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Strategies for Used Car Dealership Owners to Sustain Business in a Competitive Environment

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Abstract

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MBA, New Mexico Highlands University, 2008

BS, University of Buea, 2001

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Business Administration

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Abstract

Small used car dealership ventures experience high business failures in the marketplace. Grounded in the resource-based view (RBV) theory, the purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies used car dealership owners and managers employ to remain profitable and sustain operations for longer than 5 years. In this study, 10 participants, including 5 owners and 5 managers from small used car dealerships in Colorado participated in face-to-face semistructured interviews. These participants have developed successful strategies to remain profitable for at least 5 years. Using methodological triangulation, field notes and documentary evidence supplemented the data collected through semistructured interviews. Through thematic analysis, 3 themes emerged from the research findings: customer care, aggressive marketing, and business knowledge. The findings showed the need for managers and owners of used car dealerships to employ strategies to compete in the marketplace and sustain growth. The positive social change resulting from this study includes the potential to increase small business successes, which could increase employment opportunities and the potential for job creation. The success of these small businesses could contribute positively to the economic empowerment of other related businesses and improve the economic wellbeing of communities through an increase in tax revenues and contributions to local nonprofit organizations.

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Dedication

I dedicate my doctoral study to God for blessings in my life and through my doctoral study. I also dedicate this study to my parents, Mary Ngum Benah and Chrysanthus Ambe, for their endless sacrifices to ensure their children obtained the best education through tough times. I also dedicate this study to my supportive wife, Josephine Chisanga-Suh, for taking care of me and our children during my doctoral journey. To my wonderful children, Ambe Suh, Chileshe (Chichi) Suh, and Afanwi Suh, the completion of my doctoral study is a testament that everything is possible if you work hard and have faith. Thanks to my siblings, nieces, nephews, and friends for their support and encouragement.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Small firms operate in business environments that are increasingly competitive with fewer resources to gain and sustain a competitive advantage (Kull, Mena, & Korschun, 2016). Many used car dealerships in the United States are small businesses. Approximately 95% of used car business ventures do not survive their first 5 years (Barley, 2015). Improving sales, market share, and profitability is a challenge for small business owners and managers (Lonial & Carter, 2015). The high failure rate of used car dealerships increases unemployment in the communities where these businesses operate (Frazer, 2015). Unlike large firms, small firms do not have the resources to absorb certain costs of operations and continue to operate and attain sustainable competitive advantage (Williams, 2014). Many small business owners do not recognize the challenges and strategies to address these challenges (Hayes, Chawla, & Kathawala, 2015). The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies used car dealership owners and managers employ to remain profitable and sustain operations beyond 5 years.

Background of the Problem

Competition in the car retailing industry is intense. The quality and price of cars and services are useful determinants of whether consumers switch to a substitute means of transportation (Liu & Liang, 2015). In many cities, substitutes in the car industry include trains, bus systems, motorcycles, bikes, and walking; the cost of switching to substitutes is low, and thus the level of substitute threat in the transport sector is high (Predic & Stosic, 2014). People can commute by trains, bikes, and motorcycles, which are more fuel efficient and less costly (Suter & Bwisa, 2013). Used car dealership owners can develop long-term strategies to generate superior business performance relative to other competitors (Kanuri & McLeod, 2016). By implementing more competitive strategies, used car dealership owners and managers may increase their market share and chances to gain competitive advantage (Pivoda, 2016). Owners and managers of used car dealerships can implement value-creating strategies to differentiate their products and services from those of its competitors (Sitawati, Winata, & Mia, 2015). Thus, they can sustain their competitive advantage when other firms are not able to derive the same benefit from the strategies (Halliru, 2016).

Problem Statement

Used car dealership owners are losing market share and struggling to sustain their operations (Tadelis & Zettelmeyer, 2015). Nearly 95% of used car dealership owners fail within 5 years of operations, and over 90% of Americans believe that used car salespeople take advantage of customers (Barley, 2015). The general business problem is that multiple used car dealerships are not profitable and fail within 5 years. The specific business problem was that some used car dealership owners and managers lack strategies to remain profitable and sustain operations beyond 5 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies used car dealership owners and managers employ to remain profitable and sustain operations beyond 5 years. The population for this study was comprised of 10 owners and managers from five small used car dealerships in Colorado who have developed successful strategies to remain profitable for at least 5 years. The implication for positive social change includes the potential to increase small business successes, which could increase employment opportunities and the potential for job creation. The success of these small businesses could contribute positively to the economic empowerment of other related businesses and increase the economic wellbeing of communities through an increase in tax revenues and contributions to local nonprofit organizations.

Nature of the Study

Researchers use qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods to conduct research (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Quantitative researchers use theories to test hypotheses related to the relationships or differences among numeric variables (Ma, 2015). I did not test hypotheses or examine differences or relationships among variables in this study. Thus, the quantitative method was not suitable. Mixed methods researchers combine qualitative and quantitative analyses to yield a greater understanding of a phenomenon (Johnson, 2015). I did not use mixed methods because this method requires the testing of hypotheses using numeric data. Qualitative researchers collect data through face-to-face interviews using open-ended questions to generate details of participant experiences in a natural setting (Mukhopadhyay & Gupta, 2014). The purpose of my study was to explore a business phenomenon in a natural setting. Thus, I used the qualitative method.

The qualitative design approaches I considered for this study included ethnography, phenomenology, narrative, and case study. Qualitative researchers use the ethnographic design to explore a group’s culture and beliefs (Kruth, 2015). The intent of this study was not to study the culture or beliefs of a group. Thus, I did not use the ethnographic design for this study. Researchers use phenomenological designs to explore the meanings of lived experiences of participants (Hunt, 2014). The intent of this study was not to study the meanings of lived experiences of participants. Therefore, the phenomenological approach was not appropriate. A narrative design entails the researcher gathering life stories and experiences of individuals or small groups (Hunt, 2014). Narrative design was not suitable because in this study I did not focus on the composition of life stories and experiences of individuals. Case study researchers use rich contextual data to explore a real-life phenomenon within a bounded system to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Birchall (2014) noted that explorative case studies result in a thorough analysis of individual experiences, meanings, and interpretations. I used the case study design because it was more flexible in its application compared to other qualitative designs.

Research Question

What strategies do used car dealership owners and managers employ to remain profitable and sustain operations beyond 5 years?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies did you employ to continue to make profits and sustain your business?
2. How did you implement these business strategies to sustain your operations?
3. What are some of the difficulties you encountered in carrying out these business strategies?
4. How did you address the key challenges to implementing your strategies for remaining profitable and sustaining operations?

5. How have you assessed the effectiveness of your strategies for sustaining operations?
6. What strategies, if any, did your staff develop and acquire that have contributed to your success in the auto industry?
7. What additional information can you share regarding strategies you employed to remain profitable and sustain operations?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the resource-based view (RBV) theory. Penrose (1959) first introduced the RBV theory by identifying resources as critical to firm growth. The RBV theory provides a basis for managers and business owners to understand how they can use resources to attain competitiveness and sustainable growth (Price & Stoica, 2015). According to RBV theorists, small businesses can sustain growth and profitability through effective use of company resources (Kozlenkova, Samaha, & Palmatier, 2014). Researchers have used the RBV theory to identify how firms can gain a competitive advantage through the effective use of resources (Takahashi, 2015; Warnier, Weppe, & Lecocq, 2013). Since Penrose introduced the theory, researchers have used the RBV concept to develop different propositions and insights about the nature of firm growth and performance (Lockett & Wild, 2014; Penrose, 1959).

Drawing from the RBV theory, Sum and Chorlian (2014) established that firms use resources as leverage to create value not easily imitated by competitors. Using the RBV concept, Penrose (1959) argued that firms could use scarce resources to create economic value that is hard for competitors to copy, resulting in a gain of competitive advantage. The RBV framework provides managers and small business owners the tools to understand how to employ scarce company resources to achieve and sustain growth and profitability. Warnier et al. (2013) found that the concepts of RBV influenced managers' attitudes about the use of resources for building and maintaining a competitive advantage. The underlying concepts of the RBV theory could be useful to gain an in-depth understanding of the strategies used car dealership owners and managers employ to remain profitable and sustain operations.

Operational Definitions

Business success: Business success refers to a business that has been profitable and operational for more than five years (U.S. Small Business Administration [SBA], 2016).

Certified preowned cars: Certified preowned cars are used dealership cars that have undergone detailed inspection and repairs before sale (Chen & Hsu, 2017).

Competitive advantage: Competitive advantage is a benefit a firm obtains by using attributes that are unique and rare to outperform competitors. Some of the attributes include access to resources and highly skilled labor, superior service quality, differentiation, and convenience of service (Naatu, 2016).

Dealer: A dealer refers to a person, group of individuals or legal entities that operate automobile dealerships (Carter, 2015).

Dealership: A dealership is a retail enterprise that sells used or new cars. New car dealerships are authorized franchises of car manufacturing companies that partner with carmakers to sell new and used automobiles (Carter, 2015).

Small business: A small business is a company with fewer than 500 employees (SBA, 2016).

Small retail business: A small retail business is a profit-focused retail organization with less than 50 employees (SBA, 2016).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions and limitations are factors that a researcher cannot control in a research study. In this study, assumptions are facts according to the researcher that lacked supporting evidence. Limitations are the potential weaknesses of my study. Delimitations are the factors that as a researcher I could control in the research process.

Assumptions

Assumptions are facts considered to be true but not verifiable (Lips-Wiersma & Mills, 2014; Nkwake & Morrow, 2016). The first assumption was that all participants were knowledgeable and provided honest and nonbiased responses to the semistructured interview questions. In qualitative studies, researchers assume that participants are knowledgeable about the phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2014). Second, I assumed that the sample of participants in the study was sufficient to represent used car dealership owners in the automotive retail industry in Colorado. Third, I assumed the participants provided accurate and comprehensive information about their lived experiences and knowledge. Finally, I assumed that the answers to the semistructured interview questions and information from company documents related to the study provided sufficient data to answer the central research question of the study. The research design and methodology minimized the effect of the potential problems associated with the study.

Limitations

Limitations refer to potential weaknesses of a study including conditions that may affect the scope or outcome of the study (Soilkki, Cassim, & Anis, 2014). The limitations of a study are critical, and researchers must recognize and consider them (Fan, 2013). Locating the study only in the Denver metro area was a limitation because the results of the study may not apply to other areas. The second limitation was the ability of participants to recall events accurately during interviews and the potential bias associated with their responses. The third limitation was that the assumption participants provided honest responses to interview questions may not be accurate. The last limitation was that the study comprised of only small used car dealerships. The exclusion of owners and managers of medium and large businesses could diminish the validity and reliability of the findings of the study.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the bounds or scope of the study (Soilkki et al., 2014). Delimitations are conditions researchers introduce or impose intentionally to limit the scope of a study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The delimitation of this study included limiting the scope of the study only to used car dealership owners and managers in the Denver metro area. The study included only small used car dealership owners and managers who have developed successful strategies to remain profitable for at least 5 years. The SBA (2016) defined a small business as a company with less than 500 employees. Another delimitation of the study was that the study did not include large companies, and the scope included only firms with fewer than 500 employees.

Significance of the Study

Small business owners and society could benefit from the results of this study. Used car dealerships may fail quickly if owners and managers do not anticipate challenges and implement successful strategies (Hayes et al., 2015). An increase in profitability and growth of used car dealerships could sustain the economic wellbeing of local businesses and communities in Colorado.

Contribution to Business Practice

Small business owners in the auto industry could benefit from the findings of this study. The findings may provide small business owners with successful strategies to safeguard firm resources and identify strategies for success. By implementing value-creating strategies, small business owners and managers can achieve long-term growth and sustainability (Ferro de Guimarães, Severo, & Maia de Vasconcelos, 2017). The results from this study could further provide insights into successful strategies for owners to manage their businesses better and achieve economic empowerment. The research may assist newly created used car dealerships with strategic resources and sustained profitability. The findings may provide owners and managers of used car dealerships with information on how to develop and implement strategies to reduce business losses and increase profits.

Implications for Social Change

Society could benefit from the results of this study. The performance of the car industry is an indicator of the economic wellbeing of a community and perhaps the nation (Barley, 2015). By implementing long-term strategies that enhance performance and generate profits, used car dealerships can improve the economic health of their communities through employment opportunities for residents (Kanuri & McLeod, 2016). The implications for positive social change include the potential to increase small business successes, which could increase the economic wellbeing of communities through an increase in tax revenues and contributions to local nonprofit organizations.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

A literature review is critical during the research process because researchers can identify, evaluate, and synthesize existing literature that relates to the research topic (Shaikh & Karjaluoto, 2015). The literature review provides an overview of existing knowledge on the phenomenon under study (Boell & Cecez-kecmanovic, 2015). Researchers conduct literature reviews to generate new ideas related to the phenomenon under study (Ishak & Osman, 2016). The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies used car dealership owners and managers employ to remain profitable and sustain operations beyond 5 years. In this literature review, I identified professional and academic literature on small business success and related topics. I drew on the work of other scholars who had studied successful strategies managers and owners of used car dealerships need to sustain operations in a competitive business environment. The findings of this study may provide owners and managers of used car dealerships with information on how to develop and implement strategies that reduce business losses and increase profits.

The databases and library materials I used to search the literature for this study included SAGE Publications, ProQuest, EBSCOHost, U.S. government databases, and Google Scholar. I searched the Walden University Library resources for peer-reviewed journal articles, small business and car dealership literature, and other business materials to support the literature review. Other sources of literature for this study included Business Source Complete, Academic Search Complete, ScienceDirect, and Thoreau Multi-Database Search.

The literature review in this study included a critical analysis and synthesis of literature related to the RBV theory. The review of academic and professional literature included an overview of the RBV theory and the competitive strategies used car dealership owners use to gain competitive advantage and sustain operations. I used peer-reviewed journals and other scholarly sources for the literature review. I included 253 references in this qualitative multiple case study. The literature review includes 113 references, with a total of 104 (92.03%) published on or after 2014 (see Table 1). The study in its entirety cites 92.88% peer-reviewed references published in or after 2014. To ensure the appropriate use of peer-reviewed journals, I used Ulrichsweb Global Serials Directory website in the Walden University Library.

Researchers use specific key terms to begin a literature search (Torraco, 2016). The key search terms I used to narrow the literature search online were *car dealerships*, *used car dealers*, *car retail*, *small business*, *business strategy*, *competitive advantage*, *small business success*, *sustainability*, *economic environment*, *resource-based view theory*, *business success*, and *small business challenge*. The literature review is comprised of the RBV theory analysis, competitive advantage and the RBV concept, business strategy, and limitations for using the RBV theory. I then proceeded to discuss the alternative theories which include the general systems theory and social network theory. I moved on to analyze competitive advantage and sustainability. I discussed competitive advantage, sustainable competitive advantage and dynamic capabilities which include knowledge capability, marketing capability, technological capability, and human resource capability. Next, I discussed competitive business strategies which include differentiation strategy, low-cost strategy, focus strategy, agile strategy, and SWOT framework. Finally, I presented an overview of the car retail industry and the challenges in the retail auto sector.

Table 1

Source Identification used in the Study

	Before 2014	2014-2018	Total sources reviewed	% of sources 2014-2018
Literature review	9	104	113	92.03%
Proposal	18	235	253	92.88%

The RBV Theory

The conceptual framework for this study was the RBV theory. The RBV theory is a vital management theory that business managers and owners can use to analyze resources as a potential source of a competitive advantage (Jensen, Cobbs, & Turner, 2016). Proponents of the RBV theory argue that firms can derive a competitive advantage from resources that competitors cannot imitate easily (Hitt, Xu, & Carnes, 2016). Following this perspective, firms can manage resources that are capable of providing a competitive advantage by identifying a series of empirical indicators. These indicators include resource value, rareness, imitability, and substitutability (Barney, 1991). Each indicator is necessary but not mutually sufficient to create a competitive advantage that is sustainable over the long term (Jensen et al., 2016).

Historical development of the RBV theory. In 1959, Penrose first introduced the RBV theory by establishing that a firm's internal resources will drive its sustainable competitive advantage (Kull et al., 2016). Penrose focused on the role of resources in enabling or constraining organizational growth (Kellermanns, Walter, Crook, Kemmerer, & Narayanan, 2016). For over 50 years, researchers have built on Penrose's insights by focusing more on strategic resources (Kull et al., 2016). Wernerfelt (1984) advanced the RBV theory by illustrating how a firm's resources constitute a potential source of a competitive advantage. Barney (1991) proposed four key attributes for a resource to yield a sustainable competitive advantage: value, rareness, imperfect mobility, and nonsubstitutability of the resources. Proponents of the RBV theory argue that the RBV of the firm provides a useful conceptual lens for exploring strategies for small business competition and sustainability. Krull et al. (2016) suggested that each firm has a unique portfolio of resources that are difficult to obtain in the marketplace. Thus, managers and owners of used car dealerships can gain a better understanding of how they can employ resources efficiently to achieve a competitive advantage and superior performance.

The underlying concepts of the RBV theory may assist small business managers and owners to understand better how to manage resources efficiently, develop a sustainable competitive advantage, and achieve goals (Douglas, 2016). According to the RBV theory, a firm can gain a competitive advantage by designing and using a specific and appropriate competitive strategy which is unique, not imitable, and nonsubstitutable (Egger & Hristova, 2018). The RBV concept has direct implications on a firm's aspiration levels, as owners and managers must make decisions on what resources to use and in what manner (Koroteeva et al., 2016). Managers and owners of used car dealerships can make the strategic decision either to seek new resources or ways to use the resources as a source of sustainable competitive advantage (Douglas, 2016). Depending on what goals managers and owners consider more important, firms can overcome competition by attracting customers and maintaining better customer services (Koroteeva et al., 2016). The RBV concept highlights the significance of resource heterogeneity, allocation, independency, utilization, and imitability to create capabilities for firms to achieve a competitive advantage (Dubey et al., 2018).

The usefulness of the RBV theory depends on the firm's ability to incorporate action elements that identify how the firm uses its resources to gain competitive advantage (Kull et al., 2016). Firms can gain competitive advantage by deploying valuable resources and capabilities that are inelastic in supply (Egger & Hristova, 2018). Firm resources include assets, capabilities, organizational processes, firm attributes, information, and knowledge that are controlled by a firm. Small business owners and managers can use the resources to conceive of and implement strategies that improve their efficiency and effectiveness (Zhao & Ha-Brookshire, 2014). Resources create and add value either directly or indirectly to a firm's competitive advantage by obtaining strategic competencies such as cost advantage or differentiation advantage in an industry (Porter, 2008). Firms that align their systems with strategy can create human capital that is able and willing to deliver the desired behavior and returns value to the firm (Kull et al., 2016). Thus, small firms can accumulate and leverage tangible and intangible resources, resulting in value creation (Paucar-Caceres, Hart, Roma i Vergés, & Sierra-Lozano, 2016).

Resources and capabilities. Ruivo, Oliveira, and Neto (2015) argued that resources are inputs into a firm's production process. Capabilities refer to a firm's capacity to exploit resources, usually through organizational processes (Ruivo et al., 2015). Resources can be tangible and intangible assets owned by the small firm providing the company a competitive advantage over rivals, given that the resources are valuable, scarce, nonimitable, and cannot be substituted easily (Barney, 1991). Resources are anything tangible or intangible that a firm can use to produce, market, and distribute its products and services (Khan & Quaddus, 2017). Examples of resources include stable workforce, equipment, and financial and production capacity. In today's knowledge-based economy, intangible resources of knowledge, organizational learning, market image, innovative capabilities, organizational culture, and patent rights are some of the most valuable and competitive resources (Zhao, 2014). A firm's growth is a function of various resources and capabilities. Small firms are the backbone of job creation in many communities and require resources (Khan & Quaddus, 2017).

Dubey et al. (2018) suggested that firms operating in competitive environments need to respond quickly to external changes. Following the RBV perspective, employees are bundles of resources distributed heterogeneously across firms. Physical and organizational assets, human resources, and competencies are different components firms can use to apply wealth-creating strategies (Egger & Hristova, 2018). Resources that lead to a competitive advantage are usually scarce and inimitable (Baum, Schwens, & Kabst, 2015). Capabilities reflect the firm's capacity to deploy the company's valuable resources with the goal of achieving desired outcomes which include enhanced growth and performance (Leonidou, Christodoulides, Kyrgidou, & Palihawadana, 2017). Capabilities are a firm's ability to assemble, integrate, and deploy valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources as well as non-VRIN resources (Yang, Xun, & He, 2015). Capabilities and resources are relevant for small firms to gain advantage and position themselves strategically in the marketplace (Baum et al., 2015).

Intangible resources add value to the organization and are part of its base of knowledge and information (Lonial & Carter, 2015). From the perspective of the RBV theory, intangible resources are a significant source of competitive advantage and increase firm performance (De Luca et al., 2014). Tangible resources include the financial and logistical assets of a company and items in the balance sheet. Tangible and intangible resources combined with competencies controlled by a firm enables owners and managers to create and implement effective strategies capable of producing long-term organizational improvements (De Luca et al., 2014). According to Penrose (1959), managerial competence, acquired experience, and learning capacity will determine firm growth while using internal and external resources. Firm orientations may give rise to a sustainable competitive advantage and superior company performance (Lonial & Carter, 2015).

Strategic resources are those resources that have value and can be leveraged to increase customer value or cut costs. Such resources are rare in a way that competitors do not have access to the same or similar resources to compete, and are difficult to substitute or imitate. Firms can use strategic resources to stay ahead of competitors (Barney, 1991). Firms that control greater strategic resources will have a competitive advantage over firms with lesser resources. The strategic resources, in this case, include those that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and organizationally embedded (Kull et al., 2016). Given that employee knowledge is intangible in nature, experience and skill sets are often hard to imitate and can be of great value to a firm (Campbell & Park, 2017). Strategic resources enable firms to differentiate between companies that have advantages and those that do not (Kellermanns et al., 2016). Proponents of the RBV concept established that a firm can only gain a sustainable competitive advantage when other companies find it hard to imitate the firm’s success, considering that the nature of the resources and skills are rare, valuable, and costly to imitate (Douglas, 2016). Firms can enhance their advantages to the extent that the company possesses strategic resources (Kellermanns et al., 2016).

The RBV theory and competitive advantage. Small firms operate under greater constraints with scarce resources than larger firms (Zhao, 2014). Given the importance of small businesses to the economy and communities in the U.S., this study focuses on exploring strategies owners and managers of used car dealerships employ to remain profitable and sustain operations beyond 5 years. Small businesses can maximize long-term profits and create competitive advantage by exploiting and developing their resources (Zhao, 2014). Not all resources have the potential to create a competitive advantage (Yang et al., 2015). However, Business, human, and external resources contribute to enhance firm performance and achieve a sustained competitive advantage (Ruivo et al., 2015). Firms can gain a competitive advantage only when they implement strategies that create value, making it challenging for potential or current competitors to imitate (Duarte Alonso, 2017). A firm's potential or current competitors must be unable to replicate the benefits of the company's strategy to attain and sustain a competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). When a firm's resources are economically valuable, relatively rare, difficult to imitate, and imperfectly mobile, managers and owners can explain the differences in firm performance (Ruivo et al., 2015).

The foundation of gaining a competitive advantage lies in resources and skills (Yang et al., 2015). Barney (1991) asserted that beyond possessing resources, owners can organize themselves in a way that would exploit the full potential of such resources to gain competitive advantage. Firms can attain a competitive advantage through social capital, organizational processes, and innovation (Koroteeva et al., 2016). Intellectual capital is an essential part of the RBV concept. Intellectual capital gained from employees is another source for firms to attain a competitive advantage and create wealth. Intellectual capital includes knowledge, information, intellectual property, and employee experience (Campbell & Park, 2017). Firms can create agility, adaptability, and alignment as distinct business properties to gain sustainable competitive advantages (Dubey et al., 2018).

According to the RBV theory, a firm can gain a sustainable competitive advantage if the company can leverage internal resources to help guard against competitors and other external market forces that may negatively impact its performance (Campbell & Park, 2017). To ensure that competitive advantage is sustainable, Barney (1991) proposed four distinct resource attributes that must exist: being (a) valuable, (b) rare, (c) imperfectly imitable, and (4) hard to substitute. Firms with social capital will increase performance through value creation, innovation, and network ties (Campbell, & Park, 2017). The network ties include other local businesses, governments, and trade associations. Firms which can learn from their environment are more likely to quickly adapt to changing business scenarios, thus providing rapid improvements in product and service quality (Lonial & Carter, 2015).

Barney (1991) based his conceptualization of RBV on the assumptions that resources and capabilities are (a) heterogeneously distributed among firms, and (b) imperfectly mobile. Firms possessing resources that are valuable and rare should attain a competitive advantage and improve short-term performance, while also using inimitable and nonsubstitutable resources (Kull et al., 2016). RBV stresses the role of firm resources and capabilities in achieving a sustained competitive advantage and performance through the formulation and implementation of strategies (Baum et al., 2015). Such strategies exploit environmental opportunities and accommodate external threats by capitalizing on internal strengths to limit the impact of company weaknesses (Leonidou et al., 2017).

Proponents of the RBV argue that the endowment of capabilities and resources is a crucial antecedent to a firm's strategy (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984). Rather than market conditions, resources can limit the potential growth and strategic choices of a firm (Penrose, 1959). Thus, firms may likely diversify if they possess the necessary resources to make diversification feasible economically (Baum et al., 2015).

Variations in firm performance may occur because of the specific nature of resources and competences firms accumulate (De Luca et al., 2014). Firms can use their physical, human, and organizational assets to develop long-term competitive advantages and boost performance (Lonial & Carter, 2015). Tajeddini, Elg, and Trueman (2013) noted that customer and entrepreneurial orientations are critical for small businesses with limited resources to attain competitive advantage. Drawing from the RBV concept, the three types of orientations small firms may pursue to achieve sustainable competitive advantage and performance include entrepreneurial orientation, market orientation, and learning orientation (Lonial & Carter, 2015).

Limitations of the RBV theory. Despite the use and application of the RBV theory, some researchers have criticized the theory for not emphasizing the costs related to the acquisition and development of resources (Liu & Liang, 2015). Some RBV critics argued that some resources associated with the RBV theory, such as knowledge, can be inherently difficult for business practitioners to manipulate (Duarte Alonso, Bressan, & Sakellarios, 2016). Some critics argue that the RBV concept is static and ignores market dynamics as well as a firm's evolution over time (Liu & Liang, 2015). Although the RBV has become increasingly popular, some critics argue that resources in the context of the theory are not well defined, inconsistent, and even contradictory across studies (Kellermanns et al., 2016). The lack of an adequate definition of resource for RBV studies can hinder empirical tests (Yang et al., 2015). Critics have asserted that the RBV places excessive emphasis on the internal aspect of an organization, whereas ignoring external factors that might also have an impact on firm performance, particularly in high-velocity environments (Yang et al., 2015).

Alternative Theory

Alternative theories include the general systems theory and social network theory. Critics of the RBV theory argue that the RBV concept is static and ignores market dynamics as well as a firm's evolution over time (Liu & Liang, 2015). Yang et al. (2015) argued that the RBV theory emphasize a firm's internal aspect and ignores the external factors that affect the firm. Von Bertalanffy (1968) argued that a firm is a system that consists of parts that are interdependent and interconnected. The effect in one part of a chain can affect performance in other parts. The social network theory is essential to understand the external relationships that bridge a firm and its outside identities (Zhao, & Ha-Brookshire, 2014). Used car dealerships that have a high network can cost-effectively attain critical market information and gain a competitive advantage.

The general systems theory. In 1968, Ludwig von Bertalanffy introduced the general systems theory by establishing that a system is an entity and a coherent whole (Hughes, Anund, & Falkmer, 2015). According to Von Bertalanffy (1972), organizations can use the systems thinking concept to understand how the different components of a system interact and affect one another (Dzombak, C. Mehta, Mehta, & Bilén, 2014).

From the systems theory perspective, an organization can achieve its objectives when all key activities form a whole system (Fang, Zhu, & Zheng, 2015). Systems exist when interdependent, but related components are achieving a valued pre-set objective (Hughes et al., 2015). General systems theorists argue that a firm is a whole system that consists of interrelated and interdependent activities. The performance of one activity in a firm has a direct effect on the other parts (Millar & Porter, 1985). These activities consist of processes and techniques for investigating and improving the system as a whole (Hughes et al., 2015).

According to the concept, a firm is a system that consists of parts that are interdependent and connected (Dzombak et al., 2014). The activities of the firm are interconnected, and the effect in one part of a chain can affect performance in other parts. Therefore, the performance of one activity directly affects the cost and effectiveness of the others (Millar & Porter, 1985). The firm's systems and processes comprise of activities necessary to acquire and transform resources into assets that will return value to the firm. Through these systems and processes, firms can accumulate and leverage tangible and intangible resources that result in value creation (Paucar-Caceres et al., 2016).

Systems thinking provide a deeper understanding of how a dynamic and complex system behavior contributes to firm success (Dzombak et al., 2014). Systems theory focuses on the interrelationships, influences, and dynamics of business activities, and how they affect the firm in achieving its objectives and attain sustainable performance (Cross, & Barnes, 2014). Critical components, interdependency, relationships, and objectives represent fundamental elements of systems theory. The key components of a firm include its activities which comprise a system that is critical for the firm to operate and contributes to achieving the overall objectives of the firm (Hughes et al., 2015). A firm's systems and processes consist of the end-to-end sequencing of activities required to acquire and transform resources into products, services, and solutions that are of value to customers (Paucar-Caceres et al., 2016). The activities are related, and their relationships affect firm performance (Hughes et al., 2015). By observing a phenomenon as a whole with a holistic perspective, firm managers and owners of can understand and improve firm performance and achieve sustained competitive advantage (Fang et al., 2015).

Firm managers and owners can use the systems thinking approach to resolving business problems by establishing that the activities of the firm are linked and interconnected (Dzombak et al., 2014). Business owners and managers can view a firm as a system comprising of different components that are intertwined. The components include customers, suppliers, economy, technology, cultural, physical, and the legal environment (Więcek-Janka, Mierzwiak, & Kijewska, 2016). Managers and business owners should view their organizations as mental constructs to enable them to conceptualize, learn, and improve problematic situations (Paucar-Caceres et al., 2016). Firms can achieve their goals when all activities contribute and operate efficiently. However, the failure of one key component may threaten or reduce firm performance (Hughes et al., 2015). From the systems thinking perspective, firms can attain sustainable growth and performance by understanding the relationship and interaction between the economic, social, and environmental factors (Rahman & Khan, 2014). Small business activities include marketing, customer service, networking, technology, and working capital (Turner & Endres, 2017). These activities work together, influence each other and have a positive interaction (Fang et al., 2015).

Business owners can understand the relationships between different parts of a system and how the components depend on one another as a whole, rather than looking at one key component (Von Bertalanffy, 1972). Business owners and managers can use systems thinking to broaden sustainability initiatives beyond optimizing efficiency by focusing on strategy rather than tactics (Waller, Fawcett, & Johnson, 2015). Using systems thinking approach, managers, and owners of used car dealerships can understand how the different activities of a firm interact and how each component affects or is affected by other parts (Turner & Endres, 2017). Considering that firms activities are complex and influenced by various factors, business managers can use systems thinking to analyze firm performance (Fang et al., 2015). Firm owners and managers can use systems thinking to establish accountability in firm activities, ensure fair treatment of stakeholders, and create a sustainable impact on communities (Dzombak et al., 2014).

The social network theory. Although the RBV theory offers insights into a firm’s strategic resources and competitive advantages, it is essential to understand the social networks or external relationships that bridge a firm and its outside identities (Zhao, & Ha-Brookshire, 2014). Based on this perspective, I used the social network theory as a complementary framework to help explain a firm’s superior performance from the external perspective. Managers and owners of used car dealerships who have a strong network will be able to attain critical market information cost-effectively. The benefit of network ties to small businesses is considerable considering that small firms have limited resources and do not have the financial capital to acquire such information (Williams, 2014). Networks include relationships and connections at the firm to firm level or in the owners and managers' social networks (Wiegel & Bamford, 2015).

A firm's network consists of a set of relationships, both horizontal and vertical, with other organizations including suppliers, customers, competitors, or other entities (Zhao, & Ha-Brookshire, 2014). Wiegel and Bamford (2015) considered networking as a strategic tool for approaching new and existing customers and suppliers. Firms that engage in networking can obtain and provide critical information that is important for decision making (Williams, 2014). Personal and business networks are critical to business communities across the globe. While the RBV theory of the firm assists researchers to understand the secrets to success from the firm's internal perspective, the social network theory provides insights in determining critical information from the external perspective (Zhao & Ha-Brookshire, 2014). Network ties at the firm and employee levels can be a tool to cultivate business relationships, manage scarcity, secure production factors, distribution channels, institutional support, and create opportunities (Williams, 2014).

A firm's relationship with partners plays a vital role in the value-network constellation. Used car dealership owners and managers can create value for their stakeholders, achieve business and sustainability goals, and create competitive advantage by increasing their collaboration efforts with other partners and businesses (Bocken, 2014). The network of stakeholder relationships is a strategic resource with the inherent potential to contribute substantively to a firm's performance through its ability to gain a sustainable competitive advantage (Kull et al., 2016). By allowing partners to access comprehensive information timely, a firm can extend its operational agility to its partners who can increase the efficiency and effectiveness of its processes as well as the quality of information available for decision-making (Krotov, 2015).

Networks are critical assets for firms, especially small firms which lack resources, to overcome the resource limitation (Williams, 2014). Networks enable firms to gain valuable and necessary resources such as market knowledge, financial support or human resources support among others. Social network ties address a dynamic process by which a firm obtains, reaches, shares, or creates a bundle of valuable resources through its outside networks (Zhao, & Ha-Brookshire, 2014). These network ties are an organizational resource and a source of sustained competitive advantage. Customer relationship is a resource because it creates value by increasing sales based on the employee’s personality (Wiegel & Bamford, 2015). The RBV theory provides a useful avenue to understanding stakeholder marketing because it sheds light on the value generated by the firm's network of stakeholder relationships (Zhao, & Ha-Brookshire, 2014). Relationships and connections are critical elements for suppliers to find and establish contacts with potential customers for business expansion (Wiegel & Bamford, 2015).

Competitive Advantage and Sustainability

Small business owners face many challenges from the market and customers (Pivoda, 2016). Firms are struggling to gain and maintain market share and competitive advantages in dynamic and complex business environments (Liu & Liang, 2015). To address these challenges and sustain operations, small business owners and managers must respond to the challenges from the market and customers, requiring efficiency and effectiveness to foster and sustain competitiveness (Okeyo, Gathungu, & K'Obonyo, 2014). As a result, small business owners can focus on reducing costs, increase productivity, improve quality, and satisfy the dynamic requirements of customers and other stakeholders. Firms can optimize resource allocations that align with practical strategies, improve performance, and integrate the volatility in today's markets and environment (Liu & Liang, 2015). Used car dealership owners can identify the intensity of competition and profitability of the car retailing industry by analyzing competitive forces. The competitive forces include the intensity of the existing competition, the threat of new competitors entry, the bargaining power of suppliers, the bargaining power of buyers and the pressure of substitutes (Predic, & Stosic, 2014).

Competitive advantage. Firms can gain a more significant market share and generate more sales thereby achieving a competitive advantage (Naatu, 2016). Business managers must have the ability to create superior value for its buyers by enhancing firm performance and profitability (Sigalas, 2015). Firms can outperform competitors by developing and acquiring attributes that are unique and rare. These attributes include access to resources and highly skilled labor, superior service quality, and convenience of service (Naatu, 2016). Also, information technology is critical for firms to create competitive advantage by allocating human, knowledge, and capital resources effectively while investing in innovative technologies (Bilgihan & Wang, 2016). By improving information sharing, communication, and decision-making process, a firm can use technologies to gain a competitive advantage in a way that is beyond supporting basic operations (Bilgihan & Wang, 2016).

Service quality is the perception and judgment of service by customers (Arshad & Su, 2015). A customer's willingness to maintain a relationship with a firm depends on their perception of the quality of service that the firms provide (Dai & Salam, 2014). A customer's perception of how a firm is reliable and responsive in providing a service will determine the customer's satisfaction (Martin, 2016). High-quality service is essential for firms to establish and enhance long-term relationships with customers (Mittal, Gera, & Batra, 2015). In the car retailing industry where consumers are changing their tastes and shopping habits, firms must provide services and products at low costs, provide better value to customers, and enhance service delivery strategies to boost sales and profits while minimizing costs (Arschad & Su, 2015). The quality of service consists of service delivery and service content quality. Service delivery quality is the way in which firms make their services accessible to consumers. Service content quality is the extent to which firms provide information that is complete, accurate, and timely to consumers (Dai & Salam, 2014). Relationship quality is a critical superior performance driver for firms to gain customer loyalty and satisfaction (Giovanis, Athanasopoulou, & Tsoukatos, 2015).

Managers and owners of used car dealerships can ensure that their salespeople deliver superior customer service in an exceptional manner that surpasses customer needs, leads to customer satisfaction, and enhances competitiveness (Arschad & Su, 2015). One way dealerships can improve their service and develop a quality culture is by implementing a total quality management philosophy in their organizations (Fraser, Tseng, & Hans-Henrik, 2013). Firms can design their HR systems in a way that rewards employees that provide quality services that surpass customers' needs (Gupta, 2016). Firm managers can identify and meet customer needs by customizing portfolios of products to meet customer demand (Den Hertog, 2014). Firms should allocate resources in a way that enhances the usefulness of service operations and address customer concerns (Arschad & Su, 2015). Car retailers can focus on consumers as the starting point for marketing strategies (Pantano, Priporas, & Dennis, 2018). An attentive service strategy that fosters a culture of quality service will lead to excellence in customer relations objectives such as branding, positioning and complaint resolutions (Den Hertog, 2014).

Firms can use technology to enhance their retail service quality and deliver superior services that enhance performance and increase profitability (Pantano et al., 2018). Used car dealerships can differentiate themselves from competitors by providing quality services that retain customers, maintain their trust and loyalty, and attract new customers (Mittal et al., 2015). Used car dealerships can differentiate their services and build competitive by offering quality online car sales alternatives to customers. By providing quality online car sales services, managers and owners of car dealerships may improve customer satisfaction, build customer trust, and create loyalty (Sharma &

Halvadia, 2015). Therefore, it is essential for firm owners and managers to understand the essentials of enhancing service quality in developing effective strategies that retain customers and sustain competitive advantages (Kaura, Durga Prasad, & Sharma, 2015).

According to Dai and Salam (2014), the convenience of service is a perceived sense of control by consumers to manage, use, and converts their time and effort in achieving their goals as they access and use a particular service. Customers who find it difficult to access and use an online car dealership service may find the service less desirable to create activities associated with the consumption and value creation process (Gupta, 2014). The convenience of service is critical for most customers when making car purchase decisions (Dai & Salam, 2014). Firms can develop and implement service strategies by communicating the vision and providing training of service delivery systems to employees to ensure consistency in the delivery systems (Otubanjo, 2018). Firms that engage in online sales of products and services can implement business strategies that consider service convenience and create value for customers (Chou, Wu, & Huang, 2014).

Sustainable competitive advantage. Competition in the marketplace forces companies to lower prices and improve their products and services (Randall, 2015). A firm must either create more value for customers at a cost level comparable to competitors or provide value equivalent to competitors at a lower cost to attain competitive advantage (Sihite & Simanjuntak, 2015). The sustainable competitive advantage is a component of a firm's overall business strategy that focuses on providing a considerable advantage over a firm's present and future competitors (Ceptureanu, 2016).

The strategic combination and integration of resources can yield sustainable competitive advantage (Naatu, 2016). A firm will attain sustained competitive advantages when it can dominate competitors for a more extended period (Sihite & Simanjuntak, 2015). A firm's sustainability is the prerequisite for its competitive advantage (Predic, & Stosic, 2014). Customers expect the products they buy have good quality and a reasonable price, including conforming to environmental standards (Pivoda, 2016).

The sustainable development of a firm is a continuous process of change, the use of resources, targeting investment choices, research and development, innovation, staff development and institutional change (Zdanyte & Neverauskas, 2014). Used car dealership owners can sustain better-than-average performance in the long run to survive. Car dealership owners can achieve sustained competitive advantage in the marketplace when the uniqueness of their products and services are valuable to buyers (Sitawati et al., 2015). To be effective, managers at all levels of the firm must engage in carefully prioritized and synchronized resource allocation. Specifically, they must focus on how resources are structured, bundled, and leveraged to create a competitive advantage (Paucar-Caceres et al., 2016).

Firms can achieve sustainable performance and competitive advantage when the resources that drive the process of value creation in the existing operations of a firm continue to create value in the future (Banker, Mashruwala, & Tripathy, 2014). Business owners can structure organizational resources and gain competitive by acquiring, accumulating, and divesting resources (Paucar-Caceres et al., 2016). The way business owners define value has a significant influence on the capabilities it creates and how it treats its resources (Glavas & Mish, 2015). Firms can bundle resources by stabilizing, enriching, and pioneering them to create competitive advantage. By mobilizing, coordinating, and deploying scarce economic resources, firm managers and owners can gain competitive advantage (Paucar-Caceres et al., 2016). To have resources that are sustainable, car dealership owners can consider the value and not only focus on the end product or service but also include the systemic cost of delivering goods and services (Glavas & Mish, 2015).

A competitive advantage will enhance a firm's ability to generate superior performance relative to its competitors (Kanuri & McLeod, 2016). The longer it takes for a competitor to respond to a particular comparative advantage, the higher the opportunity for a firm to capitalize on the sustained advantages and to create new ones (Banker, Mashruwala, & Tripathy, 2014). Business owners can ensure that firms realize competitive advantage through efficient resource investment (Paucar-Caceres et al., 2016). Firms can achieve a sustainable competitive advantage by implementing effective strategies that transform problems into relevant demands (Kersten, 2015).

Also, firms that collaborate with other partners in their sector will create new markets that other firms can benefit, resulting in competition and collaboration advantages. The stakeholders include customers, potential buyers, entities in the supply chain, government agencies, regulatory bodies, advocacy groups, foundations, non-governmental agencies, and the public (Schulz & Flanigan, 2016). Firms can derive sustained competitive advantage from its resources and capabilities and includes management skills, organizational processes and skills, and information and knowledge

(Barney, 1991; Reddy & Rao, 2014). Firm owners and managers can manifest sustainable competitive advantage in the strategies and operating practices that it develops to operationalize relationships with and impacts on stakeholders and the environment (Glavas & Mish, 2015).

Dynamic capabilities are a significant source of sustainable competitive advantage (Liu & Liang, 2015). The concept of dynamic capabilities establishes that resources alone are not sufficient to sustain a long-term competitive advantage (Glavas & Mish, 2015). Dynamic Capabilities refer to the firm’s ability to create value and sustain a competitive advantage if they sense, seize new opportunities, and restructure their resources and capabilities to align with the opportunities and external environmental changes (Bocken, 2014). Firms that deploy dynamic capabilities are more likely to achieve sustained competitive advantage. Dynamic capabilities address the dynamic nature of the strategy process thus enabling a firm to continually change its strategy to fit with environmental changes (Liu & Liang, 2015). The dynamics capabilities enable firms to transform its resources swiftly and creatively that delivers superior value to customers. Therefore, firm managers and owners can create a sustainable competitive advantage because the ability to change in a short period is challenging for competitors to imitate (Okeyo et al., 2014). A firm’s dynamic capabilities include knowledge, marketing, technological, and human resource capabilities.

Firms are heterogeneous, including their ability to access and manage resources (Douglas, 2016). The deployment of dynamic capabilities without the right resource base will not be sufficient to sustain a competitive advantage. Therefore, firm managers and owners must recognize that resources are not static and must continue to adapt to the changing environment (Liu & Liang, 2015). Firms will sustain a competitive advantage when they allocate their resources to adapt to environmental changes (Douglas, 2016). Firms can use the dynamics capabilities view to respond to changes by altering their resource base. Firms will perform better when they are successful in adapting to these changes (Bocken, 2014). The sources of competitiveness in the automotive sales industry include knowledge, marketing, technological, human resources capabilities (Camisón & Forés, 2015).

Firms can gain a competitive advantage by aligning its knowledge resources with the changes that occur in the marketplace (Chen & Fong, 2015). Knowledge is an organizational capability that allows firms to integrate people, technologies, processes, and strategy to create, use, and share vital information (Tseng, 2016). Organizational capabilities include the acquisition, conversion, application, and protection of knowledge. Firms can gain knowledge through the acquisition of knowledge. Acquirers can get more of the type of knowledge they already have, or they can get knowledge that adds to those they already possess (Länsiluoto, Varamäki, Laitinen, Viljamaa, & Tall, 2015). Firms can seek, create, and capture knowledge through knowledge acquisitions (Tseng, 2016). Understanding how to manage a firm's knowledge capabilities is essential for managers and owners to deploy resources efficiently and grow in value (Tseng, 2016).

Breznik and Lahovnik, (2014) asserted that managers and owners of car dealerships can create links and nurture relationships with customers and other stakeholders by predicting customer preferences, thereby increasing the firm's competitive power in the marketplace. With increased market outreach, second-hand car dealerships can enhance their competitive advantage through innovation, market development, customer requirements, products, and processes (Okeyo et al., 2014). Firms can enhance their network marketing capabilities by employing information technologies to achieve more significant value chain for auto sales (Li, 2014). For this study, marketing capability and access include market information, advertising, trade fairs, auctions, and product exhibitions, and online stores.

The internet and technology are changing the way people shop. Online shopping is altering the pattern of automobiles sales in the United States (Barley, 2015). Used car dealers can develop a marketing or business development team that generates, leads, and sustains business relationships with clients (Reddy & Rao, 2014). Determinants of market accessibility and capability include pricing, product nature, labor intensity, retail buying practices, customer preferences, trust in buyer-seller relationships, the long-term orientation of the firm, supply chain rationalization, and supply chain integration (Schulz & Flanigan, 2016). Car dealerships can advertise more appropriately by targeting demographics and customer desires using the internet and other IT outlets (Tileaga, Nitu, & Nitu, 2014).

Firms connect with customers and other stakeholders using technology (Tseng, 2016). Firms can use information technology to target and market products to a large population of internet users and subscribers (Bilgihan & Wang, 2016). Consumers are increasingly relying on the internet to access information and compare prices (Tseng, 2016). The future of car sales entails that firms utilize information technology to improve market share and performance. Firms can use technology capabilities to link different activities between the value chain, which can become a competitive advantage (Pivoda, 2016). The rapid emergence of various types of information technology has revolutionized the car retailing industry in recent years (Tileaga et al., 2014). Information technology has given firms the ability to operate more efficiently and sustain competition. Business owners use technological capabilities to develop, produce, and use the right technology, especially in today's ever-changing and dynamic environment. Information technologies that support customer agility will enhance customer communities to gather customers' feedback (Krotov et al., 2015). Also, research and development (R&D) capability are critical because it enables companies to acquire and exploit the new knowledge that generates innovation potential (Breznik, & Lahovnik, 2014).

R&D capability is relevant especially in a high-velocity environment such as the car industry. For example, responses by competitors to pricing moves come almost immediately, while responses to innovation through R&D would take a much more extended period (Banker et al., 2014). R&D enables a firm to build technological capabilities which are some of the most critical sources of sustainable competitive (Banker et al., 2014). Firms must always search, explore, and implement new opportunities inside and outside the firm to gain market share and increase sales (Pivoda, 2016). Firms can gain market share and competitiveness by using information technology to market products to internet users and subscribers, given that economic development depends on the technological preparation of competitors (Tileaga et al., 2014). Firms use technological capabilities to facilitate interfirm collaboration and create collaborative platforms with other stakeholders (Krotov et al., 2015).

People are critical to a firm's activity and the value chain of a firm (Pivoda, 2016). Business leaders should enlist the talents of the firm's human resources to craft and deploy strategy throughout the firm (Aurik, Fabel, & Jonk, 2015). Human resources capability is another source of sustained competitive advantage. Small business owners and managers with human resource development strategies can create specific competencies that align with the strategic goals of the firm (Fareed, Noor, Isa, & Salleh, 2016). Human resource capability enhances values and improves organizational effectiveness which can lead to a sustainable competitive advantage. A firm can create sustainable intangible values that will help capitalize it on the market by implementing human resources actions (De Luca et al., 2014). The development of human capital for improving organizational performance is a source for small businesses to gain a sustainable competitive advantage (Fareed et al., 2016). Managers and firm owners have a crucial role in developing dynamic capabilities and implementing human resource development actions that align with organizational goals (Kull et al., 2016).

Human resource capabilities can contribute to organizational effectiveness and competitive advantage through the quality of the knowledge and skills which small business employees have as a result of human capital development (Jackson, Schuler, & Jiang, 2014; Sikora, Thompson, Russell, & Ferris, 2016). According to the RBV concept, core skills are central to an organization's competitive advantage, and firms must acquire them from the internal development of its employees (Fareed et al., 2016). Employees are human resources in whom a firm invests through knowledge skill development and training to improve their abilities to perform tasks, thereby adding value and enabling the firm to achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Sikora et al., 2016). Drawing from the RBV perspective, the human capital pool of a small business can contribute to sustainable competitive advantage, considering that human resource is valuable, rare, not imitable and cannot be substituted easily (Fareed et al., 2016).

Business leaders can create an organizational design that best orchestrates resources by the strategic position, evolving customer needs, and appropriate decision making at all levels (Paucar-Caceres et al., 2016). Such actions by firm leaders will increase operational efficiency, optimize access to human capital, and have the ability to respond quickly to new opportunities and external threats (Child, 2015). The firm's strategy will define how it intends to compete, serve customer segments, provide product and service solutions, and outperform competitors in the marketplace. The firm's leadership is responsible for identifying a strategic position or a sustainable competitive advantage through matching what is distinct about the firm to its competitive environment (Porter, 2008). Like strategy, organizational design is firm-specific, and firm owners must develop it to meet the specific needs and strategic position of the firm. The degree of alignment between strategy and organization design can influence the firm's ability to optimize resources and realize a competitive advantage (Paucar-Caceres et al., 2016).

Competitive Business Strategy

A business strategy is a model managers and owners use to compete in the marketplace and achieve goals (Gupta, 2016). Firms can implement sustainable strategies to achieve superior market value and financial performance which include returns on sales, equity, and assets (Lee, Nunez, & Cruz, 2018). According to Porter (1980), the three types of business strategies firms can use to become competitive and sustain business operations include (a) cost leadership strategy, (b) differentiation strategy, and (c) focus strategy (Wu, Gao, & Gu, 2015). Organizations can use these competitive strategies to attain a strategic position in the marketplace (Alzoubi & Emeagwali, 2016). Also, managers and owners of used car dealerships should consider service quality and convenience service strategies to gain and sustain competition in the marketplace (Arshad & Su, 2015). Also known as low-cost strategy, a firm's leadership can implement a cost leadership strategy by adopting a series of policies to minimize and win the total cost in the industry (Gupta, 2016). The leaders of a firm can use the strategy of differentiation to provide products and services that are unique to the industry (Sitawati et al., 2015). Firms can adopt the focus strategy by concentrating on specific products and services that yield better results (Gupta, 2016). Blanchard, Hada, and Carlson (2018) asserted that the strategy of providing and receiving referrals can influence a consumer's decision to buy a product. By receiving or providing referrals, firms can provide valuable information to consumers, including not only different purchase options but also justifications for price discrepancies (Blanchard et al., 2018)

A firm's competitive strategy is the long-term plan of action managers and owners may pursue to achieve performance goals (Sigalas, 2015). A firm's competitive capabilities depend on how its leaders deploy its resources to gain competitive advantage (Den Hertog, 2014). Companies must embrace a competitive strategy to survive in the marketplace (Sihite & Simanjuntak, 2015). Firms can develop the capability of gaining competitive advantage and sustain long-term profitability by creating, formulating, and implementing competitive strategies that create value for its buyers (Ghezzi, 2014). The outcome of the strategy journey is that a firm is more aware and anticipatory in the future. The outcome creates both the opportunity and the need for managers to manage strategy in a different and more continuous way (Aurik et al., 2015).

Differentiation strategy. Small firms have only limited financial and managerial resources. Product differentiation may be a valuable resource and a driver of competitive advantage by enabling firms to adapt products to the needs of the specific market (Baum et al., 2015). The strategy of differentiation has a significant impact on a firm's financial performance. Firms that focus on differentiation rely on customizing their product which allows them to depend on close relationships developed with customers (Banker et al., 2014). Firms can implement a differentiation strategy that focuses on offering a different product and delivery system or using another marketing approach (Porter, 2008). Firms can introduce a greater variety of products to attract new consumers with heterogeneous tastes and induce consumers to switch from competitors (Li, Li, & Liu, 2018). By adopting a strategy of differentiation, used car dealership owners can encourage new customers to buy cars and at the same time enriching their long-term relationship with existing customers (Sitawati et al., 2015). Firms can provide products and services that create new and unique things in the industry thereby gaining a competitive advantage (Gupta, 2016).

Firm managers can gain a competitive advantage by adopting a differentiation strategy that focuses on either quality or cost (Den Hertog, 2014). Organizations can differentiate from other competitors by competing on having the best customer service or quality. Firms can accomplish these goals by promoting and rewarding employees that provide exceptional quality services to customers (Gupta, 2016). A differentiation strategy that focuses on proving exceptional quality and convenience customer services can offer a firm a competitive advantage over its rivals (Arshad & Su, 2015). Firms that adopt the differentiation strategy can achieve a competitive advantage by investing in developing products or services that offer unique qualities desirable to customers (Banker et al., 2014).

Successful differentiators must strive and attain a leadership position in technology or build a good relationship with customers. Differentiators must invest in R&D activities to make products or services unique (Wu et al., 2015). Firm managers develop a strategy of differentiation around firm-specific and product-specific innovations and marketing effort that may not be easy to imitate quickly (Banker et al., 2014). Business managers and owners must first choose what type of customer needs to satisfy with its products and how best to provide them (Den Hertog, 2014). The benefits firms derive from adopting a differentiation strategy built on products or services that are different from competitors will take longer to imitate and hence lead to more sustainable performance (Banker et al., 2014). Therefore, firms should develop products and services that are unique and recognized easily in the marketplace by competitors and customers (Alzoubi & Emeagwali, 2016).

By adopting the strategy of differentiation, firms can create brand loyalty and lower the price elasticity of demand where customers are less sensitive to changes in product prices (Sihite & Simanjuntak, 2015). A differentiation strategy requires the firm's labor force to possess strong marketing and customer support skills which may increase sales resulting in improved profits and sustainability (Sitawati et al., 2015). The differentiation strategy creates barriers, reduces substitutes, and mitigates buyer power as buyers have fewer choices thereby reducing the need for a low-cost advantage (Sihite & Simanjuntak, 2015). While used car dealerships can achieve differentiation by providing premium value at a higher cost to the company and higher price to customers, Randall (2015) argued that firm managers and owners can pursue differentiation and low-cost strategies simultaneously.

Low-cost strategy. Firms can provide superior value by either offering products that are lower in prices than that of their competitors, or by offering attractive benefits that consumers are willing to pay a higher price for them. Firm managers can pursue the strategy of cost leadership through economies of scale and proprietary technology (Wu et al., 2015). A lean cost strategy will lead to cost leadership which is necessary for satisfying the budget market segment. The low-cost strategy requires excellence in overall process efficiency, as impacted by all core functions (Den Hertog, 2014). Cost leaders focus on efficiency in the production and distribution of goods and services (Wu et al., 2015). Firms adopting the cost leadership strategy aim to increase market share based on creating a low-cost position relative to their peers. Firms can adopt different resource allocation methods to achieve cost leadership through large-scale facilities, process improvements, cost minimization, benchmarking, and overhead control (Banker et al., 2014).

Companies can adopt the cost leadership strategy by having the lowest cost of goods and services relative to competitors (Sihite & Simanjuntak, 2015). While low-cost strategy does not relegate the need for firms to provide quality products and improve customer relations, it focuses on achieving low-cost production of goods and services relative to existing rivals (Alzoubi & Emeagwali, 2016). Cost leadership strategy defends the firm against influential buyers and suppliers because buyers can drive the price down only to an extent and firms have the flexibility to absorb any increase in input costs (Sihite & Simanjuntak, 2015). Firm managers and owners can implement either a cost leadership strategy or differentiation strategy if they want to target a narrow niche market (Alzoubi & Emeagwali, 2016). Firms must have a sizeable up-front capital investment in new technology to maintain cost advantage, market share, process innovation, overhead control, and labor incentive-based pay structure (Sihite & Simanjuntak, 2015).

Focus strategy. Business leaders can adopt the focus strategy by implementing specific actions that target a particular service, product line, or customer base (Gupta, 2016). The focus strategy enables firms to implement cost leadership or differentiation in a specific purchase group or market (Wu et al., 2015). The rationale for adopting focus strategy is that firms can be more efficient and obtain better results when they concentrate on specific targets that are strategic to compete with other competitors in the market (Gupta, 2016). Firms implement a focus strategy to achieve either a low-cost advantage or differentiation in a narrow part of the market. By adopting a focus strategy, firms can serve a particular customer, product, or location efficiently (Sihite & Simanjuntak, 2015). The focus strategy entails that firms target a narrow niche market by implementing either a cost leadership strategy or differentiation strategy (Alzoubi & Emeagwali, 2016).

Agile strategy. Agility is the ability of firms to detect and seize market opportunities with speed and surprise (Krotov et al., 2015). Agility enables firms to meet varied customer requirements regarding price, specification, quality, quantity, and delivery (Gligor & Holcomb, 2014). Firm managers can implement agile strategies that are highly responsive to the firm’s internal and external environment. By implementing agile strategies, firms can respond to business challenges and gain from rapidly changing markets for high-quality performance and customer-configured products and services (Krotov et al., 2015). An active delivery strategy enables delivery leadership critical for satisfying custom product configurations. It requires excellence in supply chain objectives such as resilience, flexibility, and responsiveness (Den Hertog, 2014).

By adopting an agile strategy, used car dealers can respond to challenges and opportunities timely and improve organizational performance (Krotov et al., 2015). Used car dealership owners can establish a competitive position when they implement adaptive and agile customer behaviors to respond to market volatility and other uncertainties timely (Liu & Liang, 2015). Agility is the ability for firms to rapidly respond to challenges and opportunities through internal flexibility and efficiency, leveraging various resources and capabilities, and coordinating the work of various internal and external stakeholders (Krotov et al., 2015).

The SWOT framework. Using the RBV concept, Barney (1991) proposed the SWOT framework which consists of a firm's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Barney (1991) asserted that the SWOT framework allows managers and business owners to understand how they can use the firm's strengths to take advantage of opportunities while minimizing weaknesses and managing threats (Ryke, van Eeden, Koen, & Bain, 2015). The SWOT analysis represents the RBV model under the internal environment of the firm with strengths and weaknesses as its key dimensions (Naatu, 2016). The external environment shows environmental models of competitive advantage and how opportunities and threats affect firm performance (Duarte Alonso, 2017). The SWOT analysis is a strategic tool that business owners and managers can use to make decisions and plan processes at different levels within the firm (Ryke et al., 2015).

Managers and business owners can use the SWOT analysis to analyze a firm's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (Duarte Alonso, 2017). Organizational leaders use the SWOT tool to understand how a firm can use its strengths to take advantage of opportunities while minimizing its weaknesses and managing threats (Ryke et al., 2015). According to the SWOT framework, firms can gain a sustained competitive advantage by implementing strategies that maximize internal strengths, respond to opportunities in firms' environment, while neutralizing external threats and avoiding internal weaknesses (Barney, 1991; Duarte Alonso, 2017). Small business owners and managers can implement the SWOT framework to assess strategies and determine how to best move forward in a particular business setting (Ryke et al., 2015).

Proponents of the RBV theory argue that not all resources have the potential to create competitive advantage (Yang et al., 2015). The RBV theory provides the basis that business resources, human resources, and external resources contribute to enhance firm performance and achieve sustained competitive advantage. Firms can possess the ability to integrate, build and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapidly changing environments (Ryke et al., 2015). According to Wernerfelt (1984), resources represent some aspects of a firm’s strengths and weaknesses. Firm resources include capabilities, knowledge controlled by firms, processes, and assets. Relevant resources include human, physical and organizational capital. Examples of such resources include a firm’s strategic planning function, information processing systems, and positive reputation (Jensen et al., 2016). Firms can develop competing marketing strategies that are unique to gain a competitive advantage by identifying and utilizing resources and accessing the goals, strategies, strengths, and weaknesses of competitors (Naatu, 2016).

Overview of the Auto Retail Industry

The car industry is one of the oldest and most global industries in the world (Fraser et al., 2013). In the U.S. and other developed countries, the performance of the car industry is an indicator of the economic growth and health of a nation. The automotive industry includes car manufacturing, parts, marketing, selling, and the after-sale services dealerships provide to customers (Lan, Sheng, & Zhang, 2014). The most popular automobile brands with high consumer demand in the United States include Ford, Toyota, General Motors (GM), Honda, Fiat Chrysler, Kia Motors, and Hyundai

(Toyota, 2016). Used car dealerships play an essential role in the relationship between the buyer and manufacturers (Fraser et al., 2013). In the car retail sector, dealerships derive over 70% of their gross profit from services, parts, and body operations (Balfanz & Verran, 2015).

The purchase of a car is among the most significant expenditures incurred by any household (Kihm & Vance, 2016). The decision to buy a car is vital to a consumer's lifetime. However, the car buying experience can be tedious and unpleasant. Used car dealers can offer cars to buyers at any price (Parmer & Dillard, 2015). The experience of buying a car for most Americans is unique because car salespeople expect customers to negotiate the prices (Barley, 2015). Consumers usually compare prices and shop through local dealerships, auto websites, and word-of-mouth (Parmer & Dillard, 2015). Americans perceive car salespeople in general as not trustworthy and believe that they routinely take advantage of customers (Barley, 2015). While managers and salespeople in other industries can adjust prices to sell products, consumers in the car retail sector usually do not pay the sticker price for a car (Zeng, Dasgupta, & Weinberg, 2016). Used car dealers can choose to implement a no-haggle fixed price policy to reduce consumers' dislike of haggling or expect consumers to negotiate (Zeng et al., 2016).

Used car dealership owners may incur some costs in pursuing a competitive advantage by performing value-added activities better than its competitors to be unique (Sitawati et al., 2015). Used car dealers can ensure that various components in the firm's activities harmonize with each other and redirect the firm to maximize profits, increase customer satisfaction, and attain strategic goals (Zdanyte & Neverauskas, 2014). The managers and owners of used car dealerships must implement value-creating strategies that enable their companies to achieve sustainable competitive advantage which is necessary for long-term success (Ferro de Guimarães et al., 2017). By implementing value-creating strategies, a used car dealer can sustain a competitive advantage when other firms are not able to derive the same benefit from its strategy (Halliru, 2016). Firms can achieve a competitive advantage from specific resources and privileged market positions. Small business managers and owners must translate the sustainable competitive advantage, such as innovation, into a higher performance compared to competitors (Ferro de Guimarães et al., 2017).

Used car dealership operations. Used car dealers spend much time at auto auctions and on the internet searching for used automobiles that is suitable for the market (Balfanz & Verran, 2015). Zeng et al. (2016) found that car dealers who introduce a fixed price policy may attain higher prices for their businesses and closest negotiating competitors in the market. Car dealerships usually maximize cash flow and make money faster through retail floor planning their inventory (Sultana & Khairul, 2014). Floor planning refers to the financing of a dealership's inventory through secured short-term loans with the inventory purchased as collateral (Balfanz & Verran, 2015). Although floor planning requires that dealerships pay interest on automobiles, dealerships use the inventory financing practice to have cash on hand and better manage their cash flow (Zeng et al., 2016). Car dealerships also make money through insurance and finance sales. Customers buying automobiles can finance vehicles through the dealerships while buying service contracts (Fraser et al., 2013). Also, dealerships make money when customers trade in their used vehicles while buying another used car, thus increasing their car inventory. While franchised car dealerships provide service departments that repair and service customers' cars, most independent car dealers do not provide that service (Sultana & Khairul, 2014).

Inventory. The United States has a significant retail market for used cars. Americans buy used cars from franchised retail dealers or independent car dealers (Barley, 2015). In 2016, over 38.5 million cars sold in the United States were second-hand vehicles, recording a 0.6% increase compared to 2015 (National Independent Automobile Dealers Association [NIADA], 2017). Used car dealers buy most of their inventory in auction events. The dealers buy their inventory from trade-ins or the wholesale automobile markets. The wholesale market for used automobiles refers to the trade between car dealers through auctions (Tadelis & Zettelmeyer, 2015). Sellers in the wholesale market control the information they disclose to bidders which affects the outcome of the auctions (Balfanz & Verran, 2015). Used car dealers participate in these auctions and bid for second-hand cars.

Salvage auctions is an opportunity for used car dealers to participate and buy vehicles. Salvage car dealers are increasingly locating their sales units within traditional auction sites for buyers to gain exposure to these vehicles (Tadelis & Zettelmeyer, 2015). Independent car dealers, in particular, have found salvage units to be a profitable source of inventory (NIADA, 2017). Thus, these dealers are increasing their bidding activities in salvage auctions especially as they can repair and retail the vehicles to buyers (Barley, 2015).

The automotive retail sector. Firm managers and owners can use the five forces model of Porter (2008) to analyze the attractiveness of the automotive retail sector within which used car dealerships belong. Porter (2008) identified five fundamental competitive forces that shape strategy. Porter's five forces model describes strategy as taking actions that create defendable positions in industry (Sihite & Simanjuntak, 2015). The five forces include the threat of new entrants, threat of substitutes, bargaining power of buyers, bargaining power of suppliers, and the intensity of the rivalry. Porter (2008) acknowledged that additional factors like economic downturn and the rise in technology would have a direct effect on the five forces, and by extension, therefore, will also be significant in influencing the car retailing industry.

Porter (2008) described the threat of new entrants as directly related to the barrier to entry for that particular industry and argues that it is not necessarily the actual entry of new competitors but the threat of new entrants to the industry that drives competition and impacts the industry's profitability. The threat of new entrants depends on whether or not the industry presents high or low barriers to entry (Mathooko & Ogutu, 2015; Rahman & Khan, (2014). Also, the threat of new entrants depends on access to technology, brand loyalty, and government regulations (Porter, 2008). The low level of threat of new entrants in the car retailing industry is because the industry requires significant capital investments, stringent regulations, and high levels of technological innovation.

A substitute performs the same or a similar function by a different means (Porter, 2008). The threat of substitute is high if the substitute provides a cost-effective trade-off compared to the original product (Mathooko & Ogutu, 2015). There are many substitutes in the auto industry. The quality of products such as vehicles and trucks are determinants of consumers switching to an alternative as a means of transportation. Alternatives in the transportation industry include trains, bus systems, motorcycles and others (Parmer & Dillard, 2015). Used car dealerships face a high level of substitute threats as they prefer other means of transportation especially in urban cities that have better quality, lower prices, and more convenient (Rahman & Khan, 2014). The cost of switching to substitutes in the auto industry, in general, is low, and the level of substitute threat is high especially in urban cities where the cost of maintaining a car is high.

Firm managers can assess the power of suppliers in an industry from the knowledge and materials provided by individuals or companies (Mathooko & Ogutu, 2015). In the car retailing industry, suppliers are organizations or individuals that provide information and products for car dealerships to sell vehicles. The bargaining power of suppliers in the car retailing industry is very high because car dealerships need information and skilled car salespeople to deliver superior customer services (Tadelis & Zettelmeyer, 2015). The demand for auction cars, information, and skilled labor in the car sales industry makes the bargaining power of suppliers to be high.

In the car retailing industry, the buyer is the customer who purchases cars (Tadelis & Zettelmeyer, 2015). The buyer power is high because consumers can quickly switch to another product or another means of commuting due to a low switching cost in the auto industry. Also, consumers can switch to another form of transportation such as public transit and bikes (Parmer & Dillard, 2015). In the auto industry where the switching cost is low, and companies are competing to win customers, the intensity of competition can have adverse effects on the profits of used car dealerships (Randall, 2015).

Intense competition requires that companies lower prices and improve their products and services (Randall, 2015). According to Porter's analysis, the rivalry is less if an industry has a clear market leader and more intense if there are lots of small or equally sized competitors (Sihite & Simanjuntak, 2015). Rivalry among competitors can be brought about by price discounting, new product introduction, advertising campaigns and service improvements (Mathooko & Ogutu, 2015; Porter, 2008). Firms can implement effective advertising strategies by deploying and incorporating valuable, rare, inimitable and unsubstitutable resources that provide the foundation for engendering a differentiated service brand, and also endow service organizations with a superior competitive advantage in the marketplace (Otubanjo, 2018). The rivalry is intense in the car retailing industry because buyers have lower switching costs compared to other sectors (Balfanz & Verran, 2015). Therefore, competitors are pursuing aggressive growth strategies leading to an intense rivalry because of a high level of product differentiation in the car retailing industry. Firms can pursue the value innovation to open up new market space to reduce competition (Randall, 2015).

Challenges in the automotive retail sector. Many car buyers perceive their experiences of negotiation or haggling as often unpleasant, complicated, and time-consuming. Car dealerships can either offer consumers a fixed price or negotiate with them (Zeng et al., 2016). The auto industry is evolving, and used car dealership owners and managers face the challenge of developing successful strategies to compete in the marketplace and sustain operations. Most dealerships are far from reaching car sales potentials (Balfanz & Verran, 2015). Lack of knowledge, management skills, ineffective marketing strategy, and human resources are the leading causes of small business failures in the industry (Frazer, 2015). Therefore, used car dealerships must compete to survive in a dynamic business environment. The owners and managers of these car dealers can do more in providing training to their sales team, retain experienced salespeople, and develop superior customer service (Balfanz & Verran, 2015).

Car dealerships face the challenge of generating traffic daily. Car dealers can only sell cars when prospective customers visit the dealerships in-person or shop online (Fraser et al., 2013). Used car dealers can implement effective marketing strategies that increase customer traffic in-person and in digital sales channels. A successful car sales team excels beyond firm standards and must have the desire to compete and pursue challenging goals (Suter & Bwisa, 2013). The factors that influence a consumer's decision to purchase a used car include pricing, durability, maintenance, fuel consumption, and greenhouse gas emissions (Lan et al., 2014). A car salesperson must be knowledgeable, well-trained, and understands when and how to negotiate and read buyer's intentions. A good salesperson should know how to use sales techniques and maintain a positive attitude in a very competitive industry (Barley, 2015). The dealer's sales and service staff can benefit from building lasting relationships with buyers because customer satisfaction will impact customer loyalty and future sales (Fraser et al., 2013).

Transition

In Section 1, I discussed the background of the problem, problem statement, purpose statement, nature of the study, research question, interview questions, and conceptual framework. I also presented in Section 1, operations of definitions, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. In Section 1, I discussed the significance of the study and the review of the professional and academic literature on strategies used car dealership owners and managers employ to remain profitable and sustain operations beyond 5 years.

In Section 2, I described the role of a researcher, participants, and restated the purpose statement presented in Section 1. Section 2 also included the research method, research design, population and sampling, and ethical research. Also, I presented in Section 2 the data collection instruments and techniques, data organization techniques, and data analysis. I finalized Section 2 with the reliability and validity of the study. In Section 3, I provided a presentation of the findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, further study, and reflections on my experience as a researcher.

Section 2: The Project

This section provides a comprehensive description of my qualitative multiple case study. In this section, I include the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, participants, qualitative research method, case study research design, and population and sampling. Additionally, Section 2 includes data collection and techniques, data organization techniques, data analysis, and reliability and validity of the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies used car dealership owners and managers employ to remain profitable and sustain operations beyond 5 years. The population for this study comprised of 10 owners and managers from five small used car dealerships in Colorado who have developed successful strategies to remain profitable for at least 5 years. Implications for positive social change include the potential to increase small business successes, which could increase employment opportunities and the potential for job creation. The success of these small businesses could contribute positively to the economic empowerment of other related businesses and increase the economic wellbeing of communities through an increase in tax revenues and contributions to local nonprofit organizations.

Role of the Researcher

The role of a researcher is to formulate the research question, select an appropriate research method and design, collect data, and analyze the data (Khankeh, Ranjbar, Khorasani-Zavareh, Zargham-Boroujeni, & Johansson, 2015; Yin, 2014). I collected data through face-to-face interviews using semistructured interviewed questions. My role as a researcher entailed that I participated in all phases of this study by recruiting potential participants, selecting an appropriate research method, collecting data, transcribing recordings, analyzing data, and presenting the results in Section 3.

The professional experience I gained as a child of a small business owner increased my interest in exploring strategies small business owners use to succeed. I am not a small business owner. I do not know small business owners and entrepreneurs in Denver, Colorado. However, I have witnessed the struggles of small used car dealers in my community who struggle with decreased profitability because I live in Colorado. In the future, I plan to open a small business in the Denver metro area. I asked participants open-ended questions and followed up when necessary. In qualitative studies, researchers learn how to avoid bias and strive for a high ethical standard during the research study (Shepperd, 2015; Yin, 2014).

Researchers must understand ethics and integrity relating to a particular study to achieve research goals and objectives (Collins & Cooper, 2014). The Belmont Report underlined ethical principles and guidelines for researchers working with human subjects (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). The Belmont Report includes the differences between research and practice, three basic ethical principles, and their application. These ethical principles are respect of persons, beneficence, and justice. In this study, I purposefully selected participants to eliminate vulnerable humans in line with Belmont guidelines and principles. The use of Belmont Report protocol included obtaining informed consent from participants who were willing and maintaining their confidentiality.

A researcher's background and prior experiences are critical to the research process. Parl (2013) explained that the issue of bias and objectivity is prevalent when a researcher with extensive prior experience acts both as practitioner and researcher. Although researchers cannot eliminate bias in the research process, they must be aware of the risk of bias in collecting and interpreting data (Cope, 2014; Malone, Nicholl, & Tracey, 2014). Researchers using a case study research method should have a prior understanding of the issues studied, which might influence the interpretation of evidence (Yin, 2014). A researcher's prior beliefs may influence their preferences regarding the research findings. Some researchers might prefer some research results over others because of their prior convictions (Sheppard, 2015). Researchers must be mindful during every state of the study of possible bias and deliberate on strategies to mitigate biases (Malone et al., 2014). While researchers cannot eliminate from the research process their past experiences and background, they can take some measures to mitigate the effect of these influences on the research findings (Yin, 2014). In my role as a researcher, I reduced bias by maintaining a high ethical standard through honesty, professional competence, and reading articles related to the study. Berger (2015) indicated that researchers could focus on self-understanding and the impact of their expectations and biases on their study. Thus, I mitigated bias by maintaining an understanding of the topic area and my expectations as a researcher.

An interview protocol increases the reliability of the study as researchers are bound to follow the data collection process (Yin, 2014). Qualitative researchers ask exploratory questions that enable participants to provide information, and carefully listen to get a deeper understanding of responses from participants (De Ceunynck, Kusumastuti, Hannes, Janssens, & Wets, 2013). As a qualitative researcher, I conducted face-to-face interviews using semistructured interview questions to encourage the exchange of follow up questions to better understand responses from participants. I scheduled time at the end of the interview to ask follow-up questions to ensure clarity of the responses and make sure that the notes match participant responses. A case study researcher can use a protocol to design a trustworthy procedure for data collections, formulate interview questions that focus on the information needed for the study, and outline a report of the case study (Amankwaa, 2016). In my role as a researcher, I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) and followed the same procedures with each participant during interviews, thereby reducing bias.

Participants

Researchers use eligibility criteria to screen and select participants for their study (Powell, Wilson, Redmond, Gaunt, & Ridd, 2016). Qualitative researchers recruit participants who are knowledgeable and can explore in depth the phenomenon under study (Kaczynski, Salmona, & Smith, 2014; Yirdaw, 2016). The eligibility criteria for participants in this study were that they were owners and managers of used car dealerships in Colorado, had the ability to sustain a business while making profits, and have developed successful strategies to remain profitable for at least 5 years. Researchers use purposeful sampling to select participants with different job levels (Faseleh-Jahromi, Moattari, & Peyrovi, 2014). To eliminate vulnerable humans in line with the Belmont

Report, I purposefully selected participants in this study based on participants demonstrating the ability to succeed in business while making profits.

To gain access to desired participants, researchers use specific criteria (Ismail, 2015). Gatekeepers are responsible for controlling a researcher's access to information within an organization (Gülmez, Sağtaş, & Kahyaoğlu, 2016). Researchers usually seek permission to perform a study from gatekeepers (Gülmez et al., 2016). Gatekeepers must consider their co-workers and the firms they represent in making decisions (Whicher, Miller, Dunham, & Joffe, 2015). Therefore, I requested that gatekeepers sign a letter of cooperation (see Appendix B) as part of the IRB approval process from Walden University. The gatekeepers for this study included managers and owners of used car dealerships. Researchers can invite eligible participants to participate in a study by sending letters via email or in person (Powell et al., 2016). Thus, I sent an introductory letter to eligible participants after the gatekeepers permitted me to conduct the research (see Appendix C). I invited participants to participate in the study. The email letter to participants contained the purpose of the study and a consent form. Researchers use email as a tool to communicate and recruit participants to conduct research (Lenters, Cole, and Godoy-Ruiz, 2014).

Participants participate freely in studies if they have a good working relationship with the researcher (Stühlinger & Hackl, 2014). The relationship between the researcher and participant should be clear and the outcome of the relationship overtly stated (Grieb, Eder, Smith, Calhoun, & Tandon, 2015). I established a working relationship with the participants by building confidence. Researchers can establish confidence with participants by being honest and transparent on the intended purpose and outcome of a study (Wallace & Sheldon, 2015). All participants who met the established criteria and agreed to participate in the study reviewed and signed a consent form. I explained the purpose of the study, the procedures, the risk and benefits of participating in the study, and the confidentiality of participants. The consent form provided information relating to the purpose of the study and information that the participant’s identity and confidentiality would not be compromised. The consent form also contained information that the individual’s participation in the study was voluntary.

Research Method and Design

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies used car dealership owners and managers employ to remain profitable and sustain operations beyond 5 years. Researchers can select qualitative, quantitative and mixed research methods to explore or understand a phenomenon (Makrakis & Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2016). I selected a qualitative multiple case study design as an appropriate method and design for this study to explore a business phenomenon in a natural setting.

Research Method

This study was a multiple case study using the qualitative method. The three types of research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods or hybrids (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Researchers use qualitative methods to interpret the actions and interactions of other people (Ma, 2015). Using a qualitative research method, I gained a better understanding of the experiences of participants in natural settings. Qualitative researchers explore the how and why of social events involving human experiences (Ingham-Broomfield, 2015). Using a qualitative research method, participants narrated their stories and experiences in their words. The qualitative approach was the appropriate research method for the study because it synthesized human experiences and provided a better response to the why and how semistructured questions.

Researchers use the quantitative method to examine the relationships between variables (Ma, 2015). Quantitative researchers use theories to test hypotheses related to the relationship among numeric variables (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Researchers use quantitative research method to examine quantities, test hypotheses, and support judgments (Thamhain, 2014). Contrary to the qualitative method that synthesizes human experiences, researchers use the quantitative method to examine the relationships among variables (Hunt, 2014). Quantitative researchers use closed-ended questions to test hypotheses and quantify a phenomenon (Bristowe, Selman, & Murtagh, 2015). A quantitative research method was not suitable for this study because I was not generating any theories or testing hypotheses.

Mixed methods research includes both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Johnson, 2015). Researchers use both qualitative and quantitative approaches in a mixed method to understand research problems better (Hunt, 2014). Researchers use a mixed research method to take advantage of rich data from multiple sources and describe more appropriately the methods used in the study (Brazeley, 2015). Using a mixed research method to combine qualitative and quantitative analyses can yield a better understanding of a phenomenon (Chilisa & Tsheko, 2014). The data collected in mixed methods approach has the potential to be overwhelming (Johnson, 2015). The mixed method was not suitable for this study because I did not test hypotheses.

Research Design

A research design guides the researcher in collecting, analyzing and interpreting data (Yin, 2014). Researchers must choose a design that is appropriate to answer the research question (Khankeh et al., 2015). Qualitative researchers use various designs that include case study, phenomenology, ethnography, and narrative (Kruth, 2015).

Case study designs provide an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon and consist of rich contextual data use to study a real-life phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Researchers use a qualitative case study design to strengthen the findings of the study through the process of replication (Vohra, 2014). A case study design enables a researcher to explore a single case or a small number of cases in detail by collecting information from various sources (Singh, 2014). Researchers use the case study design to investigate and analyze a single or collective case in-depth to understand the complexity of the case (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). Researchers use case study designs to study the trends and conditions of real-life situations where the people, place, and process affect those trends and conditions (Ho & Barnes, 2013). Researchers use case study designs to collect and interpret data that address the why and how questions (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Thus, I used a qualitative multiple case study to explore strategies used by some small used car dealership owners and managers to remain profitable and sustainable in business.

Researchers use a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of a group of people by describing what and how individuals experience a phenomenon (Robertson & Thomson, 2014). A researcher can use the phenomenological design to uncover unique experiences from individuals and to gain access to a phenomenon (Chan, Walker, & Gleaves, 2015). Researchers use phenomenological designs to capture the essence of a phenomenon by exploring how individuals make meaning of their experiences (Dowden, Gunby, Warren, & Boston, 2014). A phenomenological approach was not suitable for this study because the essence was not to explore how individuals situate themselves in the world based on their experiences. In this study, I explored strategies used car dealership owners and managers employ to remain profitable and sustain operations beyond 5 years.

In an ethnographic study, researchers explore the shared pattern of a community or cultural group through their daily lives, behaviors, and activities (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Using an ethnographic design, researchers learn about a particular group of people by immersing themselves in their lives and activities over time (Cincotta, 2015). Ethnographic researchers seek to capture the ongoing activities and culture of a community by engaging with the people and investigating the meaning they attach to their lives (Symons & Maggio, 2014). I did not select the ethnographic design in this study because I was not exploring the culture of people or community over time. I explored the real-world viewpoints of small business owners and not the shared beliefs, feelings, or relationships of a cultural group.

A narrative approach includes a diverse array of qualitative methods that include life history, biography, and ethnographic drama (Stolz & Pill, 2016). Using a narrative design enables the narrator to tell the stories through the interpretive lens of the researcher, in a way that resonates with their life history (Lorrimar-Shanks & Owen, 2016). Researchers use the narrative approach to organize and transmit human experiences to others and assist in understanding the behaviors of an individual over time (Rooney, Lawlor, & Rohan, 2016). Using the narrative design, researchers can analyze stories that have resulted from in-depth conversations with an individual or a small group over time (Chinyamurindi, 2016). The narrative design was not appropriate for this study because this research did not focus on understanding and composing the life stories and lived experiences of individuals.

Data saturation occurs when the researcher can no longer observe any new information to the phenomenon explored (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The research question and research methodology and design will dictate when and how a researcher attains data saturation (Viet-Thi, Raphael, Bruno, & Philippe, 2016). The concept of data saturation enables researchers to estimate the adequate sample size, the point when participants provide no new information, and when data is diminishing in value (Hancock, Amankwaa, Revell, & Mueller, 2016). Researchers can attain data saturation at the point where more information will not make further contributions or provide additional insights (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014). Qualitative researchers use data saturation to assess the quality and validity of a study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). To attain data saturation, I interviewed used car dealership owners and managers until the information and data they provided were sufficient to replicate the phenomenon studied.

Population and Sampling

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies used car dealership owners and managers employ to remain profitable and sustain operations beyond 5 years. The sample population for this study comprised of 10 owners and managers of used car dealerships in Colorado who have developed successful strategies to remain profitable and sustain operations for at least 5 years. Researchers select participants for a study based on their ability to generate rich and dense information that is unique to fulfill the research question (Cleary et al., 2014). Researchers should identify and select appropriate participants that will generate relevant information and increase the validity of the study (Amintoosi, Kanhere, & Allahbakhsh, 2015). Researchers can delineate a sample universe by using a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria, or a combination of both, that specify who is permissible for inclusion in the sample (Robinson, 2014). The sample population for this study aligned with the research question. The research question was: What strategies do used car dealership owners and managers employ to remain profitable and sustain operations beyond 5 years?

Purposeful sampling is a non-random process used by researchers to represent particular categories of participants in the final sample of a study (Robinson, 2014). I used purposive sampling to select participants for this qualitative study. Researchers select sample size based on participant’s knowledge and expertise necessary to contribute to the study (Poulis & Plakoyiannaki, 2013). Researchers use their judgments in purposeful sampling to select participants according to the study criteria (Palinkas et al., 2015). The purposive sampling strategy enables researchers to select individuals with unique and valuable perspectives on the phenomenon in question (Robinson, 2014). Researchers use purposive sampling strategies to select potential participants with specific criteria for inclusion in the study (Ismail, 2015). Moonaghi, Mirhaghi, Oladi, and Zeydi (2015) used purposeful sampling to select twelve participants with rich experiences in clinical education for inclusion in their study to explore nursing student's experiences of factors influencing clinical education. In this study, I used purposive sampling to select owners and managers of used car dealerships with experience in implementing successful strategies to remain competitive and profitable in business.

Data saturation increases the quality of a study and the validity of the content (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation refers to the degree of information redundancy that qualitative researchers encounter in interview-based research (Roy, Zvonkovic, Goldberg, Sharp, & LaRossa, 2015). The depth and richness of the data I collected during interviews determined when I reached data saturation. Data saturation is the point when researchers can no longer obtain additional information, the researcher has collected enough information to replicate the study, and further coding is not feasible (Fusch & Ness, 2015). In a study to explore nursing student's experiences of factors influencing clinical education, Moonaghi et al. (2015) reached data saturation after interviewing twelve participants with rich experiences in clinical education. In a qualitative study, researchers used data saturation approach to determine when the data collected from the interviews became redundant (Christenson, Johansson, Reynisdottir, Torgerson, and

Hemmingsson, 2016). The sample size of this study was 10 experienced owners and managers from five used car dealerships in Colorado. To ensure data saturation, I continued to interview participants until the information became redundant.

Interview settings can increase or decrease the quality of information provided by participants (Cairney & St Denny, 2015). I conducted in-person interviews with participants. The interview setting took place in an environment that was comfortable to the participants, at a location of their choice, in a private room that minimized interruptions. Distractions can interfere with the flow of an interview and affect participant concentration and the data collected (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). Participants share more relevant information related to the topic of research when they feel comfortable and safe during an in-person interview process (Bowden & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015).

Ethical Research

Qualitative researchers face a range of significant ethical concerns that include informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, & Cheraghi, 2014). Informed consent process enables prospective participants to make informed decisions to participate in a study (Beskow, Dombeck, Thompson, Watson-ormond, & Weinfurt, 2015). The informed consent form included information relating to the nature of the study, the participant's potential role, my identity as a researcher, the objective of the study, and how I will use the results. All participants willing to participate in the study read and signed the informed consent form. Before interviewing participants, I obtained the appropriate informed consent form that included information relating to the intent of the study. I clarified in the consent form that the researcher would not compromise participant's identity and confidentiality.

Researchers must respect an individual's decision to withdraw from a study (Thrope, 2014). An individual's participation in research is voluntary, and the right to withdraw is a central tenet of research ethics (Melham et al., 2014). The language used by researchers in the informed consent form should be apparent that the individuals' participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty (Beskow et al., 2015; Judkins-Cohn, Kielwasser-Withrow, Owen, & Ward, 2014). I informed participants that they were free to withdraw at any point during the study without consequences. The invitation to participate included the process for participants to withdraw from the study. I informed participants to contact me by phone, email, or in person if they decided to pull out from the study. Researchers can choose not to provide incentives to interviewees during the data collection process (Steinmeier, 2016). I ensured participants understood that their participation in the study was voluntary and would receive no incentives or compensation to take part in the research.

Researchers can convert the real identity of a research participant into fake identities to protect the confidentiality of the participant (Bromley, Mikesell, Jones, & Khodyakov, 2015; Yin, 2014). During the study, I kept the names of participants confidential and anonymous as required by the IRB regulations. I assigned numbers and initials to participants to maintain their privacy and confidentiality. Protecting the anonymity and confidentiality of participants is paramount at all times during the gathering, storage, and analysis of data (Yin, 2014). I labeled participants as DO1, DO2, DO3, DO4, DO5, DM1, DM2, DM3, DM4, and DM5. Researchers should protect the rights of participants and respect their privacy during the research process (Johnson, 2014). Once the study was complete, I stored the data in a locked file cabinet at my home for 5 years to protect the confidentiality of interviewees. After 5 years of securely storing data, I intend to shred all paper copies and permanently delete electronic copies and adhere to the requirements of Walden University's Institutional Review Board (05-24-18-0611794) guidelines to ensure the well-being of participants.

Data Collection Instruments

I was the primary data collection instrument for this study. As the primary data collection instruments, qualitative researchers should encourage participants to share their knowledge and experiences through interaction during data collection (Da Costa, Polaro, Vahl, & Gonçalves, 2016). Qualitative researchers collect data by conducting in-person interviews using journals, voice recorders, and observing participants' behavior during the interview process (Voelkel & Henehan, 2016). The primary data collection instruments for this study included the qualitative researcher and the data collection tools.

The methodology of a study will determine how researchers collect data. Qualitative researchers gather data through semistructured interviews (Conzelmann & Keye, 2014). I collected data by conducting face-to-face interviews with participants. The face-to-face interviews included open-ended interviewed questions to encourage the exchange of follow up questions to better understand interview questions and responses. Qualitative researchers use semistructured interviews to have in-depth conversations with interviewees and guided by the participant's perceptions, opinions, and experiences

(Cridland, Jones, Caputi, & Magee, 2015). Researchers supplement observations and semistructured interviews with follow-up questions and informal, conversational interviews (Hedlund, Börjesson, & Österberg, 2015).

Researchers using semistructured interviews have the flexibility to focus on issues that are related to the central research purpose and participant's experiences (Cridland et al., 2015). I conducted face-to-face semistructured interviews using open-ended questions to explore strategies small used car dealership owners use to compete and sustain their businesses. With permission from participants, I recorded the interviews to ensure I captured and retained details of information for further analysis. Each interview lasted no longer than 45 minutes. I took handwritten notes and reviewed documentary evidence. In-depth individual semistructured interviews can elicit rich information about participant's experiences and may lead to spontaneity, flexibility, and responsiveness to individuals (Carter et al., 2014).

Triangulation is the use of multiple methods in studying the same phenomenon to increase the credibility of research (Ashatu, 2015). Researchers use triangulation during research to develop a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon by collecting richer and fuller data (Wilson, 2014; Yin, 2014). Qualitative researchers use triangulation as a research strategy to test validity by gathering information from different sources (Carter et al., 2014). The most common type of triangulation is methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation occurs when researchers use more than one method to gather data including within and between-methods (Burau & Andersen, 2014). The use of method triangulation will increase the validity of the study findings and the accuracy of the collected data. Cope (2014) confirmed triangulation using multiple methods of data collection, including data from interviews, reflexive journal notes, and scientific literature. I confirmed triangulation through multiple methods of data collection, including interviews, field notes, and a review of company documents. Carter et al. (2014) explained that triangulation is the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena. In addition to conducting interviews, I took field notes and reviewed company documents.

Qualitative researchers use member checking as a technique to increase the accuracy of the findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Researchers can improve the accuracy of research findings through re-interviewing, re-observation, and triangulation with written documents (Dubois & Gadde, 2014). Qualitative researchers use member checking to enhance the accuracy of interpretations by communicating the interview transcripts to participants (Milosevic, Bass, & Combs, 2018). In this study, I used member checking after conducting the interviews to increase the reliability and validity of the data collection process, and to enhance the accuracy of the findings. At the end of each interview, I allocated 15 minutes to validate my interpretations of the data collected during interviews.

The perspectives of qualitative research include credibility and trustworthiness given that the researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Cope, 2014). Interviewers should use structured or semistructured protocols to employ interview strategies properly (Benia, Hauck-Filho, Dillenburg, & Stein, 2015). Researchers who use interview protocols can significantly use questions that are more open-ended and less suggestive prompts during the interview process than interviewers who do not use them. Hence, gaining access to reliable information and reducing researcher bias (De Ceunynck et al., 2013; Yin, 2014). Using an interview protocol provides a researcher with a systematic approach designed to increase the amount of relevant information that can be obtained from the interviewee (Benia et al., 2015). I conducted qualitative semistructured interviews by asking open-ended questions that influence the strategies the interviewees use to sustain and compete in business. By using an interview protocol (Appendix A) structured along the lines of successful strategies used car dealership owners and managers employ, I standardized the interviews to minimize bias and enhance information accuracy.

Data Collection Technique

Researchers apply data collection techniques by performing related activities to gather relevant information during the data collection phase (Jarkas & Horner, 2015). Qualitative researchers collect data by conducting face-to-face interviews and reviewing records related to the phenomenon of interest (Wilson, 2014). The data collection technique for this study included conducting in-person semistructured interviews with participants. This technique required the researcher to conduct semistructured interviews using open-ended questions (see Appendix D) and reviewed documents and records from participants. Agran, MacLean, and Arden (2016) conducted semistructured, individual interviews to gain an understanding of the interviewee’s perspectives and experiences related to voting.

Researchers use semistructured interviews to encourage follow-up questions and responses to ensure the information gathered is accurate (Kulkarni & Hanley-Maxwell, 2015). Researchers conduct semistructured interviews to investigate participant's views and perceptions on the central research topic (Ho & Barnes, 2013; Tweedie & Kim, 2015). I conducted semistructured interviews using open-ended questions and documentary evidence to explore strategies used car dealership managers and owners need to sustain business beyond 5 years. Documentary evidence included yearly company income and cash flow statements. As a qualitative researcher, the data collection techniques helped to explore the strategies owners, and managers of used car dealerships utilize to remain profitable and sustain business. Before conducting interviews, I sought permission from participants to audio record the interviews. All the interviewees reviewed and signed the consent form before conducting the interviews. All participants who met the established criteria and agreed to participate in the study reviewed and signed a consent form. The consent form comprised of information relating to the purpose of the study, stating that the researcher would not compromise the participant's identity and confidentiality, participation in the study was voluntary, and the participant could withdraw freely during the research process.

Semistructured interviews provide researchers with the flexibility to focus on issues that are meaningful to participants by minimizing researcher control over participant's expression of their experiences (Cridland et al., 2015). Qualitative researchers can obtain data for a study using semistructured interview forms consisting of predetermined questions (Yurdakul, 2015). Although researchers use predetermined questions as a guide to get information, open-ended questions encourage participants to elaborate on specific topics and perspectives. However, a researcher’s training and type of questions used in semistructured interviews can affect the quality of data collected (Agran et al., 2016).

Behringer, Omohundro, Boswell, Evans, and Ferranti (2014) suggested that the use of secondary data is convenient, efficient, and appropriate for researchers to analyze and present data. Researchers use secondary data to effectively analyze complex information (Pollanen, Abdel-Maksoud, Elbanna, & Mahama, 2016). Somers (2018) explained that researchers could compromise research when using only secondary data in a study. The use of secondary data may stretch survey items when researchers distinguish between related constructs and operationalize constructs that deviate from well-defined content domain areas (Somers, 2018).

Researchers can enhance the accuracy of data collected from participants by employing member checking of the data interpretation (Andraski, Chandler, Powell, Humes, & Wakefield, 2014). Using member checking in the data collection process provides participants the opportunity to review transcripts to ensure the researcher’s interpretations are accurate, thereby enhancing the accuracy and reliability of the data collected (Andraski et al., 214). Researchers use member checking to increase the credibility of the findings and the validity of the data collection process (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Theron, 2015). At the end of each interview, I allocated 15 minutes to validate my interpretations of the data collected during interviews.

Data Organization Technique

Researchers must be competent in using data collection tools and deploying data organization techniques (Wilkerson, Iantaffi, Grey, Bockting, & Simon Rosser, 2014). Qualitative researchers use data collection techniques to reduce the risk of misinterpreting data collected from participants (Yin, 2014). Researchers use data organization techniques to establish best practices for collecting data (Wilkerson et al., 2014). Researchers use the reflective journal to record in detail application of experiences and descriptive accounts of events and activities (O'Connell, Dyment, & Smith, 2015). In addition to audio recording the interviews, I took handwritten notes to ensure I captured and retained details of information for further analysis. I used the notes in the reflective journal to compare and contrast the interview content with my observations and interpretations. Researchers can use data applications to store and process significant amounts of data that is easily accessible (Rajesh & Ramesh, 2016). I used excel spreadsheet to store and organize data. Qualitative researchers can identify specific codes to organize and analyze data (Bell & Waters, 2014).

Data security refers to the way researchers protect data from loss, misuse, unauthorized access, disclosure, alteration, or destruction (Ruivo, Santos, & Oliveira, 2014). Researchers can store data securely by keeping printed transcripts or audio recordings in a locked filing cabinet in their office and store electronic data files in password-protected computers (Khan, 2014). Researchers can maintain the privacy and confidentiality of participants and the information collected by implementing security measures that prevent unauthorized access to the data (Johnson, 2014). Researchers must maintain the privacy and confidentiality of data files by adopting preventive security measures that include access controls, encryption in transfer and storage, and physical security (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Ruivo et al., 2014). To protect data files and maintain the privacy of participants, I stored printed transcripts and audio recordings in a locked filing cabinet in my office, and electronic data files on password-protected computers. Researchers must have a retention period to store data (Ruivo et al., 2014). The data retention timeline for this study is 5 years. I intend to delete electronic data files from my computer and shred paper copies after 5 years.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research stages, including the preparation, collection, organization and transcribing of data, will influence the analysis and interpretation stages of qualitative research (Cridland et al., 2015). Researchers should analyze and interpret data to generate relevant and meaningful findings (Darawsheh & Stanley, 2014). The data analysis stage can be challenging to an inexperienced researcher (Yin, 2014). The primary approach to analyzing data in this study is methodological triangulation. To enhance objectivity and validity, Fusch and Ness (2015) suggested four types of triangulation for qualitative research. The four types of triangulation include data, investigator, theory, and methodological triangulation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Methodological triangulation occurs when researchers use multiple sources to draw conclusions and enhance confidence in the findings (Cope, 2014). Researchers use methodological triangulation to correlate data from multiple data collection methods and explore different levels and perspectives of the same phenomenon (Carter et al., 2014; Fusch & Ness, 2015). Therefore, I used methodological triangulation to collect data for this study. I conducted face-to-face interviews using semistructured interview questions (see Appendix D), documentary evidence, and field notes to enhance the validity and reliability of the study findings.

The collection and analysis of data should coincide as one part cannot be strictly separated from the other (Dierckx de Casterlé, Gastmans, Bryon, & Denier, 2012). Qualitative researchers should analyze data systematically by providing a clear and detailed explanation of the data analysis process (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). The process of data analysis starts immediacy after a researcher conducts the first interview and continues until data saturation has been attained (Dierckx de Casterlé et al., 2012). Researchers should have a strategy to capture the rich insights of qualitative interview data and make sense of the data that is relevant to the research question (Yin, 2014). I analyzed the data collected from interviews by reading and rereading the data collected while reflecting on what I have read in an attempt to grasp the general themes from the transcripts. In the data analysis process, I transcribed every interview verbatim and organized the data. I read through the transcripts and notes to become familiar while identifying codes and linking significant segments to appropriate themes. I used member checking after the interviews to review themes with participants and made adjustments to the themes based on participant feedback. Next, I described the final results in response to the research question.

After collecting all primary and secondary data from interviews, company documents, and observations, I transcribed every interview immediately. In the next phase of the data analysis process, I reviewed the transcripts and applied codes to the texts as concepts became apparent. Next, I combined related concepts into categories and themes. Qualitative researchers can combine related concepts into categories and group them into themes to summarize key ideas and experiences discussed by participants (Riera et al., 2015). After coding narrative fragments into themes, I followed-up with each participant via email to validate the key concepts and themes emerging from the coding. Qualitative researchers can derive meaning from data collected by interpreting the data (Lynch, Smith, Provost, & Madden, 2016). Yin (2014) proposed that pattern matching, theme building, rival theme perspectives, and logical models be appropriate to ensure validity in the data analysis phase of a study. I sent transcripts to the participants and adjusted the themes based on participant responses and feedback. The use of member checking ensured accuracy and validity of the research findings. Lastly, I wrote-up the results of this study.

Researchers use computer applications to analyze data (Sotiriadou, Brouwers, & Le, 2014). Researchers can use qualitative analysis software to facilitate data organization (Riera et al., 2015). The use of qualitative data analysis software was essential to bring rigor to the data analysis phase. I used a qualitative computer software program to help with the coding and analysis of data. The data analysis software supports researchers in systematically coding and organizing data and managing the development of categories and themes (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Sotiriadou et al., 2014). Qualitative data analysis software includes NVivo, HyperRESEARCH, ATLAS.ti, and Leximancer (Yin, 2014). The NVivo software is user-friendly and supports researchers in collecting, organizing, and analyzing different types of data for patterns and themes (Blaney, Filer,

& Lyon, 2014; Casttleberry, 2014). Researchers use the NVivo software to apply text search functions that save time in analyzing data (Brennan & Bakken, 2015; Blaney et al., 2014). I used the NVivo trademark software in this study to organize and manage the qualitative material.

Researchers may use the process of thematic analysis to describe patterns of meaning combined into themes (Pascoal, Narciso, & Pereira, 2014). Researchers use thematic analysis method to analyze literature and identify important and recurrent themes (Teruel, Navarro, González, López-Jaquero, & Montero, 2016). Researchers use the thematic analytic process to read the data several times and to identify and organize emerging themes related to the research question (Rohlfing & Sonnenberg, 2016). Therefore, I used thematic analysis to detect and organize emerging themes that related to the research question.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are the most relevant standards of research (Gheondea-Eladi, 2014). The quality and relevance of research findings are affected by the reliability and validity of the study (Yin, 2014). The validity and reliability of a study ensure that researchers achieve the highest quality of research and peers perceive the findings as trustworthy (Cope, 2014). The reliability of a study reduces researcher biases and strengthens the quality of the study (Yin, 2014). Researchers can reduce biases in a study by designing and incorporating strategies that address the reliability and validity of the findings (Noble & Smith, 2015). The most common criteria researchers use to assess the trustworthiness of qualitative research findings include (a) dependability, (b) credibility,

(c) confirmability, (d) transferability, and (e) data saturation (Kaczynski et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). Researchers can use member checking in the research process to address the reliability and validity of study findings (Andraski et al., 2014). I used member checking to enhance confidence and establish reliability and validity in the study findings.

Reliability

Qualitative researchers must design and incorporate strategies to ensure consistency of the analytical procedures, including personal and research biases that may influence the study findings (Noble & Smith, 2015). Dependability refers to how data remains stable over time and under different conditions during the study (Elo et al., 2014). Dependability increases the confidence in the findings of a qualitative study (Munn, Porritt, Lockwood, Aromataris, & Pearson, 2014). Researchers can establish dependability if the research process is logical, traceable, and documented clearly (Munn et al., 2014). Researchers can assess dependability by implementing procedures. The procedures include maintaining an audit trail of process logs and peer reviews conducted by independent auditors (Connelly, 2016). The concept of dependability aligns with the quality of the study (Munn et al., 2014). I used member checking in this study to enhance the quality of the findings.

I scheduled time at the end of each interview to follow up with questions to amend notes and to ensure clarity in the participant's responses. Theron (2015) discussed the use of member checking by researchers to make sure that they portray accurately what the participants have conveyed and enhance the reliability of the findings. Triangulation occurs when researchers use multiple sources to draw conclusions and strengthen confidence in the findings (Cope, 2014). The reliability and validity of this study will increase by using the process of triangulation to develop a comprehensive understanding of the study phenomenon. The process of triangulation enables researchers to use multiple methods or data sources to converge information (Carter et al., 2014). Therefore, I used multiple data sources to collect information and increase the reliability and validity of the study findings. I collected data through face-to-face interviews using semistructured interviewed questions with different participants, company documents, and observations. Company documents included yearly income and cash flow statements.

Validity

Validity refers to how accurate the findings of a study reflect the data (Noble & Smith, 2015). Researchers can establish the validity of research findings when they employ procedures that are consistent with the study (Aravamudhan & Krishnaveni, 2016; Gonzalez, Rowson, & Yoxall, 2015). Researchers can establish the validity of research findings by maintaining the study's credibility, confirmability, transferability, and data saturation (Connelly, 2016; Yin, 2014).

Credibility. By providing interview transcripts to participants and receiving feedback, researchers can add credibility and validity to study findings (Andraski et al., 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Andraski et al. (2014) suggested that researchers use member checking to enhance the validity of findings. Connelly (2016) proposed that researchers should use member checking and reflective journal techniques to improve the credibility of research findings. The use of member checking is appropriate to ensure the credibility of a study (Yin, 2014). A researcher can enhance the credibility of a study when participants confirm research findings (Milosevic et al., 2015). Researchers use member checking as a strategy to eliminate researcher bias when analyzing and interpreting the results (Anney, 2014). A researcher can use member checking to gain additional insight into a phenomenon of study (Kornbluh, 2015). To enhance the credibility of this study, I sent interview transcripts to participants and adjusted the themes based on participant perspectives and feedback. The use of member checking ensured the validity of the research findings.

Transferability. Transferability refers to the extent to which a researcher can transfer the findings of a study to another context or settings (Elo et al., 2014). Researchers can transfer the results of qualitative research to other contexts and respondents (Anney, 2014). A researcher can facilitate transferability by providing a clear and detailed description of the inquiry and study participants (Anney, 2014; Elo et al., 2014). Readers and researchers use transferability to determine how well a research context fits other contexts (Elo et al., 2014; Gheondea-Eladi, 2014). Therefore, to ensure transferability of this study, I included adequate information on the research phenomenon to ensure comparison of this context to other possible contexts to which readers and future researchers may contemplate a transfer.

Conformability. Conformability refers to the extent to which two or more independent people agree on the data's accuracy, relevance, or meaning (Elo et al., 2014). Conformability of research findings implies that the data accurately represents the information provided by participants and not the researcher's perspectives or biases (Elo et al., 2014; Kaczynski et al., 2014). A researcher can establish conformability in a study by maintaining an audit trail of analysis and methods used in the study (Anney, 2014; Connelly, 2016). I conducted member checking with study participants and used methodological triangulation to ensure conformability. Researchers use methodological triangulation to correlate data from multiple data collection methods and explore different perspectives of the same phenomenon (Carter et al., 2014; Greene, 2014; Fusch & Ness, 2015). I conducted face-to-face interviews using open-ended questions, reviewed company documents, and field notes to establish conformability in this study.

Data saturation. Data saturation refers to the point when researchers can no longer obtain additional information. The researcher has collected enough information to replicate the study, and further coding is not feasible (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation enhances the quality of a study and the validity of the content (Cleary et al., 2014). Qualitative researchers stop interviewing more participants when the data collected from the interviews became redundant (Roy et al., 2015). Researchers can focus on data saturation to enhance the validity of a study (Hancock et al., 2016). To ensure data saturation, I continued to interview participants until the information from the interviews became redundant.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 includes a comprehensive description of this study. I started section 2 with a restatement of the purpose statement as presented in section 1. I included in section 2 the role of the researcher, data collection techniques, and data analysis. The section also describes the research method, research design, and population and sampling. Also, I addressed how I established reliability and validity for this study in Section 2. In

Section 3, I presented the findings and the application of professional practice. I discussed the implications for social change, recommendations for action, further research, and reflections on the research process.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies used car dealership owners and managers employ to remain profitable and sustain operations beyond 5 years. The population for this study comprised of owners and managers of used car dealerships in Colorado. Through an analysis of data collected through interviews, document reviews, and observations, three main themes and two minor themes emerged. The main themes were aggressive marketing, customer satisfaction, and business knowledge. The minor themes were human capital development and effective leadership. This section of the study included a comprehensive presentation of the findings as well as application of professional practice. In this section, I also discussed the implications for social change, recommendations for action, further research, and reflections on the research process.

Presentation of Findings

The overreaching research question for this study was: What strategies do used car dealership owners and managers employ to remain profitable and sustain operations beyond 5 years? To answer this overreaching question, I interviewed 10 participants using face-to-face semistructured interviews with open-ended questions. Of the 10 participants, five were used car dealership owners (DO1, DO2, DO3, DO4, and DO5) and the other five were managers of used car dealerships (DM1, DM2, DM3, DM4, and DM5). Participants indicated their willingness to participate in the study by signing the informed consent form. I informed participants that they were free to withdraw at any point during the study without consequences. To protect the confidentiality of participants and respect their privacy, I labeled participants as DO1, DO2, DO3, DO4, DO5, DM1, DM2, DM3, DM4, and DM5 (DO is an abbreviation for used car dealership owner, and DM represents used car dealership managers). Through a process of triangulation, I collected data through multiple methods including interviews, documentary evidence, and field notes. Documentary evidence included yearly company income and cash flow statements.

Each semistructured interview consisted of seven interview questions and lasted no more than 45 minutes. I audio recorded the interviews and used NVivo software to analyze, manage, and organize themes. I was mindful of possible bias and deliberated on strategies to reduce these biases. I maintained a high ethical standard through honesty and professional competence. After interviewing participants, I organized the data collected into thematic groups. I identified emergent themes and their relationships to form central themes. I coded narrative segments into themes and presented my write-up to participants to validate themes through member checking. Lastly, I revised my interpretation of the themes based upon remarks from the participants to ensure accuracy. Then, I proceeded to a final write-up of the findings of this study.

The conceptual framework for this qualitative multiple case study was the RBV theory developed in 1959 by Penrose. Penrose (1959) illustrated how tangible and intangible resources are critical to firm growth and competitiveness. The RBV concept enables managers and owners of small businesses to understand how firms can use resources to attain a competitive advantage and sustainable growth (Price & Stoica, 2015). A firm can gain a competitive advantage by designing and using a specific and appropriate competitive strategy which is unique, inimitable, and cannot be substituted easily (Egger & Hristova, 2018).

I developed themes from transcribed interview responses, company documents, and field notes. The themes indicated strategies used car dealership owners and managers employed to remain profitable and sustain operations beyond 5 years. Using thematic analysis by coding narrative segments, the research findings included themes regarding customer satisfaction, aggressive marketing, business knowledge, human capital development, and effective leadership and communication. As shown in Table 2, I found five themes from the content analysis process. Table 2 shows the interview questions, themes, and percentage of participant references.

Table 2

Interview Questions, Themes, and Percentage of Participant References

Interview questions	Emergent themes	% of participant references
1. What strategies did you employ to continue to make profits and sustain your business?	Customer satisfaction, aggressive marketing, business knowledge, human resources	100%
2. How did you implement these business strategies to sustain your operations?	Aggressive marketing, business knowledge, human capital development	90%
3. What are some of the difficulties you encountered in carrying out these business strategies?	Human capital development, employee retention, commitment, business knowledge	100%
4. How did you address the key challenges to implementing your strategies for remaining profitable	Effective leadership and supervision, human resource development, effective	100%

and sustaining operations?	communication	
5. How have you assessed the effectiveness of your strategies for sustaining operations?	Customer satisfaction and loyalty, effective leadership and supervision,	80%
6. What, if any, strategies did your staff develop and acquire that have contributed to your success in the auto industry?	Customer satisfaction, aggressive marketing, business knowledge, communication	80%
7. What additional information can you share regarding strategies you employed to remain profitable and sustain operations?	Business knowledge, product differentiation, competitive pricing, leadership and communication	70%

The five themes identified through data analysis were customer satisfaction, aggressive marketing, business knowledge, human resource development, and effective leadership. Different interview questions solicited different themes during the interviews with participants. The emergent themes are relevant for exploring strategies needed by owners and managers of used car dealerships to remain profitable and sustain operations.

Major Theme 1: Customer Satisfaction

All participants I interviewed indicated that customer satisfaction is essential for used car dealerships to sustain operations and make profits. According to Arschad and Su (2015), small businesses can sustain growth and profitability by delivering superior customer service in an exceptional manner that surpasses customer needs, leads to customer satisfaction, and enhances competitiveness. Participants acknowledged the importance of providing quality customer service to increase customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and sales, thereby maximizing profits. Used car dealership owners and managers can develop ad-hoc capabilities that integrate their own knowledge and skills with the ones emerging through interactions with consumers to develop and implement new customized services (Pantano et al., 2018). By providing quality car sales services, managers and owners of car dealerships can improve customer satisfaction, build customer trust, and create loyalty (Sharma & Halvadia, 2015). Car retailers can focus on consumers as the starting point for providing superior customer service. According to Li et al. (2018), firms can introduce a greater variety of products to attract new consumers with heterogeneous tastes and induce consumers to switch from competitors.

Participants pointed out that used car dealership managers and owners should put customers first and communicate effectively with existing and potential customers. DO1, DO5, and DM1 emphasized the importance of building customer loyalty and a positive reputation of their companies. DM1 explained that:

> We make sure that we try to address the needs of our customers so that they will say good things about us to their friends and families. I am always telling my team that our customers come first because our doors are open because of the customers. So we treat them with respect and make them feel comfortable and satisfied so that they can keep coming back again and again. This is also good for us because it is some sort of advertisement for us. A satisfied customer will come back again and even refer us to others. A customer who is not treated as special will leave and not come back. We try to provide quality customer service from start to delivery.

Participants also noted that one of the ways to ensure better customer care was to understand the needs of their customers and the type of products they want and can afford. For example, DM4 stated that:

> I know what my customers want because most of them don't care about the luxury features in cars because those are very expensive. That is why we don't carry many expensive luxury cars because our business is here and we know what our customers want. Most of my customers car about the reliability of the car on the road to take them to their destinations. Because more than half of my customers are young people and some college students, they really care much about the quality, reliability, and pricing of the car. So we make sure we have cars in our inventory with pricing that is affordable and not too costly for them.

Used car dealerships can differentiate from other competitors by competing on having the best customer service and quality. The finding supports the RBV concept by recognizing customer satisfaction as an essential tangible resource, and products and services as valuable intangible resources. Firms can achieve a competitive advantage by investing in products or services that offer unique qualities desirable to customers (Banker et al., 2014). Gupta (2016) suggested that firms can promote and reward employees that provide exceptional quality services to customers. DO1, DO2, DO3, DM1, DM3, and DM5 admitted that they encourage employees to provide outstanding customer care by providing incentives to those that demonstrate such qualities. DO2 stated posited that:

> I encourage my employees to address the needs of customers before anything, and they should let me know if they cannot take care. My office is always open. I also encourage employees to tell customers to provide feedback online or through short surveys after any service or purchase. We follow-up on any feedback customers have, whether good or bad. I reward employees that give good customer service and take corrective measures for any negative feedback. It is a continuous process dealing with customers and we strive for the best customer service.

Participants indicated that used car dealerships should provide quality services and products to customers and potential customers by focusing on their needs and preferences. Used car dealerships can benefit from building lasting relationships with buyers by putting customers' needs first thereby improving customer loyalty and future sales (Banker et al., 2014). Participants revealed that when used car dealership owners and managers focused on customer satisfaction and provide exceptional customer service, there is an increase in customer loyalty and positive reputation. A strategy that focuses on providing exceptional quality customer services is essential for used car dealerships to retain existing customers, attract new customers, and gain a competitive advantage over rivals. Blanchard et al. (2018) suggested that the strategy of specialist competitor referrals can influence consumers' decision to buy a car and salespeople can provide valuable information to consumers about purchase options and justifications for price discrepancies.

DO1, DO2, and DO3 acknowledged the importance of receiving customer feedback and encouraging effective communication within the organization and with customers. Used car dealership owners and managers can encourage new customers to buy cars while enriching their long-term relationship with existing customers (Sitawati et al., 2015). Participants also noted that effective communication is essential to provide exceptional customer services.

Major Theme 2: Aggressive Marketing.

Participants acknowledged that using the internet is essential to market products, advertise cars, and meet new customers. DM1, DO1, DO3, and DM5 indicated that they use technological capabilities such as the internet to advertise cars, increase market outreach, and gain access to valuable information. All participants disclosed that they aggressively market their cars using online tools, newspapers, and exhibitions to enhance access to potential buyers and compete on pricing. The finding corroborates assertions by Tileaga et al. (2014) that firms can gain market share and competitiveness by using information technology to market products to internet users and subscribers. The internet and technology have changed the way people shop, and online shopping is altering the pattern of automobiles sales in the United States (Barley, 2015). Firms can use technology to enhance their retail service quality and deliver superior services that improve performance and increase profitability (Pantano et al., 2018). DO3 stated that:

> Many dealers do not use the web. I use the internet to advertise our inventory and reach out to a wider population. Some people prefer to go online and shop. We have partnered with companies that advertise and sell cars online to list some of

> our inventory, that way we can increase our customer base and price our cars aggressively.

Participants noted that technology had provided a platform where they market cars efficiently and gather feedback from customers. DM2, DM3, DM5, DO2, and DO3 acknowledged that they advertise more appropriately by targeting demographics and customer desires using the internet and other information technology outlets. The findings of this study support the RBV concept of using strategic resources to gain competitive advantage. Information technologies that support customer agility will enhance customer communities to gather customers' feedback (Krotov et al., 2015). Dubey et al. (2018) suggested that firms operating in competitive environments should have the ability to respond quickly to external changes and share information effectively using technology. The participants' responses indicated that they use the internet to create links and build relationships with customers and other stakeholders by predicting customer preferences, thereby increasing their firm's competitive power in the marketplace. DM2 further noted that:

> When we started using the web to sell cars, we noticed an increase in the number of sales and the type of cars customers prefer. We use the web to set prices in a way that is difficult for other dealers to compete because we buy from the auction and information is very important. Pricing and quality are important in online sales.

The finding supports the assertion of Li (2014) that dealerships can enhance their network marketing capabilities by employing information technologies to achieve more significant value chain for auto sales. Also, used car dealerships can introduce a greater variety of products to attract new consumers with heterogeneous tastes and induce consumers to switch from competitors (Li et al., 2018).

Participants emphasized the need to form alliances with other stakeholders in the auto retail industry, which supports the assertion of social network theory that managers and owners of used car dealerships who have a secure network will be able to obtain critical market information cost-effectively. All the used car dealership owners and managers interviewed admitted that collaborating with other stakeholders increases their access to auctions, advertising, market information, trade fairs, product exhibitions, and online stores. The findings of this study support the RBV concept of using strategic resources to gain a competitive advantage. The findings also support the social network theory for business leaders to cultivate business relationships, create opportunities, and obtain critical information from stakeholders. According to participants, stakeholders in the auto retail industry include customers, potential buyers, suppliers, government agencies, regulatory bodies, advocacy groups, foundations, non-governmental agencies, and the communities in which they operate.

Major Theme 3: Business Knowledge.

The importance of having business knowledge in the car retail industry was prominent in interviews with all the participants. Participants expressed the need for owners and managers of used car dealerships to understand the trends in the industry, including consumer and customer trends to grow their business. Participants' responses supported the findings of Zhao (2014), who noted that in the current knowledge-based economy, intangible resources of knowledge, organizational learning, market image, and organizational culture are some of the most valuable and competitive resources. In the perspective of the RBV theory, knowledge is an intangible resource which is a significant source of a competitive advantage and increase firm performance (De Luca et al., 2014). Participants highlighted that used car dealership owners and managers could use the knowledge gained from their experience and skill set in the industry as a strategic intangible resource to create value that is hard for competitors to imitate.

DO1, DO2, DM1, DM3, and DO3 revealed that the most critical resource managers and owners of used car dealerships use as a source of sustainable competitive advantage is business knowledge with the car retail industry, consumers, and products. DO2 stated that:

> Having knowledge in whatever you do is important. You cannot succeed if you don’t understand how to buy cars from the auctions, set prices for the various cars, and sell them. Knowledge in any industry is everything. That’s what makes a business person compete with others in the business.

Following the findings of this study, Lonial and Carter (2015) suggested that intangible resources add value to a firm and are part of the organization’s base of knowledge and information. Managers should enable access and sharing of information across partners by establishing relationships and obtaining a shared understanding without delay and distortion (Dubey et al., 2018). Participants indicated that managers and owners of used car dealerships could use knowledge in business to integrate people, technologies, processes, and create strategy to compete in the marketplace. Car salespeople can influence consumers' decision to buy cars by providing information to consumers about focal products such as auto parts and car repair shops (Blanchard et al., 2018).

Chen and Fong (2015) explained how critical it is for used car dealership owners and managers to align their knowledge resources with the changes that occur in the marketplace. DO1, DO4, DO5, DM3, and DM4 acknowledged that understanding how to manage knowledge capabilities is vital for used car dealership managers and owners to deploy resources efficiently and grow their businesses in value. Participants discussed the importance of used car dealership owners and managers acquiring knowledge and information from other stakeholders in the industry given that the demand for auction cars and skilled labor is high in the car sales industry. The conceptual framework for this study was the RBV theory, with the general systems theory and social network theory as alternative theories. The managers and owners of used car dealerships could use these theories to understand how to employ resources effectively and how to use networks to obtain critical market information cost-effectively to gain a competitive advantage. The assertions by Tadelis and Zettelmeyer (2015) that car dealerships need information and skilled car salespeople to deliver superior customer services and increase market share corroborates the findings of this study, given that the bargaining power of suppliers in the car retailing industry is high.

Minor Theme 1: Human Capital Development. Participants recognized the importance of developing human capital that contributes to competitive advantage resulting from the quality of the knowledge and skills of used car dealership employees. DO1, DO3, DO5, DM3, and DM5 discussed how people are critical in the activities and value chain of the dealership. Participants indicated that managers and owners of used car dealerships should enlist the talents of the company's human resources to develop and deploy strategy throughout the organization. Participants acknowledged the problem of retaining experienced and highly skilled salespeople in the car retail industry. According to the RBV concept, core skills are central to an organization's competitive advantage, and firms must acquire them from the internal development of its employees (Fareed et al., 2016).

DM4 explained that "business leaders in the industry should invest in their employees and treat them well to retain them longer." DM2 further stated that:

> The turnover rate among employees in this business is high. That is not good for the customers and the business in general. When customers come in to buy cars and meet new people every few months, it's bad for business because the customers will feel more comfortable coming back again to meet the same person.

The findings of this study support the assertion by Fareed et al. (2016) that when the human resource is valuable, rare, not imitable, and cannot be substituted easily, the human capital pool of a firm may contribute to a sustainable competitive advantage. DO5 emphasized the need for investing in human resources by developing employee skill sets and knowledge through training and conferences. Participants indicated that used car dealership employees are human resources in whom a firm invests through knowledge skill development and training to improve their abilities to perform tasks effectively, thereby adding value and enabling the firm to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. Otubanjo (2018) suggested that firms can develop and implement service strategies by providing adequate training to employees to ensure consistency in the delivery systems and enhance customer service.

Ryke et al. (2015) explained how the RBV theory provides the basis that human capital is a relevant resource, and together with other business resources, contributes to enhance firm performance and achieve sustained competitive advantage. DO1, DO2, DO4, DM4, and DM5 indicated that managers and owners of used car dealerships should optimize access to human capital and have the ability to respond quickly to new opportunities. D03 explained that:

> Businesses should have qualified salespeople who have the professional experience and skills to sell cars and attract new customers. I try to keep my employees longer in my business and provide them training opportunities to grow and develop in this business. I pair the more experienced salespeople with new salespeople so that they can learn and grow.

Organizations can create sustainable intangible values that will help capitalize it on the market by implementing human resources actions that develop human capital and improve performance (De Luca et al., 2014). Participants highlighted the crucial role used car dealership managers and owners have in developing dynamic capabilities and implementing human resource development actions that align with organizational goals to gain a sustainable competitive advantage.

Minor Theme 2: Effective Leadership. Participants acknowledged the importance of communicating effectively with customers and salespeople to ensure the car buying experience is pleasant. The finding corroborates with the findings of Barley

(2015) who noted that Americans perceive car salespeople as not trustworthy and believe that they routinely take advantage of customers. DO3, DO4, DO5, DM1, DM2, and DM5 discussed how being a good role model and leading by example is essential to motivate employees to work harder and treat customers with care and respect. DM4 added that:

> We have an open door policy in this company. My door is always open for my employees to contact me at any time. I encourage a work environment that has free flow of information. When I am not in the office, I delegate authority to another senior employee to make decisions in my absence. As a manager, I try to lead by example by motivating my employees to work hard.

DO1 indicated that:

> Any negative feedback or complaints from customers and suppliers related to unprofessional behaviors in the company are addressed immediately to maintain the integrity and reputation of my organization. We do not tolerate any actions that will hurt our business and the good people that work in this company.

DM3 revealed that a business leader should inspire and motivate employees to make customers feel respected to ensure the car buying experience from sale to delivery is pleasant. DM5 added that:

> As a manager, I encourage a culture where my employees communicate freely with me and our customers, and provide feedback. The value of this company is to treat customers as people first and not just car buyers. That way, we can build trust and loyalty and maintain a good relationship with our customers.

A good salesperson should know how to use sales techniques and maintain a positive attitude in a competitive industry (Barley, 2015). The findings of the study indicated that the sales and service staff of used car dealerships benefit from building lasting relationships with colleagues and buyers because customer and employee satisfaction will impact their loyalty and future sales.

DM1 stated “employees are committed when business managers and owners encourage a culture where they communicate and provide feedback freely.” DO2 further explained that:

> If there are any work related issues with my employees, I encourage them to communicate with me freely so that we can address the problem. I encourage them to come to work committed every day and do their best to grow the business. We are like a family in the company.

In the perspective of the RBV theory, participants’ responses support the findings by De Luca et al. (2014) who noted that organizational culture is an intangible resource that is significant for a firm to gain competitive advantage and improve performance. Participants explained that when the culture of a dealership encourages employees to communicate freely with managers and owners, there is an increase in employee commitment which will translate to the quality of customer service. Also, top managers and business owners should be committed in motivating and socializing employees to improve the functioning of operations and enhance performance (Dubey et al., 2018). Used car dealership owners and managers should have the ability to gather and share information effectively with employees through communication technologies.

Applications to Professional Practice

The findings from this study are relevant to improved business practice. Participants provided additional information on the strategies used car dealership managers and owners employed to sustain operations and maximize profits. The specific business problem is that some used car dealership owners and managers lack strategies to remain profitable and sustain operations beyond 5 years. Small business managers and owners can respond to the challenges of the market and customers to foster and sustain competitiveness (Okeyo et al., 2014). Used car dealership managers and owners may consider service quality and convenience service strategies to gain and sustain competition in the marketplace (Arshad & Su, 2015). The findings may provide small business owners with information on how to develop and implement strategies that safeguard firm resources and sustained profitability.

Used car dealership owners and managers can focus on reducing costs, increasing productivity, and improving customer services to satisfy the dynamic requirements of customers and other stakeholders (Sigalas, 2015). Used car dealership owners and managers can optimize resource allocations that align with practical strategies, improve performance, and integrate the volatility in today’s markets and environment (Liu & Liang, 2015). The findings from this study concurred with the RBV theory because managers and owners of used car dealerships can use the theory to identify, evaluate, and manage the resources they need to remain competitive and sustain operations. Business managers and owners can use the RBV theory to analyze resources as potential sources of a competitive advantage (Jensen et al., 2016). The findings are relevant to professional practice in that business owners may obtain useful information on how to employ resources efficiently and improve sales to achieve a competitive advantage and sustain growth.

The findings and recommendations of this study might serve as the basis for used car dealership owners and managers to change strategies and improve business practices. The findings showed that business knowledge, customer service quality, effective marketing strategy, and human resources development are the leading strategies of used car dealership success. The results of the study may assist used car dealership managers and owners to identify and use the resources they need to remain competitive. This study is significant to business practice in that the results may provide small business management with the knowledge that may assist them to manage their businesses better and enhance growth. The results could enable small business owners to gain insights into successful strategies and practices that may improve the effective use of tangible and intangible resources. Owners and managers of used car dealerships may use the findings of this study to develop and implement strategies to reduce business losses and increase profits.

Implications for Social Change

The results from this study could benefit small business owners and society by adding to the strategies small car dealership owners and managers can use to remain competitive and sustain growth. By developing and implementing value-added strategies, used car dealerships could increase their success rate and improve the economic well-being of communities. The successes of used car dealerships could create a positive effect on other small businesses in the community by increasing foot traffic, thereby attracting new customers and enabling businesses to advertise to potential buyers. An increase in the success rate for used car dealerships may increase employment opportunities in the communities they operate, thereby affecting families in a positive way. High success rates for used car dealerships may lead to an increase in job creation, employment opportunities, and firm profitability. The findings of this study could enable small business owners to recognize the importance of training and retain experienced employees and salespeople.

Some small business owners and managers could benefit from the findings of this study and adopt business cultures that encourage honest behaviors towards customers. Small business owners might gain knowledge of the importance of implementing adaptive and agile customer strategies and behaviors to respond to market volatility, and customer needs in a timely manner. Used car dealership owners and managers might gain knowledge of the importance of meeting varied customer requirements regarding price, specification, quality, quantity, and delivery. Encouraging honest behaviors from car salespeople might lead to new customers developing trust in the car purchase process, thereby enriching relationships with existing and potential customers. Honest behaviors from car salespeople will increase customer loyalty and business profitability (Blanchard et al., 2018). Thus, used car dealerships could increase employment opportunities thereby allowing local communities to grow through an increase in tax revenues and contributions to local nonprofit organizations.

Recommendations for Action

I have noted some recommendations for managers and owners of used car dealerships to remain competitive and sustain operations. Other individuals who need to pay attention to the results of this study include potential used car dealers and small business owners. Some of the recommendations include providing exceptional customer service, implementing aggressive marketing strategies, using business knowledge in the car retail industry and consumer trends, offering yearly customer service and sales related training to employees, and applying effective leadership qualities while promoting a culture where customers and employees can communicate freely with management.

Used car dealership owners and managers should provide exceptional quality customer services and products to customers and potential customers by focusing on their needs and preferences. Used car dealerships should sustain growth and profitability by offering superior customer service that is exceptional and surpasses customer needs, which will enhance customer satisfaction and competitiveness. Some participants noted that providing exceptional customer service and focusing on delivering quality services and products enables used car dealerships to experience an increase in customer loyalty and positive reputation. Therefore, used car dealership owners and managers should focus on a strategy that delivers exceptional quality customer services to retain existing customers, attract new customers, and gain a competitive advantage over rivals. Also, used car dealership owners should promote and reward employees that provide exceptional quality services to customers and receive positive feedback.

Another recommendation for action for used car dealership owners and managers from the findings of this study include aggressive marketing of products and services. The internet and technology changed the way people buy automobiles in America. Participants acknowledged that the internet had changed car shopping. Therefore, used car dealership owners and managers should aggressively market their cars using online tools, newspapers, and exhibitions to enhance access to potential buyers and compete on pricing. Using the internet to market products, advertise cars, and meet new customers will enable used car dealerships to compete and gain market share in a way that rivals cannot imitate easily. Also, used car dealership managers and owners should form alliances with other stakeholders in the auto retail industry. Managers and owners of used car dealerships who have a strong network will be able to obtain critical information in a cost-effective manner, thereby increasing their access to auctions, advertising, market information, trade fairs, product exhibitions, and online stores. Business managers and owners should cultivate business relationships, create opportunities, and obtain critical information from stakeholders.

Used car dealership owners and managers should have business knowledge in the car retail industry. Owners and managers of used car dealerships should understand the trends in the industry, including consumer trends to grow their business. Used car dealership manages and owners should align their knowledge resources with the changes that occur in the marketplace to create value for their businesses. Managers and owners of used car dealerships should use knowledge and experience in business to integrate people, technologies, processes, and create strategies to attract new customers and compete in the marketplace. Car dealerships should use relevant information and skilled car salespeople to deliver superior customer services and increase market share. Used car dealership owners and managers should use the knowledge gained from their experiences and skill sets in the car industry as a strategic intangible resource to create value for their businesses.

Used car dealership owners should invest in their employees by providing mandatory employee training related to customer relations and services. The human capital pool of a car dealership will contribute to a sustainable competitive advantage when the human resource is rare, valuable, not imitable, and not easily substituted. Used car dealership managers and owners should treat their employees as human resources in whom a firm invests through knowledge skill development and training to improve their abilities to perform tasks effectively, thereby adding value and retaining experienced employees while competing with rivals. Used car dealership managers and owners should develop dynamic capabilities and implement human resource development actions that align with their organizational goals to gain a sustainable competitive advantage.

Used car dealership managers and owners should provide leadership and encourage a culture that promotes open communication between employees and customers. Used car dealerships should implement a culture that promotes receiving customer feedback and encouraging communication within the organization and with customers. Such actions will make the car buying experience pleasant and will increase customer loyalty, thereby building trust and reducing the negative reputation about car salespeople. Used car dealers should immediately address any negative feedback or complaints from customers and suppliers related to unprofessional behaviors in the company to maintain the integrity and reputation of the organization. When the culture of a car dealership promotes employees to communicate freely, there is an increase in employee commitment, which will translate to the quality of service delivered to customers.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies used car dealership owners and managers employ to remain profitable and sustain operations beyond 5 years. Researchers may use the findings of this study as foundation for future research in exploring other strategies not covered in this study. Also, future research could focus on the car buyer's perspectives to further understand the common biases about dealerships and car salespeople.

Participants in this study consisted of owners and managers of small used car dealerships in Colorado. The geographic location of the study only in Colorado is a limitation because the results of the study may not apply to other states or countries. Further research may expand the geographical location outside the State of Colorado. Future research could also focus on dealership sales and marketing approaches to gain an understanding of the demographic characteristics of customers. I also suggest further studies to explore how the changes in seasons can affect organizational sales. This study was limited to small used car dealerships in Colorado where the weather conditions range from very cold to hot in a calendar year. Future research that focuses on seasonal factors affecting firm performance could provide additional insights into the success of used and new car dealerships in different demographics. I used a qualitative multiple case study method and design in this study. Future research could consider other research methodologies and designs on the strategies car dealerships use to compete and sustain growth.

Reflections

The process of completing the DBA Doctoral Study was long and difficult. However, I have gained a better understanding of strategies managers and owners of used car dealerships employ to remain profitable and sustain operations. I have gained knowledge and experienced academic growth in completing the doctoral study process. In my effort to mitigate the risk of bias in collecting and interpreting data, I was mindful in every state of the study of possible bias and deliberated on strategies to mitigate biases. I took some measures to reduce bias as the researcher of this study. I used an interview protocol to ensure that I applied the same procedures to each participant.

From my interviews and discussions with the participants of this study, I realized how hardworking and committed they were to grow and succeed in business. I did not realize how much time and effort used car dealership owners and managers spend in growing their business. My experience in conducting this doctoral process enabled me to realize how passionate and dedicated car dealers are in implementing strategies to grow their business. Managers and owners of small used car dealerships may use the results of this study to develop and implement strategies to compete and sustain growth in their business.

Conclusion

Some managers and owners of used car dealerships lack strategies needed to sustain their business in a competitive environment. The purpose of this study was to explore strategies used car dealership owners and managers employ to remain profitable and sustain operations beyond 5 years. The conceptual framework for this study was based on the RBV theory. The data collection methods I used included semistructured interviews using open-ended questions and a review of documentary evidence and field notes. Documentary evidence included yearly company income and cash flow statements.

The three main themes identified through data analysis included (a) customer satisfaction, (b) aggressive marketing, and (c) business knowledge. The two minor themes identified included (a) human resource development, and (b) effective leadership. The implications for positive social change include the potential to increase small business successes, which could increase the economic wellbeing of communities through an increase in tax revenues and contributions to local nonprofit organizations. The primary findings from this study revealed the need for managers and owners of used car dealerships to employ strategies to compete in the marketplace and sustain growth. The findings from this study could help owners and managers of used car dealerships understand the importance of developing and implementing strategies that safeguard firm resources, improve customer service quality, as well as increase market share and profitability.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview: Exploring the strategies used car dealership owners and managers need to sustain their business in a competitive environment.

1. I will start with greetings and brief introduction.
2. I will thank the participant for accepting my invitation to participate in the interview.
3. I will ensure that participants read and understood before signing the informed consent form.
4. I will inform participants that the interview will last no more than 45 minutes, and the interviews will be audio recorded.
5. I will begin interviewing
6. I will explain to participants that as part of member checking, I will provide them with transcripts for their review and feedback to ensure accurate interpretations of the data collected.
7. I will conclude the interview, stop audio recording, and thank the interviewee again for taking part in the interview.

Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation

<Community Research Partner Name>
<Contact Information>
<Date>

Dear Jude Suh,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Strategies for Used Car Dealership Owners to Sustain Their Business in a Competitive Environment. As part of this study, I authorize you to interview managers and the company owner, and review the organization's income statements. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include providing contact information of potential participants, a conference room to conduct private interviews, and our organization's income statements. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I understand that the student will not be naming our organization in the doctoral project report that is published in Proquest.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,
<Authorization Official>
<Contact Information>

Appendix C: Introductory Letter

<Date>

<Address Block>

Dear Manager/Business Owner,

I am a doctoral student at Walden University pursuing a Doctorate of Business Administration degree with a concentration in Accounting. As part of my academic research study on exploring strategies used car dealership owners and managers need to sustain their business in a competitive environment, I would like to invite you to participate in the study. I believe that your knowledge and experience will make an important contribution to this study.

The eligibility criteria for participants in this study include owners and managers of used car dealerships who have experience implementing successful strategies to remain profitable. Attached is an informed consent form to provide additional information about the study. The face-to-face interview will last no more than 45 minutes and it will be audio recorded and transcribed. To ensure accuracy of information, I will give you the opportunity to review the interview transcript during member checking. The information provided during the interview will remain confidential.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or additional information. I look forward to speaking with you and I appreciate your cooperation.

Warmest Regards,

Jude Suh

Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. What strategies did you employ to continue to make profits and sustain your business?
2. How did you implement these business strategies to sustain your operations?
3. What are some of the difficulties you encountered in carrying out these business strategies?
4. How did you address the key challenges to implementing your strategies for remaining profitable and sustaining operations?
5. How have you assessed the effectiveness of your strategies for sustaining operations?
6. What, if any, strategies did your staff develop and acquire that have contributed to your success in the auto industry?
7. What additional information can you share regarding strategies you employed to remain profitable and sustain operations?