only 5.1% of total immigrants in the United States but have a business ownership rate of 23.1%, making them the second largest number of immigrant business owners in the United States. Other immigrant groups with significant business ownership rates are Vietnamese (14%), Indians (9.5%), and Chinese (10%; Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015).

In the United States, immigrants reside all across the country, regardless of country of origin; in contrast, immigrant business owners are centralized in particular geographical areas, such as California, Florida, New York, and Texas. Immigrant business owners tend to concentrate in particular sectors of the industry. For instance, about 17% of immigrant business owners are in the construction sector, 16.7% in the professional services sector, and 16.2% in other services (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Kerr & Mandorff, 2015). The rest of the immigrant business owners participate in the following industries: 10% in recreation, 10% in entertainment, 10% in accommodations, 10% in social assistance, 10% in health care, and 10% in retail trade (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Kerr & Mandorff, 2015).

Immigrants constitute about 45% of all business owners with less than a high school education and about 15.7% of all the business owners with a college degree. Among immigrant business owners, about 30% are college graduates while about 25% have less than a high school education (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015). Hunt (2014) found that immigrants arriving in the country with a student or work visa had a higher probability of starting a business than those arriving just for family reunifications. Immigrants with educational credentials and higher levels of education tended to enter into higher barrier industries with higher levels of returns (Mueller, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). However, immigrants with no credentials and lower levels of education tended to start small, informal business firms in low-profit industries (Mueller, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). In general, the majority of skilled immigrants entering the United States come for paid jobs or studies, rather than to start a business. Skilled immigrants often start

businesses several years after entering the country (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). According to Ndofor and Priem (2011), immigrant entrepreneurs with more economic and human capital often apply business strategies that focus on the dominant market, while the ones with low economic and human capital pursue enclave-focused business strategies. Findings about the relationship between education, human capital and the type of business pursued among immigrant illustrate the differences between necessity and opportunity immigrant entrepreneurs (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016)

Immigrant business owners in the United States are heterogeneous with significant differences across diverse ethnic groups. As mentioned before, among immigrants, there are ethnic groups with higher rates of business ownership (Fairlie, 2012a; Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015). Some immigrant groups pursue particular industries over others and have different levels of business performance. The marked differences between immigrant business owner groups are the result of factors such as educational level, language proficiency, and access to capital, business experience in home country, ethnic enclaves, and legal status (Chiesi, 2014; Fairlie, 2012b; Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Kerr & Kerr, 2016).

Education. Education plays a significant role in business ownership rates among immigrant groups. However, there are contradictory views regarding the nature of this role. Some authors propose that higher levels of education increase the opportunities for immigrants to pursue salary work in the mainstream market, thus decreasing the probability of seeking to open their own business (Fairlie, 2012b; Fairlie & Lofstrom,

2015; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). Other authors suggested that high levels of education generate the skills necessary to establish a successful business, thus promoting business creation among immigrants (Millán et al., 2014). Therefore, there is a positive relationship between levels of education and levels of business ownership (Millán et al., 2014). As a result, different levels of education explain significant differences in business ownership rates between some immigrant groups (Millán et al., 2014). For instance, low levels of education explain the low business ownership rates among Mexican immigrants (Fairlie, 2012b; Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). Nonlinear decomposition data from the CPS suggest that differences on education level account for 32 to 38% of the business entry gap for Mexican immigrants. On the other hand, high levels of business ownership among Asian immigrants relate to higher levels of education. Finally, some authors suggested that immigrant entrepreneurs with high levels of education have a higher probability to enter into industries with high financial return (Fairlie, 2012b; Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). As a result, they avoid small business ownership in sectors with poor financial gain. Consequently, educational level may play a role on what type of industry sector an immigrant entrepreneur seeks to pursue (Fairlie, 2012b; Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Kerr & Kerr, 2016).

Language. According to Fairlie (2012a) and Fairlie and Lofstrom (2015), immigrants that have limited English language fluency faced difficulties entering the general job market; therefore, they had a higher probability of becoming self-employed. However, Hunt (2014) suggested that high level of English proficiency relate to a higher level of self-employment. Hunt (2014) argued that proficient English language ability

allowed immigrant entrepreneurs to communicate better with customers, and suppliers. Language proficiency is relevant to the difference in business ownership rate between Latino and Asian immigrants (Fairlie, 2012b; Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014). There is a relationship between lower levels of English proficiency and lower rates of business formation among Latinos (Fairlie, 2012b; Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014).

Access to capital. Inadequate access to financial capital is a barrier to business formation and growth. Differences in levels of wealth and access to financial capital may be a source of differences in business ownership rates across different immigrant groups (Beckers & Blumberg, 2013; Fairlie, 2012b; Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015). Immigrants with no personal wealth or good access to financial capital cannot invest in new business formation. Low levels of wealth and poor access to capital among Mexican and other Latino immigrant groups result in lower rates of business formation. This factor may explain the significant differences in business formation rates between Latino immigrants and Asian immigrants (Fairlie, 2012b; Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015).

Fairlie (2012a) reported that in overall immigrant-owned businesses startup capital level was higher than native-owned businesses. However, there are significant differences in startup capital level among immigrant groups. For instance, Asian immigrant businesses have higher levels of startup capital than Hispanic immigrant businesses. The primary source of startup capital for immigrant entrepreneurs is personal and family savings (Beckers & Blumberg, 2013). The secondary sources of startup capital that immigrant entrepreneurs use most frequently are personal and business credit

cards (Beckers & Blumberg, 2013). Immigrant entrepreneurs use informal sources of capital rather than seeking financial assistance from banks, other institutions and rotating credit associations. Immigrant business owners are less likely to seek loans from financial institutions compared to nonimmigrant business owners (Fairlie, 2012a; Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015). Immigrant entrepreneurs often finance their businesses with personal or family assets and home equity loans. However, they rarely receive loans or investments from family members or friends (Fairlie, 2012b; Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015).

Business experience in home country. Immigrants who were self-employed in their home country are more likely to be self-employed in the United States (Aliaga-Isla & Rialp, 2012; Vissak & Zhang, 2014). The home country business experience also affects the earning level in the United States (Aliaga-Isla & Rialp, 2012; Vissak & Zhang, 2014). Self-employment in home country increases the probability of self-employment in the United States by 7% and has a positive effect on earnings (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015).

Ethnic enclaves. The concentration of immigrants from the same ethnic group in a particular geographical area may contribute to higher rates of business ownership (Aguilar-Morales, Sandoval-Caraveo, Surdez-Pérez, & Gómez-Jiménez, 2013). Ethnic enclaves provide immigrants with the resources necessary to establish a new business. Some ethnic enclave resources include social support networks, assistance with startup capital, low wage labor, transferring of information and business experience (Aguilar-Morales et al., 2013; Fairlie, 2012b; Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Thompson & Grant, 2015). Additionally, ethnic enclaves promote market conditions and opportunity structures that favor the establishment of businesses catering to the needs of a particular

ethnic group (Fairlie, 2012b; Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Thompson & Grant, 2015; Wang, Kitvorametha, & Wang, 2014). Furthermore, immigrants from the same ethnic group have the skills and knowledge necessary to provide services and goods to other coethnic or conationals. As a result, there are higher rates of self-employment or business formation among immigrants living in enclaves (Aguilar-Morales et al., 2013; Chand & Ghorbani, 2011; Fairlie, 2012b; Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Thompson & Grant, 2015; Wang et al., 2014).

Legal status. Legal status plays a role in business ownership among immigrants. Lack of legal status can become a barrier to profitable business ownership and force some immigrants into low paid self-employment. Higher levels of enforcement of sanctions against employers hiring illegal immigrants may promote higher rates of low pay self-employment among immigrants (Bohn & Lofstrom, 2013). On the other hand, immigrants with proper legal status can participate in contracts, and have access to the legal and banking system thus resulting in higher levels of business ownership. All the previously mentioned factors have a significant impact on the characteristics and performance of immigrant small businesses. However, the extent and type of effect varies depending on the context, the environment, and the motivation to start a business (Fairlie, 2012b; Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015).

Performance of Immigrant Entrepreneurs in the United States

Immigrant-owned businesses have lower average income than nonimmigrant-owned businesses (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016; Wang & Liu, 2015). The average immigrant-owned business income is \$49,779 compared to

\$62,695 for native-owned (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015). On average immigrant businesses, have lower sales than native-owned businesses (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016; Wang & Liu, 2015). Immigrant-owned businesses have \$434,000 average annual sales and receipts compared to \$609,000 among native-owned (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015). In general, immigrant-owned businesses tend to produce lower earnings than native-owned businesses (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016; Wang & Liu, 2015). However, immigrant entrepreneurs are heterogeneous; there are some immigrant entrepreneurs in high-tech industries that are the exception to the rule (Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). Immigrant business owners' income tends to increase with longer time in the United States. Immigrant business owners tend to have comparable earnings with U.S. native business owners after 25 years in the country (Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). However, the earnings of salaried immigrants do not converge with salaried native-born employees regardless of time in the country (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016).

Immigrant-owned businesses are as likely to hire employees as nonimmigrant-owned businesses (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015). However, they often hire fewer employees on average (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015). The immigrant-owned businesses pay average wages and salaries to employees that are comparable to that of native-owned businesses (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015). The share of total payroll for immigrant businesses is 8.8% (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015). In the United States, immigrant business owners pay about \$252,758 to employees, an average of \$31,740 per employee, while nonimmigrant businesses pay an average of \$35,880 per employee (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015).

There are differences regarding rates of business formation across different immigrant groups. There are also distinctions regarding performance among immigrant businesses based on the level of earnings or income (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). In general, Asian immigrant businesses generate higher levels of earnings than Latino immigrant business (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). Moreover, Asian immigrant businesses often perform better than native-owned businesses (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014). Asian immigrant businesses produce higher sales, profit, and hire more employees than non-Hispanic white-owned businesses (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014). The main factors promoting the high performance of Asian immigrant businesses are high levels of startup capital and high levels of education (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014). Moreover, across Asian immigrant business owner groups, there are further significant differences in earnings (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). For instance, immigrants from India, Pakistan, and the Philippines generate the highest levels of business earnings, while immigrants from Vietnam and Bangladesh produce the lowest earning levels (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016).

The main difference between these groups is the level of education. For example, about 70% of Indian immigrant business owners in the United States have a college degree (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). Among the immigrant business owner groups, Mexican immigrants generate the lowest levels of business income (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). Low levels of education, lack of wealth, and limited language ability explain the business income

gap between Mexican immigrant business owners and non-Latino white business owners (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). Moreover, Asian immigrant-owned businesses are more likely to hire employees than Hispanic immigrant-owned businesses (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). However, both immigrant groups offer the similar level of payment and benefits to employees (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). In general, Hispanic immigrant firms are smaller than Asian immigrant firms (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2016).

According to Fatoki (2013), the differences in performance among immigrant businesses owned by entrepreneurs of different ethnic groups is the result of differences in levels of education, managerial experience, motivation, networking, innovation, business skills, and access to capital. Moreover, Ndofor and Priem (2011) suggested immigrant entrepreneurs make business strategy choices such as enclave versus dominant market approaches depending on their capital endowments and cultural background. These business strategy decisions directly influence the performance of immigrant-owned businesses. In order to be successful, immigrant family business owners need to raise funds, invest in technology, locate materials, get training, hire workers, find markets, and shape their products and services to fit the needs of customers (Gomezelj & Kušce, 2013; Halabí & Lussier, 2014; Tata & Prasad, 2015). Furthermore, to achieve all those components, immigrant entrepreneurs need to access resources and information that social networks and social capital can facilitate (Gomezelj & Kušce, 2013; Halabí & Lussier, 2014; Tata & Prasad, 2015).

Transition

Section 1 contained information on the issues related to small business immigrant entrepreneurship. The research purpose was to explore the business practices and strategies that small business immigrant entrepreneurs implement to sustain and grow their businesses profitably. The overreaching goal of this study was to uncover information that can assist to develop initiatives or guidelines to improve the performance of these particular businesses and their contribution to the economy. Section 1 included explanations regarding the nature and significance of the study, the research question, and the conceptual framework. Within this section was a description and analysis of the literature related to immigrant entrepreneurship. Additionally, this section included an examination of the premises and evolution of the disadvantage and the resource-based theory.

Section 2 of the study will include information about the role of the researcher, participants, research method, research design, population, and sampling. Additionally, within Section 2 will be a description of the data collection instrument, the data collection technique, data organization technique, data analysis, and reliability and validity. Section 3 will comprise the findings of the study, interpretation of the data, and a discussion of how the results reflect or contradict the premises of the disadvantage theory and the RBT. Section 3 will also contain discussions regarding application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action and further study, reflections, and conclusions.

Section 2: The Project

This section will include a description of the purpose of this investigation, an overview of the research method and design I employed to answer the central research question, as well as an acknowledgment of my role and responsibilities as the main investigator. In this section, I will also further elaborate on the participants and population sampling, data collection and organization technique, and data analysis process. In addition, in this section I will discuss the ethics, reliability, and validity of the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to explore strategies some small business immigrant entrepreneurs use to sustain and grow their businesses profitably. The targeted population consisted of small business immigrant entrepreneurs located in Houston, Texas having sustained and grown businesses for a minimum of 5 years. Houston was an appropriate location for this study because Texas is one of the states with the highest levels of immigrant business owners in the United States (Kallick, 2012; Rubach et al., 2015). The positive social change potential for the study findings is providing small business immigrant entrepreneurs with the knowledge to improve their business strategies, thereby enhancing their contribution to the prosperity of their families, their employees, and their local community.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher is to act as the primary data collection instrument (Yin, 2014). According to Bernard (2013) and Giles and Yates

(2014), researchers conducting qualitative research have to take on a variety of roles during the data collection process to ensure their research is valid and reliable.

Qualitative researchers fulfill roles as interviewers, observers, moderators, experimenters, and facilitators (Bernard, 2013; Giles & Yates, 2014). The quality of qualitative research depends on the knowledge, skills, and integrity of the researcher conducting the data collection and analysis (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). My role as the sole qualitative researcher in this study included selecting the participants; collecting, organizing, and analyzing data; as well as reporting findings in an objective manner.

I have familiarity with the topic of immigrant entrepreneurship. I have established a successful wholesale and distribution company that has been in operation in Houston, Texas for over 15 years. During my business career, I have interacted with both immigrant and native-born entrepreneurs. Throughout these interactions, I have witnessed that some immigrant-owned small businesses have poor performance compared to similar native-born-owned small businesses. This substantial discrepancy was the driving force in my interest to explore the business practices and strategies of small business immigrant entrepreneurs in this study.

Familiarity with a topic can create a loss of objectivity during the research process (Mukeredzi, 2012). The relationship between a researcher and a particular study evolves progressively during the different study phases from conceptualization to design and finally to completion (Mukeredzi, 2012). In each of those phases, the researcher may introduce bias to the study (Mukeredzi, 2012). As a result, it is essential for researchers to acknowledge their relationship with the study openly so they can address any possible

bias accordingly (Bernard, 2013; Giles & Yates, 2014; Mukeredzi, 2012). In this regard, to prevent the introduction of bias, I did not include any small business entrepreneurs with past or existing business connections with my company in this study.

Additionally, it is essential for a qualitative researcher to understand the self as a unique, but defective instrument, thus, it is imperative to be aware of personal biases (Bernard, 2013; Giles & Yates, 2014). Consequently, I used bracketing as a technique to minimize the effects of my preconceptions or biases on the study findings. I took notes of my personal preconceptions and documented the data collection and analysis process in detail to prevent bias. The purpose of applying bracketing during research is improving objectivity by reducing personal engagement with the data and controlling preconceptions about a phenomenon or study participants (Giles & Yates, 2014; Patton, 2002; Qu & Dumay, 2011).

It is imperative that researchers follow ethical guidelines during investigations to protect research participants (Bernard, 2013; Giles & Yates, 2014; Yin, 2014). The *Belmont Report* includes ethical guidelines for researchers regarding respect, beneficence, justice, informed consent, risk-benefits assessment, selection of study subjects, and avoiding bias (Fiske & Hauser, 2014). Regarding ethics, I ensured this study included procedures for ethical research and adhered to Walden University's mandatory ethical guidelines. Before data collection, I obtained Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, which is 01-10-16-0460461. In addition to IRB approval, I completed a course in ethical research from the National Institutes of Health's Office of Extramural Research. Moreover, each study participant completed

informed consent forms before their involvement in the study. Following the ethical standards depicted in the *Belmont Report*, I maintained the privacy of the participants, answered their questions, accepted and reported their answers as stated, treated them with respect, and shared the results with them.

An interview protocol is a useful tool to manage data collection that researchers can apply to maintain focus and enhance the reliability and the validity of the data collected (McIntosh & Morse, 2015; Yin, 2014). During the interview sessions, I followed an interview protocol (see Appendix A) that outlined interview procedures to improve my data collection practices. In addition, I applied a semistructured interview technique using open-ended interview questions. The rationale for the application of a semistructured interview technique with open-ended questions was to establish in-depth but flexible conversations on the topic of business strategies that ensured I gained rich and detailed responses from participants. Yin (2014) stated that open-ended questions enhance clarity, offer flexibility, promote complete answers, and address the *why* and *how*.

Participants

In case study research design, it is imperative to produce rich and in-depth information (de Vries, 2014). It is also important to ensure that the study participants are individuals that have experienced the phenomenon under examination (Yin, 2014). The goal of applying purposive criterion-based sampling is to ensure that the participants selected for a study align with the overarching research question (Suri, 2011). Consequently, while recruiting participants, I made sure they were immigrant

entrepreneurs living in Houston, Texas and had sustained and grown their business for a minimum of 5 years.

For the purposes of this study, immigrants were individuals born in a foreign country who had been living in the United States for at least 12 months (see Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Kerr & Kerr, 2016). Hence, I did not include ethnic minority entrepreneurs who were born in the United States in this study. Immigrants have high rates of business openings indicating that they are in and out of business quickly (Fairlie, 2012). Consequently, in this study, I only included immigrant entrepreneurs who had sustained their business for a minimum of 5 years to explore the strategies they applied to sustain their businesses for an extended time. Houston, Texas was an appropriate location for this study because Texas is one of the states with the highest levels of immigrant business owners in the United States (CITE). Houston is a large metropolitan area where the immigrant share of the population is 22%, while the immigrant share of business owners is 31% (Kallick, 2012).

In qualitative research, applying multiple strategies to gain access to participants introduces rigor and a degree of randomization in the participant selection process (Bernard, 2013). Consequently, my process of gaining access to potential participants for this study involved two strategies: (a) I reviewed listings of ethnic enterprises in commercial business pages and magazines in Houston, Texas to identify immigrant-owned small businesses; and (b) I went to neighborhoods with high concentrations of immigrants and visually identified the businesses located in the area that fit the study criteria.

According to Reybold, Lammert, and Stribling, (2013) in qualitative research, it is essential to select the right study subjects and ensure their participation is volunteer in nature. Therefore, after identifying possible study participants, I visited them in their place of business and invited them to take part in the study. During these informal visits, I introduced myself as a DBA student pursuing the completion of a doctoral study and requested an audience. If prospective participants agreed, I made appointments based on preferences. During the meetings, I asked pertinent questions to ensure the participants met study criteria and provided explanations regarding the purpose and procedures of the study as well as the volunteer nature of their participation. Salmons (2015) stated there must be ethical guidelines shaping the relationship between researcher and participants. As a result, if prospective participants met study criteria and volunteered to participate, I completed a consent form with them and scheduled the interview based on their preferences.

In order to establish a positive working relationship with participants, researchers need to establish trust through honest communication about study intent and procedures (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Wolgemuth et al., 2015). I established a professional working relationship with study participants by explaining every step of the study process in detail, encouraging questions, and answering them clearly. According to Harvey (2014), researchers can improve their working relationship with participants by explaining how important their participation is to the success of the study and the potential positive impact study findings can have on the research community. I explained to participants that their responses could serve to promote a better understanding of the business

strategies of small business immigrant entrepreneurs. Protecting the privacy and wellbeing of study participants is essential to establishing trust and maintaining research ethics (McIntosh & Morse, 2015; Wolgemuth et al., 2015). I explained to participants that their interview responses were confidential and they had the right to stop participating at any time without penalty.

Research Method and Design

The decision regarding the most appropriate research method and design for a study should be the result of careful consideration of the research question, the purpose, and the requirements of the study (Khan, 2014; Yin, 2014). My overall goal with this study was to uncover the strategies small business immigrant entrepreneurs apply to sustain and grow their businesses profitably. A qualitative multicase study research method and design served as the framework for this study. Collecting data from participants through semistructured interviews composed of open-ended questions allowed me to understand the business dynamics of this population group from their perspective.

Research Method

Three primary research methods are available to researchers: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Bendassolli, 2014). Each research method is suitable to answer a particular type of research question and gather a different type of information (Posey et al., 2014). The choice of research method depends on the type of research question, the topic under study, and controlling events (Yilmaz, 2013).

The qualitative study method is suitable for the exploration of practices and experiences (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). According to Stake (2013), researchers use a qualitative research method when trying to obtain individuals' perceptions about a given problem or topic. Qualitative research method involves the following conditions: (a) asking *how* and *why* questions to allow participants to express their perspective, (b) observing people or events in a natural location, and (c) not manipulating variables (Yin, 2014). This study met all three qualitative research conditions; therefore, the qualitative method was appropriate to explore the strategies small business immigrant entrepreneurs use to sustain and grow their business profitably and understand them from their point of view. The utilization of the qualitative research method helped me to identify and generate patterns and themes coming directly from the participants' interviews. Applying the qualitative research method allowed me to explore the business dynamics of small business immigrant entrepreneurs by analyzing their answers to open-ended questions on the subject during interviews using a semistructured technique.

On the other hand, the quantitative research method is most adequate to understand the relationship between variables by testing different hypotheses (Paulus, 2013). According to Bernard (2013), researchers applying quantitative methods do not seek to capture the meaning of a phenomenon from the point of view of the study participants. As stated by Takey and de Carvalho (2015), researchers can apply the quantitative research method to use numerical data to evaluate or generate hypotheses about relationships between variables. The quantitative research method did not align with the purpose and the central question of this study. In this study, I did not seek to test

a hypothesis or to assess the relationship between multiple variables, so using a quantitative approach would not have enabled me to gain in-depth comprehension of the different dimensions of the entrepreneurial experience of small business immigrant entrepreneurs.

Mixed method research is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research (Bernard, 2013). Mixed method research involves the integration of statistical data and interpretive analysis (Paulus, 2013). According to Leedy and Ormrod (2015), researchers using the mixed methods approach combine qualitative and quantitative research strategies to gain a holistic understanding of a topic while reducing bias. The mixed methods approach was not appropriate for this study because the quantitative component did not facilitate the understanding of the phenomenon from the point of view of the participants.

Research Design

Qualitative research designs include case study, grounded theory, phenomenology, ethnography, and narrative research (Yin, 2014). I examined each qualitative research design for its alignment with the study. Upon evaluation, case study was the most suitable qualitative design for the investigation. My focus in this study was to explore the strategies small business immigrant entrepreneurs use to sustain and grow their business profitably. Case study research design is appropriate when the objective is to understand an issue or occurrence in-depth within real life conditions (Klonoski, 2013). In case study design, a researcher can explore a topic by developing comprehensive descriptions of different representative cases, and then using them as

concrete illustrations of real life (Hays & Wood, 2011; Patton, 2002). Case studies are often used in business management to explore the how and why regarding business decisions (Hyett, Kenny, & Virginia Dickson-Swift, 2014; Klonoski, 2013).

Grounded theory is most appropriate for generating theories to explain phenomena (Bernard, 2013; Patton, 2002). In grounded theory, researchers need to submerge themselves in the environment of their target population to gain an understanding of their world through direct interactions that they recognized and categorized (Chittem, 2014; Lo, 2014). The objective of this study was to describe the business strategies of small business immigrant entrepreneurs, and not to develop a new theory to explain their actions; thus, grounded theory was not fitting for this investigation.

Phenomenology is most suitable to explore the subjective experiences of individuals regarding a phenomenon (Bernard, 2013; Patton, 2002). According to Gill (2014), researchers who utilize the phenomenological design seek to describe emotions and opinions rather than concrete actions. My objective was to explore concrete business strategies implemented by small business immigrant entrepreneurs, not the emotional experiences related to running their businesses, therefore, phenomenology was not fitting for this study.

Ethnography is most suitable to understand an issue from a cultural point of view (Small, Maher, & Kerr, 2014). According to Bernard (2013) and Patton (2002), researchers apply ethnography to explore how a particular group's culture works by immersing themselves in the environment of the group they are studying for an extended

time to understand their behavior. The goal of this study was to explore business strategies of small business immigrant entrepreneurs, not their cultural background or how their culture influences business practices. Narrative research design is most suitable when completing biographies or memoirs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012). According to Bernard and Patton, researchers utilizing narrative research do not interact with participants or ask questions, and are unable to gain access to the in-depth perspectives of the participants. The goal of this study was to understand business strategies from the perspective of the participants, not the point of view of the investigator, thus narrative study design was not suitable for this study.

In qualitative research, it is essential to reach data saturation to ensure the accuracy of the findings (Bradley, Getrich, & Hannigan, 2015; Finfgeld-Connett, 2014). Data saturation takes place whenever researchers cannot gain any new information from study participants during data collection (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013; Morse, 2015). Ando, Cousins, and Young (2014) stated that a study reaches data saturation when no new themes or patterns emerged from the data collected. Data saturation indicates that the researchers have gathered enough data to understand the perspectives of the participants (Kolb, 2012; Shen et al., 2014). Data collection involved applying a semistructured interview technique using open-ended questions, taking field notes of important observations and reviewing documents related to business strategy. I recorded and transcribed each interview to facilitate review and the identification of themes and patterns. I combined the different types of data from all participants to uncover consistent patterns that answer the research question. I achieved data saturation

when the responses of the participants did not uncover any new information and only confirmed what other participants had already shared, resulting in no new themes generated.

Population and Sampling

The focus of this qualitative multicase study was to explore strategies small business immigrant entrepreneurs use to sustain and grow their businesses profitably. The population of Houston, Texas consists of 22% immigrants and 31% of those immigrants are business owners (Kallick, 2012). Any small business immigrant entrepreneur living in Houston, Texas, running a business operating for at least 5 years was eligible to participate in this study. The characteristics defining the eligibility requirements for this study included being an immigrant (foreign-born living in the United States for at least 12 months) and running a business for at least 5 years. The characteristics of both the individual and the business needed to meet these criteria before being included in the study to ensure the participant aligned with the overarching research question.

The purpose of applying purposive criterion-based sampling is to ensure that participants fit the criteria to participate in a particular study (Suri, 2011). The goal of researchers using purposive criterion-based sampling is to make sure they include in their studies only participants that have experience or in-depth knowledge relevant to the research question (Masom, 2010; Patton, 2002). In purposeful sampling, researchers use their judgment to select participants, based on the research question (Robinson, 2014; Yin, 2014). I used purposive-criterion based sampling because this strategy allowed me

to select participants who had experienced the phenomenon under investigation and could provide rich data.

In qualitative studies, the adequacy of the sample size depends on the characteristics and context of the study (Kasim & Al-Gahuri, 2015). Case studies do not have standard guidelines or set number for most effective sample size (Yin, 2014). The goal of the qualitative researchers is to gain rich and detailed information as well as data saturation (Yin, 2014). Data saturation is the point in qualitative research when data no longer generates new themes (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). As recommended by Yin (2014), the number of participants in this study was dependent on data saturation. In this study, I reached data saturation after completing the fourth interview when the participant offered no new information. I conducted the fifth interview to ensure no new themes emerged from the subsequent participant.

I scheduled the interviews personally with participants after completing the consent form process. Interviews took place in a private setting at the participants' business establishments to enhance privacy and ensure they felt comfortable with their surroundings, as recommended by Ando et al., (2014) and Yin, (2014). Furthermore, completing the interviews at the participants' businesses facilitated the collection of relevant documents for review. Completing interviews at a business location facilitates the collection of documentation data and observational notes (Qu & Dumay, 2011; Rowley, 2012). Finally, I followed the recommendation of Maskara (2014) and conducted the interview at a convenient time for the participants

Ethical Research

It is imperative to conduct research in an ethical manner that takes all necessary measures to secure the protection of study participants (Garcia & Gluesing, 2013; Taylor & Land, 2014). To ensure the fulfillment of adequate ethical conduct requirements, I started the study process by seeking the approval of the Walden University IRB. The approval number is 01-10-16-0460461. Upon receiving IRB approval, I reached out to prospective study participants and personally explained the informed consent form. The informed consent form included a detailed description of the study process, the rights of participants, and a signature area to indicate agreement to participate. As recommended by Fiske and Hauser (2014), while completing the informed consent with each participant I explained: (a) participation was strictly voluntary, (b) they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, (c) they would not receive incentives for taking part in the study, and (d) they would indicate their willingness to participate by signing the informed consent form.

Applying Vainio's (2013) recommendation, treating all information collected from the participants as confidential was crucial. Consequently, I protected the identity, privacy, and confidentiality of participants by using de-identifiers such as random letters as identifications, and saving the digital version of the interview recordings, the interview transcripts, and interview notes on a password-protected computer. Following Morse and Coulehan (2015) recommendation to protect the confidentiality of participants, I stored informed consent forms, the paper version of the interview transcripts, and notes in a safe

location under lock and key. Moreover, 5 years after completing the study, I will destroy all the digital and paper data collected from the interviews.

Data Collection Instruments

According to Scott (2015) and Yin (2014), qualitative researchers who conduct case studies often use interviews to collect data. Belin (2015) and Khan (2014) stated that qualitative researchers use interviews to generate verbal reports that describe how each individuals' perspective regarding an issue relates to the central research question. In this study, I was the principle data collection instrument. I used a semistructured interview technique using open-ended interview questions to gather information. To enhance reliability and validity, I followed an interview protocol dictating standard procedures to follow (see Appendix A). Each semistructured interview included 10 open-ended questions to encourage participants to talk in-depth about their business strategies. The 10 open-ended questions reflected the principles of both the resourced-based theory and the disadvantage theory. Probing and follow up questions were included when pertinent as recommended by Belin (2015), Higdon (2016), and Scott (2015). Furthermore, in order to enhance the validity of a study, Yin (2014) recommended the triangulation of interview data with other sources of relevant information. In order to implement methodological data triangulation, I collected documents about business strategy from participants and took field notes during the interviews as my secondary sources of information.

Upon participants agreeing to be part of the study by signing the consent form, I arranged the date and time for the interviews according to their availability and preferences, as recommended by Ando et al. (2014). Following the recommendations of

Fiske and Hauser (2014), the interviews took place in the participants' business places so they could feel comfortable with their surroundings. As recommended by Khan (2014), the interview sections started with a brief reminder of the interview process. Next, I started the recorder and began the interview questions. As the participants answered the questions, I took field notes about important ideas or observations such as participant's body language, demeanor, tone, and description of the interview environment. When a participant appeared not to understand a question, I rephrased it in a simpler manner until I was sure the meaning of the question was clear. I asked participants for documents related to their business strategy and reviewed them for further data extraction. As recommended by Yin (2014), after the interviews the participants received my interpretation of the interviews so they could perform member checking. All participants engaged in member checking via e-mail and provided clarifications about their quotes and my interpretations of the data.

Data Collection Technique

According to Yin (2014), researchers conducting qualitative case studies often use interviews to collect data. The implementation of a semistructured interview technique must follow an interview protocol to enhance the reliability of the study (Khan, 2014; Tsang, 2014). In this study, I followed an interview protocol involving 10 open-ended questions to encourage participants to share their entrepreneurial experiences and promote detail-rich descriptions. Each interview took approximately 60 minutes. It is essential to derive interview questions from the purpose and conceptual framework of the study to ensure validity (de Vries, 2014; Tsang, 2014; Welch, Grossaint, Reid, & Walker,

2014). I implemented interview questions that reflected the topic and conceptual framework of my study. If participant responses did not align with the central research question of this study, I introduced additional probing or follow-up questions based on the interview protocol. Follow-up phone interviews occurred when there was a need for further clarification (de Vries, 2014; Tsang, 2014; Welch et al., 2014). The process of the interview was as follows:

1. Reintroduced the research topic.
2. Reviewed interview process.
3. Started the recording device.
4. Collected answers using interview questions and protocol.
5. Thanked participant upon completion of interview for contribution to the study.

When using interviews as data collection technique, the goal of the researcher is to develop deep awareness and understanding of the experiences and practices of the participants (de Vries, 2014; Tsang, 2014; Welch et al., 2014). The interview process allows the researcher to collect general information and uncovers particulars that often are difficult to identify and describe (de Vries, 2014; Tsang, 2014; Welch et al., 2014). Specific details that surface through effective semistructured interview techniques can reveal the practices of participants, and the rationale behind those practices (de Vries, 2014; Tsang, 2014; Welch et al., 2014). To minimize the risk of the introduction of personal bias into a study, it is imperative to ensure the reliability and validity of the data collection instrument (Pozzebon & Rodriguez, 2014). Qualitative researchers

demonstrate reliability in case study design by repeating the same data collection method applied by other researchers to achieve the same result (Pozzebon & Rodriguez, 2014; Yin, 2013). In this case study, I ensured reliability by consistently following the same interview protocol steps and maintaining comprehensive documentation from each interview. In addition to reliability, validity is an essential component that researchers need to fulfill in order for study results to be meaningful (Elo et al., 2014). Validity refers to how rightfully study results or findings reflect the meaning given by the study participants (Elo et al., 2014). To enhance the validity of this study, participants received my interpretation of their interview responses via e-mail so they could review them, perform member checking, confirm accuracy, and provide further clarification.

Data Organization Technique

The data for this study came from recordings of participants' answers to open-ended questions during semistructured interviews, field notes recorded in a journal during the interviews, and collection of documents about business strategies. After the interviews, I used the Microsoft Word software tool to type the transcription of each interview recording verbatim. Furthermore, I typed my interview field notes into a Microsoft Word document. A different password-protected file contained the data of each study participant to prevent confusion. It is essential for researchers to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of each study participant (Gibson, Benson, & Brand, 2013). As recommended by Khan (2014), (a) storage of all the digital data for the study consisted of a password-protected computer; (b) physical copies of study data were stored

in a locked container;(c) 5 years after data collection, the destruction of all digital and physical data from the study will occur in a secure manner.

Upon completing the interviews, the data transcription extraction occurred from the Microsoft Word software for subsequent import into the NVivo software. I used NVivo to complete thematic data coding by identifying and classifying common themes across all the available interview data. According to Chittem (2014) and Welch et al., (2014), researchers can save time and effort by using computer assisted analysis tools like NVivo to organize their data. NVivo is a software tool that researchers can use to analyze qualitative data. Researchers can use NVivo to organize code, analyze, and present data efficiently (Ando et al., 2014; Edwards-Jones, 2015). In this study, I used NVivo to manage and analyze the data collected. All interviewees received a summary of my interpretation of their interviews responses via e-mail for review. I later contacted each interviewee via phone to ask whether they approved of my interpretation or had further clarifications.

Data Analysis

Researcher can complete different types of data analysis to interpret the meaning of the research data they gather (Pierre & Jackson, 2014). In qualitative studies, researchers analyze data by identifying themes and coding them into categories (Qu & Dumay, 2011; Rowley, 2012). Thematic coding or categorization allows researchers to give particular meanings to the data collection and generate conclusions or generalizations (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). In this study, the mode of data collection was a semistructured interview technique with open-ended questions, paired with observational

field notes and review of pertinent business documents. During data analysis, I followed the five-step process Yin (2014) described as consisting of (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding. The data analysis consisted of sorting and coding the information from transcripts, field notes, and business documents with NVivo qualitative data analysis software. The NVivo software program does not automatically identify themes in the data and sort them into categories. However, the program allows researchers to visualize the data, thus facilitating the identification and codification of themes (Edwards-Jones, 2015). According to Leedy and Ormrod (2015), researchers can code and classify themes to identify the ideas or experiences that are similar among all the study participants. With NVivo, I identified common themes that answered the central research question: What strategies do small business immigrant entrepreneurs use to sustain and grow their businesses profitably?

In case study design researchers often collect data from multiple sources to gain a comprehensive or holistic picture of the phenomenon under study (Keutel, Michalik, & Richter, 2014). In this study, methodological triangulation consisted of comparing and contrasting the themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview transcripts with the themes generated by the analysis of my observational field notes and business document review. Moreover, I aligned the themes identified during data analysis with the conceptual framework of the study, which consisted of the combination of the premises of the RBT and the disadvantage theory of business enterprise. The goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of the business strategies of small businesses immigrant entrepreneurs. Supporters of the disadvantage theory suggest that members of minority

groups face barriers to succeed in the mainstream market. Thus, their entities tend to perform poorly (Light, 1979). However, supporters of the resource-based theory propose that the growth of a business depends on its manager's abilities to utilize resources available properly to gain competitive advantage and overcome (Barney, 1991).

Combined, these two theories served as the conceptual framework to explore the business strategies of small business immigrant entrepreneurs. Finally, I correlated and integrated the themes uncovered with the current literature on immigrant entrepreneurship.

Reliability and Validity

To ensure studies are accurate and reproducible, researchers need to establish and maintain adequate validity and reliability (Barry, Chaney, Piazza-Gardner, & Chavarria, 2014; Grosseohme, 2014). Reliability refers to researchers being able to replicate study results easily (Barry et al., 2014; 2014; Elo et al., 2014; Yin, 2013). Validity refers to whether the study results are precise and truthful (Barry et al., 2014; Elo et al., 2014; Yin, 2013). The validity and reliability of a qualitative study depend on the researcher's capacity to demonstrate that the results and conclusions generated reflect reality (Barry et al., 2014; Grosseohme, 2014)

Reliability

Reliability ensures that different researchers can replicate the same study procedures, under the same conditions, and obtain the same results (Barry et al., 2014). As recommended by Grosseohme (2014), I ensured reliability by addressing credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability through three methods: (a) detailed documentation, (b) member checking, and (c) triangulation. Dependability refers to the

consistency and strength of data over time (Elo et al., 2014). An effective approach to secure reliability by enhancing dependability is to keep detailed documentation or records of each step of the research process as it takes place (Grossoehme, 2014). Applying Pozzebon and Rodriguez's (2014) recommendations, I maintained detailed descriptions of the procedures that took place during data collection, organization, analysis, and interpretation. I recorded detailed and rich accounts of each stage of the interview and document review process in a journal to ensure study procedures remained consistent across all study participants.

Confirmability involves ensuring the data collected is accurate and truly reflect the responses of the study participants (Houghton et al., 2013). I implemented member checking to ensure data accuracy as recommended by Pozzebon and Rodriguez (2014) and Li et al. (2013). The purpose of applying member checking is to facilitate the establishment of the accuracy of the responses of study participants (Houghton et al., 2013; Yin, 2014). After completing the interviews, all study participants reviewed my interpretation of their interviews for approval or further clarification.

Credibility encompasses ensuring the researcher's interpretation of the data reflects reality (Houghton et al., 2013; Li et al., 2013; Yin, 2014). In this regard, I implemented methodological triangulation as recommended by Munn, Porritt, Lockwood, Aromataris, and Pearson (2014), by comparing and contrasting the data from the interview transcripts, the observation field notes, and the business document review. Furthermore, I applied theoretical triangulation by correlating or aligning the study data with the conceptual framework and the literature on the topic.

Transferability involves ensuring the results obtained in a study can be transferred to another group of study participants with the same overall characteristics (Houghton et al., 2013). To enhance transferability, I followed the recommendations of Houghton et al. (2013), Li et al. (2013), and Yin (2014) and I provided detailed descriptions of the study participants based on the study criteria, as well as detailed documentation of study process which will assist other researchers to replicate the study in the future. Data saturation takes place when close examination of the data do not reveal new findings or themes related to the central question and purpose of the study (Ando et al., 2014; Kasim et al., 2015; Yin, 2014). In this study, data saturation took place when there was no new information emerging from the review of the data coming from the interviews, document review, and field notes. Data saturation occurred when consistent themes started to overlap.

Validity

In research, validity ensures that data results, study findings, and conclusions are accurate and truthful (Grossoehme, 2014; Pozzebon & Rodriguez, 2014). There are three different tests of validity: construct validity, internal validity, and external validity (Elo et al., 2014; Whiteley, 2012; Yin, 2014). Construct validity involves ensuring the instrument implemented in the study measures the intended characteristic or issue under study and not any other confounding factors (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). In the study, the central purpose was to identify the strategies small business immigrant entrepreneurs use to maintain and grow their businesses profitably. As a result, to achieve construct validity, I used open-ended questions designed to promote answers that described the

business strategies of small business immigrant entrepreneurs. In addition, I further tested construct validity by comparing and aligning the themes identified during data analysis with the study purpose and central research question.

Internal validity encompasses the establishment of a clear relationship or alignment between the study findings and the research questions (Yin, 2014).

Researchers apply member checking to increase the validity of their study by ensuring that their biases do not influence data analysis (Kolb, 2012). To achieve internal validity, I implemented member checking. After the interviews, the study participants received accounts of my interpretation of the interviews for review so they could confirm accuracy or provide further clarifications. Furthermore, to enhance internal validity, the study participants received a summary of the findings when data analysis was complete so they could provide feedback, as recommended by Grosseohme (2014). Participants reviewed the results to ensure the themes uncovered reflected the meaning of their answers, thus increasing accuracy.

External validity entails being able to transfer the findings of a particular study to other studies with similar population and context (Yin, 2014). To promote transferability of the findings of the present study, I meticulously adhered to data collection and analysis techniques for the research design, using an interview protocol and reaching data saturation, as recommended by Elo et al. (2014) and Whiteley (2012). Additionally, to enhance external validity, I included a detailed description of study participants so researchers recreating this investigation in the future could understand the study sample. To establish external validity, I used the purposeful sampling method to identify a

population of five small business immigrant entrepreneurs. Purposeful sampling is a system to attain knowledge-rich data by matching participants to the purpose of the study (Reybold et al., 2013).

Transition and Summary

Section 2 included a restatement of the purpose of the study as well as a comprehensive description of the role of the researcher and the study participants. In addition, I provided the rationale for applying a qualitative methodology and a case study research design over other research methods and designs available. In this section, I presented a description of the population sampling technique, the interview questions, and a discussion of ethics. Furthermore, I provide a description of the type of data for the study, the data collection method, and the data organization approach including a discussion on the data analysis technique, reliability, and validity. In Section 3, I will present the study findings and a detailed discussion on how this study may apply to professional practice and contribute to social change. Finally, Section 3 will contain recommendations for further study, action practice, reflections, and conclusions.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to explore the strategies some small business immigrant entrepreneurs use to sustain and grow their businesses profitably. Using Barney's (1991) RBT combined with Light's (1979) disadvantage theory of business enterprise as the conceptual framework, I explored the business strategies of immigrant entrepreneurs from data collected through face-to-face, semistructured interviews with five small business immigrant entrepreneurs in Houston, Texas. Additionally, all study participants shared documentation related to their business strategies, and I took notes during the interviews. I used methodological triangulation and member checking to aid in the analyzation, definition, and confirmation of derived major themes across multiple data sources. Section 3 will contain a presentation of the results of this study.

The findings of this study uncovered four main themes concerning strategies small business immigrant entrepreneurs apply to sustain and grow their business profitably: (a) providing good customer service, (b) offering lower prices than competitors, (c) offering popular products and (d) keeping cost and expenses low. My data analysis also revealed the main barriers small business immigrant entrepreneurs faced to sustain and grow their businesses profitably were limited capital and scarce resources. Small business immigrant entrepreneurs' approach to overcoming these barriers and gaining competitive advantage was concentrating on differentiating themselves from competitors and managing resources efficiently. Section 3 will include

the presentation of the findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, reflections, and the conclusion.

Presentation of the Findings

The objective of this qualitative multiple case study was to answer the central research question: What strategies do small business immigrant entrepreneurs use to sustain and grow their businesses profitably? To answer the overarching research question, I implemented interview questions reflecting the principles of RBT and the disadvantage theory of business. The interview questions were open-ended to allow the participants to explain what strategies they applied to sustain and grow their business profitably. My analysis of all interview responses, field notes, and documentation collected from the five study participants entailed the five-step process Yin (2014) described as consisting of (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding.

My data analysis uncovered that small business immigrant entrepreneurs' main barriers to sustaining and growing their businesses profitably were limited capital and scarce resources. This finding was consistent with literature from Light (1979), on the subject of the disadvantage theory of business, stating that barriers to good performance of immigrant businesses include lack of capital, limited resources, and lack of institutional support. Furthermore, my analysis of the data uncovered small business immigrant entrepreneurs' main strategy to overcome these disadvantages was managing their resources efficiently to keep cost low while making attractive offerings to customers

that competitors could not imitate easily. There is scarce literature available regarding the strategies small business immigrant entrepreneurs apply to sustain their business.

However, this new study finding is consistent with Barney (1991), who suggested in the RBT that to produce a sustainable profit, small business owners need to obtain the right resources and enhance them by making those resources unique and difficult to reproduce by competitors. In alignment with that principle, four major themes emerged from data analysis regarding strategies small businesses immigrant entrepreneurs use to sustain and grown their businesses profitably: (a) providing good customer service, (b) offering lower prices than competitors, (c) offering popular products and (d) keeping cost and expenses low. In the following subsections, I will discuss each major theme as a comparison and contrast to the main themes of the literature review.

Theme 1: Providing Good Customer Service

Inadequate access to financial capital is a barrier to business formation and growth among immigrant entrepreneurs (Bates & Robb, 2013; Beckers & Blumberg, 2013; Fairlie, 2012b; Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015). During the interview process, the common theme emerging from all the participants' answers was that they had limited capital and resources. Participants reported having no access to bank loans or government assistance, and therefore, were forced to obtain capital from family or friends.

Participants also described the strategies they used to make their businesses stand out among competitors while keeping cost low. Participants reported using good customer service as one strategy to differentiate from competitors and gain competitive advantage. This strategy is in alignment with Barney's (1991) findings that differentiating a business

from its competitors by applying resources in distinctive ways is a good strategy to sustain and advance a firm. Participant 2 shared,

We cannot expand the business right now. We do not have the capital. Capital will come from the growth of the business; we do not go after banks or government to get loans. We take risks. We risk our capital and the capital of our family, along the way. We try to be as careful as possible when we tap into those resources. So we can make good use of them and to be very careful not to lose them.

During the interview process, all participants identified good customer service as one of their main strategies to sustain and grow their businesses profitably. The participants explained that providing better customer service than their competitors served to attract and retain more customers without having to spend large amounts of money. Participants explained that good customer service promotes a good reputation that in return becomes free advertisement from satisfied customers that come back and bring new customers. Participant 3 stated, “Good customer service is very important. Is very important to cater to the customer [and] treat them like they are welcome.”

Participant 1 explained,

The first and the most important thing is customer service. Meeting customer needs, concerns, and likings and disliking. I give them personal attention. To sustain and keep business you need to keep loyal customers and bring in new customers. To bring new customers the best way is word of mouth, if a customer is very satisfied he may pass the good word to others and on and on.

Participant 2 shared,

First of all, customer service is the most important strategy more than anything else. Our technique is to provide good customer service with a human touch and products with low prices. We gain good reputation with good customer service. The good reputation goes from mouth to mouth. We also try to provide services that other stores don't provide.

Participant 5 stated,

Good public opinion comes with the product and good customer service. Clients see the service they get when they come to my store and compare it to other places they go to. This way they have a better opinion of my place than of competitors.

This finding was consistent with literature from Lechner and Gudmundsson (2014), which suggested that differentiation, particularly if based on customer service, speed, and flexibility, is an effective strategy for small businesses to compete. Differentiation as a business strategy involves fulfilling customer needs in a unique way to achieve superior value than competitors (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014). This finding also aligned with the findings of Duarte and Bressan (2016), who suggested product quality, staff capabilities, reputation, and service quality as the most important resources to gain competitive advantage. These resources aligned with the differentiation attributes of the RBT. The main premise of the RBT is that managers need to make sure resources are valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable, and nonsubstitutable to promote competitive advantage (Campbell & Park, 2017).

Theme 2: Offering Lower Prices than Competitors

According to Lechner and Gudmundsson (2014), the two main strategies to gain competitive advantage are offering lower prices than competitors offer and achieving differentiation. Business owners use these strategies to create more value for the customers than the competition. All five participants stressed the importance of offering lower prices than competitors offer as a strategy to gain an advantage over competitors. Participant 5 shared, “We try to see what the competition is selling and at what price to be able to match and beat the price. We check regularly our competitor price and try to provide better price.” Participant 2 stated, “Your technique is to provide good customer service with a human touch and products with low prices.” Participant 1 explained, “Maintaining good quality products and low prices, competitive prices, are good strategies to keep clients and gain new ones.” Participant 4 stated, “To maintain our clients, low price is an effective strategy.” Participant 3 explained,

If you are in the retail business, pricing is the 99% most effective strategy to grow your business, to sustain your sales. You need to check the prices of your competition and compare them to yours. Sometimes you sacrifice and make fewer margins, and you count on selling more quantity to compensate your low margin.

If we have the same product, I have to sell it at a lower price than them.

Participants reported they have to actively seek out multiple vendors and negotiate special deals to gain the best prices possible and be able to offer low prices. These findings were consistent with the literature from Greene, Brush, and Brown, (2015), who explained that decisions regarding resource acquisition and allocation are

critical for the survival of small business ventures where capital is limited. This strategy is in alignment with the RBT principle regarding managers applying strategies that competitors are not able to reproduce in an easy and quick manner to gain SCA (Shirokova et al., 2013; Silvio et al., 2014; Thomason et al., 2013). In this case, small business immigrant entrepreneurs are ensuring the competition is unable to offer lower prices than them to secure SCA.

Theme 3: Offering Popular Products

The participants shared that an important strategy is offering products that are high quality and in high demand among target customers. This finding aligns with the strategy of differentiation that Lechner and Gudmundsson (2014) described as concentrating on fulfilling customer needs in a unique manner through offering products that are exclusive regarding quality, demand, price, and support service. Participant 1 stated, “We always try to keep the products that are well known to the customers that they can relate to.” Participant 5 shared, “You need to shop from the right sources, it is very important. The products are basically the same product, but you need good sources to get good prices and high quality.” Participant 3 explained,

You have to have the products that the customers want. You cannot bring just what you feel you like to have. The product needs to be basically demanded by the customer, if you get what they want, you will be able to sell it.

Participants explained that in order to decide what products they will offer to customers, that they first study the market to determine what customers are requesting the most. This finding is consistent with literature from Greene et al. (2015) who suggested

that it is essential for small firms with limited capital to ensure they choose only the types of resources that allow them to compete effectively. This strategy is also in alignment with a main principle of the RBT regarding the importance of obtaining the right resources and enhancing those resources to gain SCA (Campbell & Park, 2017; Nyberg et al., 2014)

Theme 4: Keeping Cost and Expenses Low

All participants reported that to sustain and grow their businesses profitably, it was necessary to manage resources in a manner that kept cost and expenses to a minimum so they could maximize profits. This finding is consistent with literature from Lin and Wu (2014) that suggested business owners need to reconstruct or transform available resources to deal with competition and adapt to market changes. To gain a competitive advantage, small business owners need to manage their resources effectively and have the capability to integrate, learn, and reconfigure internal and external resources to lower cost and enhance profit (Lin & Wu, 2014). Participant 1 shared, “We try to work out something with the wholesale supplier to try to get a better price or we find an alternative product.” Participant 2 shared, “You have to bargain buying products all over to reduce your cost and get more profit while selling at lower prices.” Participant 3 stated, “One of the things we also do is that we cut our expenses to the maximum so our overall expenses will be relatively low to maintain decent profit without doing the high margin of the big-bucks stores.” Participant 5 explained,

We try to be as efficient as we can with what we have. We try to be as careful as possible when we tap into resources, so we can make good use of them and to be very careful not to lose them

All participants shared that to keep costs low, they needed to deal with multiple vendors and negotiate merchandise prices effectively to get lucrative deals. Moreover, they needed to manage daily operations carefully to complete them with minimal expenses. These findings aligned with literature from Campbell and Park (2017) and Nyberg et al. (2014), suggesting that resources such as human capital, entrepreneurial orientation, social capital and strategic management contribute to enhancing small business performance. To maintain low operational costs, small business owners need effective management competencies. Managerial competencies involve a set of knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes that contribute to personal effectiveness (Fatoki, 2014; Nyberg et al., 2014). Entrepreneur's human capital and specific competencies positively influence firm performance (Fatoki, 2014; Nyberg et al, 2014).

In summary, study participants' responses suggested the strategic formula to sustain and grow their businesses profitably with limited capital and resources was to differentiate themselves from competitors through the implementation of personable customer service, offering popular products at low prices and managing their resources efficiently to keep operational cost to a minimum. The strategies uncovered in the responses of the study participants align with the principles of the resource-based theory. Business owners achieve competitive advantage when they implement strategies that competing firms cannot replicate easily (Barney, 1991; Day, 2014; O'Donnell, 2014).

Moreover, small business immigrant entrepreneurs' strategies aligned with the findings of Lechner and Gudmundsson (2014), who found that the two main sources of competitive advantage are achieving lower costs than competitors and implementing differentiation. It is essential to create more value for the customer than competitors, and differentiation and cost leadership have a positive effect on business performance (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014).

The findings of this study revealed that with limited capital and resources, the success of small business immigrant entrepreneurs depended heavily on their management skills. The small business immigrant entrepreneurs with the management capabilities to properly plan and execute the previously described strategies were able to gain competitive advantage better than the ones without proper management skills. Some entrepreneurs were better at accomplishing their goals because they possessed unique management knowledge, skills, and experiences that competitors lacked (Devigne et al., 2013; Huesch, 2013; Kozlenkova et al., 2014; Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2015). Tabares et al. (2015) suggested that internal organizational capabilities related to intellectual capital, such as entrepreneurship, market knowledge, management skills and customer orientation are essential to take advantage of available resources successfully. All participants reported having no formal business training. However, all participants reported learning business strategies during previous business experiences or learning from the experiences of fellow business owners. Small business immigrant entrepreneurs with related experience before starting a business significantly performed better than

those without prior related experience (Bates & Robb, 2013; Fatoki, 2014; Greene et al., 2015).

Applications to Professional Practice

The study results revealed four themes as the main strategies small business immigrant entrepreneurs use to sustain and grow their businesses profitably. These findings may facilitate the groundwork for recommendations for strategic actions as well as further research studies. Furthermore, the results of this study may improve business practice by promoting and facilitating the development of management guidelines or training materials for small business immigrant entrepreneurs. Small business immigrant entrepreneurs need proper access to resources to operate effectively and generate profit (Bates & Robb, 2014; 2015). Resource limitations and business barriers negatively affect immigrant and minority small business owners operating in inner cities causing higher rates of business closures or relocation (Bates & Robb, 2014; Weterings, 2014). Consequently, it is imperative that small business immigrant entrepreneurs apply effective management strategies to promote competitive advantage and enhance their profits with the resources they have available (Bates & Robb, 2014; Weterings, 2014). Lack of knowledge of effective management strategies can cause low profitability or high business failure (Bates & Robb, 2014; Weterings, 2014).

The results of the study may help to fill in the gap of knowledge regarding what business strategies influence the success of small businesses immigrant entrepreneurs. Small business immigrant entrepreneurs could better understand and apply new strategies to improve business performance. Consequently, small business immigrant entrepreneurs

could learn from the study findings the right management strategies to overcome business barriers, enhance available resources, and achieve competitive advantage. Small business immigrant entrepreneurs could improve the profitability of their businesses by applying knowledge from this study. Moreover, this study could be of value to business practice if the findings help key public and private stakeholders, as well as policymakers, to formulate initiatives and policies directed to enhancing the profitability of small immigrant businesses. Finally, this study may promote further research of the business dynamics of immigrant entrepreneurs.

Implications for Social Change

The results of this study may contribute to positive social change if its findings lead to improving the profitability of immigrant entrepreneur's small businesses, thus enhancing their quality of life. Immigrant entrepreneurs have a higher rate of business establishment than non-immigrant entrepreneurs do; thus, they play a significant role in the U.S. economy (Aliaga-Isla & Rialp, 2013; Foreman-Peck & Zhou, 2013). However, small business immigrant entrepreneurs produce lower levels of profit and have fewer employees than non-immigrant entrepreneurs (Rubach et al., 2015). A greater understanding of the small business immigrant entrepreneurs' business strategies is necessary if the intent of leaders and public service organizations is to improve the business contributions of this group.

Relevant public and private stakeholders could use the findings of this study to formulate new policies and interventions to improve the performance of small business immigrant entrepreneurs. In addition, if immigrant entrepreneurs gain a better

understanding of the strategies required for small business success they can make effective decisions to change their economic path. The findings of this study could help to enhance the profitability and survival rate of immigrant small businesses. If small business immigrant entrepreneurs are able to improve their profit margins and hire more employees, they will also be improving their contribution to the economy of their community as well as the US economy as a whole (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015). The growth of immigrant and minority small businesses results in contributions to employment levels in their communities (Bauernschuster, 2013; Goldman et al., 2014; Halabi & Lussier, 2014; McFarland & McConnell, 2013; McHenry, 2015; Preston, 2014). Moreover, understanding and addressing the characteristics of small business success among immigrant entrepreneurs might result in poverty reduction, a higher standard of living, better social integration, and improved financial outcomes for this community (Wang & Lysenko, 2014).

Recommendations for Action

As the investigator and an entrepreneur, I am passionate about informing small business immigrant entrepreneurs of this study's findings as they relate to effective management strategies to increase profit. From the findings of this study, small business immigrant entrepreneurs can take several actions to sustain and grow their business while increasing profitability. The findings of this study align with the constructs of the resource-based theory in that small business immigrant entrepreneurs can enhance limited business resources by applying the right management strategies. The participants of this study were able to achieve competitive advantage by offering their clients products in a

kind, manner, and price that their competitors could not imitate while keeping their cost low. Small business immigrant entrepreneurs could apply the following strategies to achieve competitive advantage and increase profits: (a) providing good customer service, (b) offering lower prices than competitors, (c) offering popular products, and (d) keeping cost and expenses low.

Based on the study findings, I would recommend small business immigrant entrepreneurs to provide their clientele with excellent customer service that adds value to their products. If competitors offer the same product, clients will choose the business that provides the best service. Good customer service can keep established customers coming back, and in return, they can bring new clients. Moreover, it is important to offer products that are in high demand for the target customer population. In addition, when possible, it is advantageous to offer products that other competitors are not offering yet, and that are difficult to substitute or replicate because of their rare characteristics or low price. In this regard, it is necessary for immigrant small business immigrant entrepreneurs to be on the lookout for new products that may be of interest to their clientele and try to be the first or only one to offer it. To keep cost low, it is helpful to have several vendors to get products from different sources, so it is conducive to negotiating the lowest prices possible and get profitable business deals. Additionally, I would recommend to immigrant business owners that find they lack the necessary management skills or knowledge to properly execute the previously described strategies to seek advice from experts or engage in the appropriate management training.

I would recommend business stakeholders in the city of Houston to use the findings of this study as background information or framework for the development of training initiatives or support materials targeting small business immigrant entrepreneurs since most of them lack formal business training. According to Fatoki (2014), entrepreneurs with in-depth knowledge and experience about business strategies perform better at sustaining and growing new enterprises than those entrepreneurs without the necessary training. Moreover, business stakeholders in Houston should establish assistance programs to help small business immigrant entrepreneurs achieving better access to the capital and resources necessary to grow their businesses.

My goal is to share the results of this study with participants, business agencies, and organizations such as the city of Houston, for-profit and nonprofit agencies, the City of Houston Chamber of Commerce and the Small Business Administration. I plan to publish the results of this study for the wider audience. My objective is to make public the findings using effective and suitable means to nonprofit and for-profit organizations, the city of Houston, and institutions of higher learning through conference presentations, seminars, and web-nets and other mediums where business leaders discuss strategies to increase the profitability of small immigrant business.

Recommendations for Further Research

I conducted a qualitative multicase study exploring the strategies small business immigrant entrepreneurs apply to sustain and grow their business profitably. The study consisted of five cases in Houston, Texas. The small sample size was one of the limitations of this study. Furthermore, the study was limited to one specific geographic

location. Consequently, to promote the transferability of the findings, future researchers could replicate this study in different geographic locations such as different cities or states. Moreover, this study took place in an urban area; other researchers can choose to explore this topic with small business immigrant entrepreneurs living in suburban or rural areas.

Additionally, the majority of the study participants worked in the retail sector. Future researchers of this topic can choose different types of small business immigrant entrepreneurs in other industries such, as services or manufacturing. In addition, future researchers can use quantitative research to test the strategies (four themes) found from this study as variables on a larger set of data. Future quantitative researchers can develop a hypothesis to test the relationships between these strategies (variables) and business profitability among immigrant entrepreneurs. As a result, the scholar community can better generalize findings from this research and improve business practice.

Reflections

My motivating factor through the duration of this study was the possibility of contributing to the improvement of immigrant entrepreneurship in any manner with the potential to promote positive social change as a result. This motivation enriched my scholarly experience and helped me to persevere through the common challenges of the research process. During the data collection process, getting prospective participants to agree to participate in the study was not easy. I reached out to a large number of small business immigrant entrepreneurs in Houston, but just a few agreed to participate. Moreover, was difficult to set up the right time for the interviews with the willing

participants because immigrant entrepreneurs are always very busy fulfilling multiple roles in their businesses. For some participants, I had to change the interview appointment a couple of times. It took diplomacy, flexibility, patience, and persistence to set up the interview sessions. Furthermore, getting the participants to share their business strategies in-depth was also challenging. Some of the participants had not deliberately thought about the strategies they were applying to keep their business going. Thus, was important for me to give participants enough time to reflect on their answers during the interviews, paraphrase questions to ensure they understood them well, and include follow-up questions to ensure the richness of the answers. Additionally, some participants expressed worry about sharing information about their business strategy secrets. In this case, developing a good working relationship with the participants was critical to promoting trust. A significant element of the research process was reminding participants their rights and making them comfortable. Before working on this study, I did not expect transcribing the interviews to take long time; however, with this experience, I learned that transcribing the interviews demanded a decent amount of time allocation.

In summary, during the completion of my study, I learned through experience that research is not just a work of logic, but also one of passion. To be effective, scholars need the right academic knowledge, but also need the willingness to put in the necessary hard work and time commitment. In this regard, it is important that scholars explore topics they are passionate about to ensure they invest the right level of knowledge, energy and time. In my case, I am very interested in business issues related to immigrants and minorities, thus exploring the answers to the central research question was exciting.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to explore the strategies some small business immigrant entrepreneurs use to sustain and grow their businesses profitably. Small business immigrant entrepreneurs make meaningful contributions to the U.S. economy (Aliaga-Isla & Rialp, 2013; Foreman-Peck & Zhou, 2013). Immigrant entrepreneurs have a higher business formation rate compared to nonimmigrant entrepreneurs in the United States (Kulchina, 2015). However, immigrant businesses produce lower earnings and hire fewer employees than nonimmigrant businesses (Rubach et al., 2015). A greater understanding of the business strategies of small business immigrant entrepreneurs is necessary to develop guidelines, initiatives, and policies to enhance their performance and improve their contribution to the U.S. economy (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Rubach et al., 2015). During the completion of this study, I found that small business immigrant entrepreneurs consider the main barriers to growing their businesses are limited capital and scarce resources. The strategies they apply to overcome those barriers while sustaining and growing their businesses are, a) providing good customer service, (b) offering lower prices than competitors, (c) offering popular products and (d) keeping cost and expenses low. Building on the RBT and the disadvantage theory (conceptual frameworks), the research outcomes revealed that small business immigrant entrepreneurs placed significant value on managing their limited capital and resources effectively and efficiently to increase profit by adding value to their products with good customer service while lowering operational cost as much as possible. In summary, small business immigrant entrepreneurs' main overreaching

business strategy is implementing differentiation coupled with cost control. Because of lack of capital and limited resources, the success of small business immigrant entrepreneurs implementing these strategies depends heavily on their management skills. Consequently, in the absence of formal business training, small business immigrant entrepreneurs with the most experience are the most successful. These findings could create positive social contributions by helping to improve financial outcomes of small immigrant businesses. Small business immigrant entrepreneurs could achieve a higher standard of living while enhancing the economic status of their host communities (Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015; Rubach et al., 2015; Wang & Lysenko, 2014). I would suggest future researchers to expand the study to different locations in the United States with larger population samples.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Preliminary Preparation:

Prior starting the interview I need to make sure the recording device is working properly. In addition, I need to make sure I have the necessary paper and pens to take notes. I will start the interview by establishing the context of the study, and exploring the backgrounds of my interviewee as they relate to the topic under study. This should take less than five minutes.

Interview guidelines:

1. Initial Probe Questions.

The questions will consist of the pre-set interview questions.

2. Targeted Concept Questions.

As I interview, I may find opportunities arise for follow-up questions. At this point, I will explore why type of questions as well. I will prepare and anticipate such follow-up questions, but use this template during the interview to take notes as I think of interesting follow-up questions.

3. Targeted Follow-Up Question (s).
4. Finally, as time permits, try for a wrap up question: Remember, I am targeting a 60-minute interview.
5. Wrap-Up Question.

As I conduct the interview, I will observe both verbal and non-verbal cues, I will be alert and flexible, and work with what the interviewee is providing, and paraphrase when needed. I will not ask leading questions. I will make sure to record the interview and take notes.