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Marketing Strategies of U.S. Small Businesses Led by African Immigrants

Sophia Osei-Sarfo
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Sophia Osei-Sarfo

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

Marketing Strategies of U.S. Small Businesses Led by African Immigrants

by

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MBA, Keller Graduate School of Management of DeVry University, 2014

BA, University of Cape Coast, Ghana 2005

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

August 2018

Abstract

Small businesses play a vital role in the U.S. economy and represent 99.7% of all U.S. businesses. Small business failure rate is 50% within the initial 5 years. Creating and executing a well-formulated marketing strategy is essential to business sustainability. Effective marketing strategy builds small business survival rates and supports long term execution advantages. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the marketing strategies that African immigrant small grocery store owners use to sustain their businesses for longer than 5 years. The population included 5 successful first-generation African immigrant small business owners located in the Bronx County who had developed a well-formulated marketing strategy. Kohli and Jaworski's marketing orientation theory served as the conceptual framework. The van Kaam data analysis process was used to validate findings. The data analysis included diverse mind maps, project maps, explorations with participant response, and document analysis. Three marketing strategy themes emerged: customer retention and attitudes, inventory that promote value for potential buyers that result in superior performances, conventional and unconventional marketing that focuses on lowering cost of product and services to meet market needs of individuals. The findings revealed several features of how to use marketing strategies effectively to improve stability in the local economy by reducing small business failure rates, increasing profitability, and promoting buyer value. Application of the findings may result in a positive social change by increasing local community employment opportunities and enhancing residents' standards of living.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my husband Aaron Debrah for his love and support. He has been my rock throughout this doctoral journey. To my children Damaris Hakikson, Darryl Hakikson, Chelsea Hakikson and Aaron Debrah Jr, my parents, siblings, and friends who mercifully managed my occasionally sporadic practices from my scholastic and life-balance challenges, I genuinely thank you for your understanding with me amid this accomplishment.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The constant influx of modern marketing tools can be overwhelming to small business owners. The worst thing for a small business owner is to experiment with every different tactic. Instead, following a detailed marketing strategy might put small businesses on a clear path to success. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore marketing strategies that owners of small groceries use to manage their businesses for increased profitability. Knowledge of successful marketing strategies aids leaders with revenue generation and can ensure business growth (Gandy, 2015; Gibbons, 2015; Williams, 2016).

Background of the Problem

Small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) in the United States face the challenges of constant change, an upsurge in developing markets, and increased competition (Bijaoui, 2017). Owners of SMEs need to make management decisions grounded on perfectly conceived strategies to improve their businesses' efficiency and effectiveness (Ndubisi & Ndubisi, 2013). Clearly defined marketing strategies and plans are significant for most SME grocery store owners, helping them optimize limited resources and attain their goals (Omisakin, 2017). One significant strategic direction that such SMEs can undertake is to be more market oriented. Researchers in the field of marketing strategic management have focused on the phenomenon of SME strategic adaptations (Afsar, 2014). Omisakin (2017) showed how SME business owners can alter their strategies to attain a proper *fit* with the existing environment. According to Potter (2016), change appears to be inevitable, and yesterday's determinant of success might be

a future determinant of failure. To reach their strategic marketing objectives and to survive, owners must respond appropriately to environmental changes.

Given SMEs' status as important components of the U.S. economy, how SMEs compete in the contemporary economy is of vital importance. That SME owners create between 60%-80% of new jobs in United States economy deserves greater attention from every stakeholder (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2014). In the United States, SMEs operate in ways that are distinct from the huge players within their markets (Iturrioz, Aragón, & Narvaiza, 2015). Owners of SMEs often possess limited resources, have inadequate expertise, and exercise limited influence on their relative environment (Omisakin, 2017). Afsar (2014) noted changes that impact every company, including SME grocery store owners, can be technological, legal, social, economic, and political. Efficient marketing strategies might allow SME business owners to concentrate their limited resources on those opportunities proven to increase sales and contribute to sustainable competitive advantages (Bijaoui, 2017; Iturrioz, Aragón, & Narvaiza, 2015).

Problem Statement

Marketing expertise is important to SME performance (Jaworski, 2018). U.S. SMEs experience failure rates of 50% during their first 5 years (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2014). The general business problem is that African immigrant grocery store owners are not leveraging marketing strategies. The specific business problem is some African immigrant SME grocery store owners lack marketing strategies to survive beyond 5 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to explore the marketing strategies African immigrant SME grocery store owners use to survive beyond 5 years. The target population included five first generation African immigrant SME grocery store owners located in Bronx, New York. To be eligible for the study, the owners must have developed marketing strategies to succeed beyond 5 years. The implication for positive social change is to encourage economic empowerment among African immigrant SME owners by identifying strategies, such as effective marketing techniques, that may increase survival rates. Sustained survival of SMEs might decrease the unemployment rate, enhance the economy, and improve the standard of living in the Bronx communities.

Nature of the Study

The three methods of research are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Qualitative research is used to consider an inductive and exploratory research question (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). Researchers primarily use qualitative data to look for patterns and themes, and to gain an understanding of how people think and experience their lives (Irvine, Drew, & Sainsbury, 2013; Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). Conversely, quantitative research is deductive or confirmatory (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). Quantitative researchers analyze variables using statistical analysis to answer a research question (Bernerth, Cole, Taylor, & Walker, 2017). Mixed methods research is a hybrid of both deductive and inductive approaches using quantitative and qualitative data (Doyle, Brady, & Byrne, 2016). For this research, I

selected the qualitative method because there were no variables to examine, making quantitative and mixed methods inappropriate for the study.

Qualitative research designs include phenomenology, case study, ethnography, and narrative (Padgett, 2016). Moustakas (1994) described phenomenology as a design used to study a phenomenon from the perceptions and lived human experiences of research participants. Ethnography is appropriate for an exploration of shared cultural beliefs and behaviors (Russell & Arthur, 2016). Narrative design is a study of life stories in chronological order (Holm, Thomsen, & Bliksted, 2016). Case study design is the appropriate means of researching multiple sources for emerging ideas, patterns, and themes (Yin, 2017). Therefore, I used a qualitative multicase study design to identify and explore common factors amongst data sources.

Research Question

The specific business problem is some African immigrant SME grocery store owners lack marketing strategies to survive beyond 5 years. The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to explore the marketing strategies African immigrant SME grocery store owners use to survive beyond 5 years. To these ends, I designed the following central research question: What marketing strategies do African immigrant SME grocery store owners use to survive beyond 5 years?

Interview Questions

1. What are the marketing strategies used to attract, and retain, customers?
2. What marketing activities did you do to meet customers' needs in terms of pricing and how that varies by product?

3. How do you measure the success or failure of your marketing strategies?
4. How do you measure and evaluate the effectiveness of your marketing strategies?
5. What marketing strategies did you use in the first 5 years of your business operations to achieve the maximum profit to sustain the business?
6. What obstacles did you face when developing and implementing the strategies, and how did you address them?
7. What additional information can you share regarding the marketing strategies that helped you achieve sustainability beyond 5 years?

Conceptual Framework

Marketing orientation is a modern marketing management strategy (Mokhtar, Yusoff, & Ahmad, 2014). Kohli and Jaworski (1990) developed the market orientation (MO) theory to aid the implementation of the strategic marketing concept. Narver and Slater (1990) considered MO as catalyzing an organizational culture. Business leaders who effectively implement MO foster efficient employee behaviors that promote value for potential buyers, resulting in superior performances and business sustainability (Hussain, Shah, & Akhtar, 2016). Business owners who use customer and competitor orientation include all the activities involved in acquiring information about the competitors and promote client value in the target market. Narver and Slater posited that for a business to achieve consistently above normal market performance, leaders must create a sustainable competitive advantage (SCA). A business owner who knows the MO theory understands that, through the numerous means of creating additional benefits for

buyers, maximizing the business' competitive advantage, and attracting potential buyers are two potential outcomes (Kiessling, Isaksson, & Yasar, 2016). Thus, I selected the MO theory to explore the marketing strategies that African immigrant grocery store owners use to maximize their long-term performance and sustainability.

Operational Definitions

African immigrant: As it relates to this study, an African immigrant is person who is a national of African countries who lives permanently in another country (IRS, 2015).

Business failure: A business failure is the involuntary closure of business when the owner has not made a net profit within 2 years of operation, forcing stakeholders to liquidate business assets (Coad, 2013; Coad, Frankish, Roberts, & Storey, 2013).

Business success: In this study, business success is the gradual, continual realization of worthy business goals that contribute to the attainment of profitability and longevity beyond 5 years. Success entails meeting goals within a set period (Alagirisamy, 2014).

Unconventional marketing: Unconventional marketing is the use of marketing to identify situations which enabled marketers to allocate resources to ensure maximum exploitation of the unforeseen market opportunities (Appiah-Adu & Amoako (2016).

Marketing orientation: Marketing orientation is the development of processes to attain sustainable competitive advantage, superior customer value, and performance in the marketplace through the efficient use of organizational resources (Lonial & Carter, 2015).

Marketing strategies: Marketing strategies are the complete set of marketing activities used to meet customers' needs and achieve maximum profit to sustain the business (Mohamadzadeh, Aarabi, & Salamzadeh, 2013).

Small business: Is an independently owned profit-oriented business with fewer than 500 employees (Salas-Fumás & Sanchez-Asin, 2013; U.S. Small Business Administration, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are facts the researcher deems relevant but has little or no means to verify (Lips-Wiersma & Mills, 2014). If the researcher neglects to consider assumption, the findings may be invalid (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). In this study, I assumed that the participants would provide honest responses to the interview questions and that a qualitative multiple case study was the appropriate methodology for the study.

Limitations

Every study has some limitations and inherent weaknesses that affect the outcome (Su, Baird, & Schoch, 2015). Limitations are the potential weakness that influence the interpretation of the study results (Brutus, Aguinis, & Wassmer, 2013; Connelly, 2013). The major limitation of this study was that its findings are not generalizable to the large population of Bronx SMEs.

Delimitations

Delimitations define the study's boundaries and the propositions that researchers want to explore (Yin, 2017). A delimitation of the study was that the participants were

independent immigrant owners of African grocery stores who have demonstrated successful marketing strategies beyond 5 years. I geographically delimited the study to the Bronx, New York. The geographical location was justifiable because the Bronx, New York has many immigrant-operated grocery stores. Finally, the scope of my study was delimited to small businesses with fewer than 20 employees.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

The study is significant because I explored the marketing strategies that contributed to the success and sustainability of African-owned SME grocery stores in the Bronx, New York. I focused on identifying marketing strategies that African immigrants can adapt to enhance survival of their businesses. The study could support African immigrant SME owners working to increase their business success rate beyond 5 years. Knowledge from the study might enable and support aspiring and existing SME owners. The knowledge acquired could also aid in economic empowerment in the local Bronx community and ensure the continuance of African immigrant owned enterprises.

Implications for Social Change

Cardon, Post, and Forster (2017) noted that communities influence and affect individuals' decisions to pursue new ventures. A potential social change of this study is to ignite positive change, given Bronx County's low employment rate of 5.4% (U.S. Department of Labor, 2017). I anticipate that the knowledge from this study might be a catalyst for grocery store owners to better manage the complexities of marketing strategies, leading to their sustainability beyond 5 years.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

I reviewed the academic and professional literature to better understand the marketing strategies African immigrant grocery store owners use to survive beyond 5 years. In this comprehensive literature review, I worked to critically analyze and synthesize qualitative empirical studies done to investigate the marketing strategies employed by small business owners. The work covered a broad range of peer reviewed articles on the effectiveness of marketing in ensuring short and long-term success of SMEs.

Literature Review Scope

This literature review was an exhaustive critical analysis of the marketing strategies of U.S. SMEs under the leadership of African immigrants. The literature review included analysis of modern management and marketing strategies. In it, I focused on marketing management strategies related to marketing theories and concepts such as the MO conceptual framework, the identification and analysis of target markets, and insights into how to gain and maintain a competitive edge in the market. In the literature review, I used the MO theory to focus on how African immigrant leaders maximize performance in the management of SMEs to ensure long term performance and sustainability.

Additionally, the literature review encompassed the critical study and analysis of articles and literature on SME leadership and the effective leadership styles used in successful SMEs. Specifically, I reviewed literature on the marketing strategies SME leaders use to achieve long term performance, leadership development among SME

organizations, and market orientation management. The literature search included the above topics, ensuring an in-depth inquiry to identify solutions to assist SMEs to survive for the long term and help with economic development. For an overview of the sources used in the literature review, see Table 1 below.

Table 1

Summary of Literature Review Sources

Reference type	Total	% of total references	<than 5 years	>than 5 years
Scholarly and peer-reviewed articles	86	95.5	84	2
Government site	2	2.2		
Seminar and contemporary books	2	2.2		
Literature review totals	90			

Organization of the literature review. This literature review begins with background information on the importance of SMEs in gross domestic product growth. The introduction includes a preview of the importance of using effective marketing strategies in SMEs. I highlight the marketing strategies employed by African immigrant SME leaders and focus on the marketing strategies they used to ensure success beyond 5 years. My analysis of the four components of marketing mix includes the leadership of SMEs. The literature review also contains an analysis of MO and how it has influenced the performance of SMEs. While considering the MO conceptual framework, I also examine how African immigrant SME leaders are trying to innovative to gain a competitive edge in fast-changing business environments.

The balance of this review is a critical analysis of the literature on leadership of SMEs and how leadership development has impacted SME managers working to develop

effective marketing strategies that would ensure short and long-term success. The literature has shown that transformational leadership is effective in developing marketing strategies to help long term performance of SMEs. Following, as Figure 1, is an overview of the literature review organization.



Figure 1. An overview of the literature review organization.

Economic Importance of Small and Medium Enterprises

SMEs have a vital role in the economies of most nations (Bloch & Bhattacharya, 2016). For example, SMEs have been making significant contributions to economic growth, raising gross domestic products in both developed and developing nations (Maksimov, Wang, & Luo, 2017). Different nations have different definitions of SMEs, but the term generally refers to businesses whose employees lie within a given range, such as between 10 to 50 employees depending on geographical location (El Kalak &

Hudson, 2016). The main reason SMEs contribute significantly to gross domestic products in some nations is because they collectively employ a vast number of people. SMEs drive much-needed innovation and competition in global economic sectors (Szczepańska-Woszczyzna & Kurowska-Pysz, 2016).

In the United States, SMEs are those with 250 or few employees, and with an annual turnover of under \$25 million (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2016). Research has shown that SMEs face challenging leadership and development issues in the fast-changing business environments (Szczepańska-Woszczyzna & Kurowska-Pysz, 2016). Immigrant entrepreneurs represent a majority in several industry sectors in New York (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2016). Firms with less than 20 workers represented 45% of the aggregate work of all organizations that had been in existence for less than 5 years (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2016). SMEs in the Bronx, New York operating grocery shops are 38.1% minority-owned (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Such businesses are particularly common in New York, the Bronx areas because of the strong immigrant population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). SMEs often fail within the first 5 years, highlighting a potential gap in marketing strategy. Determining the marketing strategies that SME leaders use to ensure long term performance beyond 5 years is important.

The aim of many for-profit businesses is to make the highest possible profits; so, regardless of how small the business is, the owner or the manager must employ effective strategies to ensure the business remains competitive (Cerchione & Esposito, 2017). Managers must apply innovative skills to ensure the business effectively contend and

thrive notwithstanding the scope of developing unfavorable and fluctuating business and economic conditions. Empirical evidence has shown that many SME businesses in the United States remain successful only for 5 years (Wagner, 2013). U.S. SMEs led by African immigrants who do not possess the required leadership skills and marketing strategies to ensure the success of their businesses may fail in their early years (Tresca, 2013).

Market Orientation Theory

MO served as the conceptual framework for the study. MO is a current marketing management and strategy (Mokhtar et al., 2014) developed by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) to provide SME leaders an implementation roadmap for strategic marketing. A catalyst for positive SME culture, effective implementation of MO can promote buyer value and business sustainability (Narver & Slater, 1990). Leveraging MO to focus on the creation of additional buyer benefit can improve competitive positioning and increase the number of new customers (Lo, Wang, Wah, & Ramayah, 2016).

Following MO and focusing on the product mix in the development of marketing strategies, leaders of SME firms can ensure that the organizational philosophy meets the consumer market needs (Mokhtar et al., 2014). In MO, products and services delivered by SMEs are designed and specially created to satisfy specific customer demands (Narver & Slater, 1990). To have effective MO, SME leaders first conduct market research and analysis to identify high-demand products and services (Barnes, Kempster, & Smith, 2015). To meet those identified market needs, leaders then develop customer-focused products and or services. MO includes identifying which area of the market needs

strengthening or which product or service requires improvement to fulfill customer demands (Narver & Slater, 1990).

Barnes et al. (2015) found that MO provided customer need information that is difficult to identify or that the consumers found hard to express. MO is a form of market campaigning between SMEs and the target consumer (Narver & Slater, 1990). Therefore, SME leaders practicing such initiatives are better placed to identify and act on new market trends (Lo et al., 2016). Active market involvement will help SME businesses achieve long term success (Cacciolatti & Lee, 2016). Thus, to establish and maintain a competitive market edge, SME leaders should adopt new techniques when developing their marketing strategies (Barnes et al., 2015).

Frösén, Luoma, Jaakkola, Tikkanen, and Aspara (2016) found that SMEs that effectively meet customers' needs and demands were in a better position to remain competitive in the market for a longer duration than those SMEs that have stagnated in their marketing approaches. Therefore, SME leaders must be innovative and creative in identifying and meeting the desires and preferences of special customers' needs (Frösén et al., 2016; Narver & Slater, 1990). When trained on MO initiatives, African immigrant SME leaders have developed a competitive edge over other SMEs, and thus have achieved and sustained satisfactory long-term performance (Jogaratham, 2017).

Risk analysis. If ignored, important factors such as cost can lead to business failure, despite the owner's use of MO (Barnes et al., 2015). Further, some of the consumer demands or needs identified during MO might not be achievable (Frösén et al., 2016). Therefore, before implementation of a MO initiative, or a combination of MO and

other marketing strategies, the leader must complete a risk analysis to determine the short- and long-term impacts (Kiessling et al., 2016). Finally, to assure SME sustainability, the identified MO procedures and marketing strategies must be deployed in the most cost-effective manner (Barnes et al., 2015; Kiessling et al., 2016).

Kiessling et al. (2016) determined that marketing risk in successful SME businesses was dependent on the standardization and adaptation policies. Research has shown that communication influences the difference between place and distribution strategies with product promotion (Antoncic, Auer Antoncic, & Aaltonen, 2016). However, too much focus on some elements of marketing strategies has led business leaders to abandon or ignore other strategies, including market intelligence (Nenzhelele, 2014). For example, Nenzhelele (2014) found small business managers ignore the significance of market information. Given that SME leaders are in direct contact with the market, an incorrect assumption limits their ability to determine market requirements and remedies (Nenzhelele, 2014); Antoncic et al. (2016) found that bias by SME leaders, especially the African immigrants, led to unprecedented long-term losses. The decision-making process in SME organizations is highly dependent on the leader's chosen marketing strategies. Implementation of uninformed policies will result in poor results and short-term business survival (Jogaratnam, 2017). SME leaders who consider risk and implement effective marketing strategies are in a better position to achieve more success in short- and long-term performance (Jogaratnam, 2017).

Market-oriented culture. Different researchers have used the MO theory to consider the effect of marketing concept execution on a firm's performance. Most of the

research focused on how marketing strategies can shape the culture of the firm and its level strategy (Jakada & Gambo, 2014). MO and marketing strategies address the values and beliefs of the customer as the small business seeks to grow to other markets. Studies of MO and marketing strategies as reflections of the cultures of small companies have outlined the relationship between the execution of the marketing strategies and the performance of the business. Market-oriented culture prompts proactive innovation by empowering firms to foresee potential market segment and envision market contributions that may be appealing to such segments, and in addition prompting the need to acquire, develop or create the required resources to deliver the contribution (Glaveli, Glaveli, Geormas, & Geormas, 2017). Market orientation accommodates for customer service and bolsters improvement towards customer desires. Customer loyalty stays high with the organization as a whole and can function as an approach to advance brand loyalty.

Many researchers have established that when marketing reflects the culture of the business, there is a direct relationship with MO. According to González-Benito, González-Benito, and Muñoz-Gallego, (2014), the ideas of the theory of MO have their basis in an organizational culture that has its composition in the direction of the customer, the interdepartmental, and the adjustment to the competitors. The collaboration has its foundation as a group of cultures and aims to maintain a strategy of a high-level performance of the business through an efficient execution of actions that gain value for the customer. Therefore, the intersect of MO strategy and organizational culture is pragmatic because it involves action orientation as a basic marketing concept and bolsters the importance of the customer throughout the business.

The studies on MO demonstrate a correlation between the issue of performance and market orientation. However, some of these studies share discrepancies regarding the definition of the ideas on MO and the consistency of the question under the subject. In one study by Ozkaya, Droge, Hult, Calantone, & Ozkaya (2015), there is the definition of the MO of a given culture, but during the assessment, it used the scale of behavior orientation, which led to the idea of under-representation of some of the primary components of the MO culture. Ozkaya et al., (2015) gave a proposal for a new assessment of the MO scale and incorporated some of the concepts and essential factors of marketing at a given level of business.

Scholars have had the definition of the idea of culture as a system of artifacts, norms, and values where the design is to affect the favorite set of actions (Ozkaya et al., 2015). The issue of benefits has its basis as a popular concept with the plan to help any given person when it comes to making decisions on some of the desirable norms and course of action when implementing marketing strategies. Artifacts have its reference as a symbolic element of the business in some of the critical topics such as communication style, rituals, and facilities. Ozkaya et al., (2015) defined MO and culture as a composition of the market-oriented norms, actions, values, and market-associated norms. The research places the four factors on a hierarchy where the issue of market-oriented operation has a significant effect regarding the performance of the small business (Ozkaya et al., 2015). However, it is imperative to note that the alignment of the hierarchy of the elements of MO and the culture of the organization has its limitation in the nature and dynamics of the relationship between the different aspects (Glaveli, et al.,

2017). Consequently, Laukkanen, Nagy, Hirvonen, Reijonen, & Pasanen, (2013) proposed that the issues of MO and the elements of culture in business have an arrangement in the dynamic interaction through the means of the interpretive, symbolization, visualization, and clarification process.

Market-oriented culture and business performance. According to the research by Laukkanen et al., (2013), the ideas of market-oriented culture in a small business have its design through the creation of high customer value through the execution of the necessary actions effectively and efficiently. In the research, the authors refer to the idea of market-oriented businesses as firms that seek a valid way in the provision of the addition of value to the client while focusing on the lowering of costs of the service or product (Laukkanen et al., 2013). Maksimov et al., (2017), indicated that there was a significant effect on the performance of the firm through a strategy of MO. However, Laukkanen et al. (2013) classified the issue of market orientation culture as an interaction of different elements that are dynamic.

Marketing Strategies

Ahearne, Lam, & Kraus, (2014), argued that some of the studies that focus on the marketing strategies of business have a significant effect as a determinant of the performance of the market. Further, Ahearne et al. introduced and defined marketing strategy as a concept that unites the ideas of implementation and planning and involves the execution and design of the plans. Further, the evaluation of the performance of the business consisted of capabilities, marketing assets, comprehensiveness, and the analysis of the situation (Brunswick & Vanhaverbeke, 2015). Another process involved

interviews of the frontline staff, consensus commitment, communication quality, and the cross-functional integration (Ahearne et al., 2014).

Prior to establishing marketing strategy, research supported completion of a situational analysis, including a systematic analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats within the given area of the marketing strategy (Sui & Baum, 2014). The authors determined that the situational report consisted of the understanding and delineation of some of the new threats and opportunities due to the changes in the environment, which assists the business in the strategic adaptation of some of the risks and affecting the company positively (Sui & Baum, 2014). Covin and Miller, (2014) also recommended a comprehensive and systematic development of marketing strategy and a practical evaluation of the alternatives in the process of selection. Further, the development of some of the alternative marketing strategies can enable a business to select an effective marketing strategy through the process of the evaluation of the alternative approach (Covin & Miller, 2014). Another research showed an operating procedure had a positive influence on the performance of the business (Cui, Walsh, & Zou, 2014). The emphasis of marketing capabilities and assets bolstered the continued and productive employment of the core process of industry, foundational to a successful marketing strategy (Cui et al., 2014).

The quality of communication refers to the quantity and quality of all forms of communication within the process of making marketing strategy (Sui & Baum, 2014). The aspect of high quality of communication has the effect of preventing improvement on the execution and off tracking of the procedure. Sui and Baum (2014) determined that

communication played a primary role in the elements of failure or success of the marketing strategy. Experts believe that high quality of communication can have a positive influence on the performance of the business in the market (Sui & Baum, 2014; Hollensen, 2015).

During the marketing strategy, the issue of consensus commitment refers to the consensus of the marketing team in the business and their commitment to the type of approach. The idea of consensus building before the implementation of the marketing strategy through the promotion of the understanding of the individual of the process of making decisions reduces the chances of uncertainties. Therefore, it reduces cases of internal friction among the team members and thus creates an effective and efficient operation (Hollensen, 2015). In the research, consensus commitment was linked to individual determination and understanding and when present had a positive effect on the performance of the business (Hollensen, 2015).

Integration of marketing-oriented theory and marketing strategies. To have a clear understanding of the components of both the culture of market orientation and marketing strategy researchers focused on the market capabilities and the marketing effectiveness (Longoni, & Cagliano, 2015). Through this study, the results can have a smooth adaptation on some of the real practices of marketing strategies. Longoni and Cagliano (2015) first determined if the assessment criteria in the effectiveness of the marketing strategies evaluation are adequate regarding the assessment of the concept. This determination involved the use of 10 semantic differential scales in the review of marketing orientation and its aspect as a culture in the implementation of the strategy.

Longoni and Cagliano considered integration was characterized by operational efficiency, strategic direction, adequate marketing information, integrated marketing organization, and the customer philosophy. However, it is paramount to note that the author's criteria have a questionable validity. For example, in the aspect of the market-oriented culture, there is only the assessment of the ideological components while the market-oriented strategy is unrealistic regarding only evaluations of the fair appraisal of the abilities of the business and its strategic orientation (Krush, Sohi, & Saini, 2015).

Secondly, Longoni and Cagliano's (2015) criteria and aspects of the marketing effectiveness did not discriminate between the different cultural and strategic factors. Therefore, they failed to account the many interactions between these two elements of the marketing strategy. Thus, although there is the possibility of predicting the performance of the small-medium enterprise according to the effectiveness of the marketing, there is a difficulty in the suggestion of some of the improvement methods (Krush et al., 2015). On the other hand, some experts give an assertion that the comparative advantage of the two items can enable a business to achieve a superior performance through a competitive advantage (Krush et al., 2015).

Asseraf and Shoham (2015) researched the attempts of competitors to neutralize the edge of the company through significant innovation, substitution, imitation, or acquisition. Asseraf and Shoham then proposed the hypothesis that the aspect of market-oriented culture has a closer association with the performance of the business than the market-oriented tactic or strategy. The research is important given the fact that it was an attempt to give a clear understanding and the evaluation of some of the three dimensions

of the capabilities of marketing (Asseraf, & Shoham, 2015). The idea is from a unified perspective, which delineates the link to the performance of the SMEs. However, it is paramount to note that Asseraf and Shoham's (2015) study had many limitations. Firstly, Lamore, Berkowitz, and Farrington (2013) determined that the survey assessment scales were inconsistent regarding concept validity. Regarding the market orientation, the precise idea is that the issue of market orientation has its basis in the culture since the study has its limitation on the number of assessable criteria (Lamore et al., 2013). In the case of Asseraf and Shoham's study, it was restricted to considering marketing as the only culture in an organization. Therefore, the issue of market-oriented cannot have an assessment based on conceptual discrimination from the strategy of selling.

In the development of an assessment scale that represents the precise definition of the market-oriented culture, there must be the consideration of some of the market-oriented artifacts and norms (Cacciolatti & Lee, 2016). The other imperative problem has its basis to the assessment of some of the marketing strategy levels. Here the evaluations of the scale had its foundation on the position of the price, service, and product in the business, which in the real sense is the assessment of all the results as opposed to the content or strategic planning.

To improve future research, authors should consider the different relationship between the individual effect, the interaction relations, individual components, and marketing capabilities on the performance of the business (Brouthers, Nakos, & Dimitratos, 2015). Researchers of marketing strategies suggested that the aspect of the approach is the parameter variable, which is mediation between the performance of the

enterprise and its culture (Brouthers et al., 2015). The current research focuses on the use of the assessment of a scale that is consistent with the definition of some of the marketing capabilities. For market-oriented theory and culture to have an active impact on the performance of the business, there must be planning and implementation of a market-oriented method that is sufficient (Ozkaya et al., 2015). The process should involve an arrangement of strategic planning. Firms must focus on first following a clear strategy and procedures for marketing by establishing the market orientation and organizational culture foundation (Ozkaya et al., 2015). Having these foundational elements in place will help to ensure a positive effect on the overall performance of the business and its improvement regarding the capability in the market (Brouthers et al., 2015; Ozkaya et al., 2015).

Marketing strategies for small and medium sized businesses. In any for-profit business, regardless of the size, the aim of increasing sales and maximizing profit through developed marketing strategies. Marketing strategies create and maintain a competitive edge in the most sustainable way (Bhattacharya, 2016). Marketing strategies constitute all the long and short-term initiatives developed to improve the initial situation of an organization and create solutions to combat the near future problems (Di Benedetto & Kim, 2016). Marketing strategies are always part of strategic planning in business related organizations. The initial steps in developing a marketing strategy involve the analysis of the internal and external factors in the business environment to identify what should be done by the organization to make the most out of the presenting situation (Ratten et al.,

2016). The marketing environment consists of factors such as politics, technological developments, legal aspects, and the organizational culture.

Marketing strategies for organizations should not replace marketing objectives (Sok, O’Cass, & Miles, 2016). According to Sok et al., marketing strategies identify and describe how a firm is going to implement initiatives to accomplish and achieve set goals and objectives. Organizational leaders use marketing strategies to identify situations which will enable the management to allocate resources to ensure maximum exploitation of the unforeseen market opportunities (Appiah-Adu & Amoako, 2016). The development of marketing strategies is highly dependent on the type of a business leader and the management skills and philosophies he or she applies in leading the employees. Mehra, Mehra, Coleman, and Coleman, (2016) noted the best marketing strategies arise from creating an interactive environment between the employees and management where low-ranking employees share their views and opinions regarding the business operations.

For SME businesses, the marketing strategies differ from one SME to another depending on the type of leader and objectives of the owner (Appiah-Adu & Amoako, 2016). Such plans include entrant strategies, customized target strategy, differentiated strategy and the growth strategies (Besharat, Langan, & Nguyen, 2016). The entrant strategies are those applied by the management of the SME management launching their businesses for the first time in the new market (Sun-Liu, 2015). The differentiated strategies are those strategies employed by SME leaders to suit to a segment of the market. The products or services provided are only designed to meet the market needs of specific groups of people (Park & Campbell, 2017). The differentiated strategies and the

customized strategies share some similarities because they identify specific needs of a customer (Martin & Javalgi, 2016; Sun-Liu, 2015). Clients with different interests and preferences for goods and services; therefore, the marketing strategies directed toward the satisfying individual needs in the market. According to Wedel and Kannan (2016), the most important strategies for SME business owners and managers are the growth strategies. Given the dynamic nature of the SME business environment, there is a need to come up with marketing strategies that will ensure the survival of the business in the longer term (Wedel & Kannan, 2016). Growth strategies are essential to the success of any business regardless of the size (Kowalkowski, Gebauer, & Oliva, 2017).

Ramli (2015) found that in small and medium sized businesses a communication gap existed between SME entrepreneurs and their customers. The development of necessary marketing strategies to help small and medium sized businesses achieve the much-required success and survival in the hostile economic environment (Pérez-Luño, Saporito, & Gopalakrishnan, 2016). Marketing strategies from both the customer and the entrepreneur's perspectives need annual revision to ensure that they remain relevant to the fast-changing economic environment.

Marketing mix. The marketing mix for SMEs also includes the four elements of the *product*, its *price*, the market *place*, and *promotion* activities. Concerning the *product*, SMEs can analyze the market demand and expand the depth and width of its products to gain full advantage of the market conditions which will indeed maintain the business under long term high performance. A successful SME business manager must ensure efficient development of a product mix that will convince customers to buy.

Other SME leaders chose to focus on the *price* of their products as a marketing strategy (Harrington et al., 2017). Price is to determine for whether a business will make profits. The pricing mix used is also important to determine the outcomes and achievement of the business owner's goals and objectives. Kumar, Dixit, Javalgi and Dass (2016) published empirical evidence that supported competitive product prices (a) sustain businesses for a longer duration, and (b) maintain business performance.

Though SMEs usually associated with small scale businesses and whose market cover small geographical locations, product and service *promotions* still play a critical role in ensuring that the business remains successful. The product promotion is the initial opportunity for potential customers to interact (Nenzhelele, 2014). Leaders of successful SMEs use innovative and creative branding methods proven to be efficient at maintaining a competitive edge (Johnston, 2016). For SME managers, communication quality and high public relations between the business and the customers is significant (Nenzhelele, 2014). Within SMEs, business leaders act as bosses at the same time as managers who lead by example. They are also involved in the daily interaction with the customers. Interviews of successful New York based SME business owners revealed that useful product and service development constituted networking, use of clusters, and watching technological innovations kept the businesses flourishing after five years (Rakićević, Omerbegović-Bijelović, & Lečić-Cvetković, 2016). Finally, Sheehan (2013) found that development of a complete and efficient marketing mix also involved the *place* and distribution of products and services. Successful SME leaders identify the best places and distribution channels for their products and services (Sheehan, 2013).

Effective marketing strategies. According to Appiah-Adu and Amoako (2016), small and medium sized businesses need to develop effective marketing policies. Appiah-Adu and Amoako argued that implementation of effective strategies by SMEs will make them have a superior competitive advantage over other players in the dynamic economic environment. The combination of the marketing mix, marketing strategies, an emphasis on networking, and implementation of market intelligence systems benefit SME firms (Nenzhelele, 2014). The combination of collaborations forms an essential marketing tool that led to efficient and informed decision making by SME leaders (Nenzhelele, 2014). Shen, Chiou, Hsiao, Wang, and Li (2016) argued that the SME decision-making processes are highly dependent on the adopted marketing strategies. Superior marketing strategies led to successful business while poor policies result in SME underperformance, impacting survival (Shen et al., 2016). Also, Tiago and Verissimo (2014) advised that SME business holders be cautious when implementing different marketing strategies so that their businesses do not trap into channeling all their energy and resources to unproductive initiatives while forgetting the organization's core mandate and immediate goals.

Innovative marketing strategies. Marketing strategies are important for the development of successful SME businesses. Successful SME business holders with an African origin use other strategies in conjunction with marketing mix and marketing intelligence (Nenzhelele, 2014). Bamiatzi and Kirchmaier (2014) determined SME leaders used innovative and network marketing, relationship marketing, and technological marketing. The combination of these factors constituted a strong marketing

strategy that ensured short term and long-term success for SMEs. Further, Sheehan (2013) developed a model to determine the effectiveness of incorporating marketing tactics, strategies, and culture into SMEs firms. Sheehan concluded that using the model could assist SME leaders to develop a clear understanding of current and future market needs, enabling better planning and resource organization to bias firm performance. U.S. small businesses provide location and niche services which large organizations and manufacturers are incapable of providing (Hossain, Ibrahim, & Uddin, 2016). Niche and small run service and product delivery require leaders remain up-to-date on innovations, market studies, and fast-changing strategy development. Successful SME leaders found dynamic marketing strategies were essential to maintaining the relevance of their small businesses over longer periods of time (Hallbäck & Gabrielsson, 2013). Importantly, successful SME business experts noted that marketing strategies are not the sole determinants of long performance of SMEs (Odoom et al., 2017). Effective implementation of the set marketing strategies will about bring success in SME businesses to achieve the set goals and objectives of the organization (Odoom et al., 2017).

Dynamic market conditions. Fluctuations in market conditions and trade cycles influence marketing strategies (Prajogo, 2016). With the advancement in technology and the wake of new inventions, SME leaders and business owners need to develop dynamic strategies to maintain a competitive edge in the market amid the diverse and fluctuating market demands (Kuo, Lin, & Lu, 2017). Growth strategies incorporate the application of diversity in the development of business initiatives (Pronina, Kuivalainen, Torkkeli, &

Gracheva, 2016). To create and maintain long-term business success involves both horizontal and vertical integration strategies (Hong & Li, 2017). Sustainable growth strategies also incorporate business diversification and intensification (Pronina et al., 2016). According to Pellinen et al. (2016), leaders should also identify the potential risks of proposed initiatives and determine the possible outcomes of such actions. SME leaders have the responsibility of ensuring the development of the best business strategies to ensure short term success and long-term business survival (Lofsten & Lofsten, 2016).

Gupta, Rhodes, and Gregoriou, (2015) found that small and medium sized businesses play a critical role in the economic development of industries. The marketing strategies employed by small and medium business owners comprise of marketing mix and marketing intelligence which small and medium business entrepreneurs evoke economic consciousness (Resnick, Cheng, Simpson, & Lourenco, 2016). Gupta et al. (2015) recommended that relevant government agencies offer financial base support to ensure SMEs thrive.

In the United States, minority run businesses total 38.1% of all SMEs (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2014) and sometimes lack the necessary leadership skills to develop effective marketing strategies to keep their businesses perform over extended periods of time (Rae, 2017). Ng, Kee, and Ramayah (2016) recommended that the U.S. government and relevant agencies develop leadership programs, seminars, and in-house workshops targeting SME leaders. Such development programs will enable African Immigrant SME managers to add formal management knowledge to the business leadership experience which will further help them maintain and improve job

performance in the long term (Agostini, 2016). Implementation of Agostini's recommendations could help SME leaders to adapt to the dynamic business environment and cope with the changing market needs.

Marketing strategies used in SMEs led by African Immigrants. In this section, I explore the marketing strategies, methods, and critical operating frameworks that most of the African immigrants SME leaders use. African immigrants who own and operate U.S. SME businesses understand the importance of their role in building the economy (Anwar, Anwar, Daniel, & Daniel, 2016). Leaders are involved in the active study of their target markets, which increases their understanding of the customer and consumer needs (Hossain et al., 2016). Though African immigrants may lack formal leadership skills training, they understand that analysis of the market conditions is essential in ensuring that they produce and offer what their customers desire. African SME leaders use customer satisfaction as a proxy indicator for business sustainability (Anwar et al., 2016). Such SME leaders have learned that they are important jobs creation element in the U.S. economy. Tsuruta (2016) found that U.S. SMEs contributed at least 20% of the nation's total gross domestic product. The primary motivation of SME business owners and leaders is that they contribute so much to the U.S. economy and strive to perform and keep their businesses a success (Canals, 2013). Leaders of SMEs play a significant role to maintain the performance of large industries as they form a decent outlet for most of the industrial products (Amin, Thurasamy, Aldakhij, & Kaswuri (2016). The U.S. government has developed trade agency initiatives to develop SME leaders via in-house

training and workshops where the SME leaders learn new methods and sustainment strategies (Canals, 2013).

Research evidence suggested that SME leaders concentrate most of their energy and resources on exploiting optimal market opportunities to gain a competitive edge and maintain business sustainability (Davari & Strutton, 2014). The strategies applied by African immigrant SME leaders are unstructured and range from development of a marketing agenda to product innovation strategy. Product innovation strategies represent advanced and efficient marketing principles applied by SME leaders who are considered to lack the formal management skills required in running successful businesses (Davari & Strutton, 2014).

The nature of SME business in the United States reveal that there is fierce competition which requires that SME businesses to be engaged in innovation to remain relevant in the market (Johnston, 2016). Successful SME leaders are employing marketing concepts tailored toward the satisfaction of emerging and fast changing customer needs. To assure success, leaders of SMEs must adopt innovative marketing practices, such as the use of internet and other digital media platforms, to sell their brands (Johnston, 2016). The primary challenge for most SMEs leaders is to maintain consistency as SMEs do not cover large geographical areas (Johnston, 2016). According to Nejati, Quazi, Amran and Ahmad (2016), SME leaders have realized that they cannot keep on selling older products or using the same or similar brands, which has forced SME leaders to adopt innovative approaches to reduce their production costs and to remain competitive longer (Nejati et al., 2016). Marketing strategy interviews, conducted with

African immigrant SME leaders, show that they are aware of the changing market needs in technology and try to analyze the market conditions (Foroudi et al., 2017). Leaders of SMEs determined that market analysis enables market need identification to support tailoring products and services toward the achievement of these requirements (Sok, O’Cass, & Sok, 2013).

Product innovation. A significant strategy employed by African immigrant SME leaders is product innovation. SME leaders of African descent are reinventing themselves in the fast-changing market environment so that they remain relevant in the business to fit and meet the demands of their customers (Nejati et al., 2016). In SMEs, customers are the major determinants of the success of the business (Lo et al., 2016). In product innovation, SME leaders continually focus on creating products and services tailored toward satisfying the demands and preferences of the customers (Prajogo, 2016). According to Prajogo (2016), a product innovation strategy dictates innovative marketing based on networking and tools to identify unique or specific customer needs. Such initiatives help the businesses channel their focus on developing products and services covering a broad spectrum of specific market demand (Chuang & Lin, 2017; Nejati et al., 2016).

SME leaders follow the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor to learn strategies other SME leaders around the world are doing to maintain business success and general competitiveness (Ratten et al., 2016). Dikova, Jaklič, Burger, and Kunčič (2016) determined that SME business owners and leaders open businesses with an aim to grow the business to a global status. A future oriented focus has sometimes negatively contributed to the chances of success (Dikova et al., 2016). Of note, SMEs typically

enjoy a strong customer base; the SME leaders must identify the market needs and come up with innovative products to satisfy customer demands.

Brand building. Brand building is a marketing strategy adopted by successful SME leaders (Johnston, 2016). Brand building is a proven method of product promotion where the creation of an appealing brand supports customer loyalty and ensures long term performance (Johnston, 2016). Even though the brand building is effective marketing strategy, it requires the SME to have the resources to fund the process (Ramli, 2015). African Immigrant SME owners and business leaders usually lack such funding; lack of sufficient funds to finance the implementation of marketing strategies degrades the success of SMEs led by African immigrants (Ramli, 2015).

Sklaveniti (2017) found that most successful entrepreneurs have the requisite knowledge of the products and services they offer, which makes it easier for them to advertise and promote their goods and services to customers. Successful SME leaders use networks to obtain information about customer preferences, which also help in the determination of product and service prices (Smith, Kempster, & Barnes, 2017). The market information assists in the development of competitive prices, which ensures the business remains within the acceptable profit zones. Successful SME focused on improving the product quality and innovation versus advertising (Hyun-woo, 2015). Product quality can yield positive results as tangibles impress most customers, more than the information presented in advertisements (Hyun-woo, 2015). Perceptions of high product and service quality and standards bolster customer loyalty (Hyun-woo, 2015).

Implementation issues. Hyun-woo (2015) found that despite the efforts of most of the SME leaders of African descent, 90 % of the SME businesses do not meet the market requirements after operating for a long time (Hyun-woo, 2015). Further, the marketing strategies do not meet market needs; most of the SMEs led by African immigrants fail over long periods of time (Hyun-woo, 2015). SME leaders lag to implement the required new strategies to keep touch with fast evolving markets (Hyun-woo, 2015). Successful SME business leaders achieve and maintain strong customer relations through product innovation and study of market trends.

Some SMEs led by African immigrants have failed because of lack of a precise marketing strategy (Nejati et al., 2016). For example, SMEs leaders approach their products and services, in a *scatter gun* approach, ending up with poor returns. Lack of working market strategy to enhance business sales can cause the firm to achieve bad financial results and lead to closure (Nejati et al., 2016).

Leadership in Small and Medium Business Enterprises

The role of a leader in small and medium sized businesses is very different to the leadership of large enterprises and organizations (Fernandez & Ali, 2015). Leader's handle virtually all the daily business operations. Successful SME leaders apply a hands-on approach to implement various tasks in their organizations (Amon & Dorfleitner, 2013). The leadership style of the manager determines the outcome of the business in many SMEs.

To foster a successful business, leaders effectively combine the four production factors of land, labor, capital, and entrepreneurship (Henrekson & Stenkula, 2017). In

small businesses, entrepreneurship is the most important as is dependent on leadership quality (Henrekson & Stenkula, 2017; Saeed & Ibrahim, 2016). Through leadership the production factors of land, labor, and capital apply efficiently enough to maximize profit (Saeed & Ibrahim, 2016). In all organizations, whether large or small, leaders are important in developing and communicating the set strategic goals and objectives; leaders guide others to perform procedures that enable the implementation of targets (Leitch & Volery, 2017). To ensure that the business has a competitive market edge, business leaders communicate business strategies, marketing policies, and marketing strategies to gain and maintain customers (Klang & Hacklin, 2013). The dynamic daily business environment results in numerous leadership challenges (Fernandez & Ali, 2015). To thrive in meeting the changing markets needs and demands requires that business leaders become innovative and have the capacity to reinvent themselves (Garavan, Watson, Carbery, & OBrien, 2015).

Given that SME businesses are common in most economies, market dynamism impacts them (Antoncic et al., 2016). To ensure that their firms remain relevant in the market, SME business leaders need to develop the necessary leadership skills and apply relevant leadership theories (Saeed & Ibrahim, 2016). SME business leaders have the responsibility to develop, train, motivate, and inspire employees to foster the right attitudes and creativity in performing their duties (Mittal & Dhar, 2015). By doing this, an organization could achieve the set goals and objectives.

In SMEs, one needs to be a manager and a leader at the same time. Considering the constantly changing market needs and demands, the leaders must ensure

accountability and achievement of consistent results (Garavan et al., 2015). Successful SMEs require that the leader is in constant engagement with his or her employees to ensure that they remain focused on achieving the set organizational goals and objectives. The leader who learn to appreciate hard work from the employees develop mutual trust and initiate intellectual stimulation (Rispoli & Leung, 2014).

Leadership development in small and medium business enterprises. Over the past two to three decades, SMEs have faced leadership development issues (Atkinson, 2017). Research among small and medium business owners indicated that SMEs confront numerous challenges which have an adverse impact on their long-term survival (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017; Zhou, 2016). Zhou (2016) found that most of the SMEs decline in productivity after five years of operation. The reasons for the decline are from the dynamic nature of the business environment which involves changes in market demands over a short period. Atkinson determined that most of the SME leaders lack training and the necessary leadership qualities to sustain their businesses over long periods. Analysis of the marketing strategies demonstrated that the SME leaders focused on operational survival in the tough market (Rispoli & Leung, 2014). Such conditions have made most of the SME leaders focus developmental efforts on job training and gaining of market experience rather than pursuing professional leadership courses to obtain formal management skills (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017). SME leaders and managers do not have professional leadership qualifications; they rely on their own business experience to guide employees to achieve the organizational goals and objectives (Rae, 2017). The lack

of formal leadership skills always leads to potential business failure, lack of long term performance and survival.

The primary issue of concern among SME leaders is succession (Atkinson, 2017). Atkinson (2017) found that SME leadership structures do not have defined management succession structures making the transition difficult. In most cases, SMEs fail during a transition from one era to another. Analysis of the problem revealed that the issue stems SME leaders who lack formal leadership skills (Atkinson, 2017). Recommendations of research from different people investigating the SME leadership development indicated that SME leaders should be helped to acquire the necessary management skills (Dunne, Aaron, McDowell, Urban, & Geho, 2016; Hall, Hall, Rowland, & Rowland, 2016). Leitch and Volery (2017) recommended engaging SME leaders, given their 48.0% immense contribution to the economy, in leadership programs such as in-house workshops and seminars to hone management skills (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2014). Atkinson (2017) also recommended that stakeholders, including the U.S. government, organize and facilitate workshops for SME leaders to discuss mutual challenges and share best practices. Such workshops and forums should tailor towards the provision of innovative and creative solutions to improve on how SME managers and leaders handle their day to day operations. Initiated leadership development programs have the potential of transforming SME into sustainable businesses that will survive in the fast-changing economic environment (Hall et al., 2016).

According to Amon and Dorfleitner (2013), leadership and management are crucial to business success. The fast-changing economic environment requires leaders

skilled at the development of strategic organizational goals. In the case of SMEs, personal leadership traits and compelling leadership qualities are crucial for efficient running and operations. Empirical evidence from research shows that management of small and medium sized businesses entail critical organizing, planning, and coordination of day to day activities which differ from managing corporation and organizations (Buschlen, Warner, & Goffnett, 2015). The act of balancing the utilization of resources to ensure short term and long-term success has proved to be a difficult task for most of the SME leaders especially in the United States. It is accepted that for a leader to be effective, he or she must be able to (a) act as a role model to employees, (b) able to develop and articulate future vision for the organization, (c) demonstrate excellent problem solving and conflict resolution abilities, and (d) have enough personal confidence to represent the organization (Buschlen et al., 2015). Leaders, especially those in the SME sector, must possess creative and innovative minds that can turn ideas into actions that help the organization move forward (Buschlen et al., 2015). Given that most African groceries stores run by African immigrants who do not have formal leadership skills, leadership development programs need to be established to help to maintain their businesses in the long term (Leitch & Volery, 2017). Such development programs have led to researchers to investigate the relationship between long term performance and different leadership styles.

Transformational leadership in small and medium business enterprises.

Transformational leaders identify committed organizational members, willing to work positively towards the achievement of shared goals (Dunne et al., 2016). In this case, the

leader together with active employees, scrutinize the organization, identify the needs, and work as a team to towards implementing positive changes that will move the organization forward. The leader has the responsibility of inspiring and motivating members to execute the necessary modifications by acting as a role model to boost morale and employee job performance. Under transformational leadership style, employees develop the sense of identity and ownership of the business and they can channel positive energy towards the achievement of set goals and objectives (Mittal & Mittal, 2016). Through the application of transformational leadership skills and behaviors leaders identify and assign staff according to strengths and weaknesses (Smiljanic, 2016).

Empirical evidence suggests that SME leaders who have used transformational leadership skills in their businesses have always experienced positive outcomes regarding employee performance (Mittal, 2016) The demanding nature of small and medium sized businesses requires constant and active involvement and engagement of staff through discussions sharing of opinions and ideas of how to run the business (Smiljanic, 2016). Employee engagement brings about creativity and innovation that ultimately increases productivity. Such initiatives are only possible when practicing transformational leadership practices. Through business forums and seminars, SME leaders have acquired transformational leadership skills to boost their business performance and productivity. Research to determine the impact of transformational leadership on SME performance showed that there is increased trust and work rate among members of staff in a free and interactive working environment (Engelen, Gupta, Strenger, & Brettel, 2015). The commitment level is also high which has led to long term success. The succession of

management between various SME management eras is dependent on the leadership management style. The transformational leadership style has proven to contribute positively to leadership succession via development of a positive organizational culture, considered crucial during leader transitions from one management era to another (Dunne et al., 2016). The fast-changing economic environment of the SME sector dictates the requirement to develop an organizational culture that easily accommodates changes, supports innovation, and encourages creativity (Smiljanic, 2016).

Through transformational leadership behaviors, employees of an organization have the chance to engage with each other to share views and opinions on how to initiate positive change in the organization (Karakitapoglu-Aygun & Gumusluoglu, 2013). The SME business environment requires that staff members adapt to organizational changes as stimulated by the changing consumer needs. For long term performance of SMEs, the employees must be ready to take risks to enhance positive changes in the organization (Karakitapoglu-Aygun & Gumusluoglu, 2013). Therefore, for SME leaders to ensure achievement of long term success, they must develop structures in their leadership styles which will initiate intellectual stimulation among all employees, motivation, and act as role models in the day to day operations of the business (Tresca, 2013). That will create the right environment for innovation which is one ingredient to ensure long term success.

Literature Review Conclusion

Recommendations from most of the empirical studies on application marketing strategies on small and medium business enterprises reveal that the business leaders need to adapt efficient and innovative policies and initiatives to achieve success and remain

relevant in the firm for a long time (Canals, 2013). Small business managers should learn to study the business environment to develop products and services that will be able to meet the specific customer needs and demands. The development of such marketing strategies will require planning by conducting research on the market needs and interacting with the client base, setting of objectives by marketing conditions and getting to know who the business partners will be. Leaders of SMEs must understand that in the modern-day business marketing is one of the firm functions vital in determining short and long-term success (Agostini, 2016). Case studies of SME businesses in different parts of the world demonstrated the requirement for a strategic component which will contribute significantly to the growth of respective economies (Jamali, Lund-Thomsen, & Jeppesen, 2017). Leaders of SMEs in such countries are applying effective marketing strategies to ensure that businesses remain relevant in the market (Agostini, 2016). The researcher used multicase research study to investigate the marketing strategies African immigrants SME grocery store owners use to ensure the survival of their businesses beyond five years. Given growing concerns that some African immigrant grocery owners lack the necessary formal business leadership skills to develop, marketing strategies to survive beyond five years dictated the study focus.

Transition

Section 1 introduced the business problem and the method I used to conduct the research and a review of the literature. SMEs play a significant role in the development of the United States economy; unfortunately, most of the SMEs fail within 5 years of their set up (Bloch & Bhattacharya, 2016). The objective of Section 2 is to provide an account

of the research method and design of the study to identify the marketing strategies small business owners need to apply to succeed beyond 5 years. I explored how small business leaders engaged in successful marketing strategy, by conducting a qualitative multiple case study. The study participants were five African immigrant small business owners with fewer than 20 employees. In Section 2, I review research reliability and validity and the business impact for effecting a change to small business owned by African immigrants.

Section 2: The Project

In this multicase study, I focused on small business because small businesses produce 46% of the GDP in United States economy and are critical to the stability of domestic and global economies (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2014). In the research findings, I identified marketing strategies that are helpful to business owners as they manage their operations. To determine such strategies, I examined the experiences of five small grocery store business owners who have been in business for more than 5 years. In this section, I reprised the study's purpose and discuss my role in the study, participants, the research method and design, population and sampling, ethical approach, data collection instruments and techniques, data organization and analysis, and procedures for ensuring validity and reliability.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to explore the marketing strategies African immigrant SME grocery store owners use to survive beyond 5 years. The target population included five African immigrant SME grocery store owners located in Bronx, New York. To be eligible for the study, the owners must have developed marketing strategies to succeed beyond 5 years. My goal for this study was to encourage economic empowerment among African immigrant SME owners by identifying strategies, such as effective marketing techniques, that may increase survival rates. As a result, sustained survival of SMEs might decrease the level of unemployment, enhance the economy, and improve the standard of living in the Bronx communities.

Role of the Researcher

The qualitative researcher's role is to explore, collect, and present data in an organized form (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Merriam, 2014). My role as a researcher included building a decent relationship with the participants. Creating a healthy relationship with participants guaranteed their trust and enhanced their readiness to give me the exact information. I was responsible for ensuring that the participants were at ease so that I could gather precise and objective data from them. Also, I distinguished both verbal and nonverbal cues and facilitated the flow of communication. My role as the primary research instrument involved (a) the selection of research methodology and design; (b) selection of study participants; and (c) collection, organization, summarization, analysis, and interpretation of the data. The data collection process involved conducting one-on-one semistructured interviews with study participants. I have a passion for entrepreneurship and an interest in small business in my community. The study findings might help boost the marketing strategies of my future business.

The Belmont Report identified three basic ethical principles governing research and practice that I complied with including the principles of (a) respect of persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). I completed the online training for adherence to ethical requirement and the protection of human research members through the National Institute of Health (NIH), acquiring NIH preparing certification number 1653249 (Appendix C). I conducted my study adhering to the standards that protect participants. Marshall & Rossman (2014) posited that qualitative researchers should minimize error and researcher bias. To alleviate bias, researchers ought to abstain

from including their perspectives and rather see information through the members' lenses (Bell, 2014). To lessen the influence of researcher bias, I used an identical protocol for all interviews and self-recognized any individual predispositions amid the collection of data. I developed my interview protocol and maintained the standards of the College of Management and Technology at Walden University (see Appendix B). Using the interview protocol helped me guarantee dependability, consistency, commonality, and that all members got the same procedural approach. The interview protocol served as a reminder for me to remain on target and to test for more details. The justification for an interview protocol is to encourage interactions that inspire participants to share information on a subject and to guarantee that researchers do not stray from the study targets (Boehm & Hogan, 2014).

I audio recorded face-to-face interviews, which I subsequently transcribed. I used member checking to control quality and confirm the accuracy, validity, and credibility of the study. I used methodological triangulation to compare findings from various sorts of information sources, such as interview responses and significant business documents. Methodological triangulation includes gathering information from more than one source to answer the research question and improve the validity of the research findings (Fusch & Ness, 2015)

Participants

To identify potential African immigrant small business owner participants, I conducted an internet search on Yelp and requested referrals from acquaintances. I used purposeful sampling to identify participants who have successfully operated a grocery

store for 5 or more years. According to Robinson (2014), purposeful sampling is the selection of qualified participants to provide data that reflect the population. After the approval from Walden University Institutional review Board (IRB) (02-05-18-0510888), I visited potential participants' offices, provided them with a written invitation to participate in the study, and explained the study intent. I introduced the owners to my research and its purpose. I informed the members that I would ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of their participation. The central research question was: What marketing strategies do African immigrant SME grocery store owners use to survive beyond 5 years? To ensure the data collected answered the question, participants' eligibility criteria required that they (a) be African immigrants aged 18 years or older; (b) currently own and have operated a grocery store for at least 5 years in the Bronx, New York; (c) have 20 or fewer employees; (d) act as their store's chief decision maker; (e) could provide substantial insight into the central research question; and (f) would provide the required informed consent.

Mason (2008) reported that smaller sample sizes allow for a thematic saturation strategy, which reduces the time and increases efficiency in data collection. Therefore, the sample size of five was deemed sufficient to produce the requisite multicas e data. I selected five business owners who voluntarily agreed to participate by signing the consent form. To establish a healthy working relationship with participants, I scheduled interview times and dates that worked best for each participant. Also, I advised participants that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. I followed detailed and proper ethical research

procedures and avoided any violation of human rights abuses. I also leveraged Kral's (2014) advice throughout the data collection process regarding (a) establishing trust, (b) promoting participant confidentiality, and (c) being honest with the participants on the intended purpose and study outcomes.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

Three research methods available to researchers are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins, & Kuppelwieser, 2014). Each method has merits and limitations. I selected a qualitative research method for the study because it was suitable for an exploration of the practices and experience required to answer the central research question. Yin (2017) posited that qualitative method involves the use of the following: (a) asking how and why questions to allow study participants to express their perspectives, (b) observing people or events in their natural location, and (c) not manipulating variables. According to Stake (2013), researchers use qualitative methods to obtain participant perceptions about a problem or topic. The qualitative method I used met all three conditions posited by Yin, produced the data required to answer the central research question, and ultimately proved preferable to quantitative and mixed methods. The quantitative method is appropriate for numerical data, correlation, and significance, evaluating or generating hypotheses, and understanding the relationship between variables (Takey & de Carvalho, 2015). The quantitative method did not align with the research question since my intent was to explore and not to test hypothesis or find the relationship between variables. The quantitative method includes statistical information

and does not give in-depth comprehension of lived experiences of participants. Mixed research is a hybrid of both deductive and inductive methods from both quantitative and qualitative data (Hodis, & Hancock, 2016; Maxwell, 2013). In the absence of variables to examine, both quantitative and mixed methods were not appropriate methods for the study (see Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

Research Design

I chose a multicasestudy design to gather information from grocery store owners who reside in the Bronx, New York area. Designs used in qualitative research method include (a) phenomenology, (b) case study, (c) ethnography, and (d) narrative (Padgett, 2016). Moustakas (1994) described phenomenology as a design researcher uses to explore a phenomenon from the perceptions and lived human experiences of the research participants. According to Gill (2014), researchers who use phenomenology describe emotions, feeling, and opinion instead of business objectives. Phenomenology was not appropriate for the study because I designed the research question to find marketing strategies of small business and not to understand the lived experiences of individuals. Ethnography is appropriate for an exploration of shared cultural beliefs and behaviors (Mutchler, McKay, McDavitt, & Gordon, 2013). Ethnography was not appropriate for the study because I was not researching cultural beliefs of African immigrants. Researchers who use ethnography are embedded to conduct field observation of behaviors and to understand an entire society for an extended period (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). According to Patton, (2014), researchers who use ethnographic design live and work among the study participant or community for a period to learn about participants'

sociocultural lives. The long-term approach was not feasible for my study. The purpose of the study did not align with the characteristics of ethnographic design because of the limited number of participant selected.

Narrative design is a study of life stories in chronological order (Agrawal, De Meyer, & Van Wassenhove, 2014). Researchers who use narrative tell stories of individuals or group of people (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). The marketing strategies of small business did not align with the story telling of a single individual or group of people, making narrative design inappropriate for the study. Finally, case study design is the appropriate means of researching emerging ideas from multiple sources, patterns, and themes (Yin, 2017). The central research question of this study was: What marketing strategies do African immigrant SME grocery store owners use to survive beyond 5 years? Therefore, the qualitative multicase study supported the exploration and development of common factors amongst the data sources.

Multicase study design is the appropriate means of researching emerging ideas from multiple sources, patterns, and themes (Yin, 2017). My use of case study provided requisite data to illustrate grocery store owners' use of marketing strategies to survive beyond 5years. I uncovered complimentary and contrasting aspects of the marketing phenomenon by evaluating marketing strategies of different African immigrant grocery store owners. The case study design is right for exploring a new phenomenon and examining the how, why, and what of the study (Yin, 2017). The case study design is suitable for studying complex problems through interview, observation, and documentation (Yin, 2017). Among the African immigrant grocery store owners, some

use the Internet as a marketing strategy, which is a relatively contemporary phenomenon over more traditional marketing strategies. Hence, my use of case study design supported the deepest and richest insights regarding this under-researched phenomenon. Perry (1998) described case study as a rigorous and suitable design for conducting marketing research. One benefit of the case study design is that it enables the researcher to get a holistic view of the process as opposed to a fragmented evaluation (Yin, 2017). I selected multiple case study over single case study because of the likelihood for study replication and persuasive findings (Cruzes, Dybå, Runeson, & Höst, 2015).

Population and Sampling

The scope of this multiple case study included a purposeful sample population of five small businesses located in the Bronx, New York area, and with fewer than 20 employees. Purposeful sampling involves identifying suitable participants who have in-depth knowledge of practices relevant to the study (Yin, 2017). I searched the internet for small businesses and also got referrals from acquaintances. I visited potential participants' businesses, introduced my study, and provided them with consent forms. I followed up with telephone calls and scheduled a visit to pick up the signed consent forms. I used a purposeful sampling strategy to ensure the richness of the findings. Kornhaber, Wilson, Abu-Qamar, McLean, and Vandervord (2014) posited the purposeful sampling method is most appropriate for small sample size data collection. Purposeful sampling ensures that the participants are contextually relevant to the purpose of the study and the research question (Robinson, 2014). Purposeful sampling also enables a researcher to collect data from the participants who have expertise with the phenomenon and who have diverse

views of the research topic (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014). A purposeful sampling approach enables an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences (Ginsberg & Sinacore, 2013; Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013).

Selection of five participants for the study facilitated the collection of a variety of perspectives, encouraged substantive comparison during data analysis, and resulted in the achievement of data saturation. Data saturation occurs when there was no new information emerging from the data collected (Cleary et al., 2014). Yin (2017) posited that as few as two cases might be appropriate for reaching data saturation and study replication. Fusch and Ness (2015) supported the notion that no one size fits all in the concept of data saturation. The sample size of five participants was satisfactory for this multicase research. I reached saturation on my fifth participant when no new ideas emerged.

I planned meetings with participants at the time and place of their choice. I conducted face-to-face interviews with participants in on-site environments free of noise and distraction which enhanced the quality of audio recordings. To ensure that participants understood and answered the central research question, I emailed participants the interview questions in advance so they could prepare for the interviews. Prior to the start of the interview I asked the eligibility criteria questions to ensure that they (a) were African immigrants aged 18 years or older, (b) had operated a grocery store for at least 5 years in the Bronx, New York, (c) had 20 or fewer employees, (d) acted as the store's chief decision maker, (e) could provide substantial insight into the central research

question, and (f) had provided the required informed consent. The interviews lasted no longer than 45 minutes.

Ethical Research

I used informed consent and followed the Belmont report guidelines for (a) respect for the person, (b) beneficence, (c) and justice to ensure adherence to ethical when collecting data from study participants. For example, any individuals who is under 18 years of age were not eligible to be participants in my study.

I performed my study under the auspices of Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Therefore, I did not collect data until I had IRB approval and the assigned IRB number for the study (02-05-18-0510888). Before conducting my study, and after achieving Walden IRB consent, I visited participants' premises and delivered an invitation to participate in the research. The request included informed consent and offered the potential participants an opportunity to ask questions concerning their rights and terms of the research. The consent form included important information about the purpose of the study and stipulated the characteristics of the eligible participants. Participants signed the form on the day of interview; the intent of giving the consent form before the interview was to allow participants to make an informed decision without feeling pressured to participate.

I did not give compensation or incentives for participating in the interview; involvement in the study was voluntary. Participants had the right to decline participation and withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Members could withdraw without penalty in writing, via email, over the phone, or in person. I assured

participants of their privacy and protected names of individuals or organizations to keep the participants and organization confidential by not publishing their names, titles, and business instead; I assigned codes to each member. Assurance of the confidentiality improves the truthfulness of participants in the data collection and reduce the fear of consequences or risks of identity disclosure (Wallace, Gaye, & Burton, 2014). I have stored a hard copy of the interview transcript in a locked file cabinet and the electronic file on a protected password external hard drive for 5 years. I will shred the hard copy and destroy the external hard drive after 5 years. Participants reviewed the interview transcripts, as recommended by Check, Wolf, Dame, and Beskopw (2014). Sharing research findings helps to ensure the accuracy of interpretation and solidifies the trust between the researcher and the participants (Thompson, Williams, & Thomas, 2013). Upon approval by of the study by Walden University, I will send email to each participant a summary of the findings.

Data Collection Instruments

In a qualitative study, a researcher serves as the primary data collection instrument because the researcher hears, sees, and interprets the data (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013; Yazan, 2015). The data collection process of my research included first gaining Walden University's IRB approval to conduct the study, sampling strategies, recording, and storing data, and dealing with potential ethical problems. A researcher applies sensitivity, knowledge, and skill to yield quality data (Leedy, & Ormrod, 2013). I collected data during semistructured interviews using open-ended questions. This approach allows a researcher to capture rich data about how the participant think and

make a judgment (Elsawah, Guillaume, Filatova, Rook, & Jakeman, 2015). A semistructured interview follows a list of pre-established questions that address the research topic. I chose seven open-ended semistructured interview questions to address the central research question and inquire about participant decision-making processes and opinions, see Appendix B.

Ekekwe (2013) suggested that researchers seek expert advice to enhance the usefulness of the recording instrument. The recording instrument for the study was an Olympus WS-852 because of versatility and easy connection to share files on the computer. Olympus WS-852 has a 4GB built in flash memory that can record to 1600 hours of audio which is much more capacity than available on the iPhone 7 digital voice recorder.

A face-to-face interview is an effective method to collect data from the owners of small enterprises (Terrell & Rosenbusch, 2013). I conducted participant interviews face-to-face at their grocery store sites to observe and have confirmatory evidence of their marketing strategies. I follow a consistent interview protocol, see Appendix B, for example: (a) before the interview began, I confirmed informed consent; (b) reminded participants of their rights; (c) then asked each open-ended interview question in turn; (d) encouraged participants to provide detailed descriptions of their marketing strategies; and, (f) took observational notes on site. Yin (2017) suggested documents, records, answers to interview questions, direct observations, participant observations, and artifacts as the six types of data case study research. The data collection instrument for the study is interview protocol with seven open ended questions in a semistructured format. Yin

(2017) recommends interview questions have clarity, balance, appropriateness, and applicability to address a problem statement. The interview question list is attached as Appendix B. An interview protocol enhances consistency in the interaction between the interviewer and the participant (Ramthun & Matkin, 2014). Therefore, an interview protocol served as the guide for exploring the marketing strategies of small owners in the interview. I used interview, documents such as financial statement, and member checking, in addressing the research question. Data for triangulation for this multicase study is a face-to-face interview, direct observation, and documents. As participants answered the questions I recorded the interview and took field note of ideas and observed their body language, tonality, and demeanor. I asked for company documents relating to marketing strategies that have increased profit and sustain the business such as their financial statement, their projection plan, stock, and inventory records to review for data extraction.

After the interview was over, I transcribed the interview data notes using a computer-assisted software such as NVivo 11, for coding and determine patterns and themes. I emailed each participant a copy of the finding for member check on the accuracy of interpretation of answers and welcome any viewpoint (see appendix A). Researchers use member checking to improve the efficiency, and the credibility of the data collected (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). Member checking enhances validity and reliability of the study and ensures objectivity and neutrality of the trustworthiness of the study. (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). The technique of member checking included post-interview verification to determine the accuracy of the

interpretation of the interviewer. Participants had the option to make addition, edits, or annotation to ensure my correct understanding of responses to interview.

Data Collection Technique

The data collection technique helps a researcher to systematically collect information from a range of sources for the study and the setting they occur (Battistella, 2014). Yin (2017) identified interview as a useful source for case study research since participants get to varying degree of flexibility to express an opportunity or share views and experiences. The technique for collecting data was face-to-face interview and relevant business document such as website, financial statement, and inventory. In a qualitative study, participants' face-to-face interview is a viable means of gathering data (De Massis, & Kotlar, 2014; Haahr, Norlyk, & Hall, 2014; Potter, Mills, Cawthorn, Donovan, & Blazeby, 2014). Check et al., (2014) demonstrated the use of a semistructured face-to-face interview with purposive sampling to elicit experience. The interviews all took place at each participant preferred location. The interview protocol, which constitutes an arrangement of questions to follow, guides researchers remain on track when conducting interviews (Chan & Walker, 2015). As noted in the interview protocol (see Appendix B).

Before the interview, I called the members to schedule a convenient meeting date and assigned every member a distinguishing identification. The day preceding the actual meeting, I called the members to confirm the scheduled meeting arrangement. Upon the arrival of the meeting, I reintroduced myself quickly to the members reminding them of the privacy of their data and their rights. Reassuring the members of their confidentiality

increased the trust and paved way for an honest response to the interview questions (Mealer & Jones, 2014). I reviewed the informed consent form that I had emailed and in person with the participants. The consent form explains the participants' rights and other general information of the study. I audio recorded the interview with Olympus WS-852, upon completion of the interview, I stopped the recording device and performed transcript audit. I reminded the members that I would reach out to them for member checking later and expressed my gratitude to the members for their time. I took notes of vital details that emerged from my observation in touring the store after the interview. The interview did not exceed 45 minutes. Participant 1 and 2 showed me their websites but only participant 1 gave out the financial statement. Participant 3 and 4 had displayed their stock at catchment area. Participant 5 had a projection plan for expansion.

The merit derived from a face-to-face interview is the opportunity to build rapport with participants and included observation of the non-verbal gestures, which helps the interviewer to interpret the meaning and get the breadth and depth of additional information to enhance data saturation (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). The eye contact during the interview made the interaction more personal that developed a rapport and helped to maintain participant's full attention. A face-to-face interview process also promotes a participatory atmosphere that allows for the exchange and development of knowledge versus simple extraction (Uribe-Jongbloed, 2014).

The demerits are that a face-to-face was time-consuming and costly compared to other data collection methods. I lessen intrusiveness by conducting the interview at a

quiet place and protected their identity. The participants were labeled with codes to protect their identity and privacy.

Data Organization Technique

Data organization includes proper data storage and robust analysis for an efficient method of classifying and organizing data to make the research useful for both digital and physical records (Korhonen, 2014). Organization of accurate data collection was essential for maintaining the integrity and validity of research, and to support and detect errors in the process (Flannery & Gormley, 2014). The creation of a dedicated database enables future verification and quality assurance and quality control are the approaches that preserve the data integrity of the study (Camfield & Palmer-Jones, 2013). I will protect the organized data for 5 years in a password protected, dedicated database. I used a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to record receipt of the signed consent form and to schedule the date and time of participant interviews. Audio recording and note taking of interview led creation of a reflective journal, similar to that used by Arney, Yadav, Miller, & Wilkerson, (2014). Proper organization of research information promoted an efficient research process (Korhonen, 2014). The study notes and recorded interviews have dates and codes for easy identification; having replaced participant names with code protects their confidentiality (i.e. Grocery 1, Grocery 2, and Grocery 3). I reviewed the recorded interviews for accuracy and ensured the transcripts were properly labeled to protect each participant's identity.

I have stored the data collected in an organized, locked file cabinet in my home office for 5 years. I have all signed consent forms, interview notes, and interview

transcripts data on password-protected external hard drive for 5 years from the date Walden administrators approve the study. I will wipe the external hard disk, shred any paper files, and delete all electronic, digital, and recorded data after 5 years has elapsed.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis in qualitative research is the preparation and organization of the data for comprehensive analysis. I analyzed the transcribed interview recordings and field notes as the steps to answer the research question. Data analysis technique reveals participants' points of view while examining participants' experiences to give the rich descriptions of the problem under study (Ginsberg & Sinacore, 2013). Case study data analysis involves working with data, examining, categorizing, breaking it down, looking for patterns, synthesizing, determining what is essential to learn, and what information to write for others to read (Lawrence & Tar, 2013). The initial sequential process of the data analysis is to read the interview transcript and field notes that lead to developing ideas, common patterns, themes, and categories that relate to the research question (Guetterman, 2015).

Baskarada (2014) identified descriptive and topic coding in qualitative data analysis process. Descriptive coding involves the identification of the primary theme to develop. Topic coding includes the apparent issues that capture action in data analysis. NVivo is a Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) computer software that generates themes and codes (Castleberry, 2014; Edwards-Jones, 2014). The decision to use NVivo was because the software has the capability to import and analyze document, the size of data and the need to generate themes and codes from the transcription from the interview.

Other software such as MAXQDA do not have the same functionality and the search function is clunky for complex data (Guetterman, 2015). I used the themes and codes to identify the commonalities of the successful marketing strategies used by African immigrant grocery store owners.

Data triangulation for data analysis involves comparing and analyzing transcribed data with the interview notes, and then triangulating evidence to draw conclusion (Yazan, 2015). Denzin (2012) identified four types of triangulation as data, investigator, theory, and methodological. To enhance transferability of the findings, I employed methodological triangulation which involved triangulating information among participants of the same environment. The conceptual plan included the aid of a computer software NVivo 11 for coding leading to identifying themes. NVivo 11 coding and query-based features helped manage the analysis of this large data set quickly and efficiently. The focus of the analysis was to determine new themes, correlating the key ideas with the literature review of the study. The software assisted to manage and organize various types of unstructured data including interview transcripts, and field notes (Castleberry, 2014; Edwards-Jones, 2014).

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Reliability is the extent of the authenticity of the procedures in the study to which the study is accurate and reproducible (Yin, 2017). Reliability is the degree to which the collection and assessment of information are coherent and free from mistakes or errors (Hess, McNab, & Basoglu, 2014). To ensure the reliability of the study, my conduct,

ethical consideration, the process of data collection, and member checking are the activities that assure authenticity. I facilitated member checking by asking participants to review the analysis and the interpretation of data to confirm accuracy and credibility of analyses of small business owners' marketing strategies as well as to allow the participant to offer additional insight concerning the accuracy of the findings used by Hess et al. (2014). Member checking provides comfort to members regarding the validation of their documented experiences and ideas (Littvay, Popa, & Fazekas, 2013; Park, & Campbell, 2017). Member checking also addresses the issue of researcher's bias that might influence the reliability of the study and has a considerable effect on the credibility of the research (Aust, Diedenhofen, Ullrich, & Musch, 2013; Narayanan, Greco, Reeves, Matthews, & Bergin, 2014).

Dependability is the reliance of design, of which the findings are stable and defensible over time (Arney, et al., 2014). Data triangulation and audit trail may improve the expectation of a similar finding (Morse, 2015). An audit trail in the research includes a document of study steps, data collection, data organization, data analysis cross-check findings, and peer scrutiny process (Yazan, 2015). Peer scrutiny heightens transparency and improves the dependability of conclusions, considering alternative findings and conclusions (Moravcsik, 2014; Morse, 2015). Peer scrutiny involved receiving scholarly guidance from committee members, review boards, and methodology experts in the doctoral study process to improve credibility in the study.

Validity

Validity concerns the trustworthiness of the qualitative research and consists of three components: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) and confirmability (Luria & Yuval, 2013; Yin, 2017). Validity is a sign of accuracy in the outcome of the research that relates to reality. Credibility pertains to the confidence that readers have in the truthfulness of the research findings (Arney, et al., 2014; Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). Researchers emphasized the importance of using a rigor strategy to enhance credibility (Eno & Dammak, 2014; Noble & Smith, 2015; Takyi, 2015). The strategies I applied in the multiple case study include purposeful sampling technique, peer scrutiny, methodological triangulation, member checking, and interview protocol. As a primary researcher, who is African and lives in the Bronx community, I am familiar with the geographical surroundings and have some level of understanding relating to the core issues of the study. Researchers claimed that familiarity creates rapport, trust, and comfort to provide accurate, detailed data (Dikko, 2016; McDermid, Peters, Jackson, & Daly, 2014; Takyi, 2015). Methodological triangulation in the study includes interview data, documents, and observation which help reduce bias and enable cross-checking of data collection (Yazan, 2015).

Transferability of the study refers to how the results of the research transfer to another context (Morse, 2015). Transferability is the ability to draw conclusions and inferences and is the application of the results of research to similar situations (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Transferability relates to the trustworthiness of a study allowing a researcher to reapply the finding or methods from one study to another. Transferability is

the responsibility of readers, research users, and other professionals who believe the study findings could apply to situations they are dealing with. I am not able to make such a determination. The purposeful sampling strategy in the case study involve a detailed information of participants, method, design, and selection process will help readers make an informed judgment about transferability (Palinkas et al., 2013).

Confirmability relates to objectivity in a research study (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013). Qualitative researchers establish confirmability by ensuring the accuracy and neutrality of the data and free from research bias (Houghton et al., 2013). To ensure the dependability of the data collection instrument, I will conduct a review of the literature, and focus on the interview research question without containing any leading questions, audit trail, triangulation, and member checking (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). The strategy I will use to improve the dependability in the study is to provide a detailed description of the research method and design. Member checking after the interview support confirmability of the study, the interview protocol establishes the standard for audit trail in the study, and the methodological triangulation establishes a technique to support or refuse any theme addressing the research question.

Data saturation is primarily to ensuring credibility (Ando, Cousins, & Young, 2014; Monden et al., 2014). Providing data saturation through member checking of interview transcripts and lack of new emerging data enhanced credibility (Houghton et al., 2013). Data saturation improves the trustworthiness and quality of a study and occurs when the selected data sources do not reveal new themes and have become repetitive (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Data saturation is evident when information redundancy

occurs after adequate time immersed in the study produces no new information. I depended on five participants from five different grocery stores for an interview on their marketing strategies. I used NVivo to import and analyze data from the meeting after member checking. The concept derived from the analysis was the basis for addressing the research question of marketing strategies that might be useful in SMEs.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I first reprised the purpose and then included a step-by-step account of (a) the role of the researcher, (b) the participant selection process and the population sample size, (c) the research method and design, (d) the plan to ensure high standard of ethics and the assurance of participant confidentiality (e) the data collection instruments and technique, (f) the data organization technique and data analysis process, and reviewed (g) ensuring reliability and validity through data triangulation, data saturation, member checking and the use of interview protocol. In Section 3, I presented the study findings and results based on the salient themes from the data analysis, application to professional practice, implications for social change, and the recommendations for action and further research. The conclusion of section 3 included effective marketing strategies for SMEs to succeed beyond 5 years.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The objective of this qualitative multicase study was to explore the marketing strategies African immigrant SME grocery store owners use to survive beyond 5 years. I explored the business marketing strategies of African immigrants via face-to-face interviews with five small business owners in the Bronx, New York. The participants shared their marketing strategies that fostered efficient employee behaviors, promoted value for potential buyers, and resulted in superior performances and business sustainability. The findings of the study showed three themes concerning marketing strategies African immigrant small business owners apply to manage and develop their business productively: (a) customer retention and attitude, (b) inventory, and (c) conventional and unconventional marketing. In Section 3, I present the study findings, discuss applications to professional practice and implications for social change, make recommendations for action and further research, and offer reflections on the study process.

Presentation of the Findings

I followed series of data handling processes to ensure clean data. All data for analysis underwent validation for content accuracy, alignment with participant thoughts, and content meaning. The van Kaam (1959) method worked well for analysis of the semistructured interview data and validation of the findings. The NVivo11 data analysis package for qualitative research was appropriate to run diverse mind maps, project maps, and explorations with participant response data. Such exercises made possible the extraction of diverse critical elements that led to potentially study findings.

The foundational pre-analysis task involved following the steps in van Kaam's (1959) postulations, to wit, compiling participant response, seeking participants' confirmations for meanings, analyzing the data, compiling the initial reports, assembling the critical elements, sorting those elements into categories, and identifying multiple levels of themes. Thereafter, I dissembled the elements. The various understandings that emerged facilitated data processing. I conducted the exploratory exercises multiple times to see if the outcome would differ. Following the data collection and analysis process with specificity and rigor resulted in a high confidence level in accepting the resulting themes.

The initial exploratory analysis included frequency searches of text and other elements. Multiple iterations of such searches produced the same results. In Figure 2 below, word visibility shows the comparative frequencies of the words used by participants.



Figure 2. Word frequency query.

Figure 2 is a word cloud I created from the final word frequency query. It shows the comparative importance of the words to the participants. Without intending to create an order or preference, participants were particular about elements that mattered to them. The frequency of mention revealed the order of importance of the words as follows: *customers, products, marketing, and business*. The other visible words, *responses* and *participant* filtered in because the word was on participant responses. The rest of the words in the frequency word cloud are less visible because participants used them rarely.

I found Sikahala's (2014) approach instructive, and to keep on track I also kept van Kaam's (1959) pointers handy during the analysis process. I followed the van Kaam process because it has undergone scientific verification. With van Kaam's approach, the themes and subthemes converged to reveal the average participant perception. Figure 3 shows the overall participant's perception of each coding node.

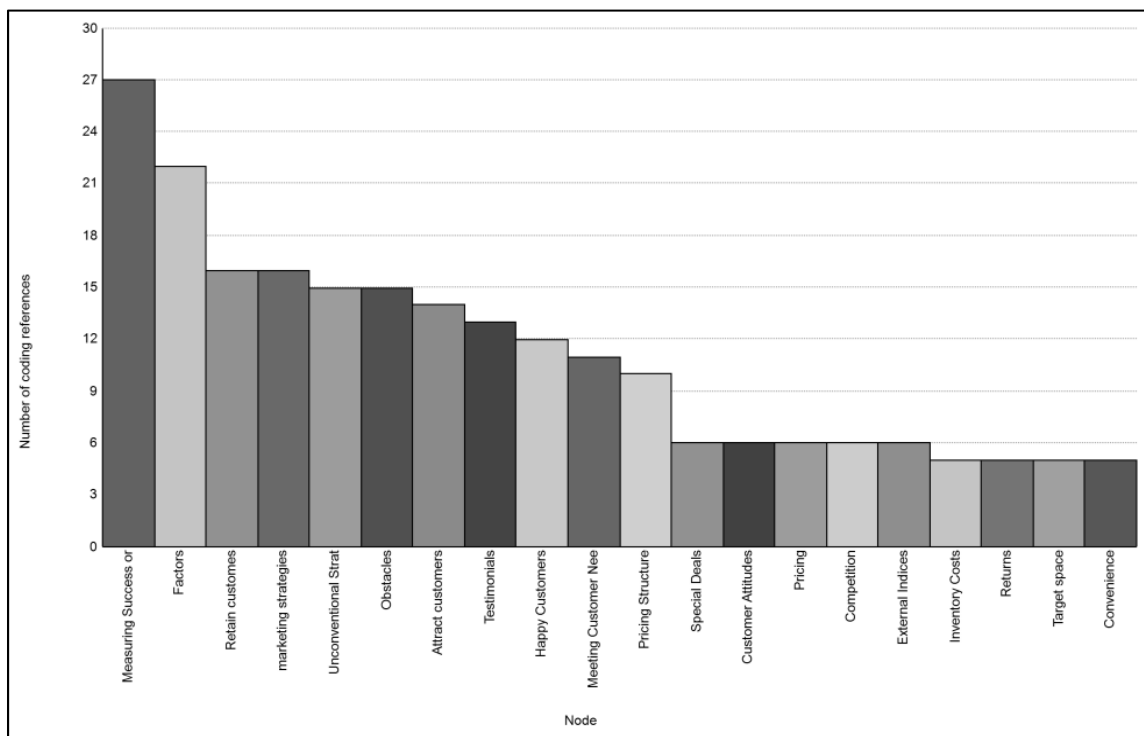


Figure 3. Average participant perceptions of elements.

Participants were interested in determining whether they were succeeding or failing in business, as indicated in Figure 3 above. The thought occupied their minds when pursuing profitability. Several factors were discernible, and participants addressed such discernible factors on merit while alluding to the existing of contingent factors. The participants were unanimous in stating that a business owner would identify anything that emerges to enable or disable the business enterprise. Since such contingencies exist, participants continued to mention them in the course of the interviews.

Theme Emergence

Participant responses revealed multiple perspectives, as the participants focused on different aspects of the phenomenon. Some participants were more interested in marketing. Other participants focused on immigrants' value to retail business, general

survival issues, duration before profitability, and duration before business closure. Some participants were particular about survival and staying in business no matter how long it would take before experiencing profitability. Active market involvement will sustain SME businesses to achieve long term success (Cacciolatti & Lee, 2016).

The elements that initially emerged appeared to be themes, but as the interviews went on, some of those elements manifested as themes while the others became clear as subthemes. In some situations, what one participant would treat as critical to business success amounted to an insignificant factor in the opinion of another participant. Through such matches and mismatches, themes that all participants shared as critical emerged and remained constant throughout the interview process.

When identifying the elements that morphed into themes and subthemes, participants made references to regular marketing strategies, unconventional strategies, customer retention and testimonials, meeting customer needs, observing customer attitudes, and siting the store within the catchment area. Customers share similar characteristics with employees, and their activities are within the limits of a geographic location (El Kalak & Hudson, 2016). The elements such as meeting customer needs, observing customer attitudes, and locating a store in specific areas are in line with El Kalak and Hudson's (2016) observations about geographic locations for businesses. Leaders of SMEs can ensure that the organizational philosophy meets the consumer market needs (Mokhtar et al., 2014).

Noted in Figure 4, below, is the extent to which the various elements mattered to the participants regarding each element's face value. Participants used the same verbiage

in answering the different interview questions. This revelation stems from the continued presence of the same words across interview questions. The import is that a researcher could rely on such quantities to identify elements that are of mutual interest to the participants.

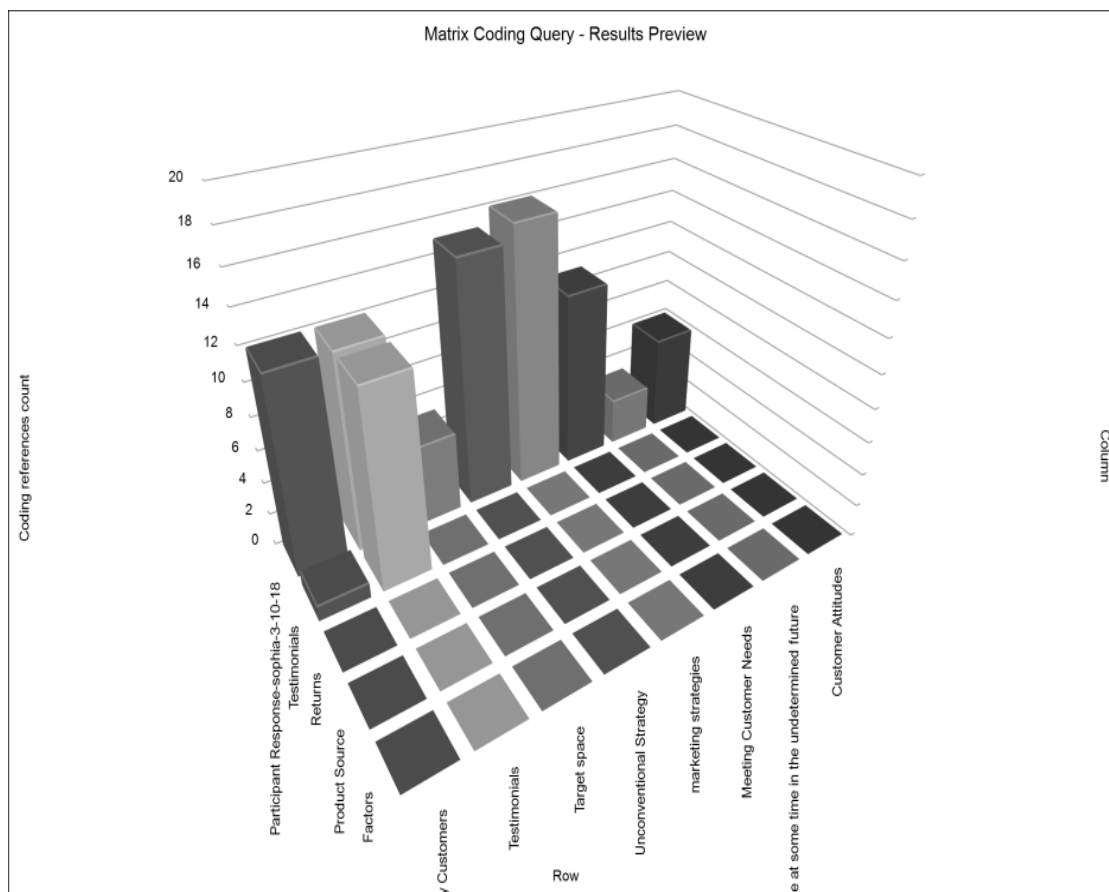


Figure 4. Elements morphing into themes and subthemes.

To arrive at the strategies some SME grocery store owners used, I found that virtually all the participants explained that looking to *customer attitudes*, *diverse unique store-customer relationship factors*, *customer needs*, *product sources*, *profitability potentials*, and *customer reaction to pricing* would reveal the strategies. The above elements turned out to be the themes all the participants emphasized throughout the

interviews. Other themes that emerged were factors such as *competition*, *ease of shopping*, *regulations*, and *external environment*. Subthemes were *marketing*, *target space*, *obstacles*, *inventory costs*, and *stocking*. Next, I consider each of the interview questions in order from IQ1-IQ7, highlighting the key information results.

IQ1: Attracting and retaining customers. The participants considered customer retention as a critical element in staying in the grocery store business. Strategies should relate to succeeding rather than failing in business; therefore, since customers buy the products to produce revenue for the store, business owners should take steps to retain the customers. Participant 1 noted the need to establish a personal touch with customers, saying, “I use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, as well as YouTube for free advertising and interacting with future and current customers.” Other critical elements were loyalty rewards, as Participant 1 explained, “Happy customers are more likely to recommend my business to other potential customers.”

Based on the participants’ comments, I found that customer retention was a strategy they used to stay in business beyond 5 years. The ultimate action would be excellent customer service if a grocery store owner wanted to survive beyond 5 years. Participant 2 emphasized satisfying the need and wants of customers. Products and services delivered by SMEs are designed and specially created to satisfy specific customer demands (Narver & Slater, 1990). Active market involvement will sustain SME owners’ goals of achieving long term success (Cacciolatti & Lee, 2016). Participant 3 revealed the power in packaging, arranging, and creating convenience for customers. Beyond the three action items, Participant 3 sourced inventory from wholesale dealers

and delivered customer orders. With these elements, the store saved on costs and retained customers.

The participants, although interviewed at different times and places, used the same or similar words to describe. A post-interview query to confirm those similarities returned the popularity of words such as convenience, packaging, pricing, special deals, home delivery, attract customers, and retain customers.

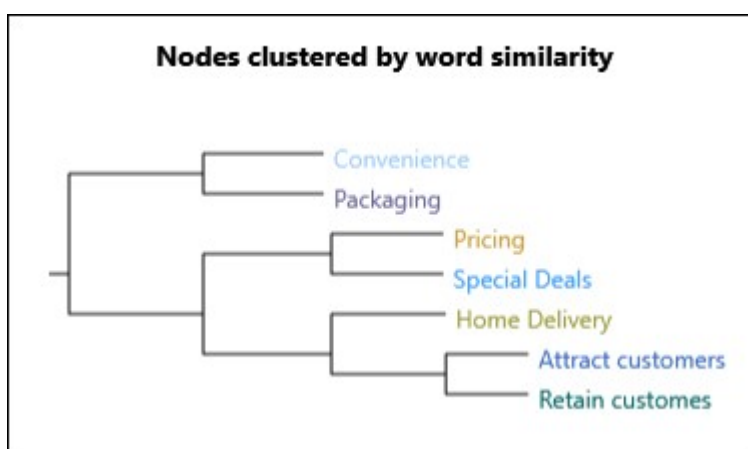


Figure 5. Participant word usage similarities.

Noted in Figure 5 above, the participants faced the same situations at their respective business locations; the same things mattered to them. Consistency of store operation, for instance, was important to several participants. Customers should be able to recognize product packaging from a distance once the customers entered the store. The customers would find the prices friendly and the layout of the products attractive. Furthermore, the overall experience would prompt some customers to visit the store over and over while other customers would request home delivery of their purchases. Participant 4 stated, “Many of my consumers found meaning in sharing stories of their favorite products and services and those who got the information and tested the product never regretted and

kept coming and passing on the good news.” According to the participant, taking the steps to attract and retain customers was of utmost importance. Customers who developed a high level of trust would not hesitate to tell their friends and families about the store, thereby helping to increase traffic for the store. Participants considered customer testimonials to be very valuable for building their businesses.

IQ2: Pricing and Product Varieties. SME business leaders have the responsibility to develop, train, motivate, and inspire employees to foster the right attitudes and creativity in performing their duties (Mittal & Dhar, 2015). Participant 2 stated, “For the prices of our products, they depend on the cost of the products including shipping and handling from Africa. We get most of our products from Africa; therefore, price them accordingly.” Also addressing this point, Participant 1 stated,

Customer feedback provides me with insight into customers’ attitudes toward my products helping me identify how well I am meeting their pricing needs. I have set up a forum or poll on my website or on my social media site where my customers could post their reviews or leave comments about their pricing needs.

The importance of products in the search for survival among SME grocery stores became visible through a search of the intensity with which participants mentioned ‘product’. Participants unequivocally placed products on the pedestal as the bait for catching customers. While customers were the most important element in business survival within and beyond the first 5 years, the participants made it clear that a store that treated customers with utmost excellence must also have excellent products. Without products, good products, the good customer service would be a waste of time. Below is a

graphic illustration of the importance of product based on the intensity with which participants cited *products*. As noted in Figure 6 below, about 60 feeder antecedents into ‘products’ and about 50 output antecedents from ‘products’. The meaning this figure conveys confirms that products are probably on the same level of importance as customers. According to the participants, products have to exist in the store for customers to come in and purchase. While customers are the animate purposes of the business, products are the inanimate purposes of the business.

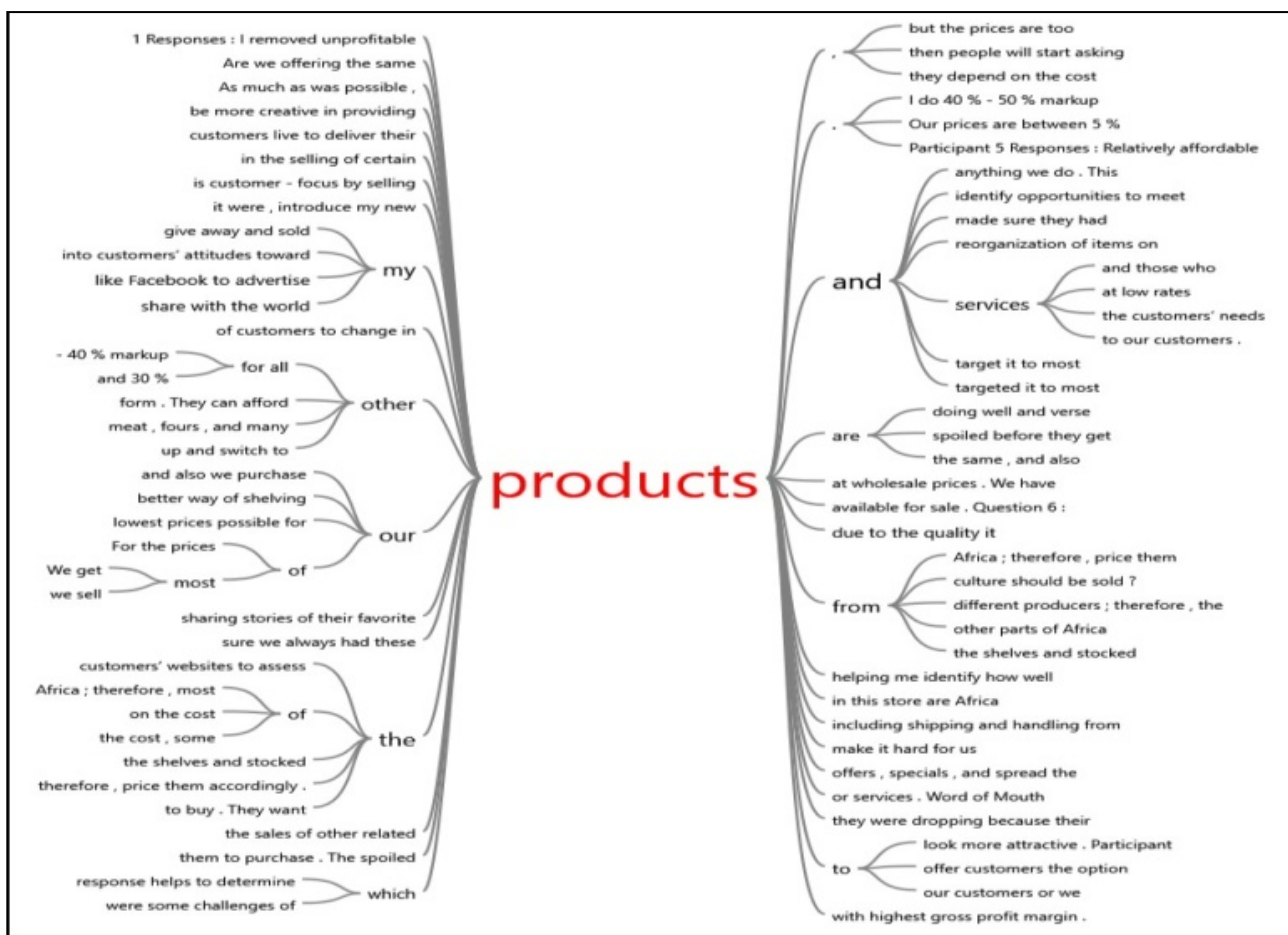


Figure 6. Feeder and output intensity for the term products.

Participants described different strategies to address price competitiveness. For example, Participant 3 explained that the best things he did was to meet customer product and pricing needs through *price matching*. If a customer proved a lower price from a competitor, the customer would pay at the lowest price regardless of the original higher price. The main focus was customer satisfaction. SME leaders chose to focus on the *price* of their products as a marketing strategy (Harrington et al., 2017). Price is a major determination for whether a business will make profits. As Participant 3 explained,

Our competitors' markup of between 50%-70% for meat, fish, and fresh produce; and 35%-40% for other products. I do 40%-50% markup for fish and meat; and 30% for all other products. Our prices are between 5%-25% less than our competitors.

Using a loyalty program assists Participant 5 in boosting profits as noted,

The higher the price of a product, the greater the points one can accumulate. This takes the minds of customers off the price of the product they are purchasing and cause them to focus on the points they are gaining.

IQ3: Measuring success or failure of marketing strategies. Some SMEs led by African immigrants have failed because of lack of a precise marketing strategy (Nejati et al., 2016). Participant 1 measured marketing strategies by considering “return on investments, sales numbers, expansion of the business, customers’ response, and general customers’ feedback. Feedback from my outside partners and competitors’ response also helps the growth of the business”. Participant 2 considered success or failure in the context of continued customer patronage, customer purchase volume, patronage

fluctuations, inventory load, supplier relations, and customer increase or decrease.

Participant 3 stated, “we measure our failure and success by the percentage change in returning customers as well as increase or decrease in the number of new customers. We compare these changes before and after the implementation of a new marketing strategy”.

Additional buyer benefit, can improve competitive positioning and increase the number of new customers (Lo, et al., 2016). Participant 4 said, “I measure my marketing strategies through customer response. Customer response helps to determine which products are doing well and verse versa. Surveys in person and general customer service feedback also helps reveal what customers think”.

SMEs leaders approach their products and services, in a *scatter gun* approach, ending up with poor returns. Lack of working market strategy to enhance business sales can cause the firm to achieve bad financial results and lead to closure (Nejati et al., 2016). Therefore, the extent to which the participants focused on customers and products necessitated further investigation. The participants made it clear that customer traffic was insufficient to sustain a new store over the first 5 years. Even after the business owner ensures quality products at affordable prices, more work was necessary. See Figure 7 below for the essential ingredients to quality customers before the business may count on the customers for long-term survival. The Figure 7 content, see below, reveals the elements of customer qualification that ensure a grocery store benefits from the kinds of customers walking through its aisles. According to the participants, the store needs happy customers. Happy customers provide testimonials without any prompting. The store has to be in the appropriate neighborhood (target space). A good product-customer mix

would involve the use of unconventional marketing strategies in addition to known marketing strategies. Under the above circumstances, the store would be able to meet customer needs. A note of warning is that customer is not willing or unlikely to invest their time, money, and emotional attachment to a store with a poor customer-product mix.

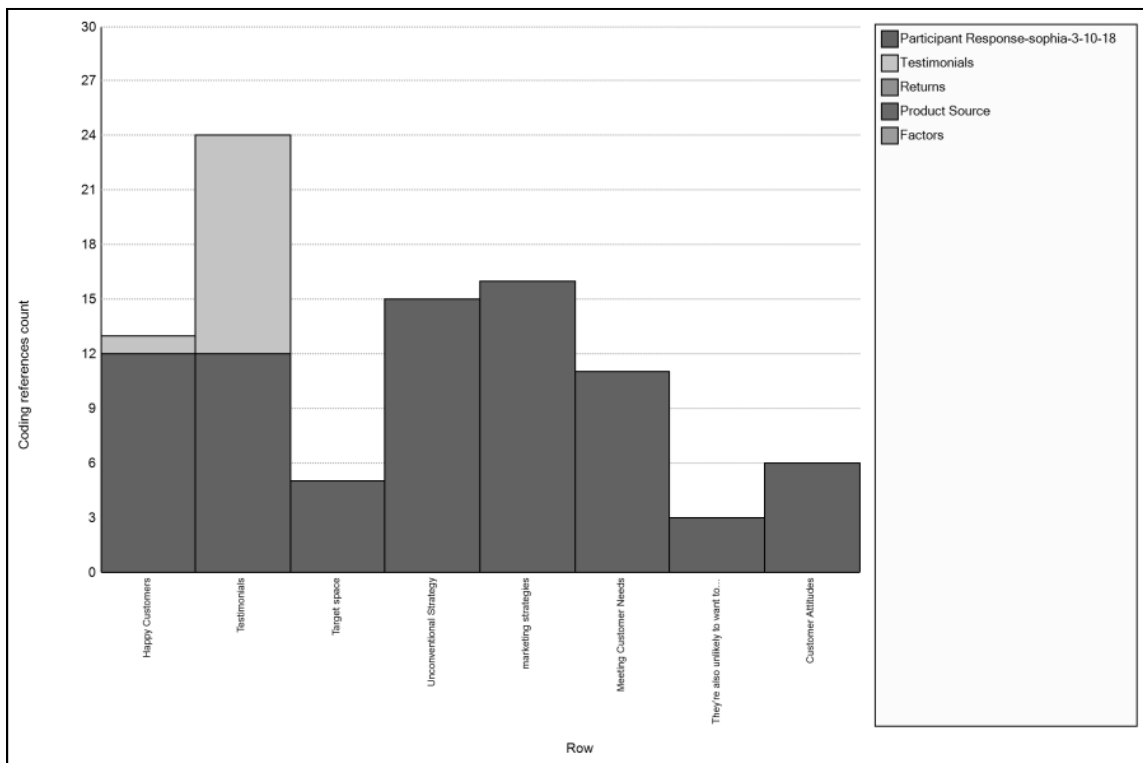


Figure 7. Customer qualification and associated antecedents.

IQ4: Measures of marketing strategy effectiveness. Participant 1 explained that marketing strategy effectiveness arises from creating marketing goals and objectives for the business as well as from analyzing and maintaining up-to-data of the business. Participant 2 explained that he assessed effectiveness by asking pertinent questions such as, “What do we want to achieve as a small business in this community?” and “Have our strategies helped us to achievethem?” Participant 3 stated, “to listen attentively for

customers' comments, and we take these comments very serious. We also do a survey biannually to get customers feedback which helps us to make important changes." Of note, SMEs which effectively meet customers' needs and demands were in a better position to remain competitive in the market for a longer duration than those SMEs which have stagnated in their marketing approaches (Frösén, et al., 2016). Participant 4 used an example stating "if my overall sales for last year totaled \$100,000 and my total sales for this year totaled \$150,000, then automatically I am able to deduce that my current marketing plan is having some sort of positive effect". Participant 5 revealed the measures were dependent on an interaction with customers because such an interaction would reveal every opinion element controlling the customer's behavior towards the store.

IQ5: Marketing strategies for profitability in first 5-years. Participant 1 said the unprofitable products must be off the shelves. For example, the strategy must include: products with high gross profit margin have shelf space priority; deploy continuous efforts to get new, and retain old, customers; conduct constant review and adjustment of pricing structure; maintain inventory control through new orders; and, order quantity alignment. Additional buyer benefit, can improve competitive positioning and increase the number of new customers (Lo et al., 2016). Participant 2 emphasized the need to introduce innovative ideas and endeavor to implement them.

Participant 3 pointed to pricing, convenience, customer satisfaction, modern technology. He added, "we also registered with Google so people can easily locate our contact information when needed. As at now, I have developed our own website to promote our product and offer our customer an opportunity to buy from online". SMEs

drive the much-needed innovation and competition in the global economic sectors (Szczepańska-Woszczyzna & Kurowska-Pysz, 2016). Participant 4 revealed the use of give-away deals and word-of-mouth marketing. Beyond those two strategies, he identified “social media tools like Facebook to advertise products targeted to mostly Africans on the friends list. Due to the wider range of advertisement on social media, I was able to get customers who were not within the target space”.

Participant 5 stated, “products from other parts of Africa were sold so that we could attract customers from most African cultures. With this strategy, the customer base increased”. He went on to explain, “we specialized in the selling of certain products and made sure they had that taste that gave one that nostalgic feeling. We made sure we always had these products available for sale”. SME culture, effective implementation of marketing orientation can promote buyer value and business sustainability (Narver & Slater, 1990). Therefore, when a grocery store owner pays attention to customer cultures, imbibing such cultures will align the business with its target customers.

IQ6: Identification and mitigation of implementation obstacles. Participant 1 enumerated, “Lack of resources for the growth of the business, task of prioritizing resource distribution to the focused strategies, opposition of customers to change in products and reorganization of items on the shelves, task of pursuing transparent overview and explanation to customers of the importance of this reorganization.” Participant 2 explained that bringing the items from suppliers in Africa to the US was a major source of concern. He further added that “Aside from the cost, some of the products are spoiled before they get here. The high cost involved sometimes makes some

of the expensive, and spoiled products make it hard for us to reach our goal of profit making”. Implementation of uninformed policies will result in poor results and short-term business survival (Jogaratnam, 2017).

Participant 3 enumerated, “(a) financial difficulty was the main obstacle to the development and implementation of our marketing strategies, (b) grocery store in general, is capital intensive, and (c) it was very difficult to get the needed capital to finance our business activity”. He revealed that after the first year, they contracted a business loan to improve cash flow. That adjustment helped to build two walk-in freezers for wholesale storage of meat, fish, and other frozen items.

IQ7: Additional business sustainability antecedents. Participants explained that focusing on target consumers can form a solid foundation for a 5-year business sustenance. Knowing the target population for the business to service is critical to surviving the first 5 years. Beating the competition will draw consumers to the business, thereby making the business successful over the first 5-year period. High supply volume comes with cost reduction; and this reduction helps to reduce selling price to consumers. Regardless of how small business is, the owner or the manager must employ effective strategies to ensure the business remains competitive (Cerchione & Esposito, 2017).

Some participants used the word *consumers* while other participants use the word *customers*. The meanings showed interchangeability of the two words to these participants. Because of the intensity of the use of the words, a word search was necessary to graphically throw the searchlight on the word in the context of business survival within the first 5 years of operation. Noted in Figure 8 below are *customer*

related antecedents with 70 feeder and 50 outputs. These antecedents reveal the importance of customers in the search for survival strategy among SME grocery stores. This high intensity reveals that if the store owner pays less attention to customers the store will not survive the first 5 years of operation.

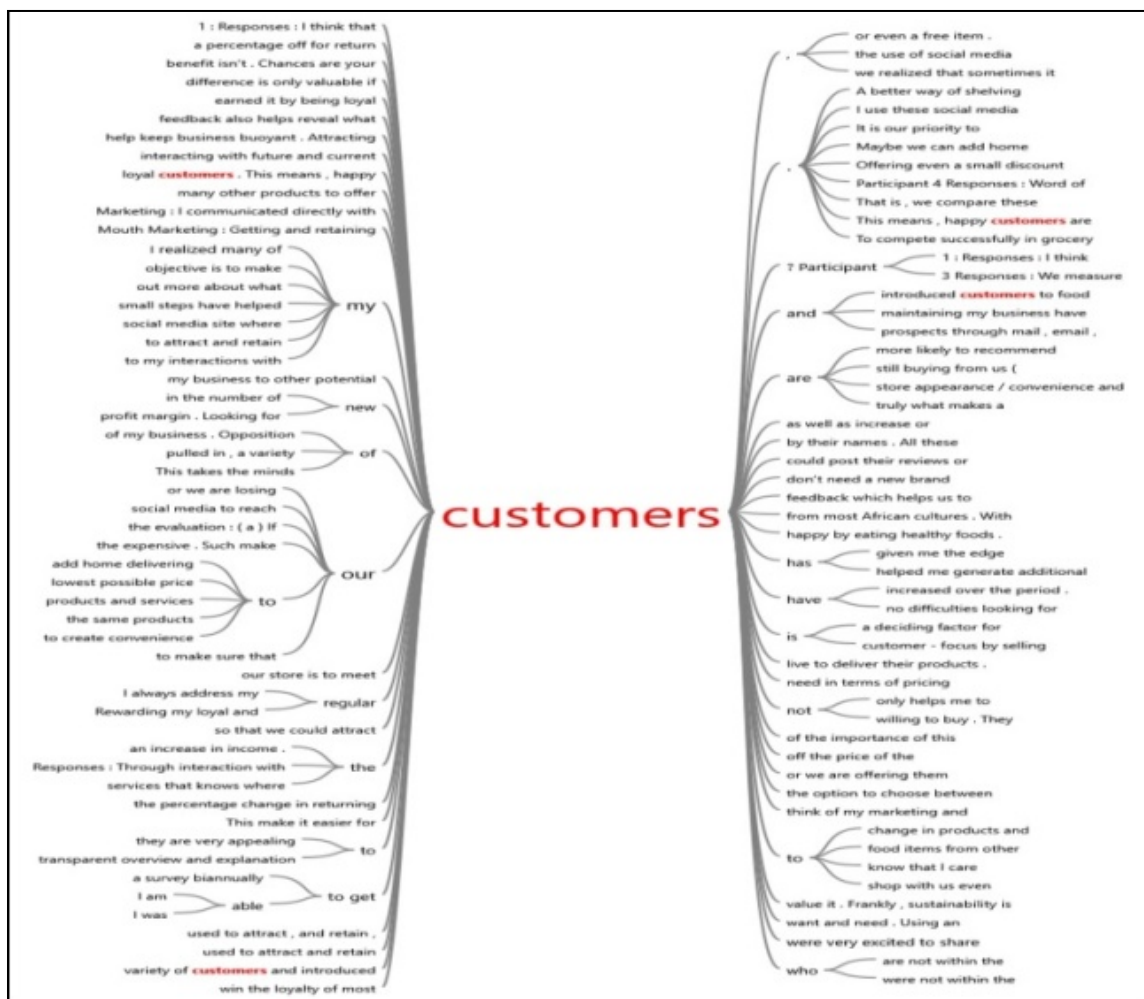


Figure 8. Customer related feeder and output intensity.

Focusing on the customer is a major step in succeeding. To achieve that focus, a business enterprise can rely on technology. With the deployment of technology, customers can place order form home and receive their purchases through home delivery.

Eye-catching shelf display is another way to bring customers back are repeat purchasers. Business location has to be central to an identifiable concentration of potential customers. Customer convenience and a good price are central to business survival. A business must be certain about the configuration of the customers, especially customer cultures. Such an understanding will help the business serve its customers better and create loyal and return buyers.

Answering the Research Question

The research question was What marketing strategies do African immigrant SME grocery store owners use to survive beyond 5 years? The seven interview questions were carefully designed to elicit the data required to answer the research question. Based on the responses the participants gave to the interview questions, and summarized above, African immigrant SME grocery store owners focused in three areas to survive beyond five-years (a) customer retention and attitude, (b) inventory, and (c) conventional and unconventional marketing. Further, the participants revealed that they knew about conventional marketing strategies existing in typical marketing textbooks. However, they also stressed contingent marketing strategies that emanate from unforeseen, emergent situations. Such situations require creativity and resourcefulness on the part of the SME business owner. Therefore, the ability to deploy unconventional marketing strategies can make a difference between succeeding or failing within the first 5 years.

As noted below in Figure 9, the marketing strategy elements revealed strong compatibility with scholarly literature. From the point of view of overall strategy, small and medium business enterprises (SMEs) have a vital role in the economy of most

nations (Bloch & Bhattacharya, 2016). First, the participant's echoed Laukkanen et al.'s (2013) findings as they too sought valid means to provision of the addition of client value to the client while also focusing on the lowering of costs of the service or product.

Second, from the standpoint of inventory, the products or services provided are designed to meet the market needs of specific groups of people (Park & Campbell, 2017). Finally, regarding *conventional marketing*, the evaluation of the business performance aligned to Brunswicker and Vanhaverbeke's (2015) recommendations, as owners typically considered capabilities, marketing assets, comprehensiveness, and situational analyses.

Regarding *unconventional marketing*, also described by Appiah-Adu and Amoako (2016), involved participants using marketing to identify situations which enabled them to allocate resources to ensure maximum exploitation of the unforeseen market opportunities.

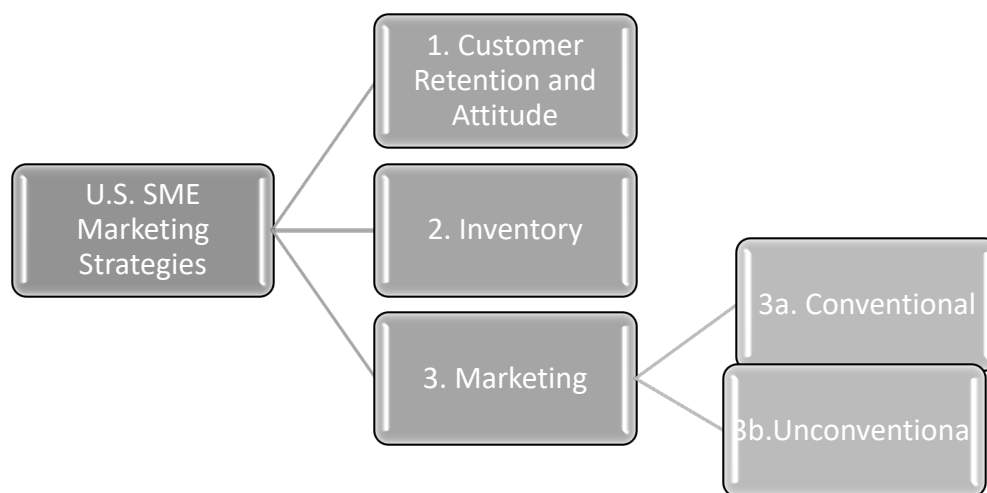


Figure 9. SME store owner marketing strategies for business sustainability.

Given the dynamic nature of the SME business environment, there is a need to foster marketing strategies that ensure the survival of the business in the longer term

(Wedel & Kannan, 2016). Nenzhelele (2014) determined that a strong overarching marketing strategy would involve the combination of marketing mix, marketing strategies, an emphasis on networking, and implementation of market intelligence systems of specific benefit to SME firms. Bamiatzi and Kirchmaier (2014) also recommended that SME leaders use of innovative and network marketing, relationship marketing, and technological marketing. The findings aligned to the literature; through a thoughtful combination of customer retention and attitude, inventory, and conventional/unconventional marketing, study participants constituted a strong marketing strategy that ensured short term and long-term SME success. As also highlighted in Nejati et al.'s (2016) research, these SME African immigrant leaders have reinvented themselves and their business in the fast-changing market environment. The core marketing strategies participants elected to deploy for business sustainability have resulted in retention of relevant business fit and meeting, or exceeding, the evolving demands of their customers.

Applications to Professional Practice

The findings that stemmed from the research may prove valuable to current and future immigrant small business owners. Participants readily shared their specific approaches for business sustainability. Other SME business owners may deploy recommended strategies if seeking a roadmap for business sustainability past 5-years. For example, in terms of customer attitude, business owners can query about and meet customer needs, observe customer attitudes, and seek customer testimonials. Second, when considering a service or product owners can focus on the lowering of costs while

meeting a customer need. Finally, participants deployed both conventional and unconventional marketing efforts. Leaders of SMEs can benefit from this study by increasing the likelihood of marketing success and profitability; a lack of knowledge of effective marketing strategies can cause low profitability or high business failure (Bates & Robb, 2013; Weterings, 2014).

Implications for Social Change

The study findings may help improve the chances of survival for new SMEs in the grocery store business by providing knowledge about the marketing strategies required to survive, to remain competitive, and to build a sustainable business future (Anderson & Ulla, 2014; Awan & Hashmi, 2014). Applying the knowledge gained from this study may enable small business owners to direct their limited business resources to those areas critical to the survival of the business. Maximizing the value created through the efficient use of resources may increase the chances of survival for those businesses. Businesses that are still in operation after 5-years continue to contribute to the stability and health of the economy (Liu, 2015).

Implications for social change may provide insight that positively influences social conditions. Small business owners may use such information to differentiate themselves from their competitors and increase profits through effective marketing strategies (Anderson & Ulla, 2014; Ciasullo & Troisi, 2013). The findings may contribute to the human condition through creating jobs and generating revenue in market economies and local economies. This study may also provide for social change by improving economic activity, as small business owners may understand more efficiently

how to sustain their businesses. Other small business owners may benefit from this study by using the findings to develop and improve the quality of marketing strategies to reduce the risk of failure in small businesses (Eggers, Kraus, Hughes, Laraway, & Snyckerski, 2013; Stelmokien & Endriulaitiene, 2015). Increasing the longevity of small businesses could lead to local economic development, create job opportunities for the local community, raise employment to improve the standard of living of residents, and contribute to effect positive social change (Ghobakhloo & Tang, 2013).

Recommendations for Action

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to explore the marketing strategies African immigrant SME grocery store owners use to survive beyond 5 years. The findings of this study align with the MO theory that stipulates promoting buyer value and business sustainability. I found that African immigrant SME grocery store owners focused in three areas to survive beyond five-years (a) customer retention and attitude, (b) inventory, and (c) marketing. An African immigrant small business owner may take a few promoting procedures to maintain and develop their business while expanding gainfulness. The owners who participated in the study could accomplish upper hand by offering their customers items in a kind, way, and value that their competitors could not copy while keeping their cost low. I recommend SME business owners provide their clients with benefits that enhance the purchase of their products and services. On the off chance that contenders offer a similar product and services, customers will pick the business that gives the best customer service. Excellent client administration can build a client base and keep clients returning. Clients are cheaper to retain, can draw in new

customers. Referencing inventory, it is critical to offer items that are sought after by the client populace. It is worthwhile to provide products that competitors are not offering yet or are hard to substitute or imitate given their exceptional qualities. To this end, working with small immigrant business owners is one route to surfacing unique inventory.

I recommend deployment of conventional and unconventional marketing activities. Conventional marketing activities include completing analyses such as SWOT, environmental scans, and competitive profiling. In terms of unconventional marketing, SME business owners should consider to outsmart perception filters in their niche and sell the emotional ideology bound up with the product. I found over the course of this research that a significant part of African immigrant business owners in Bronx, New York now lack formal business training. I recommend African immigrant small business owners in the Bronx to increase sustainability by creating and following a business plan. Owners who update their business plan annually demonstrate flexibility against market forces. Fatoki (2014) determined that business visionaries with top-to-bottom information and experience about business strategies perform better at maintaining and developing new endeavors than those business people without preparation. This original research explored the marketing strategies African immigrant SME grocery store owners use to survive beyond 5 years. To ensure the findings reach the intended audiences, I will share the study results with participants and publish it in an African journal to benefit the wider audience.

Recommendations for Further Research

I conducted a qualitative multicasestudy exploring the strategies small business migrant business owners apply to manage and develop their business gainfully beyond 5 years. The study comprised of five owners in the Bronx, New York, U.S. The sample size was one of the limitations of this study. The study was restricted to one particular geographic area. Subsequently, to advance the transferability of the discoveries, future researchers could repeat this research in various geographic areas. Other researchers may explore this study with small business people living in rural or rustic regions. Future researchers of this topic may pick diverse kinds of small business immigrants in different enterprises such, as services or manufacturers. Likewise, future researchers may utilize quantitative research to test the strategies found from this study as variables on a larger set of data. Future quantitative researchers can build up a hypothesis to test the relationship between these strategies (variables) and business gainfulness among immigrant's business owners. Accordingly, the researcher group can better sum up discoveries from this exploration and enhance business hone.

Reflections

My motivating factor through the length of this study was the likelihood of adding to the positive social change of African immigrant small business. This inspiration promoted my scholarly experience and helped me to continue through the difficulties of the research procedure. Amid the data collection process, getting members to consent to take an interest in the interview was difficult. I connected with an expansive number of small business grocery stores owners in the Bronx New York; however, few agreed to

participate. Also, it was hard to set up the correct time for the meetings as the immigrant business owners were extremely busy satisfying various parts of their business. For a few members, I needed to change the meeting arrangement two or three times. It took tact, adaptability, tolerance, and determination to set up the meeting sessions. Besides, getting the members to share their business systems inside and out was additionally testing. Few members express worry over sharing information about their business financial transaction. For this situation, building up a decent working association with the members was essential to advancing trust. A unique component of the research procedure was reminding members their rights and making them comfortable. Finally, I did not anticipate that transcribing the interview would take a long time; I discovered that transcribing the interview required a decent measure of time.

In synopsis, amid the fruition of my study, I learned through experience that research is not only a rational work, it is also one of passion. To be compelling, researchers require the correct academic knowledge and need the willingness to put in the diligent work and essential time. It is imperative that researchers explore topics they are passionate about to guarantee they contribute the correct level of information, vitality, and time. For my situation, I am inspired by discussing business issues related to owners of immigrant grocery stores. I found exploring the responses to the central research question was energizing.

Conclusion

In this qualitative multicase study, I explored marketing strategies that successful small business owners used to sustain their businesses for the past 5 years. The study

comprised of data collected from face-to-face, semistructured interviews with successful small business owners. Three themes rose from the collected data (a) observing customers' attitudes and testimonials, (b) inventory and meeting customer's needs, and (c) conventional and unconventional marketing. SMEs have a crucial part in the economy of most countries (Bloch & Bhattacharya, 2016). From the angle of inventory, the product or services provided are just intended to meet the market needs of particular gatherings of individuals (Park & Campbell, 2017). I confirmed Laukkanen et al.'s (2013) findings that firm leaders look for a convincing path of expansion to assure significant worth to their customers, while concentrating on the bringing down the overall expense of administration and products. Concerning the conventional marketing strategies discussed by Brunswicker and Vanhaverbeke (2015), I concluded that these SME owners considered the performance of their business by reviewing organizational capabilities, marketing assets, product/service comprehensiveness, and situational analysis. Unconventional marketing strategies involves leader's utilization of marketing strategies to recognize circumstances which will empower the management to distribute resources to guarantee most extreme misuse of the unexpected market openings. Unconventional marketing promotes, empowers small businesses with lower budgets to produce an impact. Otherwise called guerrilla marketing, these strategies aim to take your core message and present it remarkably that wins the consideration of your intended target audience

When marketing, given the dynamic idea of the SME business condition, there is a need to think of showcasing techniques that will guarantee the survival of the business

in the longer term (Wedel & Kannan, 2016). The general procedure would include the marketing mix, marketing strategies, and networking implementation of market intelligence systems benefit of SME firms (Nenzhelele, 2014). Bamiatzi and Kirchmaier (2014) tended to SME leaders utilization of technology marketing, network marketing, and innovative marketing. Over the completion of this study, I found that a blend of conventional and unconventional marketing components constituted a powerful marketing strategy that guaranteed short and long-term accomplishment for SMEs. Finally, I concur with Nejati et al. (2016) having found that in the quickly changing business sector African immigrant SME leaders are reexamining business fit with the goal that they stay essential in meeting the requests of their clients.

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Appendix A: E-mail to Validate Researcher's Interpretations

Date:

Re: Marketing Strategies of U.S. SMEs Led by African Immigrants

Dear (Participant's name),

Thank you for setting aside the opportunity to take an interest in my doctoral research study entitled "Marketing Strategies of U.S. SMEs Under the Leadership of African Immigrants ." I am contacting you to request your assistance in validating my interpretation of your responses to the interview on (insert date). Please see the attached file for the interview transcript. Kindly respond to this e-mail if any changes need to be made to the attached transcript. Much thanks for your significant time and support in my doctoral research.

Regards,

Sophia Osei-Sarfo

DBA Candidate

Walden University

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

I. Commence by introducing myself and the research study. I will go over the eligibility criteria with the participants again as follows:

- (a) African immigrant aged 18 years or older
- (b) Own and have operated a grocery store for at least 5 years
- (c) The grocery store located in the Bronx, New York, U.S.
- (d) The grocery store has 20 or fewer employees
- (e) The participant acts as the store's chief decision maker
- (f) The participant can provide substantial insight into the question
- (g) The participant has provided the required informed consent.

II. Review consent form with participants and answer any question that may arise.

III. I will let members know my intention of audio recording the interview for accuracy.

IV. Start recording by noting the date and time.

V. Introduce participants with coded identification to protect their privacy.

VI. Begin interview with question #1; follow through to the final question.

VII. Discuss member checking procedure with participants after the end of the meeting.

VIII. Verify their contact information.

IX. Thank them for their time

X. End protocol.