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# Marketing Strategies to Increase Sales in Small Family-Style Restaurant Businesses

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Tammira Lucas

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Walden University  
2018

Abstract

Marketing Strategies to Increase Sales in Small Family-Style Restaurant Businesses

by

Tammira Lucas

MBA, Strayer University, 2012

BS, Coppin State University, 2009

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

March 2018

## Abstract

Small business owners understand the advantages of using social media as a marketing tool; however, some of these owners do not leverage social media marketing strategies to increase sales. Small business owners who fail to implement social media marketing strategies minimize the potential to gain new customers; thus, negatively impacting sales. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore social media marketing strategies used by five small family-style restaurants in Maryland. Berry's relationship marketing theory was the conceptual framework for this study. Data collection included semistructured interviews, documents pertaining to social media marketing strategies, and social media pages and websites from the participating restaurants. These data were analyzed following Yin's 5-step analysis plan. Key themes that emerged were (a) social media platforms small family-style restaurant owners use to increase sales and were most effective, (b) employees' response to social media marketing strategies small family-style restaurant owners use to increase sales, and (c) relationship marketing. The implications for positive social change include the potential to increase the knowledge of future entrepreneurs and show them how technology can help them launch and grow their businesses faster creating an atmosphere of better customer services. Increasing the demand for employment can have a direct impact on decreasing the unemployment rate within the United States, particularly in the state of Maryland.

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this doctoral study to my amazing husband and loving daughter who have sacrificed so much so I can follow my dreams of becoming a doctor. I could thank you for a lifetime. There are no words to describe my appreciation and love for you two. We did it! I also dedicate this study to my late brother. Thank you for your sacrifice and being my angel.

## **Acknowledgments**

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## **Section 1: Foundation of the Study**

Small business (SB) owners are utilizing social media for marketing, advertising, employee recruitment, and communications with clients, partners, and employees (Schaupp & Belanger, 2014). Achieving marketing objectives has become difficult for business owners because of media fragmentation and the increasing number of daily media exposures (Lapido, Nwagwu, & Alarpe, 2013). In particular, restaurant owners struggle with understanding how to best utilize social media for marketing (Bilgihan, Cheng, & Kandampully, 2014).

### **Background of the Problem**

More than 99% of businesses in the United States are small businesses (Fox, 2013). The officials from the U.S. Small Business Administration reported that 50% of all small businesses close within the first 5 years because of insufficient marketing plans (Cronin-Gilmore, 2012). Small business owners are utilizing social media as a marketing tool to increase visibility to sustain their business in competitive markets (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). Business owners utilizing social media platforms have access to customer information that was not previously available which allows small business owners to perform marketing tasks at minimal cost (Taneja & Toombs, 2014).

Social media is an online platform that individuals use to communicate or share information (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). The usage of social media platforms changed the way organization members directly communicate with their consumers and the way consumers perceive organizations (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). Xu, Ryan, Prybutok, and Wen (2012) noted that social media users utilize forums to build connections between

other users. Thorough and sophisticated preparation occurs when marketers use social media platforms for marketing as compared to traditional and mass-marketing techniques (Svatosová, 2012). The power of social media lies in the abilities of one consumer to communicate with many consumers simultaneously (Xu et al., 2012).

A family-style restaurant is a casual dining restaurant where a customer sits at a table and receives table service from waitstaff as opposed to over-the-counter service at a fast-food restaurant where a customer receives their meal to go (National Restaurant Association, 2014). Riehle, Grindy, Bruce, and Stensson (2014) reported that 32% of consumers utilize information from social media when choosing a restaurant. Implementing social media strategies to increase net sales for small family-style restaurants will ultimately increase the demand for employment.

### **Problem Statement**

Small business owners understand the advantages of using social media as a marketing tool; however, some of these owners do not leverage social media marketing strategies to increase sales (Jones, Borgman, & Ulusoy, 2015). Seventy-four percent of small business owners do not use social media marketing strategies to gain new customers and increase sales (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). The general business problem is that failure to use social media minimizes the potential to gain new customers, thus, negatively impacting sales. The specific business problem was that some small family-style restaurant business owners lack social media marketing strategies to increase sales.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore social media marketing strategies small family-style restaurant owners use to increase sales. The target population comprised five family-style restaurants small business owners, located in Maryland, who have been in business more than 2 years, and use social media marketing strategies to increase sales. The implications for social change included the potential for business owners to improve small family-style restaurant social media marketing strategies, which could increase sales and employment opportunities. Community stakeholders stand to benefit from an enhanced standard of living, realized through increased household income.

### **Nature of the Study**

Bailey (2014) indicated that qualitative research is a multi-method for exploring and explaining human behavior, utilizing interpretive and material practices that enhance the visibility of the world. The qualitative method allowed me to obtain valuable information in establishing effective social media marketing strategies for small family-style restaurant owners to use to increase sales. Researchers use a quantitative method to test a theory or hypothesis and collect numerical data for inferential statistical testing (Hoare & Hoe, 2013) which was not appropriate for this study. Researchers use mixed methods to incorporate both qualitative and quantitative data in a research study (Molina-Azorin, Lopez-Gamero, Pereira-Moliner, & Pertusa-Ortega, 2012). The mixed method was not appropriate, because I did not employ a quantitative method.

Yin (2013) indicated researchers use a case study design to explore a phenomenon

or case in a comprehensive and practical environment. A multiple case study design was preferred over a single case study when the study involves examining conditions for similar findings that researchers can replicate or examine conditions for contrasting cases (Cope, 2015). Other qualitative designs included phenomenology and ethnography. Phenomenological studies are useful to researchers who explore the lived experiences of individuals about a particular phenomenon (Kafle, 2013). Small family-style restaurant owners who use social media marketing strategies to increase revenue was not an experience or event that warranted conducting a phenomenological study; therefore, the qualitative phenomenological study did not fit the form of my research question. Leedy and Ormrod (2013) indicated researchers use ethnographic design to focus on cultural aspects of a target demographic. The scope of this study did include cultural aspects of a target demographic; therefore, the ethnographic design did not fit my study. A multiple case study was the most appropriate design for this research project because the research question and the focus of the study aligned with Yin's (2014) conditions for conducting a case study.

### **Research Question**

What social media marketing strategies do small family-style restaurant owners use to increase sales?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What social media platforms are you using to increase sales?
2. What method do you find works best to increase sales?
3. How do your employees respond to your different strategies to increase

sales?

4. What additional information can you provide regarding the social media strategies that you have implemented to increase net sales?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Berry (2002) first mentioned the concept of relationship marketing (RM) theory in 1983. Relationship marketing, as a concept, is attracting, maintaining and, in multiservice organizations, enhancing customer relationships (Berry, 2002). Berry (2002) identified five RM strategies to include: core service marketing, relationship customization, service augmentation, relationship pricing, and internal marketing. Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995) proposed the basic tenant of RM is consumers' choice reduction. Consumers' choice reduction tenant in RM theory involves consumers consistently patronizing a brand based on relationships, which ultimately reduces consumer choices when purchasing a product or service. In RM theory, organizational goals involve creating consumer champions or advocates who will recommend the company (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Hunt, Arnett, and Madhavaram (2006) proposed that the purpose of RM theory is to provide systematized structure to explain the RM phenomena. Using RM theory, Hunt et al. (2006) determined that consumers interact with businesses through relational exchanges when they have benefits that exceed the cost of a product or service (Hunt et al., 2006).

RM theory is relevant to social media because more than half of consumers who use online tools such as social media to make purchasing decisions interact with a business on social networking sites and business owners. This means capitalizing on this

new promotional dimension to strengthen their customer relationships (Rapp, Beitelspacher, Grewal, & Hughes, 2013). As applied to this study, social media marketing media strategies align under the service augmentation relationship marketing strategy. Berry (2002) argued service augmentation involves business owners providing customers with extra bonuses within their service to differentiate their business from competitors.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Brand community:* A brand community is a collection of people with a shared interest in a specific brand, creating a subculture around the brand with its values, myths, hierarchy, rituals, and vocabulary (Gummerus, Liljander, Weman, & Pihlstrom, 2012).

*Electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM):* Electronic WOM is an informal discussion among consumers regarding products and services via the Internet (Teng, Wei Khong, Wei Goh, & Yee, 2014).

*Facebook:* Facebook is a social tool that helps people communicate more efficiently with their network of friends and relatives (Rocha, Jansen, Lofti, & Fraga, 2013).

*Family-style restaurant:* A family-style restaurant is a casual dining restaurant that delivers table service as opposed to counter service, charging higher prices than fast food restaurants (National Restaurant Association, 2014).

*Marketing strategy:* Marketing strategy is how an owner of an organization will engage customers, prospects, and competitors in the market arena for success (Shaw, 2012).

*Return on investment (ROI)*: Return on investment is something of value that has resulted from an investment of time, energy, or money (Gilfoil, Aukers, & Jobs, 2015).

*Small business (SB)*: A small business is a company having 500 employees or fewer and generating \$7 million or less in average annual receipts (sba.gov, 2014).

*Social media (SM)*: Social media are platforms, such as content-sharing sites, blogs, and social networking sites, on which users can exchange and share information online (Weeks & Holbert, 2013).

*Social media marketing (SMM)*: Social media marketing is a tool that marketers use as a voice to communicate with media, customers, peers, and target customers through the act of using social networks, online communities, blogs, wikis, or any other collaborative Internet form of media for marketing, sales, public relations, and customer service (Srivastav & Shah, 2013).

*Word-of-Mouth Marketing (WOMM)*: Word-of-mouth marketing is oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, concerning a brand, a product, or a service (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013).

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

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are ideas considered as true despite a lack of proof (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). One of my assumptions in the proposed study was that family-style restaurant small business owners would provide honest feedback during the interviews with an understanding that their responses are confidential. The second assumption was

that participants would agree to contribute to the study and follow through with their commitments. The third assumption was that the design of the interview questions was appropriate for the study purpose and would elicit thoughtful responses from the participants.

### **Limitations**

Leedy and Ormrod (2013) defined limitations as potential weaknesses beyond the researcher's control that may influence the results of the study. One limitation of this qualitative multiple case study was that data would only reflect strategies small family-style restaurant business owners utilize and might not reflect strategies other restaurant type owners utilize. A second limitation of this study was the data would only reflect strategies that family-style restaurant business owners utilize that were successful and would not reflect strategies that were not successful, but could potentially be successful for other family-style restaurant owners. A third limitation was personal bias. Personal bias could unintentionally have had an effect on the data during the interviewing and analysis process. Moustakas (1994) commented that identifying or exposing personal views or opinions could reduce bias when interviewing participants. The level of existence of personal bias in research influences the credibility perception of the data (Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy, & Sixmith, 2013). Regardless of the efforts taken to identify personal views or opinions to mitigate personal bias, personal bias was unlikely to eliminate it.

## **Delimitations**

Ody-Brasier and Vermeulen (2014) noted that delimitations are boundaries researchers impose to narrow the scope of the study. Using delimitations, I defined the boundaries of the study and furthermore, examined propositions within my study (Yin, 2014). The first delimitation for this study was the sample size of five small family-style restaurant owners. One of the restrictions of qualitative research is that researchers might use a small sample size, because they need more time to collect qualitative data (Yin, 2015). The sample population of small family-style restaurants was the second delimitation in this study. The third delimitation was geographical location; all participants were from Maryland. Another delimitation was the participants were small family-style restaurant owners who have successfully used social media strategies to increase sales.

## **Significance of the Study**

Small family-style restaurant owners could expand their understanding of effective social media marketing strategies that will create and maintain relationships with customers and increase sales. Small family-style restaurant owners could benefit from this study in three ways: increase sales, create new social media marketing strategies, and strengthen relationships through social media.

## **Contribution to Business Practice**

Small family-style restaurant owners must continue to implement social media marketing strategies to reach customers and increase sales (Schaupp & Belanger, 2014). Schaupp and Belanger (2014) determined that small business owners who engage in

social media marketing build relationships and trust with customers that translates into increased sales. Engaging in social media marketing can help SB owners generate exposure and increase traffic at a much lower cost than traditional marketing approaches (Schaupp & Belanger, 2014).

Consumers are also able to give instant feedback to businesses through social media (Marshall, Moncrief, Rudd, & Lee, 2012). Social media use can alter the level of communication and interaction between SB owners and consumers (Pookulangara & Koesler, 2011). Consumers of small family-style restaurants can communicate through social media their questions or concerns, and family-style small restaurant owners can directly respond to the consumers' questions. Small family-style restaurant owners could use the results of this study to increase sales using social media marketing strategies.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The implications for positive social change include the potential for restaurant owners to increase their ability to implement cause-related marketing campaigns. Cause-related marketing is a social responsibility program in which owners of companies donate to nonprofit organizations with purchases from the company or charitable donations to the organization (Chanana & Gill, 2015). A restaurant owner can increase revenue and brand loyalty while implementing positive social change through cause-related social media marketing.

Social media marketing for SB owners of family-style restaurants can create positive social change by business owners showing future entrepreneurs how technology can help them launch and grow their businesses faster. Yun (2013) noted small

businesses make economic growth more sustainable through job creation. Increasing the demand for employment can have a direct impact on decreasing the unemployment rate within the United States, particularly in the state of Maryland. Increasing net sales does not only influence individuals who need employment, but also those interested in opening a small business.

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

The literature review includes a conceptual framework and highlights several recurring themes discovered when reviewing scholarly literature: relationship marketing theory, social exchange theory, diffusion of innovation theory, social media marketing strategies, social media marketing and business sustainability. References within anticipated graduation data of 2017 are 246, or 85% of the total references, and 90% of the articles are peer-reviewed. The number of references in the literature review is 132. The data collected consists of journals, formative works (i.e., books, along with a dissertation), and Internet data from industry organizations.

The data collection process began with keyword searches using the following databases: Business Source Complete/Premier, ABI/INFORM Complete, Emerald, SAGE, ProQuest, Thoreau, and Google Scholar. I accessed these databases through Walden University Library and used different combinations of keywords related to the sections of the literature review to locate research studies. Some of these keywords included: *social media*, *social media marketing*, *marketing techniques*, *small business*, *small restaurant businesses*, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *LinkedIn*, *customer loyalty*, *branding*, *small business marketing*, *sales and social media*, *social media strategies*, and *marketing*

*for restaurants*. Eighty-seven percent of the articles had a publication date between 2012 and 2017, and 90% of the articles were peer-reviewed. Using current literature ensured reliability and validity of the study. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore what strategies small family-style restaurant business owners use to market their brands on social media.

### **Relationship Marketing Theory (RM)**

RM theory is a widely acceptable theory and approach to business practices in various sectors that may prove beneficial in developing strategies for customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and thus barriers to competition (Gupta & Sahu, 2012; Moore & Bowden-Everson, 2012; Østergaard & Fitchett, 2012; Vauterin, Linnanen, & Marttila, 2011). RM theory developed as an alternative theory to traditional marketing theories when researchers and marketers recognized a gap in marketing theory that required marketers to develop and focus on the emotional exchanges between two parties (Østergaard & Fitchett, 2012). The purpose of employing RM theory is to allow business owners to use a strategic process to develop and maintain a profitable relationship portfolio (Catoiu & Tichindelean, 2012). Small family-style restaurant owners should understand the importance of building strong relationships with consumers via social media to enhance their brand loyalty. Enhancing relationships with customers and elements of the brand community can enhance relationships and increase contacts between the brand and the customers to influence the brand (Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2013). Kang, Tang, and Foire (2014) noted that active participation on restaurant Facebook pages has a positive influence on brand trust. Given the

interactive effects and social media usage, small business owners with strong customer relationships (Kang et al., 2014) have the best advantage with social media. Kang et al. (2014) noted small business owners could use social media as a reinforcing mechanism to build stronger relationships.

In RM theory, organizational goals involve creating a consumer champion or advocate that will recommend the company (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Consumer identification, customer acquisition, customer retention, customer development, and tracking consumer information are steps in the process of relationship marketing small business leaders implement to maintain lifelong relationships (Khan, 2014a). Marketing executives who implement relationship marketing may improve marketing productivity, increase profits from 25-85%, and decrease customer attrition by 5% (Khan, 2014a). Although some researchers considered RM theory simply a modification of original marketing concepts, others have noted differences between RM theory and other marketing theories significant enough to conclude RM itself a separate marketing theory and practice (Gummesson & Grönroos, 2012). Owners can use brands and products to revitalize and innovate customer relationships (Bettiol, Di Maria, & Finotto, 2012).

Various scholars presented alternative theories to enhance the understanding of social media and consumer behavior. Rapp, Beitelspacher, Grewal, and Hughes (2013) studied how social media affects consumer interactions with sellers and retailers and found social media use by owners is most active from those with strong customer relationships. Consumers' social media usage on retailer's loyalty were revealed through research, which determined social media applications enable companies to provide

information on products and services that lead to greater loyalty (Rapp et al., 2013).

When online interactions increase, so does brand loyalty (Rapp et al., 2013). Social media usage does not just improve reliability; Rapp et al. (2013) suggested that retailers who engage in social media see a dramatic improvement in performance.

Naylor, Lamberton, and West (2012) studied the effect of likes on social media and the decision for online supporters to hide or reveal their demographic characteristics to other consumers. Naylor et al. (2012) suggested that social media could influence a brand's identity transparent to its supporters and prospective customers in ways that have no offline analog. Karahanna, Xu, and Zhang (2015) studied how the needs that underlie psychological ownership collectively motivate individuals' behavior. Interviews of business owners indicated that there was a variety of reasons consumers utilize social media to make purchases. Psychological ownership motivation can drive the use of social media to satisfy the underlying needs that are the psychological roots of psychological ownership (Karahanna et al., 2015). Before social media, consumers were aware of brands based on a spokesperson or advertisement in other avenues. With the advancement of social media, consumers are now able to connect by way of social media and get a visual of what the brand embodies (Naylor et al., 2012). Stephen and Galak (2012) argued that research has shown social media can translate into increase sales although Naylor et al. (2012) argued Facebook likes do not add any value.

### **Supporting Theories**

George Homans introduced the social exchange theory (SET) in 1961 (Cook & Rice, 2003). The major concept of SET is that individuals are likely to repeat their

behaviors if they predict a positive outcome (Cook & Rice, 2003). Archibald and Clark (2014) suggested individuals utilize social media on the perceived benefits they will receive. SET indicates that customers take an active part in brand interactions through a dynamic and iterative process of brand interactions such as brand mentions, Facebook likes, or discussions with others (Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014). Chen, Chen, and Farn (2010) noted the concept of SET also indicates that satisfied patrons will reciprocate services and assistance to other members of virtual communities.

Under SET, users will perceive benefits from sharing and exchanging knowledge online (Shiau & Luo, 2012). Users of social media generally interact with other online users to maximize rewards and minimize costs (Shiau & Luo, 2012). Consumers often expect satisfaction with both products and services in purchases online (Shiau & Luo, 2012). Thus, applying SET was not appropriate to explore the problem in this study as the concept of SET examines the behaviors of individuals based on their prediction of positive outcomes (Chen et al., 2010).

Under SET, online users perceive that they will receive benefits for sharing and exchanging knowledge online (Shiau & Luo, 2012). Social media does not have financial implications for consumers; therefore, the motivation to exchange information could vary and limit the findings in this study (Rui, Shi, & Whinston, 2014). Another limitation to this theory is that it does not examine the relationship aspect of marketing which has a significant effect on human behavior in marketing (Clark & Melancon, 2013). SET supports RM theory, because under SET a key assumption is that relationship maintenance and growth determines relationship outcome evaluation (Wulf & Odekerken-Schroder,

2001). Under SET, individuals engage in relationships because either they genuinely want to or because they believe, they have no other option (Wufl & Odekerken-Schroder, 2001).

Another supporting theory of RM theory is commitment-trust theory introduced by Morgan and Hunt (1994). The major concept of the commitment-trust theory is that when both commitment and trust are present, they produce outcomes that promote efficiency, productivity, and effectiveness; therefore, commitment and trust lead directly to cooperative behaviors that are conducive to relationship marketing success (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). According to the commitment-trust theory, trust and relationship commitment are central to successful relationship marketing because they encourage marketers to work at preserving relationship investments, resist attractive short-term alternatives, and view potentially high-risk options as being prudent (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). The use of social media alters the roles of engagement and the relationships between buyers and sellers (Sashi, 2012). Commitment-trust theory supports relationship-marketing theory because customer engagement requires the establishment of trust and commitment in buyer-seller relationships (Sashi, 2012).

### **Rival Theories**

Rogers (1983) developed the diffusion of innovations theory (DOI) in 1962 to understand how individuals adopt innovation as it relates to technology. Social media is a new technology that can enhance marketing techniques for small businesses, but small business owners must accept the new technology (Archibald & Clark, 2014). Innovation theories, such as DOI, support the positive use of social media marketing as a means to

increase sales, reduce cost, and connect with customers (Erdogmus & Cicek, 2012). Archibald and Clark (2014) concluded that sociological factors influence a person's acceptance of innovations. The diffusion of innovations theory may appear as a key factor in understanding how small business owners adopt new technologies (Thompson, Williams, & Thomas, 2013). The diffusion of innovations theory explains the different adoption rates (Ifinedo, 2011; Rogers, 2003).

The diffusion of innovations theory explains elements, such as potential rewards and peer pressure, which motivate social media users (Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013). Rogers's (1995) theory provided a context for the adoption process and serves as a catalyst for new ideas, products, and services from decision makers (Ratcliff & Doshi, 2013). A limitation to this theory is the focus on how individuals and communities adopt ideas and technologies (Rogers, 1995).

Researchers commonly employ the uses and gratification (U&G) theory to understand media usage. In the U&G theory, media users choose their level of participation and decide whether to engage in certain media based on their socio-psychological needs (Krause, North, & Heritage, 2014). Media users select media based on their needs and continue to use that medium as long as their needs are satisfied (Ku, Chen, & Zhang, 2013). Researchers use the U&G theory to explore consumer context and behavior.

### **Social Media Marketing**

Social media marketing is a marketing tool that does not include high advertising costs or an extremely high amount of time and is a strategy of doing beneficial and

costless business marketing (Rugova & Prenaj, 2016). Social media marketing caused businesses to form separate strategies from traditional marketing strategies (Ramsaran-Fowdar & Fowdar, 2013). Shi and Wojnicki (2014) studied the drivers behind online referrals and investigated the effectiveness of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivations for consumers' online social network referrals, specifically across opinion leaders and non-opinion leaders. Utilizing a unique data set, the study indicated that consumers were not inspired to refer a company website to their social networks based on intrinsic behaviors (Shi & Wojnicki, 2014). Business owners may utilize social media marketing as an integrated component in a marketing communications campaign as an ongoing corporate communications channel and/or as a series of micro campaigns specifically designed for digital exposure for a variety of marketing objectives including branding, customer relationship management, and sales promotions (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). However, business owners must understand that large numbers of fans do not guarantee the success of social media marketing; instead, timing and dialogue are the key factors, because consumers utilize social media to contribute to their psychological well-being (Ashley & Tuten, 2015).

The use of social media by restaurant owners provides access to a new way of marketing their products and communicating with potential customers in a bi-directional quickly, cheaply, and with the ability to offer a warm welcome to a target audience (Sanchís Verdeguer, Peiró-Signes, & Segarra-Oña, 2014). Social media marketing in restaurants includes a different approach than traditional marketing, as social media involves interacting directly with customers and public bi-directionally (Sanchís

Verdeguer et al., 2014). Karimi and Naghibi (2015) noted the main purposes of using social media marketing are the amplification of word-of-mouth marketing, market research, general marketing, idea generation and new product development, co-innovation, customer service, public relations, employee communications, and reputation management. Social media platforms foster communication around brands and products, enhancing positive, as well as negative, word-of-mouth around a business and its products and services (Karimi & Naghibi, 2015).

Social media marketing helps to achieve traditional goals through non-traditional ways using creativity, community, and relationships instead of using a lot of money to achieve marketing goals (Rugova & Prenaj, 2016). Andzulis, Panagopoulous, and Rapp (2012) suggested business owners determine the appropriate goals associated with the social media implementation prior to using the platform. Small business owners must determine whether implementation will add value to the consumer relationships (Andezulis et al., 2012). Customers should receive, or at the least perceive, value from a firm's social media efforts. Social media marketing methods are powerful guerrilla marketing strategies and have become a very effective way to drive targeted traffic to companies' websites or blogs (Rugova & Prenaj, 2016).

Wallace et al. (2014) studied the marketing approach with the observation that many marketers are obsessed with determining the real value of a Facebook fan. However, as Wallace et al. (2014) observed in the article *Who Likes You ... and Why? A Typology of Facebook fan* a host of blogs exist, but websites and articles offering advice about increasing the number of likes on Facebook may not provide information on why

consumers become fans of certain brands (Wallace et al., 2014). Wallace et al. (2014) suggested that the use of varying degrees of brand loyalty, brand love, WOMM, and self-expressive brands attract different customers.

The four types of Facebook fans offer a different kind of brand acknowledgment and engagement. The first type of Facebook fan is the fanatic who highly engages on Facebook while on or offline (Lapointe, 2012). The second type of fan is the utilitarian who likes brands to gain incentives but have no real connection with the brand (Lapointe, 2012). The third type of fan is the self-expressive fan who likes brands to make an impression on others (Lapointe, 2012). The last type of fan is authentic with no concerns of an image whose likes are genuine (Lapointe, 2012). Family-style restaurant owners should provide content to meet each type of Facebook fans' needs. As restaurant customers increase their participation on a restaurant Facebook page, for information seeking communication with other members, their trust and commitment toward restaurant brands are likely to be enhanced, ultimately increasing sales (Kang, Tang & Foire, 2015).

Commentators have noted that managers are obsessed with the value of a fan metric (Lapointe, 2012). Most research focuses on fan behavior (e.g., counting the number of likes), rather than the profile of audiences reached. As Lapointe (2012) noted, SB owners should acknowledge that all fans are different when attempting to determine the value of a fan. Little information exists about the complex relationship between Facebook fans and their liked brands (Nelson-Field, Riebe, & Sharp, 2012). Family-style restaurant owners can utilize metrics to enhance advertisement campaigns. Gaber and

Wright (2014) revealed fast food restaurant marketers could execute effective advertising campaigns on Facebook by utilizing metrics.

Small business owners should implement social media marketing strategies to communicate effectively to consumers (Karimi & Naghini, 2015). Small business owners utilizing social media can utilize analytics and metrics to evaluate and improve their message based on their customers' needs. Schulze, Scholer, and Skiera (2015) suggested customizing marketing campaigns for specific products and services of a business is the key to successful social media marketing. Whiting and Deshpande (2016) determined social media marketing strengthens brand pride and relationships, which is healthy for a company because when customer relationships are strong; it increases their word-of-mouth marketing and results in higher sales.

Marketing on social media is affordable because joining the platforms is free (Herman, 2015). Chauhan and Pillai (2013) determined that the form in which business owners present messages on social media impacts customer engagement. Business owners should monitor the amount of content they are placing on social media platforms, because posting too much content can annoy consumers and lead to poor brand loyalty and word-of-mouth marketing (Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt, & Fuller, 2013). Parson (2013) suggests postings requesting feedback from consumers are more appropriate when brands are conducting market research for products or services. SB owners can utilize social media marketing to reach a broader customer base and maintain relationships with established consumers because of the around the clock marketing ability.

Taneja and Toombs (2014) suggest that SB owners participate in casual and formal networking as a fundamental piece of social media marketing. SB owners should concentrate on networking and preferences within their social media platform to determine the impact the network has on the audience (Taneja & Toombs, 2014).

Networking through social media involves establishing relationships with customers and businesses to increase competition. Alharbie (2015) noted small business owners utilizing social media have an opportunity to get to know their potential customers and find ways to meet their wants and needs.

Restaurant businesses are the second largest employer in the United States; however, 67% of restaurants fail within the first 3 years of operation (Frazer, 2012). Information taken from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) states 50% of all small businesses close within the first 5 years because of insufficient and poorly executed marketing plans (Cronin-Gilmore, 2012). For SB owners of family-style restaurants to strengthen their competitive position, they should implement effective marketing strategies that will improve profitability (Desai, 2013). One of the biggest challenges for SB owners is in relationship building with customers through marketing because of resource constraints (Fiore, Niehm, Hurst, Jihyeong, & Sadachar, 2013). SB owners of family-style restaurants should implement technology, such as social media to engage and communicate with customers (Rowley, 2012). Social media marketing is a great way to add an implicit consumer endorsement of a brand (Keller & Fay, 2012). Zailskaite-Jakste and Kuvykaite (2013) found applying social media for brand equity as a marketing focus increases revenue and profits.

A social media strategy created by small business owners is often effective within an organization. Agnihotri et al. (2012) found that various types of communication amongst salespeople determine the relationship with customers. Levy (2011) suggested that social media strategy should define business goals, target the particular use of social media by the target customers, consider the competitors' strategies, track market events, and set goals and milestones to track progress.

Owners of businesses can utilize social media to secure a reputation, increase sales, involve consumers in the brand creation process, expand brand awareness, provide associations that are more positive, and increase customer loyalty to a brand (Zailskaite-Jakste & Kuvykaite, 2013). Zailskaite-Jakste and Kuvykaite (2013) found that communication in social media could influence brand equity experience, brand awareness, and brand image. Quality is a prerequisite to effective communication in social media. Zailskaite-Jakste and Kuvykaite's study suggested managing proper communication in social media has a direct impact on establishing brand awareness and forming a favorable brand image. Owners of family-style restaurants must understand that communication has the biggest impact on brand equity and, therefore, must consider a good communication strategy that connects with their target customers. Hanaysha (2016) found restaurant owners who utilize social media advertising had loyal customers and by using social media as marketing communication tool, restaurant owners can enrich their communication with customers and develop better customer loyalty day by day.

Gilfoil et al. (2015) found that social media ROI is measurable if planned carefully; however, SB owners should understand that real financial ROI only happens when a sales conversion takes place in the marketing or sales campaign with the right technology. Small business owners can utilize analytics tools within social media sites and marketing approaches to better define ROI (Geho & Dangelo, 2012). Like most other successful operations in the business world, process control, and ownership is critical; therefore, effective planning and implementation of social media involves keeping operational and functional goals in mind (Gilfoil et al., 2015).

### **Social Media Marketing Strategies**

Social media platforms are valuable tools when business owners implement strategies for marketing purposes (Schlinke & Crain, 2013). Before investing in social media for business purposes, SB owners need to ensure that the chosen platforms will meet their needs. Social media sites are inexpensive and, more often than not, are completely free to use (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Schaupp and Belanger (2014) noted that 66% of SB owners strongly agree that social media is necessary for their business. A key component of any successful social media strategy is having a strategy for great content (Schlinke & Crain, 2010).

Pliska (2012) noted small business owners should set clear goals and objectives before deciding what social media platforms to use for marketing purposes. An important component of social media strategies in business is fostering relationships between consumers and companies. The use of social media platforms provides business owners several options for reaching potential customers: communication, collaboration, and

creating value for customers (Carlson & Lee, 2015). Whiting and Williams (2013) provided a generous and comprehensive understanding of why consumers utilize social media, which can help SB owners penetrate the market and increase their consumer base. Succeeding in social media marketing implementation depends on knowing and understanding where most conversations are occurring (Castronovo & Huang, 2012).

Consistently monitoring the magnitude of communications and engagement amongst members is a way to measure effectively the social media program (Castronovo & Huang, 2012). Firm employees can determine whether social media campaigns are effective at measuring and comparing the positive buzz generated by the increased sales of products or services (Castronovo & Huang, 2012). Castronovo and Huang (2012) proposed an alternative marketing model to provide markets with a framework that effectively leverages the efficiencies and interactions of word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM) through social media. Some marketers believe social media is a powerful tool because of consumer-generated communication, which creates WOMM (Wang & Chang, 2013). Social media is intensifying how WOMM is spreading. Meuter, McCabe, and Curran (2013) described the evolution of WOMM since the 1940s in their study and introduced the coproduction model, in which a consumer spread WOMM to other consumers with consumers ultimately influencing each other. WOMM is an effective form of marketing and small business owners should encourage satisfied customers to post positive reviews on social media sites by offering incentives, such as discounts and gifts (Kumar, 2012). Social media users are transforming WOMM to the network coproduction model, as described by Meuter et al. (2013), since representatives of

companies and customers are influencing the sales of products or services. The power of electronic WOM (eWOM) and brand loyalty has a direct correlation (Gilfoil et al., 2015). Whiting and Deshpande (2016) noted that a method of succeeding in SMM is to use WOMM to market products rather than exclusively relying on the company's content.

Owners of small businesses need to comprehend the psychographics of target markets and understand it is not the requirement for insights as much as the need to build up a relationship with clients (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). To build up a relationship, SB owners should connect with their clients by implementing social media into their marketing strategy. Ciprian (2015) suggested social media is effective, inexpensive, and gives SB owners the ability to reach a large population of consumers.

Social media marketing utilization is a common in organizations and SB owners can utilize social media to strengthen their customer base and to attract new business opportunities (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). Taneja and Toombs (2014) argued competition for small businesses derives from the Internet and not from traditional associations. Bakeman and Hanson (2012) demonstrated that just 26% of small businesses are using social media effectively and efficiently to create new customers and sales.

Entrepreneurs and top managers must grasp social media as a new genre of customer interaction and distinguish more ways of fueling the future development of their organization based on various social media platforms (Roy, Maxwell, & Carson, 2014). Schaupp and Belanger (2014) noted that developing social media strategies allows small businesses to create new ways to communicate with their customers. Social media platforms changed consumer conduct where simple correspondence has evolved into an

intelligent correspondence (Roy et al., 2014). Through the intelligent correspondence, all participants are producing esteem in a communitarian domain that goes past the formal borders that traditionally separate internal correspondence from the external communication (Roy et al., 2014). SB owners can use various social media platforms to share data, add valuable content, and concentrate on growing new products and services.

Chou (2014) indicated that online brand communities remain on a social media platform enabled by a plethora of information. The characteristics of social media can have a significant influence on brand equity by enhancing the relationships between a company and consumer (Chou, 2014). Consumers associate with brands they like most because of social media platforms, including, yet not restricted to, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube (VanAuken, 2015). Small business owners should focus on improving their relevance to social media to build and sustain long-term business success (Carlson & Lee, 2015).

Chou (2014) measured online brand community participants' perceptions of social media characteristics, customer relationships, and brand equity to examine the influence of each. Information and communication technology enhance social network platforms, which allows people to establish an identity and share values quickly in the virtual community. With more company personnel developing online brand communities to deepen customer relationships and enhance brand equity, Chou (2014) endorses the positive marketing value of online brand community management. The research results show that brand equity enhances online community customer relationships, which in turn

strengthens the social media characteristics of knowledge sharing mechanisms and platform quality.

Edwin, Chandramohan, Rao, and Rao (2014) studied social media marketing in small businesses. Edwin et al. (2014) found several advantages for small businesses to market on social media, including the affluence of customer acquisition and direct customer interaction. Numerous SB owners are not dedicating their endeavors to social media marketing, frequently because of time restrictions of the business managers (Edwin et al., 2014).

Economic uncertainties have global brands utilizing social media more because of the little capital investment requirements (Samanta, 2012). Srivastav and Shah (2013) indicated that a social media platform is a useful tool to promote brands and provides identity to what product or services business owners should offer. Social media strategies, such as researching and identifying social media keywords, help business owners gain a better picture of how to efficiently construct and communicate their message, ultimately driving traffic to a business website by providing valuable content (Srivastav & Shah, 2013). Papasolomou and Melanthiou (2012) found that social media is a platform that includes two-way conversations between consumers and marketers. Papasolomou and Melanthiou (2012) recommend that firm managers focus their efforts on interesting content and engagement with their customers, as this will cause customers to become more receptive toward marketing efforts from firm managers that market their favorite brands. The key point is managers should use social media to talk with customers instead of talking at them as with traditional media sources (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012).

Producing valuable content will help organizations increase their scope to customers worldwide with expenses that no one has ever considered (Roy et al., 2014).

Another social media marketing strategy involves understanding the sources of trust in online information provided by sources social media users may or may not know about (Vinerean, Cetina, Dumitrescu, & Tichindelean, 2013). Small business owners should identify and target different types of customers as well as take the initiative to recognize and highlight customers' interests, because social media sites influence online shopping. For small business owners working towards success in social media marketing, they first need to create a buyer persona and should then develop and continuously adjust their online marketing strategy according to the interests of customers for long-term success (Venkatesh et al., 2013). Saxena and Khanna (2013) conducted a quantitative study of the effectiveness of social networking sites in promoting products and services. Business owners utilizing social networking should reduce any content that would irritate their customers (Saxena & Khanna, 2013). To successfully market on social media, marketers should address the attitudes, lifestyles, and behaviors of their target market while concentrating on the various market segments they are serving across the globe (Pookulangara & Koesler, 2011).

Kumar and Mirchandani (2012) suggested a viable social media strategy should naturally characterize the marketing goals, assess the opportunities, and select a suitable manifestation of social media to convey. Social media networking sites are equipped with analytical capabilities that help business owners analyze their marketing message and how the message is affecting their social media marketing strategies (Kumar &

Mirchandani, 2012). Kumar and Mirchandani developed and implemented a seven-step method to identify the net influence exercised by a user in a social network to predict the user's ability to generate a viral spread of information. Feng and Papatla (2011) recommended that business owners have a strong social review site presence and must be proactive with customer complaints. Business owners can utilize the seven-step method to identify the right social media conversations to engage individuals to promote WOMM for genuine sales and to build return on investment (Kumar & Mirchandani, 2012). Customers find WOMM sincere and realistic, and they are likely to follow WOMM recommendations (Kim & Ko, 2012; Wang et al., 2012).

The first three of Kumar and Mirchandani's (2012) seven steps to social media success suggest business owners should monitor the conversations and identify influential individuals who can spread messages and identify the factors shared by prominent individuals. Kumar and Mirchandani's (2012) first two steps to social media success suggest business owners should locate potential influencers who have interests relevant to the campaign and recruit those influencers with interests relevant to the campaign to talk about the company's product or service. Word-of-mouth consumer conversations about brand occur 75% face-to-face, 15% via phone, and 10% online, with an estimated 15 billion brand impressions every week in the United States (Keller & Fay, 2012). Small family-style restaurant owners can implement online marketing as a communication platform to build relationships and customer loyalty (Tabaku & Mersini, 2014). SB owners can retain current clients and attract new ones by offering competitive rewards for positive reviews about their products or services on social media (Kumar & Mirchandani,

2012). By observing and following positive word-of-mouth marketing and connecting it to items and brand growth, SB owners can achieve compelling social media rankings and begin to see improved financial growth, increased client engagement, and expanded brand awareness (Kumar & Mirchandani, 2012).

Brand extension and reputation management are two crucial public relation requirements that social media tools can fulfill (Schlinke & Crain, 2013). Kim, Koh, Cha, and Lee (2015) studied the impact of social media on a restaurant's value within the restaurant industry and found a positive linear relationship between a restaurant's social media activity and firm value. Increased positive customer engagement via social media can influence a restaurant's revenue (Kim et al., 2015). Rodriguez, Peterson, and Krishnan (2012) found that using social media in business has a positive relationship with increases in sales, creating opportunities, and managing relationships.

Danciu (2013) stated the Internet and technologies, such as mobile devices, are revolutionizing consumers' focus on industries, companies, and consumers. Social media users interact, socialize, and access information on companies, products, pricing, and availability through social media platforms. Small business owners should strategically implement the use of social media marketing (Danciu, 2013). Social media marketing is a way to add an implicit consumer endorsement of a brand (Keller & Fay, 2012). Danciu (2013) projected that 50 billion devices will connect to social media platforms by the year 2020 with each consumer connected through seven devices. SB owners who do not have a mobile marketing strategy will miss a significant market share and revenue. Applying

social media for brand equity as a marketing focal point increases revenue and profits (Zailskaite-Jakste & Kuvykaite, 2013).

Wang (2012) argued that social media is a highly complex form of marketing. With the widespread trend of social media uses within social and professional realms, business owners should understand the risks associated with the use of social media. Understanding various types of risks, SB owners can use social media to help grow or sustain their financials. Paid advertisements and endorsements that appear alongside the platform is advertorial exposure. The challenge of putting brands and related stimuli within a target consumer segment's sensory range is achievable by applying existing best practices and guidelines advising media purchase decisions. Communication exposure relates to new information and stimuli arising from interactions and communication with other users on the social media platform. To effectively attract and retain the attention of consumers with the intention of positioning brand messages on social media platforms, owners should tailor their messages in a manner that is best suited for social media (Wang, 2012). Owners of companies should accept that they no longer have control over the majority of the discussions and communications about their brand online among consumers.

The use of social media by small business owners is heavily dependent upon the degree to which business owners can utilize social media sites and their offerings. The use of social media is crucial for small business owners with limited means and skills (Schaupp & Belanger, 2014). Social media affords SBs an opportunity to reach a large population of potential consumers. Marketing professionals are well versed in all social

networking mediums (e.g., Twitter and Facebook) (Schaupp & Belanger, 2014).

Platforms that are relatively new have already garnered significant attention (Barnes & Jacobsen, 2013). Internal cohesiveness is vital to the success of small businesses and their social media campaign efforts that contribute primarily to their penetration in the social media market (Toombs & Harlow, 2014).

The use of social media by small business owners also offers companies a relative advantage (Barnes & Jacobsen, 2013). The use of new communication tools allows organizational owners to reach their customers faster and more frequently, creating a more honest and open dialog, which leads to more relevant feedback (Barnes & Jacobsen, 2013). Current customers, prospective customers, fans, and critics of products are several types of consumers who participate in social media (Brooks, Heffner, & Henderson, 2014). Social media communications influence product branding and customer relationships positively or negatively depending on how the company representatives participate in the discussions. Effectively understanding how to interact in the social media conversations as well as gathering knowledge from these conversations can help to influence product branding and customer relationships positively (Brooks et al., 2014). The viral marketing concept has assisted company owners trying to reach various prospective consumer groups (Brooks et al., 2014). Controlling and measuring the outcomes of the social media marketing helps business owners understand how efficient the social media marketing strategies are. Owners need to determine whether the strategy is working or not (Rugova & Prenaj, 2016). Business owners should seek an

understanding of why a customer will or will not buy a product or service, which is crucial for establishing a competitive edge in the business industry (Brooks et al., 2014).

Yadav and Pavlou (2014) indicated that framework technology includes some communication technologies, devices, and infrastructure related to the Internet. Consumer-to-firm interactions, firm-to-customer interactions, consumer-to-consumer interactions, and firm-to-firm interactions are the four interactions that focus on an organizing framework (Yadav & Pavlou, 2014). The context in which consumers purchase goods or services using one device is the center of technology-enabled decision-making. Research in technology-enabled decision-making has examined the adoption and efficacy of various online marketing tools. Hanaysha (2016) noted that focusing on social media considering the presence of competitors and communication mechanisms that restaurant owners use to reach customers should not be an option for family-style restaurant owners but a key aspect of their marketing communication elements.

Smith (2011) suggested digital and online advertising is growing phenomenally since inception. How consumers perceive digital advertising because of potentially intrusive messages that are distracting, disturbing, forced, or interfere with their work is a concern (Smith, 2011). Smith (2011) suggested cognitive psychology indicates when individuals are engaging in an online task and interruption occurs, their reaction is harmful because it interferes with the person's attention and limits the amount of information they are trying to receive. Family-style restaurant owners can leverage the consumer's perception of their brand and the power of digital advertising to increase sales. The use of social networks by restaurant owners provides access to a new way of

marketing their products, such as social shopping through discount Bonds Company (Sanchís Verdeguer, Peiró-Signes & Segarra-Oña, 2014).

Yadav and Pavlou (2014) indicated that social network usage shapes consumers' perceptions and purchase behavior. Consumers' engagement in brand communities has a direct impact on new product options where community sponsor's brand increases and the likelihood of adopting a competing brand decreases (Yadav & Pavlou, 2014). Smith (2011) stated that the value of using digital media in business is business owners have the ability to offer consumers a more personal shopping experience.

Luigi, Oana, Mihai, and Simona (2011) indicated the rise of digital media, and the impact of new marketing channels have consumers more engaged than ever before in controlling communications and message delivery at a global level. Small business managers must consider consumers and potential consumers are the subject of different triggers beyond conventional paid media with the interactivity characteristic of social media (Luigi et al., 2011). Capitalizing on group-forming networks means companies will gain the strongest advantage via the Internet. Restaurant owners should focus on social media marketing to establish successful relationships with customers to inform them about the products or service in an easy and cost-effective manner (Sanchís Verdeguer, Peiró-Signes, & Segarra-Oña, 2014).

Powers, Avincula, Austin, Gaiko, and Snyder (2012) determined that consumers utilize social media to get information regarding a potential purchase, get familiar with a particular product, or have their mind changed about a brand. The use of social media by small business owners also allows consumers to feel empowered about making a

purchase because of connecting to a brand in a social setting (Powers et al., 2012).

Rugova and Prenaj (2016) suggested if a business owner is aware of where its target audience interaction is in the social media landscape, a small investment is enough to get a social media strategy started and the returns can be amazing.

Social media is the most famous factor of information technology and the Internet making it easier for business owners to communicate to their customers (Rugova & Prenaj, 2016). Schaupp and Belanger (2014) examined the actual social media usage of organizations rather than considering the intentions to use social media as most prior research has done. Schaupp and Belanger also examined the technology-organization-environment (TOE) framework, the resource-based view (RBV) theory, and previous literature by interviewing small business utilizing social media. Schaupp and Belanger indicated that technology competence, customer pressure, and the mobile environment were three of the four antecedents of social media usage that were significant. Competitive pressure was the fourth insignificant antecedent.

Varini and Sirsis' (2012) empirical study of a large firm owners' internal social media usage found that people who contribute to an online community would likely continue posting. The findings of the study also determined that valuable, engaging content would build closer ties with consumers and influence patronage intentions via emotional bonds (Varini & Sirsi, 2012). Consumer-generated content is an opportunity for owners to engage with customers directly while at the same time stagnating the use of traditional marketing approaches. Almost half of all purchasing decisions are because of WOMM. WOMM is greatest when consumers are buying a product for the first time or

when products are relatively expensive, which are all factors that would require users to do more research (Varini & Sirsi, 2012). However, when dissatisfied customers are spreading negative comments by word-of-mouth, which can hurt a business (Utz, Kerkhof, & van den Bos, 2012). Business owners can create more awareness through social media and technology in several ways, whether marketing with video sharing or harnessing the customer creativity and enable partial or full customization of products.

The use of Facebook by small business owners provides many features that make marketing possible for businesses to connect with current and potential consumers effortlessly. Facebook made history by having one website with over 750 million members with more than 146 million of them being Americans (Jeanjean, 2012). Facebook consists of over 1.5 million organizations with business pages that over 20 million people follow every day. Business owners can market to followers using targeted ads (Jeanjean, 2012). With all the capabilities and people on Facebook, business owners have the opportunity to use the features to connect with consumers and increase business revenue. Through Facebook, business owners cannot only utilize the platform to connect and share with their customers, but they can also launch marketing campaigns for their products or services (Pencheva & Georgieva, 2012). Restaurant owners can strategically engage potential and existing customers via social media and convert them into advocates for users who trust their friends' recommendations (Ghiselli & Ma, 2015).

Facebook is easy to use and has the capability to increase brand awareness through various connections (Taining, 2012). Facebook brand pages are a popular channel through which consumers interact with brands directly by either liking or

commenting on posts and messages (Kabadayi & Price, 2014). When consumers like a business page they can see the business post and stay connected with the business, ultimately increasing traction to Internet traffic for brands. Gummerus et al. (2012) suggested business owners should create content that keep customers visiting the Facebook site and encourage transactional behaviors. The status update feature on Facebook is the most important functionality of this medium because it can serve as a product or service review and assist future consumers in their purchasing decisions (Hansson, Wrangmo & Klaus, 2013). Hansson et al. (2013) suggested businesses optimize their use of Facebook in marketing through consistency, clear messaging, and having a clear purpose. Small family-style restaurant owners should consider effective communication techniques that can promote active participations on Facebook pages, which can significantly contribute to the success of branding on Facebook (Kang, Tang, & Fiore, 2014).

Business owners are using Facebook for a variety of purposes, but the focus seems more on trying to develop relationships with consumers rather than simply providing information. Facebook pages have a different look and feel to them than the typical website and encourage interaction among consumers (Patino et al., 2012). Through the Facebook platform, business owners can obtain valuable insights and feedback about existing and potential products and services (Ramsaran-Fowdar & Fowdar, 2013). Kang, Tang, and Fiore (2014) revealed that consumers who actively participate in activities on restaurant Facebook pages were likely to feel that the restaurant brands were trustworthy and developed commitment toward the brands.

Social media marketing can be an extremely cost-effective solution if business owners utilize the appropriate social media channels (Rugova & Prenaj, 2016). Engaging in social media efforts can produce results at a fraction of the cost of traditional marketing approaches, which assists business owners with appreciating the value of results from utilizing social media platforms (Schaupp & Belanger, 2014). Using a social media platform like LinkedIn, which is a professional social media network that connects new people, consumers, and companies (Pencheva & Georgieva, 2012) can help business owners build relationships with new consumers. LinkedIn's company philosophy is relationships matter (Claybaugh & Haseman, 2013). Professionals utilize LinkedIn to validate background experience and credentials of individuals while creating search engine optimization if someone is searching the person on the Internet (Pliska, 2012). LinkedIn is a networking tool that helps professionals connect with others in their profession (Schlinke & Crain, 2013). The search features within LinkedIn allow business owners to foster relationships with potential clients, business partners, or other professionals (Schlinke & Crain, 2013). This professional website is not to entertain users but instead to foster and sustain professional relationships (Claybaugh & Haseman, 2013). Business owners can utilize LinkedIn to conduct business-to-business research with potential contributors (Patino, Pitta, & Quinones, 2012). More than 190 million individuals utilize LinkedIn making this social media platform the number one platform for business purposes (Pliska, 2012). Eighty percent of business owners utilize LinkedIn as a tool to recruit effective and efficient staff (Bohmova, 2016). Restaurant owners use social networks to supplement the process of recruitment and selection of staff (Sanchís

Verdeguer et al., 2014). Notably, the major source of value representing business organizations is the employee; therefore, hiring is an act of responsibility that requires all information available via social media to select the best potential workers (Sanchís Verdeguer et al., 2014). Small family-style restaurant owners could utilize LinkedIn as a tool for employment recruitment.

Malhotra and Malhortra (2016) found many business owners have embraced Twitter as one of the best ways to communicate with their customers and other type of stakeholders; however, business owners do not leverage the power of Twitter fully. Twitter is a microblogging site where users can post short text (maximum 280 characters) updates called tweets to a network of people called followers (Jin & Phua, 2014). Business owners of family-style restaurants can influence the underwriting force fashioned by celebrities on Twitter and their capacity to achieve a significant number of followers through their tweets as an approach to expand their image equity by promising positive eWOM through their image (Jin & Phua, 2014). Business owners have the opportunity to have their messages shared by consumers, which gives business owners the ability to reach new customers (Wilson & Quinton, 2012). Malhotra and Malhortra's (2016) research suggested that business owners' tweets that provide new information about the company's products and services, tweets that refer to external validation and tweets that share customer stories and refer to customers, are more likely to be liked and retweeted than others. Restaurant owners can leverage Twitter strategically as a marketing tool to inform potential and current customers of special offers available only to their Twitter followers (Wright, Khanfar, Harrington, & Kizer, 2016).

## **Business Sales**

Alharbie (2015) explored independent factors of social media marketing, which results in positive business growth. With social media accessibility and affordability, small business owners can now execute marketing initiatives that have a wider reach and larger impact. Analysis of data revealed six factors of social media marketing that have positive effects on small business growth: social network reach, social news, low cost marketing, customer relationship, branding, and sales (Alharbie, 2015).

Jones, Borgman and Ulusoy (2015) studied the benefits of using social media sites for small businesses that operate in underserved regions. Small business owners must have a well thought out strategy for social media to be effective. Findings indicated the use of social media by small businesses has a positive impact on business growth in terms of increased traffic, awareness, and revenues (Jones, Borgman, & Ulusoy, 2015).

In establishing a link between consumer behavior and social media use, one must understand the impact on the marketplace and bottom-line for a business. Bronner and DeHoog (2014) focused on how social media is influencing consumer decisions, examining the relationship between factors like E-WOM, consumer experience, site relevance, and accessibility. Findings indicated higher ticket items require more in-depth searches on domain specific sites, like TripAdvisor, and open opinion sites, like Facebook (Bronner & DeHoog, 2014). Corstjens and Umbligs (2012) analyzed two real-world examples linking the amount of social media coverage to market performance and discovered negative social media had a more powerful impact on a brand in the marketplace than positive social media.

Smith (2013) used a quantitative study to determine that consumer social media experiences emit strong feelings and can influence future consumer behavior. Additional research could help understand how business owners are addressing this element of consumer marketing and establish best practices for implementing social media within a marketing plan (Smith, 2013). Powers, Advincula, Austin, Graiko, and Snyder (2012) concluded the digital world has better connected companies with consumers, as well as consumers with other consumers. Client loyalty is critical from different viewpoints. Online customers are utilizing social media sites, frequently looking for suppositions, brand recognition, and information regarding services (Pookulangara & Koesler, 2011). Luo and Zhang (2013) agreed consumer-created buzz does have a relationship with the overall value of a firm, and managers should consider establishing more positive social media buzz. Providing relevant content among friends in social media has a huge impact on customer loyalty.

Social media can affect the sales process at every step (Andzulis et al., 2012). Gupta (2016) concluded that social media has a great impact on the buyer's purchase decision. Social media users trust online reviews, and opinions from friends and strangers are trusted equally playing a huge role as to whether a customer will purchase a product or service (Gupta, 2016). Andzulis et al. (2012) recommended that organizations strategically integrate social media and selling a product or service at each step in the sales process.

Kuofie, Gholston and Hakim (2015) argued social media affects business owners' products, awareness, and sales. Small business owners have a chance to engage with their

customers with social media in various ways, ultimately building relationships that will encourage customers to purchase their product or services (Kuofie et al., 2015). Small business owners should pay attention to the development and sustainability of their social media marketing strategies at all costs to achieve longer-lasting successful results (Barutcu & Toma, 2013). If a small business owner places its priorities into building relationships instead of focusing on sales, sales will increase (Kuofie et al., 2015).

Rohm, Kaltcheva, and Milne (2013) argued business owners utilizing social media platforms could benefit from a plethora of positive outcomes, including immediate sales. The more the consumer interacts with the retailer, the more loyal the consumer is to the retailer and the brand, which in turn yields positive sales performance (Rapp et al., 2013). Thach, Lease, and Barton (2016) found business owners who use multiple platforms benefit from the greatest increase in sales.

DiPietro, Crews, Gustafson, and Strick (2012) found that leaders in the restaurant industry were unsure of how social media could be used to their benefit; however, restaurants use social media websites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn to advertise to customers and obtain feedback. Restaurant owners who use social media websites gain the advantage of increased customer satisfaction, increased revenues, and productive employees (DiPietro et al., 2012). Kwok and Yu (2013) stated that restaurant owners draw in new business and increase sales by using social media websites.

Whiting and Williams (2013) expected ROI to increase for business owners who use social media marketing. Public Relations Society of America reported that in 2016, over half of the 90% of the active U.S. business owners would increase sales by using

social media as part of the total marketing mix (Public Relations Tactics, 2016). Kumar and Mirchandani (2012) stated that social media marketing efforts used to increase sales, profits, brand awareness, and positive WOMM must relay the right message to the right individual. If business owners do not take the time to understand how to use social media as a marketing tool, business owners could cause potential damage to their organizations by missed opportunities for growth and sales (Li, 2012).

### **Transition**

Small business owners understand the advantages of using social media as a marketing tool; however, some of these owners do not leverage social media marketing strategies to increase sales. Grounded in RM theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies small family-style restaurant owners use to increase sales. The target population consisted of small business owners from five family-style restaurants in Maryland who successfully use social media marketing strategies to increase sales. Social media marketing for SB owners of family-style restaurants can create positive social change through business owners showing future entrepreneurs how technology can help them launch and grow their businesses faster.

Section 1 included a background of the problem, the problem and purpose statement, nature of the study, research questions, and conceptual framework. I provided operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, and significance of the study in Section 1. A review of the scholarly literature was included to ensure the reader had a basis of the purpose of the study. In section 2 I addressed aspects of the research study such as role of

the researcher, participants, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection, data organization, data analysis, and reliability and validity. I concluded with a discussion of what method of coding authenticated and validated the data collected in this proposed study. Section 3 includes an overview and analysis of data collected and critical findings.

## **Section 2: The Project**

In Section 2, I include the sampling method, sample size, and eligibility criteria for the participants. In addition, I cover my data collection techniques, data organization techniques, and data analysis, as they are key elements of this research study. This section expands on Section 1 and provides an in-depth review. In Section 3, I present the findings of the study.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore social media marketing strategies small family-style restaurant owners use to increase sales. The target population comprised five family-style restaurants small business owners, located in Maryland, who have been in business more than 2 years, and successfully use social media marketing strategies to increase sales. The implications for social change included the potential for business owners to improve small family-style restaurant social media marketing strategies, which could increase sales and employment opportunities. Community stakeholders stand to benefit from an enhanced standard of living, realized through increased household income.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role as a qualitative researcher in a qualitative multiple-case study is to explore a phenomenon using a variety of data sources from multiple perspectives (Qu & Dumay, 2011). I was the primary data instrument in the data collection process of this study by conducting each of the face-to-face interviews with the participants. Berger (2015) determined the role of a qualitative researcher is to conduct observation and

interviews as well as gather documents and artifacts that highlight the phenomenon of a qualitative study. A qualitative researcher role is to become a learner in the study process (Berger, 2015). Xu and Storr (2012) articulated that a qualitative researcher role is to interrogate the data and provide informed commentary. As a small business owner in Maryland, I had business experience with developing social media marketing strategies with restaurants and experience establishing a customer base, as well as living in the same geographic region as the participants of the study.

Adhering to the Belmont Report by taking steps to ensure respect, beneficence, and justice for all human participants involved in the study (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979) was important. The Belmont Report assists researchers in the application of basic ethical principles through informed consent, risks and benefits assessment, and selection of participants (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). The Belmont Report includes ethical principles that are in place to enforce the protection of human research subjects (Haahr, Norlyk, & Hall, 2014). To comply with the Belmont Report's ethical guidelines, I upheld respect for and the autonomy of all research participants.

Accepting the responsibility of conducting ethical research included respecting participants' privacy, ensuring full disclosure, and minimizing potential bias (Lunnay, Borlagdan, McNaughton, & Ward, 2015). Rubin and Rubin (2012) indicated that the quality of the data depends on the ability for a researcher to reduce bias and validate the correct interpretation of the phenomenon. My goal in this qualitative multiple-case study was to gather data without bias. My experience in the area of social media marketing and

helping small business owners develop effective marketing strategies to increase revenue since 2013 created the potential for bias. To refrain from researcher bias, use of bracketing methods included taking notes during data collection and analysis and asking open-ended questions that invited interviewees to tell the story about their experience. Bracketing can increase the rigor of a study and enhance data analysis and findings (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). Member checking is a quality control technique used to enhance the accuracy, credibility, and validity of participants' responses and qualitative research findings (Harper & Cole, 2012). Member checking is useful because participants clarify responses or provide additional data to confirm the accuracy of the data collected and/or to affirm the accuracy of the study findings (Harvey, 2015). I used member checking by asking participants to review my interpretations for accuracy which helped reduce researcher bias (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

As the primary research instrument for this qualitative case study, I developed interview protocols (Appendix B) as the basis for the semistructured interview questions. Jacob and Furgerson (2012) indicated that an interview protocol is a tool researcher's use through the interview process. Semistructured interviews, according to Cridland, Jones, Caputi, and Magee (2015), are beneficial in helping the researcher remain focused on fully addressing the research questions, avoiding nuances, and providing the researcher with a better comprehension of the participant's experiences. An interview protocol is more than a list of interview questions; it also extends the procedural level of interviewing and includes a script of what to say before, during, and after the interview, as well as includes prompts to remind the researcher of the information to collect (Jacob

& Furgerson, 2012). Rabionet (2011) determined an interview protocol is important and the protocol should include statements of confidentiality, consent, options to withdraw, and use and scope of the results to establish the line of communication that will elicit the best information.

### **Participants**

Qualitative researchers focus on a smaller number of participants with a deeper exploration of their experience to gain an in-depth understanding missed by quantitative research (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Värlander (2008) screened study participants for experience, current role, and knowledge of research topic and acquired prior consent of each participant. The rationale for selecting participants that meet the selection criteria is to gain an understanding of the phenomenon within relevant circumstances (Stake, 2006). Screening of small family-style restaurant owners ensured alignment between the participants and the overall research question (Asioli, 2011). According to Englander (2012), the researcher is responsible for finding and selecting participants who meet the expected criteria of the phenomenon. Prospective participants for this study must have met the following criteria: must be located in Maryland, have experience with social media marketing strategies to increase sales, is a small family-style restaurant owner, and have been in business for at least 2 years.

Similar to Cronin-Gilmore's (2012) study, gaining access to a purposive sample of five successful small family-style restaurant owners started through contacting the existing network of small business owners through email and telephone communication using local business directories. According to Englander (2012), the researcher is

responsible for finding and selecting participants who meet the expected criteria of the phenomenon. Robinson (2014) noted researchers could recruit participants by way of advertising, which includes methods, such as online, print, and face-to-face; therefore, I recruited participants by posting advertisements on social media as well as visiting small family-style restaurants and advertising face-to-face. I reached out to my existing network of business owners to identify five small family-style restaurant owners. I also leveraged advertising through social media to gain access to participants.

White and Hind (2015) verbalized that establishing a good rapport with participants is vital to generating a productive qualitative research study. Patton (2015) mentioned that building mutual trust and appreciation and showing interest in the participants' experiences could strengthen working relationships. Relationship development required a shared understanding of purpose and expectations (Ward, 2013), which I developed as I explained the purpose of the study, the interview process, and answered any questions prior to the start of the interview. I fostered a working relationship with potential participants through personal communication at the onset of the study via email, Facebook, phone, and in-person visits. To build a working relationship with participants, I explained the purpose of the research, the research procedures, and addressed any questions or concerns regarding the research and research process that participants had. To enhance my working relationship with participants, I reminded the participants that all communications would remain private and confidential. Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested that people are more willing to participate in research when the project involves solving a problem. To establish a working relationship with

research participants, I began the dialogue with participants by emphasizing how helpful and beneficial their participation in the study could be to helping small family-style restaurant owners increase sales through social media marketing.

### **Research Method and Design**

I chose a qualitative research method for this research project. Qualitative researchers aim to dig deeper into participants' experiences by focusing on the how (Mancuso & Stuth, 2011). The purpose of qualitative research is to answer what, why, and how inquiries, instead of how many or how often (Mukhopadyay & Gupta, 2014). Branthwaite and Patterson (2011) suggested that qualitative research is a unique approach that brings understanding and appreciation of the consumers' reactions. Providing insight into what the person experiences was the essence of the chosen research method (Kramer-Kile, 2012). Qualitative research involves delineating the participants' perspectives and collecting data through participant dialogue (Wisdom, Cavaleri, Onwuegbuzie, & Green, 2012). Qualitative methods are beneficial for generating in-depth information that would be hard to quantify, such as interpretations, opinions, views, and experiences (Bristowe, Selman, & Murtagh, 2015). Researchers using a qualitative method will typically collect verbal data from a small number of participants to determine specific patterns. Given this, the reason for the study was to explore social media marketing strategies that small family-style restaurant owners use to increase sales.

Quantitative researchers use statistical data, in addition to large and random representations (Trafimow, 2014). Barczak (2015) contended that in quantitative studies, the researcher will focus on measuring and examining the casual relationship between

variables, and a qualitative researcher will concentrate on investigating or exploring the research problem. The use of quantitative research narrows the understanding of the study (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). Taking a quantitative approach to this doctoral study would have required a larger selection of participants and would have entailed testing hypothesis that would not complement the purpose of this research (Yoshikawa, Kalil, Weisner, & Way, 2013). The use of quantitative methods would have made it difficult for researchers to explore ideas and themes of the phenomenon, as well as gain an understanding of participants' experiences through face-to-face dialogue (Moustakas, 1994).

Mixed-methods researchers use a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods (Hayes et al., 2013). Mixed-method is an appropriate approach when neither a quantitative approach nor a qualitative approach are sufficient independently to delineate a research topic or when research requires one method to support the other (Wisdom et al., 2012). Mixed methods research could constrain the researcher's ability to produce accurate research results and sufficient data due to a lack of sufficient available data and adequate survey responses (Mukhopadyay & Gupta, 2014). Naidu and Patel (2013) suggested the most appropriate research method depends on the research question and goals. Mixed methods researchers examine the problem instead of understanding the problem by using a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods (Sparks, 2012). My purpose in this doctoral study was to gain a deep understanding of social media marketing strategies small family-style restaurant owners use to increase

sales and taking a qualitative approach was more appropriate to use to help me accomplish the purpose of the research study.

### **Research Design**

I chose a multiple case study design for this research project. Yin (2012) stated that case studies include collecting detailed information by using a variety of data collection procedures over a certain length of time. Case study research provides an understanding of individuals' experiences, issues, insights, and developmental pathways in rich detail (Duff, 2014). Almutairi, Gardner, and McCarthy (2014) noted researchers use the case study design when trying to gain insight into a problem where there is extremely limited information. A multiple case study design allowed me to gather in-depth responses via open-ended interviews with small family-style restaurant owners who use social media marketing strategies to increase sales. Case studies are the most appropriate research design when the goal is to explore a complex concept via an intensive real-world analysis (DeMassis & Kotlar, 2014). El Haddad (2015) argued that a case study design is most appropriate when there is a lack of research on a problem within a specific sector. I intended to explore the marketing strategies of small family-style restaurant owners, which researchers did not address in previous studies. A multiple case study approach is useful, because researchers utilize multiple subjects and data sources to analyze a phenomenon in its natural setting (Wahyuni, 2012).

Other qualitative designs, including phenomenological and narrative, were not appropriate, because they would not have included analysis of secondary data. Case studies are better for analysis of a process as opposed to experience and attitudes (Yin,

2014). The phenomenological research design received consideration for this research study; however, a researcher in a phenomenological study can capture the experiences of individuals from their perspectives and uncover themes that challenge structural or normative assumptions (Tirgari, 2012). Moutstakas (1994) noted in phenomenological research perception is knowledge and perception adds insight into the experience that cannot be doubted. During the phenomenology interview process, the researcher would seek to discover the logic and the interrelationships of the phenomenon under study (Ejimabo, 2015). The purpose of this research did not warrant the use of a phenomenological design, because I was not seeking to determine descriptions or interrelationships of phenomenon; therefore, this design was not appropriate for this study.

Bernard (2013) determined narrative research consists of studying a phenomenon from the reflections of participants and data collection includes extensive interviews with the participants, observations, and documents. Hancock and Epston (2013) noted a narrative approach translates ideas and practices of individuals into a story with meaning and purpose. Hanson, Balmer, and Giardino (2011) indicated written narratives might provide reflections about participants' experiences to generate detailed stories and longer written reflections, which may provide the data needed to build in-depth understanding about research questions. The narrative research design is not a good design selection for this study because the focus of this study was to explore social media strategies small family-style restaurant owners utilize. A narrative or phenomenological design would not have permitted a substantial contribution to the business environment given the lack of

analysis of secondary data, such as marketing and business strategy documentation, customer base information, and profitability records.

When conducting qualitative research, scholars must achieve data saturation (O'Reily & Parker, 2012). Fusch and Ness (2015) noted data saturation occurs when additional data collection does not result in new information, coding, or themes. Undermining the importance of data saturation affects the quality of the research findings (Gibbins, Bhatia, Forbes & Reid, 2014). Fusch and Ness (2015) indicated that failure to achieve data saturation affects content validity. To achieve data saturation, I continued interviewing participants until no new information emerged from these sources.

### **Population and Sampling**

Sanderson and Lea (2012) described purposive sampling as a nonprobability sampling strategy in which a researcher selects participants based on their experience and knowledge of the subject. Purposive sampling is appropriate when difficulties arise in obtaining a list of members of a specific population (Barratt, Ferris, & Lenton, 2015). Walker (2012) indicated that researchers could use purposeful sampling to research a group of people who have the best information about the problem under investigation.

Öberseder, Schlegelmilch, and Gruber (2011) developed a sample population of knowledgeable participants through purposive sampling to ensure an appropriate and effective sample size. The sample size for this case study consisted of five small family-style restaurant owners in Maryland who utilize social media marketing strategies to increase revenue. Trotter (2012) stipulated that researchers offer different recommendations for determining a suitable sample size to reach saturation. Marshall et

al. (2013) argued that case study researchers should use a minimum sample of four participants. Dworkin (2012) maintained that a sample size of at least five participants is necessary to achieve saturation.

Saturation is the key to excellent qualitative work (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). Trotter (2012) described saturation as the means that researchers take to reach the point at which participants no longer offer new themes and researchers have captured all accurate information through the data collection process. Marshall et al.'s (2013) suggestion of conducting interviews until new data was no longer emerging supports my purposive sampling method for establishing a population of five family-style restaurant owners to gain proper data saturation from a suitable population. Through a purposive sample size, saturation was obtainable (Walker, 2012). An appropriate sample size is one that is adequate to address the research question but not too big that the amount of data makes analysis prohibitive (Sandelowski, 1995). In addition, the number of participants required to achieve saturation in a qualitative study could range from five to fifty (Dworkin, 2012). The proposed study included five small family-style restaurant business owners. Yin (2014) outlined criteria for case study replication noting the goal is to select cases with similarly predictable results that would provide support for the research question. Achieving saturation involved conducting interviews until there were no other themes to identify.

The criteria for selecting participants for this study were small family-style restaurant owners in Maryland who utilize social media marketing strategies to increase revenue. I selected an interview setting that was convenient and comfortable for the

participants' safety and confidentiality. Mikėnė, Gaižauskaitė, and Valavičienė (2013) indicated that methodological literature recommends that researchers conduct qualitative interviews in an environment that is comfortable and non-disturbing for the participants. Jacob and Furgerson (2012) indicated libraries are a great place to conduct interviews, because they are easy to locate, safe, non-threatening, and quiet which allows a researcher to produce a quality recording. Houghton et al. (2013) noted conducting research in a public environment could be uncomfortable and create a problem because of the risk of additional bystanders and not knowing who to obtain informed consent from and by what means.

### **Ethical Research**

Ethical research involves the protection of human participants (Stiles, Epstein, Poythress, & Edens, 2012). Voluntary participant consent is an essential principle of ethical research (Won Oak, 2012). I asked participants who agreed to participate to sign an informed consent form acknowledging their risk and confirming proper methodological systems were in place. The informed consent documents explained data collection, storage, and utilization to each participant (Griffith, 2014). All participants in the study agreed to participate by signing a consent form. The form contained the researcher's contact information, committee members' contact information, and a complete description of the purpose of the study. Participants received a copy of their signed consent form.

An informed consent process makes it easier to make changes to arrangements throughout the study, as researchers cannot guarantee the collection of data from

participants; therefore, the researcher must inform the participant of the right to withdraw from the study at any time (Houghton et al., 2013). Participants could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants did not receive any incentives for participating in this study. It is vital to remain ethical during research, which a researcher can accomplish by adhering to a governing body, attaining informed consent, informing participants about the role of the researcher, intentions for the interview data, and ensuring the privacy of the participants (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Sending participants a summary of my findings helped ensure the accuracy of my interpretations and solidified the trust of my study participants. After the completion of my study, I sent the participants a summary of the findings.

Corti (2012) defined data archiving as a process of securing, preserving, and storing research data and resources for future audits to verify research findings or future exploitations to advance research. The consent forms, as well as the files, transcripts, and recordings from the research, will be stored on a private encrypted external hard drive for 5 years after the study concludes to ensure the protection of the rights of the participants (Cronin-Gilmore, 2012). After 5 years, I will permanently delete the data.

An Institutional Review Board (IRB) examination is imperative for approved research involving human participants (Tsan & Tsan, 2015). The final doctoral study manuscript includes the Walden University IRB approval number. Participant recruitment for my study did not launch before IRB approval. I assigned numbers to each participant to ensure adequate ethical protection of participants by keeping all participants' responses confidential to mitigate bias, respect participants' privacy, and protect their interests.

Using only the assigned interview numbers throughout the study removed any confidential or personal information about the interviewee or organization, and provided confidentiality and security for participants.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Yin (2014) identified an interview as one of the most important sources of case study evidence. Brayda and Boyce (2014) determined interviews can be face-to-face (i.e., questionnaires or asking questions), over the telephone, or via group interview. Neuman (2014) determined face-to-face interviews provide the advantage of inserting the researcher into the interviewee's contextual environment. Parker (2014) found that unstructured interviews comprise informal discussions with participants, and structured interviews include a list of established questions asked in a specific order with a limited number of common responses provided.

Neuman (2014) asserted that the individual using a qualitative method of research is the primary person who collects data. I served as the primary data collection instrument for this multiple case study by conducting semistructured face-to-face interviews with five small family-style restaurant owners who use social media marketing strategies to increase sales in the Baltimore, Maryland, metro area. Semistructured interviews allow researchers to ask open-ended questions without predetermined answers (Panagiotakopoulos, 2014). The objective of semistructured interviews is to collect data without influencing the story of the interviewee (Denzin, 2012).

Rubin and Rubin (2012) recommended defining a protocol to ensure a common approach before beginning the interviews in a qualitative study. An interview protocol is

a procedure guide to help direct the researcher through the interview process to ensure the collection of all data from the participant and includes a script on what the interviewer should say to the participant before, during, and at the conclusion of the interview (Jacobs & Furgerson, 2012). Rubin and Rubin (2012) determined following a protocol will keep a researcher focused on the topic and force a researcher to anticipate problems. For interviews, I used an interview protocol form as a data-collection instrument (see Appendix B). Yin (2011) determined best practices for a semistructured qualitative interview as (a) not guiding the interviewee, (b) not dominating the conversation, (c) maintaining impartiality, (d) following protocol, and (e) developing follow-up questions during the interview. As the researcher in this study, I followed Yin's (2011) interview best practices. The semistructured interviews in this study contained four open-ended questions (See Appendix A) to determine how each small family-style restaurant owner utilized social media marketing strategies to develop a customer base and the impact social media marketing has on business revenues. I recorded and transcribed the interviews.

According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), follow-up interviews enhance the achievement of new interpretations, accomplishes a profound understanding, and adds rich information that assists in the presentation of strong and vivid evidence for a conclusion. The member checking process validates an understanding of the correct data collected and the correct interpretation of the data collected by the researcher from the participants strengthening accuracy, validity, and credibility (Harper & Cole, 2012). Member checking is a quality control technique used to enhance the accuracy, credibility,

and validity of participants' responses and qualitative research findings (Harper & Cole, 2012). Member checking is useful, because participants clarify responses or provide additional data to confirm the accuracy of the data collected and/or to affirm the accuracy of the study findings (Harvey, 2015). I used member checking rather than an intrusive transcript review to enhance the reliability and validity of the study's data collection instruments. I used NVivo software to validate the data I analyzed and coded after I collected data to identify themes.

### **Data Collection Technique**

Researchers who use a case study research design utilize techniques that will allow them to investigate a phenomenon while focusing on the dynamics of the participants' experiences in a real-life context (Raeburn, Schmied, Hungerford, & Cleary, 2015). Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) noted qualitative researchers rely on in-depth standardized interviews often used in multiple case studies for data collection until no new information emerges from data collection. Yin (2014) identified six sources of evidence to include (a) documentation, (b) archival records, (c) interviews, (d) direct observations, (e) participant-observations, and (f) physical artifacts. I used two sources of data collection, semistructured interviews and documentation. Documentation included social media marketing plans, social media budgets, social media data reports, and financial reports.

The interview is the most critical source of data collection (Yin, 2014). Well-informed interviewees can provide critical insight into the phenomenon of inquiry in addition to leading the researcher to additional sources of evidence (Bryman & Bell,

2015). Disadvantages of the interview are the misinterpretation or misunderstanding of questions and answers (e.g., because of personal prejudices or convictions), as well as making assumptions about what the interviewee may answer based on prior responses (Baškarada, 2014).

According to Bourgeault (2012), a multi-method qualitative study involves the collection and triangulated analysis of documents and key informant interviews. In addition to semistructured interviews, I augmented data collected from the interview with each company's electronic social media documents, such as data reports, financial reports, and marketing plans to compare the data trends. Singh (2014) determined documents are inputs to the interview guide that are useful for saving time in interviews, for tracing the history of the organizations and statements made by key people in the organizations, and counteracting the biases of respondents. An advantage of utilizing company documents as secondary data is that analyzing the content of documents could help researchers in their search to develop themes and patterns (Vasimoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). A disadvantage of using company documents as a data collection technique is the possibility of insufficient details or inaccurate information (Casey & Murphy, 2009).

After approval from Walden University IRB, the following process took place to conduct the proposed study. I requested and received permission to conduct this research study from Walden University IRB and to gather contact information of potential participants. Potential participants received the informed consent form during initial contact. Contacting potential study participants to clarify any questions about the

informed consent form is part of the follow-up process. Participants delivered a signed informed consent form indicating the study participants' voluntary agreement to participate in the study in person or electronically through email. Participants scheduled interviews convenient to their schedules. I held interviews in a public location convenient, confidential, and comfortable for the participant. Qu and Dumay (2011) maintained that the qualitative interview is an effective and convenient way to collect data. At the beginning of each interview, the participant acknowledged their rights on the informed consent form. Data collection took place face-to-face. Data collection should include thick and rich information on the participants' perspective of a specific issue (Wahyuni, 2012). Once data collection has taken place, I imported data into Nvivo 11 software. Recording of interviews occurred by using a digital device, such as an iPad. During the recording of the interviews, I made notes of the respondents' nonverbal communication, vocal inflection, and tone. Before importing textual transcripts into Microsoft Word and commencing the process of data analysis, an interview summary went back to the participants to verify the accuracy of the data through a process of member checking as suggested by Faseleh-Jahromi, Moattari, and Peyrovi (2013).

Yilmaz (2013) stated that member checking is an essential step in the data collection process, and the researcher should ensure they correctly document and understand the participant's answers to the interview inquiries. Incorporating member checking into the design of the study ensured confidentiality (Houghton et al., 2013). Assuring research credibility and dependability occurs by allowing participants to confirm the validity of codes, themes, and study findings interpretively through member

checking (Cope, 2014). I employed member checking as a technique to confirm the accuracy of participant interview responses and study findings. I emailed each participant a copy of my interpretations of their responses and conducted follow-up interviews to confirm or clarify each participant's responses through member checking.

### **Data Organization Technique**

Radcliff (2013) noted researchers use diaries or reflective journals to help them accurately recall their research experiences and participants' interview responses. Koopman-Boyden and Richardson (2013) stressed that a diary could capture the immediacy and spontaneity of a particular experience, thereby maximizing a researcher's future recall accurately and minimizing retrospection bias. Ponterotto (2014) noted qualitative researchers who utilize a reflective journal can mitigate personal beliefs and meanings and can enhance their ability to remain impartial about the phenomena they are researching. I used a reflective journal to keep track of responses.

Coding can also help researchers manage text data (Constantine, 2013). Without a case study database, commingling of the narrative in the case study with the interpretations of the data could make inspecting raw data nearly impossible (Yin, 2014). Constantine (2013) described how the computer revolution included software for text data analysis through themes. The use of computers for qualitative data analysis (i.e., CAQDAS) has practical advantages in comparison to more traditional methods, such as cutting quotations and sorting them into cardboard boxes (Odena, 2013). Researchers are obligated to be clear about their chosen coding procedures to help the reader comprehend the research data (Turner, Kim, & Andersen, 2013). The coding system and data

organization technique for this study entailed assigning participants an alphanumeric code to ensure the confidentiality of their identities.

The data organizing process can help researchers identify themes, patterns, and contradictory information or interpretations of the data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). I utilized NVivo software to synthesize themes and patterns for further analysis and understanding. I organized collected data by establishing themes through NVivo to create codes and understand emerging themes of the data. I titled interview audio files with a unique identifier code assigned to each participant and maintained an inventory of documents for each company included in the case studies. Data resided in a series of personally produced documentation, such as Word documents and Excel spreadsheets. Reviewing all data creates a quality analysis (Yin, 2014). Confidentiality and anonymity involve assigning generic codes to each participant (Gibson, Benson, & Brand, 2013). Each document had a unique identifier code in the file title. I kept a list of audio and digital files in a spreadsheet with identifying details, such as coded identifier number, file title, file type, document author(s), category from the list above, and document date. I stored field notes in a Word document and stored all digital files related to the research in a password-protected folder while research was underway.

Ritch (2014) examined transcripts utilizing double hermeneutics to understand the participants' application and meaning by developing themes and grouping data into relationships with other broader themes. Organizing the interview data into emerging themes will benefit further data analysis (Rich, 2014). Herranz and Nin (2014) recommended that investigators safely store all research data in a secure area to protect

the privacy and confidentiality of participants' identity and their contributions to the research project. Although the length of time to store research data varies (Torrance, 2012), the Inter-University for Political and Social Research (2012) noted that the ability to store and archive data over a long-term ensures data preservation and protection from obsolescence, loss, or irreversible damage. Once the research was complete, I removed the audio files and documents provided by the participants from the folder and stored all digital files on an external hard drive in a safe deposit box, which I will hold for 5 years, and after 5 years, I will destroy all data files.

### **Data Analysis**

Triangulation is a method of integrating multiple data sources to help understand the results (Denzin, 2012). Patton (2005) proposed four types of triangulation in case studies: (a) data triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) methodological triangulation. Per Patton's data triangulation proposals, I collected information from semistructured interviews and company documents to corroborate my findings with each section of the literature review. Data triangulation involves the use of different data collection methods to enhance transferability and robustness of findings (Walshe, 2011). Triangulation increases the credibility of case studies by improving both internal consistency and generalizability (Hussein, 2015). The purpose of data analysis is to uncover themes that answer the central research question (Denzin, 2012).

The data analysis process includes preparation, interpretation, and analysis of the data for meaning (Yin, 2014). In this case, I used thematic data analysis to explore the social media marketing strategies SB owners of family-style restaurants need to expand

business markets and sales. Thematic analysis is a process to conduct an analysis of qualitative data (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015).

Five stages of thematic data analysis include (a) collecting the data, (b) separating the data into groups, (c) regrouping the data into themes, (d) assessing the information, and (e) developing conclusions (Yin, 2014). I followed Yin's (2014) five stages while also incorporating both Stake's (1995) and Merriam's (1998) notions of gaining impressions and observations from participants. Percy et al. (2015) identified three types of thematic analysis: theoretical analysis, inductive analysis, and thematic analysis with a constant comparison. In a theoretical analysis, a researcher has predetermined themes to examine during the data analysis but remains open to the possibilities of new themes emerging from the analysis (Percy et al., 2015); therefore, thematic analysis was most appropriate for this case study.

To perform data analysis, I transcribed the interviews and used codes to identify recurring themes. The coding process consisted of developing labels consistent with the research questions and purpose of the study. Specifically, to dissect and analyze the data associated with the social media marketing strategies used by each target company (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). A review of the transcribed data and identification of themes using a highlighter facilitated coding and categorization of the data. Next, data was categorized, which involves reviewing the data further and clustering information by words and phrases (Rademaker, Grace, & Curda, 2012). Finally, the process of data analysis involved reviewing codes and any additional data, drawing on system theories

and the central research question to ensure connections drawn reflect the foundation of the study (Noble & Smith, 2014).

After collecting the data, I analyzed the data. Stake (1995) defined data analysis as a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations. From Stake's perspective, researchers must take apart impressions and observations (Yazan, 2015). Stake (1995) admitted that researchers must find suitable forms of analysis for research and reflection. Merriam (1998) agreed with Stake's data analysis proposition that the simultaneous collection and analysis of data is a quintessential attribute of qualitative research design, which distinguishes it from the research-oriented by positivistic epistemology.

Data analysis involves reviewing the data to discover meaningful themes, patterns, and descriptions that answer the central research questions of the study (Yin, 2011a). I organized the collected data in a category relating to social media marketing strategies and selected the initial categories deriving from the findings and from the literature review, such as the Facebook marketing, Twitter marketing, Instagram marketing, customer engagement techniques, and relationship marketing. Although these classifications are an idea of what the categories were, data collected dictated the true categories (Yin, 2014). Other categories emerged during data analysis. If new information did not fit the initial categories but emerged during subsequent interviews establishing additional categories, a review of previous interviews for information that should have been included in the new category was the appropriate action (Baškarada,

2014). I used Yin's five-step data analysis process that included compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding the data (Yin, 2011b).

Nvivo 11 is a tool specifically designed to compile data for analysis of qualitative cases into specific words or phrases (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). I utilized NVivo 11 software to categorize and sort data for identification of relevant themes. In this study, designing coding themes coordinated with the research questions, as suggested by Stuckey (2014). Coding is the process of tagging segmented data with category names or descriptive words and then grouping the data (Wilson, 2012). Coding of data is essential in identifying patterns and themes (Smit, 2012). I used the auto-coding feature in the NVivo 11 software for data analysis, which consisted of identifying similarities in data and prevalent themes, thereby observing consistencies among the perspectives of participants. I used NVivo 11 software to input, store, code, and explore themes and patterns. Garrett-Howard (2012) noted researchers can use data analysis software for creating themes. The NVivo 11 software is suitable for identifying themes (Garrett-Howard, 2012). Advantages of using NVivo 11 included storage of data in a single location with easy access to information and the ability to use continuous coding schemes (Garrett-Howard, 2012). Utilizing NVivo increased the vitality and rigor in qualitative research (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011).

After decoding the data, consideration of the data under several arrangements until emerging themes are satisfactory took place, which is the process of reassembling the data (Yin, 2011b). Successful reassembling was evident in the emergence of themes in the data analysis. The next step was interpreting the data, which is the process of

making sense of the data (Turner, 2010). A crucial component of data analysis was an accurate interpretation of the data (Carcary, 2011). Concluding the data was the final step and is the development of a sequence of statements while noting the findings of a study from the viewpoint of a larger set of ideas (Buchanan, 2013; Yin, 2011b). The results from the interview required an analysis and coding to determine if there are any emerging themes between participant experiences of the phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

In qualitative analysis, the conjunction of multiple conceptual frameworks, prior research, and newly acquired knowledge point toward a worldview for social change (Trochim, Donnelly, & Arora, 2015). Data analysis in view of RM theory helps to interpret the meaning of data collected (Denzin, 2012). Investigating a problem while concurrently triangulating multiple sources and methods will enhance a researcher's understanding of the problem under study (Varaki, Floden, & Kalatehjafarabadi, 2015). By examining social media marketing strategies in small family-style restaurants through the RM theory, I compared the data collected with established theories relevant to the phenomenon and used member checking to verify data.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability and validity are essential to ensuring that researchers adhere to the highest standards of academic research (Noble & Smith, 2015). Validity in qualitative research refers to the researcher assuring that the methodology, design, and data collection tools and techniques are suitable to answer the research question (Leung, 2015). Leung (2015) further suggested that reliability in qualitative research is dependent upon consistency of research procedures. Displaying reliability and validity in qualitative

studies by employing principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability can confirm the rigor of the research process (Auer et al., 2015; Valizadeh et al., 2012).

### **Reliability**

Reliability is the consistency and transferability of the research procedures used in a case study (Yin, 2014). Using the appropriate research methodology ensured the quality of data interpretation would not only be reliable but also consistent with the intent of the study (Akerlind, 2012). To establish rigor within the qualitative field, researchers must create trust. Trustworthiness and data management are vital to the success of qualitative studies (White, Oelke, & Friesen, 2012). Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability all contribute to trust in a study (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013).

Dependability is the extent to which an independent researcher can replicate the study (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). Houghton et al. (2013) suggested researchers increase dependability by maintaining records about research decisions made during the entire study process. While using reliability and validity in quantitative research is appropriate, rigor in qualitative research supports confidence in the findings of a qualitative study (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Rigor involves making sure that the research methodology, design are in alignment with the research purpose, and that the research process maintains attention to every detail (Barusch, Gringeri, & George, 2011). Rigor includes four elements: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Barusch et al., 2011; Petty et al., 2012; Watkins, 2012).

In addition to validity and reliability, data quality ensured the dependability of my case study. To enhance the dependability of my case study, I followed Stake's (1995) four triangulation strategies: data source, investigator, theory, and methodology. Finally, to enhance the dependability of my study, I utilized member checking. Harvey (2015) stated member checking is a strategy scholars employ to obtain participants' insight on their conclusions and recommendations and to verify correct analyses of data. The member checking process included the researcher verifying the analyses of feelings, facts, experiences, beliefs, and values to establish credibility and to eliminate researchers' bias and misreporting (Anney, 2014). Koelsch (2013) observed the member checking exercise could serve to validate the primary purpose of the qualitative case study researcher.

### **Validity**

Validity is the accuracy and legitimacy of research findings (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). Research validity and reliability are common concepts in quantitative research but also applicable in qualitative research since researchers must establish credibility using either method (Olsen, McAllister, Grinnell, Walters, Appunn, 2016).

**Credibility.** Credibility is the degree to which the research findings are trustworthy (Odena, 2013). Hussein (2015) noted in research studies scholars could use data triangulation to validate research instruments as well as to overcome challenges and biases with a single method, observer, and theory. Triangulation refers to collecting, exploring, and examining multiple perspectives, data sources, theoretical frameworks, and methodological paradigms comparatively to develop an affirmed or confirmed

understanding of study findings (Azulai & Rankin, 2012). I used methodological triangulation to ensure credibility by using semistructured interviews, collecting company documents, viewing social media platforms, and asking open-ended interview questions. The use of methodological and data triangulation increases the internal validity and creditability of case study research (Baškarada, 2014). Assuring research creditability occurs by allowing participants to confirm the validity of codes, themes, and study findings interpretively through member checking (Cope, 2014). Performing member checks with each participant can validate the conclusion of transcribed data (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Member checking is an important quality control process in which participants have the opportunity to review statements for accuracy (Harper & Cole, 2012). Member checking is appropriate with each participant by calling the participants on the telephone and relaying the gathered information to the participants to verify the correct interpretation of the data. I solicited each participant's review of the summary of their responses to affirm the accuracy, credibility, and validity of the study and to seek to confirm or clarify each participant's responses through member checking. I utilized member checking to guarantee that the data I collected was a precise reflection of each participants' responses.

**Transferability.** Transferability can establish trustworthiness in qualitative studies (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Transferability, an element of rigor, involves the capacity to apply the findings in a similar situation or context (Houghton et al., 2013). A key strategy for supporting transferability is providing an in-depth description for the readers (Carter et al., 2014). Marshall and Rossman (2011) noted researchers need a

thorough description of the original nature of the study to make an informed decision regarding its applicability, or transferability, to their situation. Documenting the research process, such as providing specific descriptions of the research population sample, as well as the demographic and geographic boundaries of the study, can support the transferability of the research study results (Griffith, 2013). To make it possible for other scholars to follow my research procedures to generate similar or identical results, I thoroughly explained the research context and assumptions. I also ensured that my doctoral study included precise information about the research participants, population, sample, demographical and geographical inclusions, research method and design, data collection instruments and techniques, data organizational techniques, and data analysis.

**Confirmability.** Confirmability is the degree to which the findings of the study are a reflection of the sentiments of the participants and not a reflection of the researcher's personal biases (Hanson et al., 2011; Siemiatycki, 2012). Houghton et al. (2013) indicated that researchers closely link confirmability to dependability in referring to the neutrality and accuracy of the data. To strengthen the confirmability of the qualitative data, researchers can use a rigorous audit trail (Singh, 2014). A rigorous audit trail involves outlining the decisions made throughout the research process that provides reasoning for the methods used and interpretations of the data. For this study, I used NVivo software to help me achieve and maintain a good comprehensive audit trail of decisions made throughout the data collection and data analysis process. The software has a query tools feature that allowed me to audit results and identify excessive emphasis on infrequent findings that could benefit and support my research efforts to identify

social media strategies that small family-style restaurant owners can execute to increase sales.

I provided an in-depth account of the data collection and analysis process in this study. The provision of these details allows for an audit trail that enables the reader to examine and judge the logic utilized in analyzing the collected data and reaching the conclusions noted by the researcher (Hanson et al., 2011). As suggested by Houghton et al. (2013), the confirmability through audit trail rigor is achievable by outlining the decisions made throughout the research process. I used audit trails to not only provide a solid methodological reference for other researchers but also to provide an opportunity for reflective reasoning on chosen themes or categories, interpretations, and criticism as the study progresses (Johnson & Waterfield, 2004).

**Data saturation.** Data saturation is useful as a criterion to verify the quality of qualitative research for its transparency and creditability (Rooddehghan, ParsaYekta, & Nasrabad, 2015). Fusch and Ness (2015) noted data saturation occurs when additional data collection does not result in new information, coding, or themes. Saturation of data happens when no new themes emerge or essential information and any further data collection will result in diminishing returns (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). For this case study, I pursued data saturation by interviewing participants until no new data and themes emerged and until I collected enough data to make it possible for other investigators to replicate the study. I incorporated the use of methodological triangulation to help me reach data saturation and applied the personal lens process to

identify my personal views and perceptions of the research topic to mitigate bias and to achieve data saturation.

### **Transition and Summary**

The objective of Section 2 of this qualitative case study proposal was to explain the plan used to conduct this qualitative study. This study explored social media marketing strategies SB owners of family-style restaurants can implement into their company's marketing plan to increase net sales. The population of the study included five small family-style restaurant business owners in Maryland. The researcher collected data from various sources including documents, archival evidence, semistructured interviews, direct observation, and physical artifacts. Utilizing Microsoft Word and Excel helped organize the collected data. Coding of the interview transcript and looking for common patterns, themes, and categories that relate to the research question is how I analyzed the data. Section 3 includes an overview and analysis of data collected and critical findings.

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

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore social media marketing strategies small family-style restaurant owners use to increase sales. I conducted semistructured interviews with five small family-style restaurants in Maryland, and I used my interview protocol to guide the interview process. I triangulated data obtained from participant interviews and electronic social media reports and documents. Using methodological triangulation, I identified five themes: (a) social media platforms that small family-style restaurant owners use to increase sales, (b) strategies that work best for small family-style restaurant owners to increase sales, (c) employees' response to social media marketing strategies small family-style restaurant owners use to increase sales, (d) impact social media marketing has on small family-style restaurant sales and (e) relationship marketing.

#### **Presentation of the Findings**

The central research question for this qualitative single case study was the following: What social media marketing strategies do small family-style restaurant owners use to increase sales. Five themes morphed from the data analysis (a) social media platforms small family-style restaurant owners use to increase sales (b) strategies that work best for small family-style restaurant owners to increase sales, (c) employees' response to social media marketing strategies small family-style restaurant owners use to increase sales, (d) impact social media marketing has on small family-style restaurant sales, and (e) relationship marketing.

## **Social Media Platforms**

The theme of social media platforms pertains to participants' responses to the types of social media used to increase sales. Three categories social media were the basis of this theme (a) Facebook, (b) Instagram, and (c) other platforms.

**Facebook.** Facebook is the preferred social media site for business marketing (Jennings, Blount, & Weatherly, 2014). All participants in the study stated they utilize Facebook to increase sales. P1 mentioned they are not as consistent using Facebook as they are using other platforms; however, they still utilize Facebook as a way to market by encouraging their customers to write reviews about their experience on Facebook. P1 also utilizes Facebook to post specials and allow customers to market their business for them by encouraging customers to post about the restaurant and tag their business in the post. P2 mentioned they not only utilize Facebook to post pictures of their menu items, but they also leverage Facebook to promote events. P2 stated:

Not only do we post pictures of food, because there's only so many pictures of food and drinks you can post, but there's always something new that's happening at our restaurant with the music and open mic night, so we also like to share that information on Facebook and provide our customers with a reason to return.

P3 mentioned that a key strategy for them using Facebook “is using the paid promotion feature.” Yearly, P3 spends \$1500 on paid Facebook promotion ads for their restaurant marketing to increase sales; however, they have never been able to effectively learn what their ROI is with this strategy. P3 also mentioned that they understand the paid

promotion algorithm for Facebook allows them to reach outside of their current followers, which allows them to reach more people who have never engaged with them before. P4 and P5 stated they were both very consistent with marketing on Facebook and after reviewing their Facebook reports and accounts, it showed they were both very active and consistent.

Business owners use Facebook as a marketing tool because of the potential to reach and communicate to a large population (Fan & Gordon, 2014). As of July 2016, there were 1.71 billion people on Facebook (DMR, 2016). All five participants understood that Facebook is a great way to build and maintain relationships with their current and potential customers, and that it is important for them to utilize it in their business to increase sales. This supports Sheth and Parvatiyar's (1995) basic tenant of relationship marketing of consumers' choice reduction.

**Instagram.** All five participants used Instagram consistently. Participants stated they utilize Instagram to post pictures of their menu items as well as for their customers to engage in strategies to increase sales. None of the participants utilize Instagram for contests; however, P2 and P4 stated they utilize Instagram to promote events. P3 mentioned they started utilizing Instagram after first implementing Facebook marketing. P2 stated:

Posting pictures of our signature dishes almost always give us a return immediately. Customers will come in because they saw the picture of the dish on Instagram.

P4 stated they rely heavily on Instagram, and they have specific marketing strategies they implement on Instagram. P4 mentioned:

We post a food item at least once every other day. Pictures of food are super popular, and then we post pictures of community. Our main thing is to never show an empty cafe, to show the vibrancy of the space, and so the picture is meant to capture the vibe and essence of the space. I'll capture what's happening on the front, street skating, or if the music's popping and people are dancing, I'll try to capture that so that customers really see the essence of the space through it through the pictures versus just a static picture of food or an event.

Using Instagram for marketing was most effective, because you can share pictures of their menu and allow customers to use specific hashtags to promote their business to reach a larger audience. P3, P4, and P5 stated they use specific and general hashtags on their posts. P1 and P2 stated they do not use hashtags. All participants stated they see some form of return by using Instagram for marketing. These findings support Castronovo and Huang (2012) that social media can be used to accomplish one of three goals for a business: building awareness, increasing sales, or building loyalty. Instagram is a visual platform and allows business owners to reach potential customers through communication, collaboration, and creating value through picture content (Carlson & Lee, 2015).

*Other.* One of the five participants stated that they use Yelp to increase sales (P3); however, they felt that there was no need to implement any specific strategies, because

Yelp is user-generated content and can sometimes come with negativity. One of the five participants also stated that they utilize Twitter for marketing but not very often (P2). They stated that they only have Twitter, because it was the popular thing to have when they first got into business. They have not been consistent with marketing on this platform. A review of the businesses' social media sites revealed that the participants used social media to post pictures and videos, promote community events, advertise daily specials, and post the restaurant's menu (See Figure 2 and 3).

	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>
<b>Photos</b>	Food photos, Space photos	Food and drink pictures	Food and drink pictures	Event photos, Food photos	Food, drink, and events
<b>Menu</b>	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Events</b>	Special events, Weekly brunch	Open Mic Night, Special events	Holiday Events	Community events, Customer events	Holiday events
<b>Videos</b>	No Videos	Videos of what is going on in the restaurant	No Videos	Events, Customers engaging	Current atmosphere of the space
<b>Recent Posts</b>	Pictures of the space	Post of musicians playing in space	Upcoming events, Food post	Upcoming events, Customers engaging	Upcoming events and specials
<b>Consistently</b>	No consistency	Two-Three times a week	Twice a week	Daily	Two-three times a week

*Figure 2.* Review of participants' Facebook post

	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>
<b>Photos</b>	Food photos, Space photos	Food and drink pictures	Food and drink pictures, Gear, Specials	Event photos, Food photos	Food, drink, and events
<b>Events</b>	Special events, Weekly brunch	Open Mic Night, Special events	Upcoming events	Community events, Customer events (Events customers are giving outside the restaurant)	Holiday events
<b>Videos</b>	No Videos	Videos of what is going on in the restaurant	Videos of what is going on in the restaurant	Events, Customers engaging	No Video
<b>Recent Posts</b>	Pictures of the space	Food post	Upcoming events, Food post	Upcoming events, Customers engaging	Upcoming events and specials
<b>Consistently</b>	No consistency	Two-Three times a week	Twice a week	Daily	Two-three times a week

*Figure 3.* Review of Participants' Instagram posts

### **Strategies**

The theme of strategies pertains to strategies that work best for small family-style restaurant owners to increase sales. The findings of this study support Castronovo and Huang (2012) argument that consumer purchase decisions are highly affected by the opinions and decisions of one's peers, with peer-to-peer communication acting as a highly valid and reliable source of product information. Four categories strategies were

the basis of this theme (a) posting food & drinks, (b) paid social media, electronic word-of-mouth marketing and (c) hashtag strategy.

***Posting food and drinks.*** All five participants emphasized posting pictures of their menu items helped increase sales. Participant 1 stated, “I think the most effective strategy is showing the products. Once you display your products, consumers anticipate what their experience will be like. They come to our space for the product they see on Instagram or Facebook. Once you show the product, it becomes very alluring to the customer.” Participant 2 agreed that posting a picture of their drinks and food tends to always keep the restaurant on their minds and coming through their doors. P3 stated, “I found food posts to be more successful than anything and generate more online and foot traction than any other post.” P4 stated they post food pictures but found showcasing their space gains more traction. P5’s photo strategy consists of them doing a professional photoshoot of their new menu items every time the menu changes and creating a plan to post the photos over a period of time. The findings of this study supports Carlson and Lee (2015) argument that small business owners should focus on improving their relevance to social media to build and sustain long-term business success. Varini and Sirsi (2012) determined valuable, engaging content would build closer ties with consumers and influence patronage intentions via emotional bonds.

All participants agreed that when their customers post pictures, it also increases their sales. P2 stated, “when our customers post pictures of our “popular” dishes we gain more traction which results in increased sales.” This strategy supports RM theory where

organizational goals involve creating a consumer champion or advocate who will recommend the company (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).

***Paid promotions.*** P3 mentioned that a key strategy for them using Facebook “is using the paid promotion feature.” Yearly P3 spends \$1500 on paid Facebook promotion ads for their restaurant to market in an attempt to increase sales; however, they have never been able to effectively learn what their ROI is with this strategy. P3 also mentioned that they understand the paid promotion algorithm for Facebook allows them to reach outside their current followers, which allows them to reach more people who have never engaged with them before. All other participants agreed that they understand they could gain more traction and increase sales while utilizing the paid promotion feature on Facebook and Instagram; however, they have not taken the time to understand how to use the feature thoroughly. They also stated they do not have the proper budget to dedicate to paid promotion. P4 only used the paid promotion feature for events they are hosting. Small business managers must consider consumers and potential consumers are the subject of different triggers beyond conventional paid media with the interactivity characteristic of social media (Luigi et al., 2011). Business owners can market to followers using targeted ads (Jeanjean, 2012).

***Word of mouth marketing.*** All five participants emphasized the power of electronic WOM marketing. An electronic WOM strategy is crucial to marketing success (Castronovo & Huang, 2012). Social media allows WOM to accelerate its reach (Walaski, 2013). Four of the five participants added that they encourage customers to post pictures of the food on social media sites and comment about their experience in the

restaurant to help spread the word about the service they received (P1, P2, P3 & P5). The dominant factor in WOM engagement is customer satisfaction, which occurs when the client wants to share a positive experience about a product or service (Wolny & Mueller, 2013). All five participants confirmed that customers are enthusiastic to share their experience on social media sites, especially when it is a positive one. P2 mentioned:

When customers post pictures their friends (or following) will look at the post and think that looks good or seems like a nice place to visit. Then they will come in. I think word-of-mouth is the strongest form of marketing tool for us. Positive word-of-mouth I guess I should say-- because everybody gets word-of-mouth is not always positive. Customers will then come in and say, 'I have heard about this place or I saw this dish on social media I wanted to try, and it looked really good.

Potential consumers are more interested in what others recommend rather than the vendor-generated information (Hajli, 2014). P4 noted that when friends of their customers see their experience their customers experienced virtually, they want a piece of that experience. It is important that they always provide their current and new customers with the same experience they saw happening on social media. P1 noted that

The only strategy I use in terms of marketing and advertising is social media, and I believe that is the biggest form of advertising; therefore, when a customer comes in, they get the best experience, and then they go tell another customer which increases our sales.

P1 stated they use bloggers and influencers to help increase their following and traction by having the blogger come to their restaurant and provide them with a free meal and great experience for them to share on their social media platforms. All participants noted they do not offer specials or discounts for customers sharing their experience on social media but do encourage them to do so. Figure 4 lists the participating restaurants' Facebook user activity.

	<i>P1</i>	<i>P2</i>	<i>P3</i>	<i>P4</i>	<i>P5</i>
<i>Page followers</i>	2,065	7,247	7,721	4,769	1,533
<i>Likes</i>	2,051	7,294	8,008	4,745	1,538
<i>People Checked In</i>	1,312	21,762	21,551	3,416	3,497

*Figure 4. Facebook User Activity*

Customers help increase traction by posting their experience through formal reviews with the review feature on Facebook or informally by just posting a picture or words and including their experience in the caption. Customer reviews increase brand awareness (P3). “Yelp is more user-generated content; however, when potential customers read reviews, they will make their decision to come in based on the reviews.” Figure 5 and 6 illustrate the number of customer reviews and the customer ratings of the participating restaurants on Facebook and Yelp.

	<i>P1</i>	<i>P2</i>	<i>P3</i>	<i>P4</i>	<i>P5</i>
<i># of Reviews</i>	141	583	527	227	59
<i>Star Rating</i>	4.7	4.5	4.3	4.9	4.6

*Figure 5. Facebook Customer Reviews and Ratings*

	<i>P1</i>	<i>P2</i>	<i>P3</i>	<i>P4</i>	<i>P5</i>
<b># of Reviews</b>	182	637	370	80	103
<b>Star Rating</b>	3.5	4.0	3.5	4.5	3.5

*Figure 6. Yelp Customer Reviews and Ratings*

**Hashtags.** Two of the five participants stated they strategically utilize hashtags to help increase their exposure; however, all participants use some type of hashtag. Social media marketing campaigns are more likely to succeed when the message content is able to highly resonate with the target audience and appeal to this group's motivations for sharing information (Castronovo & Huang, 2012). P4 stated,

We use the hashtag of our mission, which is community first, cafe second, which I think allows us to be consistent in all of our messages. New followers are able to find us and see our cohesive brand through our hashtags.

Castronovo and Huang (2012) determined small business owners should utilize social media to foster communication and therefore a social media strategy must allow users to share and contribute to content. P4 also stated that they use general hashtags also, but it depends on what type of post they are posting. P5 stated they have also created their own personalized hashtag; however, they use general hashtags to describe their posts and also use ones that are specific to holidays or events.

### **Employees**

The theme of employees' pertains to employees' responses to social media marketing strategies small family-style restaurant owners use to increase sales. All five

participants stated their employees are very receptive to utilizing social media marketing strategies. Only 1 of the 5 participants stated they require their employees to implement social media marketing in their job roles (P3). P3 stated, "Our staff is supposed to post twice a week and we ask our bartenders to post once a week." Four of the five participants do not have dedicated staff to manage social media or require their staff to post on social media (P1, P2, P4, P5). However, P1 stated that although they do not require the staff to post, they tend to take the initiative and post about the restaurant on their own. P5 mentioned their staff increases traction by posting on their personal social media and tagging the restaurant mainly on Instagram. P4 also sells other entrepreneurs products in their business and stated:

Our employees love utilizing social media, and they actually give me many strategies. We focus a lot on art and when we have new artists installing their work the team will send me content to post on social media. When we think about increasing sales, we also think about increasing the sales of our vendors.

### **Impact**

The theme of impact pertains to the impact social media marketing has on small family-style restaurant sales. All participants stated that social media marketing had a positive impact on their sales. P3 stated since implementing actual strategies they have seen an increase in their sales. P5 stated they see their sales increase when they are consistent on social media because they are constantly on the minds of their following. P5 stated, "People see our post, and they are like, "Oh. I will make the choice to go there

tonight," which is where we find the return on our time investment of using social media." P4 mentioned that because they not only promote their restaurant but also promote and empower other entrepreneurs through their social media platforms, they have been able to increase their sales and other entrepreneurs' sales. P4 stated:

Any entrepreneur who places their product on our bookshelf for sale is also our focus. We think about how do we showcase that entrepreneur or that business on our platform as well. We also highlight our chefs. The chefs are always super proud of the food that they put up, so they constantly are sending me pictures of new dishes to be featured. We post the pictures for internal, but of course, sales; however, then we tag the chef, and then that helps promote their brand and who they are as a chef.

Although it increases our sales and the chef sales we do not know of these strategies as sale strategies we just want everyone to win.

P4 mentioned that when having events they utilize social media to promote and sell tickets and almost every time they sell out their events, because they leverage social media platforms for marketing. Social media has had an impact on their bottom line.

### **Relationship marketing.**

The theme of relationship marketing pertains to how the social media marketing media strategies participants of this study utilized aligns under the service augmentation relationship marketing strategy increase sales. Relationship marketing is attracting, maintaining, and, in multiservice organizations, enhancing customer relationships (Berry, 2002). Berry (2002) identified five relationship marketing strategies to include core

service marketing, relationship customization, service augmentation, relationship pricing, and internal marketing. All five participants in this study identified at least one RM strategy they use through social media. P4 stated when new customers find them on social media; the customers expect to receive the same experience they saw on social media. P4 is very adamant about providing them with that experience. P4 is using the core service marketing strategy of relationship marketing. P4 stated they want their customers to become advocates of their business. In RM theory, organizational goals involve creating a consumer champion or advocate who will recommend the company (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).

P1 mentioned that their major strategy is utilizing social media for marketing by having their current customers to market their business and drive sales. However, P1 stated they also understand that customer retention is extremely important, because if they can retain customers, they can acquire new customers. Consumer identification, customer acquisition, customer retention, customer development, and tracking consumer information are steps in the process of relationship marketing small business leaders implement to maintain lifelong relationships (Khan, 2014a). P1 mentioned that social media is extremely important to their business, and they understand that building strong relationships with their customers is important.

P2 mentioned that without building strong, trusting relationships with their customers on social media their sales would probably not be where they are. P2 stated,

Marketing on social media allows our customers to know who we are before they actually come in. It can be a struggle sometimes, because we

always have to ensure that we provide our customers with the best experience so that they will not use social media to post negative comments about us but instead encourage their followers, family, and friends to come in.

The purpose of employing relationship-marketing theory is to allow business owners to use a strategic process to develop and maintain a profitable relationship portfolio (Catoiu & Tichindelean, 2012). P3, P4, and P5 all mentioned that marketing on social media strategically is important to their business growth. P3 mentioned that they originally did not incorporate social media into their marketing but quickly realized it is a must that they use social media to increase sales. P4 noted that social media is not a huge struggle for them, and it is a great way to always stay connected to their current customers and a way to obtain new customers. RM theory is relevant to the findings of this study because family-style restaurant owners in this study agreed that more than half of consumers who use online tools such as social media to make purchasing decisions interact with their restaurant on social networking sites. Small family-style restaurant owners in this study understood the importance of building strong relationships with consumers via social media to enhance their brand loyalty. Enhancing relationships with customers and elements of the brand community can enhance relationships and increase contacts between the brand and the customers to influence the brand (Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2013). All participants agreed that when their customers post pictures, it also increases their sales. This strategy supports RM theory where

organizational goals involve creating a consumer champion or advocate who will recommend the company (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).

All participants mentioned that they did not have a written social media-marketing plan. The participants posited that a written marketing plan is necessary, but they have not had the time to create one. In addition, participants 1, 3, and 5 said they would incorporate social media marketing into their print marketing in the very near future to help engage their followers.

Small family-style restaurant owners in this study agreed continuing to implement social media marketing strategies to reach customers will increase sales. The findings of this study support Schaupp and Belanger (2014) argument that small business owners who engage in social media marketing build relationships and trust with customers that translates into increased sales. Social media use can alter the level of communication and interaction between SB owners and consumers (Pookulangara & Koesler, 2011). Participants of this study agreed consumers of their small family-style restaurants can communicate through social media their questions or concerns, and as family-style small restaurant owners they can directly respond to the consumers' questions.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The findings of this study support Schaupp and Belanger (2014) argument that small business owners who engage in social media marketing build relationships and trust with customers that translates into increased sales. Utilizing the findings of this study, small family-style restaurant owners can increase their understanding of various social media marketing strategies that translate into increased sales. Small family-style

restaurant owners can utilize the findings from this study to increase their knowledge of how to foster relationships with their customers through social media marketing strategies ultimately increasing WOM through social media platforms.

Small family-style restaurant owners can use the findings of this study to understand specific social media marketing strategies to implement utilizing various social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. The findings of this study suggest leveraging photographs of food and drinks on Facebook and Instagram increased engagement ultimately increasing sales. Participants in this study indicated that they rely heavily on digital marketing rather than traditional marketing methods. Small family-style restaurant owners can utilize the findings of this study to guide them into creating a cost-effective social media and traditional marketing plan. Utilizing the findings of this study, small family-style restaurant owners can get a better understanding of how to leverage their employees to implement social media marketing strategies.

With this study, I confirmed that implementing social media marketing strategies does require some formal training or understanding of all the components on the various social media platforms. Small family-style restaurant owners in this study agreed that they did not know how to utilize all the features of the social media platforms. None of the participants in this study utilize the data reports to analyze and strategically implement social media marketing strategies to increase their sales. Therefore, proper training of social media utilization for marketing should be an application to enhance business practices for small family-style restaurant owners. The participants in this study did not participate in any form of training to learn how to implement social media

marketing. If business owners do not take the time to understand how to use social media as a marketing tool, businesses could cause potential damage to their organizations by missed opportunities for growth and sales (Li, 2012). All participants in this study mentioned they did not have one staff person who solely focuses on social media marketing strategies and as the business owner, but they do not have the disposable time to spend on social media for marketing consistently. However, one participant did mention that their younger employees were perceptive, and I believe that recruiting employees who are social media savvy may relieve business owners from the learning curve associated with social media and may increase employment rates in the community. The themes that emerged throughout the data analysis process are applicable to small family-style restaurant owners and other restaurant types and can be beneficial in helping business owners develop and employ social media strategies to increase sales. Additionally, small-family restaurant owners can utilize the knowledge and information included in this study to enhance customer retention and increase WOM to increase sales.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The implications for positive social change include cause-related marketing for local non-profit organizations and education to future entrepreneurs in the restaurant industry, ultimately having a positive impact on economic development and education in communities. Cause-related marketing is a social responsibility program in which owners of companies donate to nonprofit organizations when a customer purchase from the company (Chanana, & Gill, 2015). Small restaurant businesses use marketing strategies on social media websites to disseminate their marketing message (Kwok & Yu, 2013).

Reaching a broader audience allows small family-style businesses owners to increase visibility, which has a direct impact on brand awareness and sales. Small family-style restaurants can leverage their reach and brand awareness to implement cause-related marketing campaigns. Connecting with local non-profits to impact, small family-style restaurant owners in Maryland will influence the community through cause-related marketing and have an impact on social change by donating profits based on sales.

By utilizing the strategies from the findings of the current study, small family-style restaurant owners may contribute to positive social change by increasing the knowledge of future entrepreneurs in the restaurant industry ultimately increasing the number of entrepreneurs in their community. Restaurant owners can utilize strategies from the findings of this study to also show future how technology can help them launch and grow their businesses faster and drive economic development in their communities. Increasing the demand for employment can have a direct impact on decreasing the unemployment rate within the United States, particularly in the state of Maryland. Yun (2013) noted small businesses make economic growth more sustainable through job creation. Increasing net sales does not only influence individuals who need employment but also those who are interested in opening a small business which contributes to the economy of their community, drive economic development, and improve community relations.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Small family-style restaurant owners, managers, and employees could use the information, research findings, and recommendations in this study to create and

implement effective social media strategies to increase sales. Based on the findings of this study, I have three recommendations for small family-style restaurant owners to consider. The first recommendation is that small family-style restaurant owners should research and determine which social media platforms are the most effective for their restaurant type and align their policies with the goals of the restaurant. I recommend taking advantage of social media trainings to enhance small family-style restaurant owners knowledge and increase their probability of increasing sales through effective strategies with the best social media platforms.

The second recommendation is small family-style restaurant owners to hire an employee who is solely responsible for implementing social media marketing strategies. Small family-style restaurant owners having a dedicated person who can analyze the social media marketing strategies and adjust strategies based on proven data will reduce the time and cost, ultimately having a bigger ROI. Participants of this study had no single employee dedicated to social media and did not understand how to analyze social media data to make informed social media strategy decisions.

The third recommendation is small family-style restaurant owners should create a social media-marketing plan. Participants of this study implemented social media marketing strategies but had no social media-marketing plan to implement these strategies and therefore had no consistency. Consistency drives brand awareness ultimately increasing sales (Hansson et al., 2013). The participants stated they understood the importance of having a social media-marketing plan to strategically implement their strategies they are currently using, but never took the time to create one. The findings of

this study can provide useful information to create training programs on the use of social media marketing for small family-style restaurants. I could disseminate this research to small family-style restaurant owners through journals and conferences.

I may disseminate the research findings in several methods. I plan to provide each research participant with a summary of the study and research findings to share with other small restaurant owners. The ProQuest/UMI dissertation database will house a published version of the current doctoral study for review. I will present the findings of this research at business conferences, training colloquiums, and other avenues of interest when opportunities arise or opportunities I create.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The findings of this study provide a foundation for further research in the areas of social media marketing. In this qualitative multiple-case study, two main limitations arose: the data only reflected strategies small family-style restaurant business owners utilize and did not reflect strategies other restaurant type owners utilize. The data only reflected strategies that family-style restaurant business owners utilize that were successful impacted sales and did not reflect strategies that were not successful but could potentially be successful for other family-style restaurant owners. Researchers could expand this study to include other types of restaurants, such as fast food and casual dining restaurants, to see different strategies used based on restaurant style. Conducting a study inclusive of several types of restaurants can offer restaurant owners effective social media marketing strategies to increase sales. This study included small restaurant businesses in

Maryland. Recommendations for further research are to expand research to other geographic locations.

Further research utilizing a quantitative method to examine in-depth financial performance analysis of the relationship between social media marketing techniques and profitability rates may provide additional information on effective marketing strategies. Additionally, I recommend that researchers utilize the themes of this study and develop a quantitative study to measure the effectiveness of each strategy.

### **Reflections**

The Walden University Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program has been a challenging yet rewarding experience. I began the program with a preconceived notion that I was at an advantage in completing a doctoral study since I obtained masters of business administration (MBA) and was very knowledgeable of the subject. However, I was intimidated by the thought of conducting research because I was not required to conduct research in my MBA program. Although faced with challenges, the DBA doctoral study process enriched my academic competence.

I chose to research social media marketing strategies based on my past marketing experience and passion for social media. I spent 4 years as a marketing consultant and professor. Throughout the year, marketing became my specialty. Social media became the innovation of marketing, and I knew the importance for me to educate others on how to utilize this new marketing tool to grow their businesses.

The participants of this qualitative multiple case study provided knowledge and understanding of social media marketing strategies. The participants openly shared in-

depth information with me. I gained valuable information on implementing social media marketing and awareness of the obstacles and challenges associated. Prior to conducting interviews, I had no relationship with the participants, which helped to avoid bias. One challenge that I faced during this study was collecting documents pertaining to social media marketing strategies. Not all participants could provide written documentation, such as financial reports or social media analytics, because they did not know how to obtain those reports from social media and did not track their social media investments. I found that documentation was limited.

### **Conclusion**

The usage of social media platforms changed the way organization members directly communicate with their consumers and the way consumers perceive organizations (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). The use of social media by restaurant owners provides access to a new way of marketing their products and communicating with potential customers quickly, cheaply, and with the ability to offer a warm welcome (Sanchís Verdeguer, Peiró-Signes & Segarra-Oña, 2014). Five small family-style restaurant owners in Maryland participated in interviews to explore this subject. After analyzing and coding the data, five themes emerged. The key themes included: (a) social media platforms small family-style restaurant owners use to increase sales, (b) strategies that work best for small family-style restaurant owners to increase sales, (c) employees' response to social media marketing strategies small family-style restaurant owners use to increase sales, (d) impact social media marketing has on small family-style restaurant sales, and (e) relationship marketing.

The results of my study support and align with the evidence I found in preceding and current research that business owners who utilize social media marketing strategies could increase business sales. Using data collected from participant interviews and document review, I found that social media usage for marketing purposes has increased in popularity within businesses when compared to traditional methods of marketing. All participants of this study implement social media as their main source of marketing. Participant responses confirmed the importance in using social media marketing strategies to increase sales. The findings, conclusions, and recommendations could help small restaurant businesses understand effective strategies to implement in their marketing plan. Facebook and Instagram was the most used social media marketing platform by the participants of this study.

The findings of this study affirm that business owners who utilize social media to communicate with current and prospective customers can foster strong relationships and ultimately increase sales through WOM. WOM has the potential to increase sales and brand awareness. I concluded from the findings that social media is a powerful marketing tool for small family-style restaurants, which can ultimately have a positive impact on sales when owners properly implement strategies.

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### **Appendix A: Participant Interview Questions**

In this qualitative research study, the interview consisted of four open-ended and non-directional questions to gain insights and ideas from SB owners of family-style restaurants:

1. What social media platforms are you using to increase sales?
2. What method do you find works best to increase sales?
3. How do your employees respond to your different strategies to increase sales?
4. What additional information can you provide regarding the social media strategies that you have implemented to increase net sales?

## **Appendix B: Multi-Case Study Protocol**

### Marketing Strategies to Increase Sales in Market Small Family-Style Restaurant Businesses

The following information constitutes the interview protocol for this doctoral study. The purpose of an interview protocol is to provide a step-by-step guide of the interview process.

*Before the interview, the researcher will:*

- provide each participant with a copy of the interview protocol, a consent form to read and sign, a list of the interview questions, and confirm with each participant they have read and understand each document;
- schedule time, place, and date with the interviewee;
- answer preliminary concerns and questions the participants may have.

*During the interview, the researcher will*

- obtain a signed consent form, if not already obtained in advance;
- confirm that each participant agrees to be recorded;
- remind the participant that their participation is voluntary;
- remind the participant of their free will to withdraw from the study at any time;
- advise each participant that the researcher will take notes in a journal;
- remind each participant that their identities are confidential;
- address with each participant any concerns regarding the consent form or interview questions;
- ask each participant the interview questions provided to them in advance.
- Apply the member checking technique with each participant to ensure accurate documentation and reflection of their interview response

*After the interview, the researcher will*

- thank each participant for taking part in the interview;
- transcribe the data and determine if a second interview is necessary;
- send the transcript to the participant for review;
- schedule a second interview for follow-up (if necessary);
- receive affirmation from participant regarding accuracy of the transcription and accuracy of data interpretation (via e-mail or telephone); convert all paper documents to digital format; save all files to a thumb drive and lock in a safe for 5 years; and
- destroy all data after 5 years.

*After publication, the researcher will*

- send the participant a summary of the findings;
- advise the participant of the publication.