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Marketing Strategies for Small Business Sustainability

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

Marketing Strategies for Small Business Sustainability

by

Stetson S. J. King

MBA, Webster University, 2013

MPA, Webster University, 2006

BS, Alcorn State University, 2002

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2018

Abstract

The restaurant industry is the second largest employer in the United States; however, only 33% of restaurant owners sustain profits longer than the first 5 years from inception. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore marketing strategies that owners of small business restaurants use to sustain profitability for longer than the initial 5 years. Aaker's brand equity model was the conceptual framework used to ground this study. Purposeful criterion sampling was used for the study. Participants included 3 owners of small restaurants operating in the southern United States. Data analysis involved using Yin's 5-step data analysis process to identify and code themes. Analysis included data compilation, data disassembly, data reassembly, data interpretation, and data conclusion. Three themes emerged from the analysis of data: social media, word of mouth, and brand differentiation. The implications of this study for positive social change include business development opportunities, opening resource centers for training programs, and free webinars associated with marketing and brand equity strategies. Communities, organizations, and new entrepreneurs may benefit from the increase of social resources, community economic growth, and expanded employment opportunities.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my beloved wife, Andrea Denise King, my son Stetson Carter King, and my parents. Starting at an early age, my parents instilled in me the passion for learning and the desire to better myself. Though they passed away before they could see me accomplish my goal, I know that they are smiling down and are proud of me. Along this journey, my wife has been my biggest supporter and I will forever be in her debt. I want my son to know that life is not easy, but that he can achieve anything he puts his mind to.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the many individuals who have supported me throughout my academic journey. The first acknowledgement is for my Committee Chair, Dr. Fan, for her support, availability, professionalism, and gregarious personality. I will most remember the candid advice she would offer me during our conferences. I am grateful to my committee members, Dr. Rocky Dwyer and Dr. Peter Anthony for their guidance and support. I would also like to thank all my family members who provided me with encouragement. To my sisters: Stephanie and Keisha and brothers: Treon, Samuel, and Jadarius I love you and just know that all things are possible for those that believe. To my parents whom have passed, thank you for love and support throughout my life. I stand on the shoulders of giants. Most importantly my special thanks go to my wife Andrea and my son Stetson. To my wife, thank you for supporting me throughout this academic journey. To my son, I have set the example for you to follow.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

When the economy is unstable, owners of small restaurants are affected considerably and face many challenges, such as decreased consumer demand, decreased sales, and reduced disposable income, which may threaten their level of profitability and competitive advantage (Agarwal & Dahm, 2015). Small businesses are the largest employer in the United States, of which restaurant businesses constitute the second largest population. However, 80% of restaurants fail within the first 5 years of startup (Self, Jones, & Botieff, 2015). Businesses leaders of small restaurants may need to use new marketing tools to attract and retain customers, increase revenue, optimize products, and develop a comprehensive understanding of customer needs to grow and sustain their business. Small business restaurant owners must increase and toughen their position versus competition to pursue marketing strategies effective at increasing profitability and beating out the competition (Parsa, van der Rest, Smith, Parsa, & Bujisic, 2015).

Background of the Problem

Creating marketing plans that contribute the effective expenditure of resources and promote profitability is a task for small business leaders such as small restaurant owners. The major obstacle for small business owners that is largely due to resource limitations is developing a relationship with customers via marketing (Fiore, Niehm, Hurst, Jihyeong, & Sadachar, 2013). Marketing strategies for small–medium enterprises are different from large enterprises (Moorman & Day, 2016). Strategic execution of market and competitor analysis and adjusting marketing strategies to meet target revenue and profitability goals are tasks for owners of small businesses (Fiore et al., 2013). The

ability to react to changes in market conditions is an internal factor that influences business performance (Moorman & Day, 2016).

Small restaurant owners cannot afford to become content with the current customer base but should continue to be innovative in establishing and building relationships with customers (Fiore et al., 2013). Small business leaders should also use social networks such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter to filter marketing strategies and retain customers (Palmer, Simmons, & Mason, 2014). To remain competitive, small restaurant owners should explore new strategies to survive and remain profitable.

Problem Statement

Small businesses close operations at a rate of approximately 3.7% as compared to the startup rate of approximately 3.5% in southeastern United States (U.S. Small Business Administration [SBA], 2015). It is estimated that 53,268 southeastern United States small business owners failed to achieve target business profits resulting in the closing of their business operations in 2014 (Acs, Audretsch, Lehmann, & Licht, 2016). The general business problem is that small business owners face profitability challenges based on the implementation of marketing strategies. The specific business problem is that some small business restaurant owners lack marketing strategies for sustaining profitability beyond the initial 5 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore marketing strategies small business restaurant owners use to sustain profitability beyond the initial 5 years. The targeted population was three restaurant small businesses owners in

southeastern United States who used a marketing strategy to sustain their businesses

beyond 5 years. The implications for positive social change could include an increase in

local employment, higher living standards, decrease in homelessness, and prevention of

anxiety related health issues. As a result, these efforts may aid in decreasing poverty and

crime and provide financial stability to residents of southeastern United States.

Nature of the Study

The three research methods are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed (Fuller, 2017).

I did not choose the quantitative method because it is for examining the association with

and group variances among study variables including an analysis of numbers and

statistics (Zyphur & Pierides, 2017). The mixed method is a combination of the

qualitative and quantitative methods which may include requiring a vast sample size and

also test hypotheses (Fuller, 2017). I did not choose this method because I did not

examine the association of group variances among study variables. With the qualitative

method, the researcher gathers information via documents, observations, and interviews

to conduct inductive data analysis (Zyphur & Pierides, 2017). I chose the qualitative

method because I explored both events and processes that addressed the research

question.

The principal research designs available for the qualitative method are

ethnography, narrative research, grounded theory, case study, and phenomenology. I did

not choose ethnography because it entails expounding on behavior and culture, which did

not pertain to this study. I did not choose the grounded theory because it best fits research

aligned with the purpose of developing a theory. The purpose of this study was to

determine what strategies address the research question, not the development of a new theory (Park & Park, 2016). Researchers utilize the phenomenology research design for summarizing experiences of individuals and groups (Park & Park, 2016). Because I captured data and opinions from profitable business owners, the phenomenology research design was not suitable for this study. I also did not choose narrative research design. It is for creating a narrative story, while this study provided a compilation of strategies (Paulsen, 2017). I chose the case study design because it is best suited for in-depth data accounts of the opinions and strategies used by business owners in creating sustainable profitability. Researchers use the case study design for recognizing patterns in data collected (Paulsen, 2017).

Research Question

RQ: What marketing strategies do small business restaurant owners use to sustain profitability beyond the initial 5 years?

Interview Questions

1. Please describe your successful marketing strategies used for sustaining profits beyond the initial 5 years.

2. Describe how you implemented marketing strategies for sustaining profitability beyond the initial 5 years.

3. Describe how you overcame obstacles when you first attempted implementing your marketing strategies used for sustaining profits beyond the initial 5 years

4. What approach have you found successful in developing marketing strategies used for sustaining profits beyond the initial 5 years?

5. Describe how you evaluated your marketing strategies used for sustaining profits beyond the initial 5 years.

6. What additional information would you like to add regarding marketing strategies small business restaurant owners use for sustaining profits beyond the initial 5 years?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework selected for this study was the brand equity model. Aaker (1991) developed the brand equity model and suggested that brand equity comprised assets and liabilities linking to a brand, symbol, or name that increases or decreases the value offered by a business's products or services. Aaker categorized these assets and liabilities as brand name awareness, perceived brand quality, brand associations, brand loyalty, and other proprietary brand associations (Aaker, 1991). Aaker's brand equity model is used for marketing strategy development (Stahl, Heitmann, Lehmann, & Neslin, 2012). Aaker illustrated how each category impacts business value and profit through sales and other means (Stahl et al., 2012).

Practitioners apply strategies aligned with brand equity and provide value to a business by enhancing efficiencies, prices, profit margin, competitive advantage, and trade leverage (Stahl et al., 2012). There is a high probability that customers will change to a familiar and favorable brand because there is a reduced probability the product will not provide satisfaction, translating into positive results for the company's profit margin (Stahl et al., 2012). Aaker demonstrated the cost-effectiveness of brand loyalty in sustaining profits, as it is cheaper to keep current customers than to attract new customers

(Aaker, 1991). The brand equity model developed by Aaker (1991) was selected as the conceptual framework because it is relevant to discovering marketing strategies that business owners use to sustain the profitability of small businesses beyond the initial 5 years. Aaker's brand equity model enabled me to understand the findings from the study because of marketing dimensions that give value to business and customers (Aaker, 1991).

Operational Definitions

Branding: The selection and blending of business attributes specifically and uniquely attractive to consumers (Cheng, 2014).

Competition-based pricing: Pricing that reflects the price of a product or service based on what the competition charges (Khan, 2014b).

Customer relationship management (CRM): A strategic approach that is concerned with creating improved shareholder value through the development of appropriate relationships with primary customers and customer segments (Şahin, Kitapçi, Altindağ, & Gök, 2017).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions in qualitative research are suppositions about what is analyzed, what counts as evidence, and what counts as knowledge (Nayak, 2016). Assumptions carry risks because prejudgments and conjectures may taint knowledge obtained from the qualitative study data results. The first assumption with this study was that there is a lack of marketing strategy implementation in business practices. Another assumption was that

participants would understand the interview questions and would provide truthful and unbiased responses. I clarified interview questions upon request and informed participants of the importance of truthfulness in data collection. The third assumption was that the restaurant owners have applied marketing strategies for sustaining profitability. I mitigated this assumption by reviewing company marketing and financial documents.

Limitations

Limitations include constraints and circumstances that are not within the researcher's control that restrict performing qualitative research (Barnham, 2015). The first limitation may include the limited experience of the participants. The second limitation is marketing strategies are rapidly changing, and participants may have a lack of experience in emerging, current, and most effective strategies for sustaining profitability within the first 5 years. Another limitation of this qualitative study was obtaining authorization from the small restaurant owners to review and include pertinent and proprietary company information. The final limitation of this qualitative case study was the sample size of participants.

Delimitations

Delimitations are defined boundaries and scope of a study (Ody-Brasier & Vermeulen, 2014). The first delimitation was the focus on marketing strategies for small restaurants in southeastern United States. The final delimitation was the small geographical segment used in this study. I did not research small restaurants outside of southeastern United States.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

I designed the study with southeastern United States-owned restaurant small businesses in mind, primarily those small businesses with fewer than 5 years of operations. Economic development leaders and these specific owners could address the problem of approximately 2.5% of southeastern United States small business owners closing their operations annually since 2005 to 2015 (SBA, 2015). Economic development leaders have a chance to develop and implement changes that can greatly increase the success rate of small businesses located in southeastern United States while decreasing unemployment and spurring economic growth (Spremo & Mićić, 2015). Findings from this qualitative case study may enable economic developers and small business owners operating in southeastern United States to pinpoint strategies that best lead to higher success rates. Economic developers may use the findings of this study to develop mentorship programs, counseling, financial aid, and instruction for small business owners operating in southeastern United States.

Implications for Social Change

At the point when southeastern United States small business owners are not successful at reaching their anticipated profits, employment declines and the associated economies suffer (SBA, 2015). Southeastern United States small business owners who can manage their small businesses will be able to deliver jobs to the local economy, increasing productivity and spurring economic progress. Southeastern United States has approximately 244,755 small businesses with about 425,573 employees, which makes up

approximately 47.1% of all businesses in the state (SBA, 2015). When small business owners fail, it threatens to destabilize the economy while impacting communities, local economies, and families (Doumpos, Andriosopoulos, Galariotis, Makridou & Zopounidis, 2017). The gathering and exchange of lessons learned from successful small businesses can assist increasing the success rate of other small business owners. This stimulation of the economy may lead to positive social change including a decrease in homelessness due to being unemployed; having a job can instill a sense of dignity for people who struggle to find worthwhile employment. An increase in sustained small business profits will grow jobs and increase cash flow and revenue for local economies while improving livelihoods.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore what marketing strategies small restaurant owners used to attain profitability beyond the initial 5 years. In 2014, U.S. small businesses created 61% of the new jobs and employed 39% of technological workers (SBA, 2015). In this literature review, I examined the various strategies of marketing for profitability in small restaurants through marketing concepts and theories. Ninety-eight percent of the 172 sources in this literature review were peer reviewed, and 86% were published within 5 years, 2014-2018, of expected Chief Academic Officer approval of this study. The aim of this literature review was to recapitulate, compare, and contrast various sources that relate to the research topic.

The organization of this literature review starts with the fundamental issues of marketing strategies, followed by theories of marketing: branding, relationship

marketing, resource advantage, and a review on profitability. For this study, the primary sources were obtained from the Walden University Online Library. The most often used databases included the Business Source Complete and ABI/INFORM Complete for this research study. Journal articles, reports, and scholarly seminal books including peer-reviewed documents were the primary sources used in the review. Other databases used included Google Scholar, Proquest, Government databases, and Sage Premier. The keywords I used to search the databases included the following: *advertising, branding, competition-based pricing, competitive advantage, customer engagement, customer relationship marketing, customer relationship management, customer segmentation, marketing–mix adaptation, market analysis, marketing mix, market orientation, market segmentation, marketing strategies, marketing theories, product development, profitability, pricing strategies, relationship marketing, resource advantage, small business, small restaurants, social marketing,* and *viral marketing*.

Fundamental Issues of Marketing Strategies

The main goals of marketing strategies for business leaders are to fulfill market needs, grow market share, and increase shareholder value (Jemaiyo, 2013). Small restaurant owners must develop stakeholder strategies to support annual strategic initiatives and assist in exploiting opportunities for growth. Small business leaders should gather all insights regarding marketing activities to help forecast growth and sustainability patterns (Fiore et al., 2013). Identifying consumer perceptions and trends through marketing assists with the evaluation of cost savings and other ongoing initiatives and may contribute to organizational growth.

Marketing new products keeps customers aware of new offerings; for long-term growth, organizations must involve innovation and insights from customers (Agnihotri, Gabler, Itani, Jaramillo, & Krush, 2017). Owners use promotion, advertising, fundraising, and public relations as principles of marketing operations and strategy (Tabaku & Mersini, 2014). Small restaurant owners can attract new customers by applying marketing strategies such as viral marketing, advertising, flyers, brochures, and outreach (Zheng, 2017). Creating and executing a coordinated marketing plan for new and existing products and services may also help small restaurant owners make enhancements or modifications in the competitive landscape. Small and medium sized businesses with high levels of performance are descriptive when documenting strategic marketing planning activities such as business mission, marketing objectives in the area of market share, products and services, and distribution (Clemons, Kauffman, & Weber, 2014). Using the concept of marketing as an adaptive strategy is necessary to ensure resources are available when implementing marketing activities (Tabaku & Mersini, 2014).

Leaders of small and medium sized firms should use more cross-functional involvement with a focus on interorganizational partnerships, intraorganizational partnerships, and training as a marketing strategy (Whalen et al., 2016). Training all staff on marketing principles and the importance of market research is fundamental (Tabaku & Mersini, 2014). Training owners from stakeholder organizations in areas such as sales, services, and leadership are critical when implementing a marketing plan (Janicic & Jankovic, 2014). Integrated marketing strategy, external integration of resources, market research, steady marketing management activity, and market orientation are basic

principles of an innovative marketing model (Li & Ju, 2014). Organization commitment, market orientation, business performance, and data sources (top management, employees, annual reports) are the main factors in the theoretical model when implementing internal marketing programs in organizations (Zaman, Javaid, Arshad, & Bibi, 2012). Internal marketing programs of a business often share a relationship with elevated performance and profitability (Zaman et al., 2012). Employees who are loyal and committed to an organization provide excellent service to their customers and are concerned with organization growth when business owners provide strategic rewards, effective training, and internal marketing programs (Zaman et al., 2012). An organization's degree of market orientation can be positive for business performance and profitability (Jakada & Gambo, 2014).

A strategic marketing system entails a needs analysis, research and analysis, creative infusion, strategic positioning, marketing plan development and training, implementation, evaluation, and adjustment (Janicic & Jankovic, 2014). A strategic marketing system comprises approaches that can help leaders cultivate and enhance marketing plans and marketing efforts. Marketing contributes to customer and shareholder value through the development of customer-oriented solutions (Rossiter, 2017). The analysis of customer data is extracted through marketing strategies (Şahin et al., 2017). With the use of marketing strategies, business owners can share concepts with consumers and stakeholders to precipitate profit (Miles et al., 2016).

The implementation of aggressive advertising strategies is used as a way to combat competitors' attacks (Cheng, 2014). Aggressive marketing can be implemented as

a way for business leaders to provide differentiation capabilities compared to competitors, act as a liaison between supply and demand, and meet consumer expectations by dispersing better quality products (Cheng, 2014; Sarathy & Banalieva, 2014). According to Cheng, posttesting, recall tests, and recognition tests are ways to assess, compare, and contrast advertising strategies of competitors and examine various market segments. Business owners assess customers' product awareness and the effectiveness of advertising in the target markets by posttesting (Cheng, 2014). Leaders implement recall tests to check the retention and awareness level of customers about advertising (Cheng, 2014). Through recognition tests, customers read advertising and note what they have seen previously to help managers assess the advertising influence in different market segments (Cheng, 2014).

Marketing managers should implement offensive and defensive strategies to adopt a relationship marketing approach centered on three concepts: attracting, retaining, and regaining lost customers (Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012). Offensive marketing strategies involve marketing planning goals of acquiring more customers, suggesting brand modifications, and increasing purchase frequency (Vivek et al., 2012). Small business owners should use offensive marketing strategies to assess the value of engaging prospective customers and the value of evaluating brand potential (Vivek et al., 2012). Owners should monitor the activities and interactions of customers to determine what drives customers to the product or brand (Vivek et al., 2012). Some prominent classifications of marketing strategies for organizational growth and profitability are the implementation of offensive strategies for challenger firms, intense growth, market

penetration, product development, market development, and diversification strategies to growth (Bozkurt & Ergen, 2014). Using offensive marketing strategies may help small business leaders such as small restaurant owners determine if brand modifications are needed to increase purchases. Defensive marketing strategies are marketing planning goals to increase customer retention and brand switching; small restaurant owners may use defensive strategies to maximize the effectiveness of marketing activities (Vivek et al., 2012).

Strategy formulation and technology development can aid decision-making capabilities and build a competitive advantage for small restaurants (Yang & Gao, 2017). According to Lash and Zhao, (2016), small and medium sized enterprises contribute to 55%-95% of U.S. Gross Domestic Product and generate technical innovation for the economy. Small business owners should use the Internet as a marketing tool to avoid competitive disadvantages (Biroscak et al., 2015). Using the latest technology to engage and communicate with customers is important, because implementing technology as a marketing strategy may help small business leaders forecast customer expectations and values (Kauppinen-Räisänen, & Grönroos, 2015). Measuring the outcomes from web-based marketing may determine if it helps increase profit, increase return on investment (ROI), enhance company brand, increase customer loyalty, and improve business processes (Biroscak et al., 2015).

Word of mouth communication is a powerful marketing tool (Dadzie, Amponsah, Dadzie, & Winston, 2017). Viral marketing, through word of mouth communication is fundamental to innovative marketing strategies and is a good way for owners to promote

and strengthen the brand by encouraging loyal customers to spread the word to other people (Bozkurt & Ergen, 2014). Word of mouth consumer conversations about brand occurs face-to-face 75% of the time, 15% of the time via phone, and 10% online with an estimate of 15 billion brand impressions passed along every week in the United States (Archer-Brown, Kampani, Mardaer, Bal, & Kietzmann, 2017). Small restaurant owners can implement online marketing as a communication platform to build relationships and customer loyalty (Tabaku & Mersini, 2014). Small business owners need customers to spread the message about the company and products because the ultimate credibility source is customer to customer or customer to a new prospect (Swenson, Rhoads, & Whitlark, 2012). Marketing campaigns that incorporate incentives to encourage viral diffusion may allow dissemination of the message to spread beyond the anticipated pool of customers and to continue after the incentive has completed (Ewing, Stewart, Mather, & Newton, 2014). Social marketing provides an avenue for gaining an unspoken consumer endorsement of a brand (Archer-Brown et al., 2017). Revenue and profits increase for brand equity when social media is applied (Zailskaite-Jakste & Kuvykaite, 2013).

Thirty-four percent of small business owners do not examine the effects of marketing activity (Katona, 2014). Following up with existing customers to confirm satisfaction may help marketing managers who work in small businesses establish, maximize, and maintain positive relationships with existing and potential customers. Small business owners should realize the importance of effective marketing because the elements of marketing help the operation and management of a small business (Katona,

2014). Marketing strategies and activities for small businesses are distinctively different from those observed in large organizations (Miles et al., 2016).

Through the analysis of a strategic marketing plan, small business owners can obtain information on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (Janicic & Jankovic, 2014). Small restaurant owners should conduct research and a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis of competitor's strengths and weaknesses and internal elements such as past sales, consumers, and profitability per consumer (Janicic & Jankovic, 2014). Small restaurant owners should use the data from research and SWOT analysis, maintain industry statistical information and market research resources, and implement a strategic marketing plan for profitability (Janicic & Jankovic, 2014).

Marketing activities such as marketing communications, personal selling, competition-based pricing, product development, and distribution may help small restaurant owners emphasize differentiation-based product market strategies to meet market goals (Khan, 2014b; Mohammed, Rashid, & Tahir, 2014). Owners can use marketing communications to obtain information and advice, offer information about products, and persuade target customers on the merits of a particular product (Khan, 2014b). Information used to determine consumer preferences and to segment consumers benefits effective promotional programs and marketing expenditures (Barber, 2014). Personal selling is a form of promotion that small business restaurant owners should apply to market a product successfully (Khan, 2014b). Small business restaurant owners can use marketing activities to create a competitive advantage in the market and provide a

product that satisfies individual needs of customers (Khan, 2014b; Mohammed et al., 2014). Maintaining customer retention favors cross-selling and an increase in purchasing frequency (Khan, 2014a). According to Khan (2014b) the product is the core of the marketing mix strategy, and small business owners can differentiate their product from competitors and offer broad product lines to enhance profitability and market share positions in the market. Focusing on differentiation-based product market strategies and resource deployments may help small business owners meet product-market goals (Mohammed et al., 2014).

Small business restaurant owners should consider competition and company objectives when implementing competition-based pricing as a marketing activity (Khan, 2014b). With marketing innovation, small business owners can use new methods for promotion or change the price of the product to increase sales through new product introductions and positioning strategies (Çetinkaya Bozkurt & Kalkan, 2014). Marketing is applied through a unique marketing model structure to gain better customer satisfaction, higher market premiums, or higher sales efficiency (Li & Ju, 2014). Marketing managers should design products with a focus on customers' consumption behavior and customer satisfaction and measure market premiums and sales efficiency (Li & Ju, 2014).

According to Li and Ju (2014) small businesses owners can use a corporate marketing model structure as a tool to help improve customer value, communicate efficiently, and interactively while reducing total customer cost. Khan (2014b) advanced that small business owners should use pricing to reinforce other marketing activities

because although higher prices lead to higher profitability initially, higher prices may result in lower sales and profits in the long term. Creating short-term and long-term marketing and advertising strategies that align with strategic plans may help small business owners achieve profitability.

Branding

Tactically creating a respected brand grows customer value perception, gives the product an advanced quality level and rises profitability (Eryigit, 2017). Proactively innovating a business model, brand differentiation, and trend creation increase brand image (Yang & Chiu, 2014). Small restaurant owners should continue to generate innovative product concepts to elevate brand growth.

Brand image can be an influential factor that causes customer complaints in a restaurant (Haislip, & Richardson, 2017). Brand strategists are tasked with using various communication levels to determine which consumer populations are most likely to talk about a company brand to help influence quantifiable ways to sales and profitability (Archer-Brown et al., 2017). Businesses which have a robust brand name attain healthier marketing capabilities and (Jannesari, Ghorbani, & Haery, 2014). Krautz (2017) conducted in-depth interviews with restaurant managers to identify marketing strategies and activities for building brand equity about managerial strategies such as: production development, customer service, restaurant ambiance, and integrated marketing communication. Krautz (2017) analyzed data from the interviews and found customers age 21-30 years old place value on perceptions of looking, hearing, smelling, and testing, and physical evidence such as meals, uniform design of staffs, tableware design, and

decorations of a restaurant. Customers age 31-40 value symbolic benefits and service attitudes because they want to feel relaxed while dining and want to experience a friendly, enthusiastic, and cheerful attitude from restaurant staff (Krautz, 2017).

The results of the study may help marketing owners develop, evaluate, and enhance hospitality brand equity. Small business restaurant owners can use the results to create marketing strategies and improve customer value of brand equity. Brand creation, marketing internationally, and searching for new marketing opportunities are ways small restaurant owners should strategize for profitability (Yang & Chiu, 2014). Creating brand equity is a vital part for the competitive advantage development of a business (Zailskaite-Jaste & Kuvykaite, 2013). When brand extensions are successful, companies gain additional customers, and organizational performance is superb (Dall'Olmo Riley, Hand, & Guido, 2014). Brand and target identities should be transparent because the most effective approach is to connect the brand to consumer identity (Bhattacharjee, Berger, & Menon, 2014). Enhancing brand image along with implementing effective and interactive communication improves customer value (Li & Ju, 2014). According to Zailskaite-Jaste and Kuvykaite (2013), business owners must employ marketing via social media to permit consumers to participate in brand equity building and brand representation. Zailskaite-Jaste and Kuvykaite advanced that through social media, consumers can decide how to interpret a brand and business owners can expand brand awareness. Using social media guarantees high consumer involvement in communications that may increase brand equity, determine brand loyalty, and increase revenue and profits (Zailskaite-Jaste & Kuvykaite, 2013).

Small restaurant owners must be abreast of the trademark distribution of competitors before promoting their brand and design a patent map to create an enterprise brand (Chen & Liang, 2013). Building a patent map helps restaurant owners create a trademark map from the company brand and find its position in the market (Chen & Liang, 2013). Brand extension and brand equity is a way small restaurant owners can fill market gaps and hinder the expansion of its competitors' market shares (Cheng, 2014). Brand equity and marketing activities are pertinent to customer relationship retention and components of business success (Thaichon, & Quach, 2015). Brand elements selection and marketing strategies affect brand equity building (Krautz, 2017).

Business managers should design viral marketing and email message execution regarding brand promotion, in an attractive manner in which the recipients relate and contextualize the marketing strategies (Pöyry, Parvinen, & McFarland, 2017). Implementing viral marketing in collaboration with internal and external counterparts may drive brand initiatives. The likelihood of customers purchasing products and services are better when brand value and brand equity are superior (Chun-Chen, Szu-Wei, Cheng-Yi, & Chang, 2014). A brand name is equally vital to product profitability and product quality (Syed Alwi et. all, 2016). Companies such as Coca-Cola and Sony have established reputations globally through branding (Whittler & Farris, 2017). Small restaurant owners ought to consider customers in brand development as a means to attract customers and promote loyalty (Cheng, 2014).

Companies with a brand image that include distinctive characteristics from its competitors and attributes that are better than normal transparency of product marketing,

sustain long-term competitive advantage (Walther & Von Davier, 2017). Developing a valuable brand increases the product's profitability and sustainability levels and boost customer value, perception, and loyalty (Eryigit, 2017). Business owners should review metrics regarding profitability and market awareness when seeking cobranding strategies (Datta, Ailawadi, & van Heerde, 2017). Small restaurant owners can examine economic attractiveness, competitive intensity, and differential product advantages through market characteristics, product characteristics related to branding and pricing components, and business portfolio priorities (Eryigit, 2017).

Budget comparisons, marketing objectives and goals, marketing activities, sales channels, and positioning are areas within marketing dynamics that small business owners can use as they conduct a marketing audit (Janicic & Jankovic, 2014). Marketing strategies and marketing capabilities that include an in-depth market and brand analysis may help to support brand growth. Sixty percent of product decisions and 32% of distribution decisions influence long-term brand sales (Moorman & Day, 2016). Small business owners may promote products and brand to locate market tendencies, propose business specific marketing strategies, and execute market strategies via online interaction successfully (Lee, Qiu, & Whinston, 2016). Small restaurant owners can track and optimize brand performance by using data analytics to help identify opportunities for business growth and innovate brand initiatives. Using a virtual environment for advertising can permit consumers to persuade brand expression and aid the creation, distribution, and promotion of the brand (Zailskaite-Jakste & Kuvykaite, 2013). Small

restaurant owners should collaborate with consumers about website updates and various multimedia sources to increase brand awareness and recognition.

Small restaurant owners should use a brand development model, logo, and a website, as parts of a marketing plan to accomplish the brand (Bentley-Goode, Newton, & Thompson, 2017). Şahin et al., (2017) opined brand strategy coupled with an organization's business strategy is a marketing plan that promotes growth and strategic brand development initiatives. The development and execution of marketing brand strategies are key initiatives that drive brand awareness. Comprehending customers' value and using marketing activities for positive investment may improve brand performance (Cao, Jiang, & Wan, 2016). Human resources managers should create brand ambassadors because employees should play an integral part in an organization's brand strategy to deliver brand messages properly (Şahin et al., 2017).

Product development, promotion, advertising, and innovation are marketing activities that help promote brands. Filtering on the knowledge that consumers prefer brands positioned on their identity, Jif peanut butter targets mothers with marketing messages by noting, *Choosy moms choose Jif* (Bhattacharjee et al., 2014). A marketing strategy should include image development and brand characteristics that allow organizations to have an efficient marketing mix that reflects a trustworthy image (Torre, Fenger, VanTwist, & Bressers, 2014).

Relationship Marketing

Relationship marketing, which encompasses relationship building and market analysis of competitors and consumers, emerged as a marketing theory in the early 1990s

(Khan, 2014a). Relationships with customers and competitors are forefront for a company when issues are addressed regarding business strategy (Whittler & Farris, 2017). Small business owners employ relationship marketing as a means to create profitability (Catoiu & Tichindelean, 2012). Relationship marketing is critical to a business owner's profitability (Pick & Eisend, 2016). Small restaurant owners ought to emplace beneficial marketing strategies that coincide with the business strategy, which comprises identifying the effective interaction of potential customers, current customers and, the competition (Jemaiyo, 2013).

Micromarketing, database marketing, one-to-one marketing, loyalty marketing, wraparound marketing, customer partnering, and interactive marketing are customer relationship concepts under the pillar of relationship marketing (Khan, 2014a). Small restaurant owners should implement micromarketing as a proponent of the relationship marketing process and strategic approach to customer engagement (Khan, 2014a). Small business owners apply relationship marketing to different marketing activities ranging from consumer frequency marketing programs, customer partnering, and interactive marketing, directed toward building partnerships with important business customers (Khan, 2014a). Owners implement loyalty marketing to show commitment and maintain a relationship with the buyer; leaders use commitment as a variable to measure the strength of a marketing relationship and predict future purchase frequency (Khan, 2014a). Relationship marketing aids the development of the competitive advantage via networking communications and engagements while implementing marketing strategies (Gharehbashloni & Seify, 2014). Small business leaders should identify, develop, and

execute new business opportunities to build relationships with primary customers within targeted market segments.

Customer relationship marketing (CRM) is a new paradigm and is important to the service industry for leverage of customer and business value (Şahin et al., 2017). The CRM strategy is an integration of marketing, sales, and customer service with the objective of delivering customer value to enhance marketing productivity (Soliman, 2011). Soliman (2011) advanced the aspects of CRM, which include a primary focus on customers, organizational efficiency, and customer knowledge management, help businesses achieve a high marketing performance. Small restaurant owners should execute a CRM strategy to evolve marketing communications, drive brand engagement, and generate profit. Small restaurant owners should invest in CRM technology and systems, to improve electronic and direct marketing programs, enhance prediction models, upgrade planning systems, improve organizational structures, and increase profitability margins (Soliman, 2011). Small restaurant owners should implement CRM and lead maturation to attain new customers for targeted growth. Small business owners should apply relationship marketing to maintain and improve competitive position in the market (Pick, & Eisend, 2016). Soliman (2011) conducted a study of sales administration and reported 50% of companies, which had a profit of more than one million dollars in sales, had owners who practiced CRM.

Product, price, promotion, and place are the traditional 4P concepts in relationship marketing for small business owners to improve its competitive position in the market (Pick & Eisend, 2016). Driven marketing approaches involve the initiation of product

strategies that foster the development of product positioning, formulation, advertising, and pricing. Changing the product might be necessary to maintain or grow market share because product characteristics are also factors of brand loyalty (Schmidt & Ralph, 2014; Zailskaite-Jaste & Kuvykaite, 2013). Customers' positive perception of a brand cultivates relationship-marketing strategies (Radu, 2013). It is imperative that small restaurant owners work to influence customer loyalty while investing efforts to feverishly increase sales through searching for and fostering relationships with external stakeholders within the targeted population. Business owners can use products and brands to invigorate and encourage customer relationships (Miles et al., 2016).

Effective marketing strategies should include leveraging products and services to meet customer needs. Marketing owners who implement relationship marketing may improve marketing productivity, increase profits from 25-85%, and decrease customer attrition by 5% (Khan, 2014a). According to Khan (2014a) small business owners should use customer retention to obtain advantages from a turnover perspective, and a costs perspective. Khan (2014a) conveyed owners should track the fragmentation of consumer markets and customer buying patterns in the development and growth of relationship marketing.

The close relationship small and medium-sized enterprise leaders have with customers along with market orientation affords them the competitive advantage over larger businesses (Laukkanen, Tuominen, Reijonen & Hirvonen, 2016). The process of relationship marketing requires the knowledge base of customers' economic, emotional, and moral needs, and mechanisms to serve and satisfy customers efficiently (Radu,

2013). Small restaurant owners should use relationship marketing to identify existing and

potential customer segments and to invest in new market segments (Neslund, 2014).

Employing relationship-marketing strategies that encompass long-term communication

processes to capture customers' point of view makes customers loyal to the organization

(Omidinia, Matin, Jandaghi, & Sepahyar, 2014). From a broader perspective, positive

relationships and customer satisfaction help attract new customers generate referrals,

expedite the rollout of new products and services, and improves brand equity (Jaisinghani

& Kanjilal, 2017). Positive customer relationships are formed from the process of CRM

because CRM creates customer awareness and customer engagement and allow business

owners to establish long-term, resource-manageable, and profitable customer

relationships (Şahin et al., 2017).

Proper implementation of relationship marketing helps business managers

successfully attract and maintain profitable clients and establish relationships with

manufacturers and distributors for optimization of organizational, financial performances

(Radu, 2013). Relationship marketing is a way to establish a unique long-term

relationship with customers to drive business equities (Dust, Resick & Mawritz, 2014).

Small business owners should pay attention to customer needs as they design, implement,

and coordinate product strategies and other marketing initiatives; the maintenance of

customer interaction is important (Obadia, Vida, & Pla-Barber, 2017). Small restaurant

owners should align the philosophy of relationship marketing with a business and

marketing plan to cut costs, increase incomes, and generate intangible benefits (Radu,

2013).

Retaining current partners and customers pose high economic options (Tandon, Sharma, & Bhulal, 2017). Specializing in the acquisition of new customers and retention of existing customers can help small business owners leverage relationships to maximize revenue opportunities. Customer loyalty is linked to financial success and profitability Umashankar, Ward, and Dahl (2017). Fundamental components of strategic relationship marketing are an increase in profitability and sustainable competitive advantage for service organizations (Paliouras & Siakas, 2017). Relationship marketing involves market success and profitability; small restaurant owners must be positioned to influence existing customer relationships and adjust services, products or strategies as needed (Jensen & Cornwell, 2017). Creating a systematic follow-up process for all networking activities, maximizing referrals, and focusing on a target market are strategies small restaurant owners should implement to improve marketing activities. Evaluating existing products, services, market segments and customer targets, as well as profitability can ascertain the need for new products and services.

Relationship marketing presents a strategic response to businesses in attaining competitive advantages and commitment with customers (Meyer, Lin, Jiajun & Tsui, 2017). Understanding and responding to consumer needs, operating in a competitive environment, and consumers' preferences are centralities of marketing (Sarathy & Banalieva, 2014). Small restaurant owners should make efforts to measure the value of each customer (Radu, 2013). Business managers should take advantage of complaints from customers and use it as a marketing tool to build long-term customer relationships (Haislip, & Richardson, 2017).

In relationship marketing, strategic competitive advantage involves satisfying existing customers through buyer-seller relationships and increasing corporate profitability (Khan, 2014a). Bilateral relationships, seller-maintained relationships, and buyer-maintained relationships are categories of buyer-seller relationships business owners can use to incorporate relationship-marketing tool and build partnerships with important business–to–business customers (Khan, 2014a). From a sales management perspective, managers apply relationship marketing to various marketing activities directed toward developing long-term relationships, trust, and communication with customers (Khan, 2014a). Client orientation, trust, commitment, teamwork, innovation, flexibility, and results orientation, which are shared values related to the development of relationship marketing orientation, should align with marketing strategies (Hyoseon, 2017). Developing relationship-marketing programs and valuing customers across cultures are important (Zongchao Cathy & Stacks, 2017). Relationship marketing helps businesses thrive in the market and guard competition (Henneberg et al., 2015).

Small restaurant owners should have their sales and management team review marketing campaigns, consumer frequency marketing programs, and sales activities relating to data about business partnerships when applying relationship marketing (Khan, 2014a). The sales management team should conduct a review to seek information on the competitiveness of the firm, transaction cost, financial performance, and marketing productivity (Khan, 2014a). Influencing customers through relationship marketing to achieve sales volume and margin targets may provide small businesses the competitive advantage in the marketplace. Relationship marketing represents a win-win situation for

buyers and sellers and helps guide the needs and interests of current customers with a focus on building positive relationships (Zhang, Watson IV, Palmatier & Dant, 2016).

Relationship marketing focuses on enhancing, retaining, and maintaining relationships with existing customers (Vivek et al., 2012); when small restaurant owners implement relationship marketing as a strategic business plan, they should ensure that they are also developing relationships with distributors, suppliers, and public institutions (Khan, 2014a). The high level of customer engagement that encompasses a relationship-marketing strategy is pertinent to business owners because it leads to customer retention (Paliouras & Siakas, 2017). Commitment and trust are essential for promoting long-term relationships via the relationship marketing approach (Grönroos, 2017).

Resource Advantage

The aspect of resource-advantage theory supports the notion that valuable resources influence marketing strategy and export performance (Magnusson et al., 2013). The objective of the resource-advantage theory is superior financial performance (Kunieda, Okada, & Shibata, 2016). Sustainable marketing and economic growth are cross-functional disciplines in resource advantage theory (Kamboj & Rahman, 2017). Operational practices of an organization around the actions of competitors and suppliers and consumers' behavior are concepts of resource advantage theory (Thoeni, Marshall & Campbell, 2016).

Marketing is a solution for small businesses to distribute scarce resources equitably (Baker, 2013). Scarce resources and lack of specialized structures and competences may hinder the implementation of marketing strategies and marketing

planning for small businesses (Miles et al., 2016). Marketing strategies that encompass sustainability align with resource-advantage theory (Du, Yu, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2017).

Resources and high financial performance are concepts of resource-advantage theory (Shin, Mendoza, Hawkins, & Choi, 2017). Resource-advantage theory is a theory centered on competition, theoretical practices of business, and marketing strategy (Junge, Severgnini, & Sørensen, 2016). Resource diversity and market segments for competitive advantage and disadvantage are important in resource-advantage marketing strategy (Foroudi, Gupta, Nazarian, & Duda, 2017).

Profitability

To accelerate profitability levels and be successful, owners have to engage customers in product deployment, which helps drive the market (Swenson et al., 2012). Examination and analysis of best market opportunities and creation of profitable strategies are elements of strategic marketing planning (Clemons, Kauffman, & Weber, 2014). Small restaurant owners should create marketing strategies from the analysis of customer segmentation to augment sales and profits (Dziadkowiec & Rood, 2015).

Marketing strategies affect financial outcomes for small businesses (Kiser, Prager, & Scott, 2016). Business leaders can use an effective marketing strategy as a tool in target market dominance and increasing sales (Jemaiyo, 2013). Small business leaders can gauge market attractiveness based on growth rate and profitability (Eryigit, 2017). Creating opportunity, multiplying the effect, leveraging relationships, and making profits are elements of a systematic framework used to measure and execute entrepreneurial marketing (Swenson et al., 2012). Evaluating a business idea and the dimensions of a

product are ways leaders create growth opportunities and develop responsive marketing
strategies (Swenson et al., 2012).

According to Swenson et al. (2012) entrepreneurs implement the multiplying
effect to identify and partner with business stakeholders who have a significant influence
on the target market. Leveraging relationships with advisors, suppliers, and customers
may increase business success (Swenson et al., 2012). Small restaurant owners should
use marketing strategies to help identify specific buying and use trends of customers and
modify product specifications for profitability (Swenson et al., 2012). Understanding use
patterns may allow owners to understand customers' needs and how to deliver value and
recognize marketing opportunities (Swenson et al., 2012). Small restaurant owners
should apply market information management to grow market value and enhance
organizational performance (see Mourad, 2017).

Marketing activities should involve the analysis of data for efficiency, marketing
program pricing, and cost savings recommendations. Implementing an analytical system
that includes a reporting mechanism for ROI, revenue projections, and industry and
market developments are important. Using marketing metrics to forecast profitability and
evaluate organizational performance are important for marketing managers because
forecasting allows managers to analyze marketing effectiveness and ROI outcomes
(Wenxian, Rongshan, & Nambiar, 2014).

Business owners should continuously use marketing to increase profitability and
growth through the assessment of market research and customer dynamics (Groenewald,
Prinsloo, & Pelser, 2014). Business leaders must conduct a profitabilityanalyses to

determine if marketing strategies permit allocation of resources and innovative ways to

foster and retain customer relationships (Im & Ha, 2013). Allocating higher expenditures

for an effective marketing innovation strategy and technology development is

recommended for small businesses, based on study results (Çetinkaya Bozkurt & Kalkan,

2014).

Small restaurant owners' innovative-oriented strategies and marketing activities

help increase organizational sustainability (Çetinkaya Bozkurt & Kalkan, 2014).

Marketing strategies should include quick product launches and the identification of new

market dimensions needed to pursue and drive customers, and successfully drive profits

(Swenson et al., 2012). Small restaurant owners should design marketing practices on

cross-functional and cross-buy opportunities to develop strong customer relationships and

drive sales (Estrella-Ramón, 2017). Development and execution of marketing strategies

and promotional activity through the marketing mix may help achieve revenue targets for

small businesses.

For-profit and growth, business owners must implement a marketing strategy such

as designing and redesigning companies' products and services to sustain competitive

advantage (Josephson, Johnson, & Mariadoss, 2016). Small business leaders should

create information gatekeepers for product marketing to drive profits (Billett & Yu,

2016). Andrew (2011) opined significant gaps between marketing expectations and

performance satisfaction are barriers called tactical soup and failure to launch. *Tactical

soup* is when business leaders do not adequately prioritize strategies on how to generate

revenue and profitability through marketing activities, whereas *failure to launch* is when

business owners do not effectively implement marketing resources for growth and profitability (Andrew, 2011). Small restaurant owners should review current marketing strategies to avoid tactical soup (Andrew, 2011). Leaders should (a) put every marketing tactic under the microscope, (b) calculate the value received from the marketing activity, and (c) schedule ongoing maintenance of the activity (Andrew, 2011). Reviewing current strategies will allow leaders to explore the correlation of between marketing activity and business outcome (Andrew, 2011). Advanced email and direct mail campaigns must be in a reliable and accessible database and maintained continuously.

Small restaurant owners should use marketing resources and convert business ideas into revenue to avoid failure to launch (Andrew, 2011). Facilitating an engagement with prospective clients and maintaining brand awareness are marketing tools business owners can implement for growth and profitability (Andrew, 2011). The marketing channels small business owners use should incorporate customer feedback, as a way to increase customer profitability and influence corporate profitability (Akbas, Chao, & Koch, 2017). Marketing owners should use customer base and relationship with customers to create marketing programs and initiate profitability (Hsin-Hui, et al., 2017).

The effectiveness of marketing strategies is measured by analysis of profits and sales (Jemaiyo, 2013). Eighty percent of the senior managers ranked branding, marketing, and sales as important success factors for business (Andrew, 2011). Sales promotions foster short run or long run profitability (Reid, Thompson, Mavondo, & Brunsø, 2015). Profitability levels relating to advertising are measured by past sales figures with past advertising expenditures (Cheng, 2014). Developing a marketing plan that creates new

product concepts based on customer insights and customer innovative recommendations may help small business owners improve the performance of products and become more profitable (Walker, 2016). Brand execution is essential to long-term growth, whereas customer insights are valuable in guiding innovation and resource allocation (Agnihotri et al., 2017).

Profitable customer loyalty, business performance metrics, and marketing-mix adaptation correlate to the following marketing-mix variables: product, promotion and advertising, price, distribution, sales, and sales force (Kumar, Sharma, Shah, & Rajan, 2013; Magnusson et al., 2013). Profitable customer loyalty is fundamental to business success and involves customers who exhibit attitudinal loyalty and provide profits for a firm (Kumar et al., 2013; Magnusson et al., 2013). Increased customer loyalty contributes to business profitability (Jaisinghani & Kanjilal, 2017). Marketers should implement a combination of promotional and advertising strategies to reach profitability goals (Kumar et al., 2013; Magnusson et al., 2013). Small restaurant owners should develop pricing strategies around business objectives, market conditions, and customer portfolios, as they align marketing strategies (Kumar et al., 2013; Magnusson et al., 2013). Effective marketing strategies can help small business owners enhance the understanding of its position in the marketplace (Zheng, 2017). Effective sales promotions implemented by owners will optimize pricing strategies; sales performance is an important indicator of customer loyalty (Kumar et al., 2013; Magnusson et al., 2013).

Small restaurant owners should develop marketing plans around customer loyalty programs across multiple platforms. Examining various distribution networks will help

leaders build a loyal customer base and more customer segments, which are primary marketing strategies (Kumar et al., 2013; Magnusson et al., 2013). As small restaurant owners assess market needs, marketing specifications and measure organizational growth, product innovation should represent the voice of the customer through a strategic and operational marketing process (Cherchem, 2012). For small businesses, major components of marketing innovation are increased profits and market shares, and sustainable competitive advantage (Çetinkaya Bozkurt & Kalkan, 2014).

Small business owners use corporate profitability and product characteristics as a dimension of relationship marketing to connect with existing satisfied customers (Khan, 2014a). Customer insights can help foster the process of building a valuable long-term asset, brand equity, and a platform for business growth (Agnihotri et al., 2017). Financial and operational accountability should align with marketing initiatives and strategies. Small restaurant owners must measure the effectiveness of marketing program and strategies quantitatively and qualitatively. Small restaurant owners can use business and marketing strategies to shape, achieve, and sustain the competitive advantage of their portfolio (Jemaiyo, 2013). Zaman et al. (2012) proposed business owners who apply internal marketing programs influence market orientation, business performance, and profitability. High brand image, high company image, and a well-maintained profit margin are success factors that may help small restaurant owners maintain its market shares and profit (Cheng, 2014). Small restaurant owners may have a competitive advantage on sales and marketing opportunities when the brand image is high because of customers' brand loyalty and awareness (Cheng, 2014). Customers' positive perception

of products and services attributes to high company image and the quality of products and services delivery (Cheng, 2014). Owners should continue to analyze and evaluate brand equity strategies and marketing approaches for profit margin (Cheng, 2014).

The focus of a marketing plan for small restaurant owners should be to create customer equity development and brand valuation to facilitate the innovation of new products (Sarathy & Banalieva, 2014). Implementing creative project plans and strategic marketing plans tailored to build products and brand equity may help small restaurant owners achieve annual profit and volume. Conducting a market analysis when implementing a strategic marketing plan, is important for small restaurant owners, because using marketing analysis will help position image and brand awareness (Janicic & Jankovic, 2014). As marketing opportunities change, owners should stay current on trends and consumers attributes for organizational growth and profitability (Schmidt & Ralph, 2014). Small business owners should create strategic marketing plans to target and grow revenue in each channel effectively. Leaders should continuously assess the effectiveness of strategic marketing initiatives and market channel. Small restaurant owners should become familiar with the attributes of competitive products and design new products and programs in current and evolving markets to support organizational sales and profitability.

Sales process, marketing communication, and strategic marketing are essential elements of effective profitability and operational execution and (Bierbooms, Van Oers, & Bongers, 2014). Bierboom et al. (2014) senior business leaders should create a marketing communications plan and target both markets and position products.

Successful marketing strategies may help leaders strengthen the market orientation and increase profitability (Bierbooms et al., 2014). Small restaurant managers must drive a customer retention strategy along with a marketing strategy to attain brand goals and concentrate on increasing profits and revenue. Small business leaders should seek opportunities and threats through the examination of how economic development of emerging markets over time affects marketing strategies (Sarathy & Banalieva, 2014). The chief marketing officer's role is important to evaluate business performances such as a low asset turnover and high profitability (Sarathy & Banalieva, 2014).

Small Restaurant Size and Survival

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), almost all full-service restaurants are small, businesses with 98% having fewer than 100 employees. The majority of restaurants operate independently, and seven out of 10 restaurants are single unit operations (National Restaurant Association, 2015). According to the SBA (2015), nine out of 10 restaurants are small businesses, and 50% of small businesses fail within the first 5 years. In challenging economic times, full-service restaurants are the most significantly impacted segment within the restaurant industry, and owners must be proactive in understanding business cycles and strategic plans (Jiana-Fu, Yi-Chiun, Chen-Feng, & Shao-Jen, 2017).

Researchers disagree on the exact reason small restaurants fail and attribute failure rates to many internal and external factors, indicating a need for additional research (Jiang & Erdem, 2017). Moorthy et al. (2017) agreed with the need for research because some restaurant owners do not consider how internal factors correlate with

profit, costs, and overall survival. Similarly, Lo, King, and Mackenzie (2017) discussed how factors like poor quality products, organizational culture, and marketing contribute to restaurant success. There is a need for further research considering the link between effective allocation and utilization of marketing funds and restaurant outperformance of competition in troubled economic times (Jiana-Fu et. al, 2017).

Emerging Marketing Strategies

Researchers have cited that marketing is a principal factor in the success or failure of small restaurants (Perry, 2014). Restaurants that targeted married couples and families between the ages of 30-49 were the heaviest users of social media, an emerging marketing approach (Zheng, 2017). Despite researcher agreement that digital marketing communications have become critical to CRM, many small restaurants are overwhelmed with the choices and lack the resources to implement new marketing strategies (Perry, 2014).

Mun and Jang (2017) studied the effectiveness of restaurants' social media messages and suggested that restaurants use eye-catching keywords and photos of menu items or special events in status updates. Restaurants can gain an advantage by establishing a friendship type relationship with customers via social media rather than pushing marketing messages. After engaging customers through sharing recipes, asking for feedback on menu items, or discussing community involvement restaurants can balance additional posts with promotions or marketing materials (Mun & Jang, 2017).

Wellton, Jonsson, Walter, and Svingstedt (2017) found that restaurants could use social networking to reduce costs and maintain a competitive advantage. Despite an

inconsistent trend among which social media platform restaurants used most, restaurant managers reported that social networking was beneficial as a low-cost advertising and marketing tactic (Wellton et al., 2017). Potential advantages of social networking included finding employees, menu feedback, promotion, and maintaining direct feedback with customers (Wellton et al., 2017).

Emerging versus traditional media. The Internet has been around for over 25 years, and the recent surge of social media sites has contributed to the evolution of consumer and company interaction (Fry, 2014). Katona and Sarvary (2014) defined social media as the way in which people interact to create, share, and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communications and networks. Previous researchers agreed that companies who used e- marketing (social media, emails, web sites) were able to reach consumers quicker, but questions still linger regarding effectiveness and profitability of such methods. Companies must understand how to reach consumers in the most effective and efficient manners because customers are more business savvy. Lepkowska-White (2017) found that businesses want to use the marketing strategy that will allow them to reach more consumers, increase sales, and reduce costs.

Lepkowska-White (2017) used a case study to examine a multi-media campaign regarding data from a company's loyalty program. Although Danaher and Dagger found targeted email effective, they concluded more traditional media such as direct mail, television, and radio were the most useful types of media. Their study only examined one company with limited online shopping options for consumers and only researched a one month-long promotional campaign.

Restaurants, Social Media, and Return on Investment

Businesses are constantly trying to determine the most effective way to engage with consumers and increase market share. Social media plays an integral role in the marketing ecosystem and is at the forefront of most scholarly and professional debates. Kim, Koh, Cha, and Lee (2015) studied the impact of social media on a restaurant's value within the restaurant industry and found a positive linear relationship between a restaurant's social media activity and firm value. Increased positive customer engagement via social media can influence a restaurant's value within financial markets (Kim et al., 2015).

Despite the consumer-generated social networking site era, questions remain as to how these sites generate revenue and if that same business model could reach customers (Lee, 2017). Most SNS sites use either site advertising or a subscription fee to generate revenue, which leads to sustainability issues and concerns in identifying customers on sites that require subscriptions. Lee (2017) analyzed various factors to determine if a profitable revenue stream could be attributed to SNS and determined the costs of using social media are low, but there is still a lack of tangible metrics.

One of the primary concerns is the value of social media like Facebook, and most business owners have a difficult time measuring the ROI of social media efforts. Companies are skeptical due to lack of knowledge, inability to measure, and cost of technology-related resources associated with social media (Bufquin, DiPietro, Park, & Partlow, 2017). There is a lack of scholarly information regarding how social media can influence overall sales strategies. Social media continues to influence consumer

purchasing decisions, and sales firms realize the benefit of having a social media presence. Organizations must put effort into social media to ensure prompt responses to customers, accurate information, and positive feedback (Jiang, & Erdem, 2017).

Guo and Zheng (2017) revealed social media users could influence others' purchasing decisions, and a new link exists between consumer shopping and social media referrals via posts, tweets, or blogs. Mobile phones have added another dimension to social commerce push marketing concepts like group buying and co-creation of user-generated material. All of these innovative technologies and marketing methods require companies to develop multi-channel messages to use social media tools effectively and reach target audiences (Guo & Zheng, 2017).

It has been difficult to measure social media efforts, but Jiang and Erdem (2017) created the Social Media Performance Model (SMPM) to analyze social media efforts of organizations. Metrics included a daily activity like Facebook likes, posts, tweets, retweets, along with factors including website views and new visitors to pages to determine engagement, reach, and frequency. Companies must understand that social media usage is dynamic, and the monitoring and evaluating of activity must be continuous to create the most appropriate messages for the audience (Jiang & Erdem, 2017).

Small Business Marketing

Marketing strategy. Kukanja, Gomezelj Omerzel, and Kodrič (2017) used a qualitative study to analyze small businesses marketing methods and what influences small business owners to pursue other marketing tactics. Small businesses owners realize

their lack of marketing skills but do not know how to use current marketing tactics and are afraid to try new ventures without experience or resources. Cronin-Gilmore's in-depth analysis provides support for the need to further understand small business marketing and social media. Marketing researchers want to understand how attitudes impact consumer purchasing decisions, and the real influence customer satisfaction has on future purchasing decisions (Qi, Chandrashekaran, & Yu, 2015). Qi et al. (2015) studied restaurant customer satisfaction and determined that consumers expressed uncertain satisfaction if they had prior expectations about promotions.

Innovative marketing. Salehzadeh, Khazaei Pool, Tabaeeian, Amani, and Mortazavi (2017) conducted a 4-year-long study of marketing executives to evaluate the usage of social media tools by small businesses. The response indicated that 83% of marketing professionals were using social media, with the most popular being Facebook and Twitter. Small businesses owners felt that social media was a critical component to the success of companies and extremely valuable to marketing and business plans (Salehzadeh et al., 2017).

Small businesses can reach a larger market and create more brand awareness by spreading marketing messages via social media. This inexpensive marketing tactic can assist small restaurants through boosting sales and reaching new customers (Jiana-Fu et. al., 2017). Lo, King, and Mackenzie (2017) agreed small businesses lag behind when competing with larger corporations' marketing budgets. The progression of social media and mobile marketing reduces that financial advantage, offering a level playing field to reach and engage target segments (Lo et al. (2017).

Traditional advertising methods are simply not as pertinent in today's market because customers can fast-forward through television ads, block Internet pop-ups, and subscribe to ad-free radio. Companies must integrate pull marketing methods like opting in for blogs and providing useful content on social media sites to engage customers (Lo et al. (2017). The use of online videos and QR codes became a marketing staple with the rise in consumer use of mobile devices. Social media and mobile marketing are an integral part of a company's marketing plan, especially for those firms that cannot afford strategies that are more elaborate (Lo et al. (2017).

Schaupp and Belanger (2014) found that small businesses lack the resources or time to establish a traditional marketing plan. Social media can assist small business owners to gain business leads, awareness, and build traffic at a significantly lower cost than traditional marketing (Schaupp & Belanger, 2014). Sixty-six percent of small business owners realize that social media is vital to their business success but struggle to measure the value of social media with only 37% of small business owners feeling proficient in social media (Schaupp & Belanger, 2014).

Marketing Strategies and Social Change

Organizations can use social media to access consumer needs and requests, as well as communicate sustainability and business plans to customers. Cause-related marketing is a corporate social responsibility program where a company donates to a nonprofit cause when a customer purchases from the company or donates to the cause (Hanks et al., 2015). Small restaurants can create social change by implementing cause-related marketing strategies within their local markets. When restaurants participate in

cause-related marketing, it helps to build a positive brand image and increase engagement with customers (Hanks et al., 2015).

Many companies consider cause-related marketing a necessary step in achieving social responsibility and maintaining an ethical appearance. One method of cause-related marketing occurs when a business donates to a specific charity when consumers make purchases at their organization (Vanhamme, Lindgreen, Reast, & Popering, 2012). Hanks et al. 2015 found that consumers were more likely to donate if the restaurant offered to match the donation. Vanhamme et al. (2012) indicated there are benefits linked to cause-related marketing including sales increase, brand loyalty, and employee motivation. The study supports the need for organizations to research target markets and determine the most effective tactics to use in cause-related marketing (Vanhamme et al., 2012).

Socially aware business leaders recognize the increased benefits of corporate social responsibility (CSR), but there is a lack of research regarding how CSR motivates consumers' future behaviors. Öberseder, Schlegelmilch, and Gruber (2011) examined how CSR influences purchasing behaviors while considering social desirability basis. Despite consumers' positive attitudes toward socially responsible companies, this did not translate into buying from that company (Öberseder et al., 2011).

Consumer Research and Marketing Innovation

Customer sentiment can be a difficult concept to measure, but the advent of social media has created such a large pool of public opinion. Gunter, Koteyko, and Atanasova (2014) examined potential marketing research benefits to identify, track, and respond to thoughts about brands and products via social media. The online era gave power to

consumers and could lead to a deeper knowledge source for market research and a substitute for traditional market research methods. Concerns over the reliability of online posts do exist, but Gunter et al. concluded that most users' express honest opinions and any overly extreme thoughts are self-corrected by a higher quantity of genuine posts.

In 2011, social media surpassed email as a communication tool and began to surface as a marketing research tool (Rossiter, 2017). Despite potential drawbacks, such as the validity of participant information and control of a moderator, Guo and Zheng (2017) found valuable data could come from actual consumers who want to share information about their experiences and products. Social media research avoids some costly expenses of traditional focus groups like travel costs, paper surveys, and venue rentals; however online users may request additional validation from researchers as to how their information will be used and protected (Guo, & Zheng, 2017).

Rossiter (2017) suggested that social media tools like online focus groups could enhance but not replace traditional research tools and it is up to the researcher to know how to use all of the tools available to them. The concept of gaining insight from the voice of the consumer (voc) has been around for decades with customer service representatives logging and recording phone conversations and using that feedback in marketing and business decision-making process. Henderson agreed with Gunter et al. (2014) that social media does have challenges ensuring the reliability of selecting the most appropriate participants. Henderson noted this challenge has plagued traditional research in the past but is overcome through additional validation tools. In research situations where time is vital, traditional focus groups and phone surveys would take too

long, considering that 500,000 tweets in six hours can provide immediate data to researchers (Rossiter, 2017).

Transition

In Section 1, I included both the problem statement and purpose statement, along with the nature of study used to rationalize my usage of a qualitative method and case study. Section 1 also comprised of the conceptual framework, limitations, interview questions, limitations and delimitations for the study. The literature review includes literature concerning brand equity model, small business, including sections of small restaurants and owners, profitability, and successful marketing strategies.

In Section 2, I expound on the purpose of the study, data analysis, research method and design, the population and sampling, data collection instruments and technique, the role of the researcher, ethical research, reliability and validity participants, and data organization technique. In Section 3, I expound on the introduction, implications for social change, recommendations for action, presentation of findings, future research, application of professional practice, and conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore marketing strategies small business restaurant owners use to sustain profitability beyond the initial 5 years. The targeted population was three restaurant small businesses owners in southeastern United States who have used a marketing strategy to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. The implications for positive social change could include an increase in local employment, higher living standards, decrease in homelessness, and prevention of anxiety related health issues. As a result, these efforts may aid in decreasing poverty and crime and provide financial stability to residents of southeastern United States.

Role of the Researcher

The role of a researcher in the data collection process is to use reliable and valid data collection instruments for accurate representation (Ridder, 2017). In the data collection process, I collected and analyzed qualitative data to evaluate outcomes that support marketing strategies for profitability in small businesses. A researcher should interpret the data and limit personal bias to circumvent ethical concerns that may relate to reliability, authenticity, and validity (Ulriksen & Dadalauri, 2016). The process included providing a clear and concise explanation of the goals and objectives of the research to each participant and furnishing clarity of language and content to eliminate incorrect analysis. According to Chen, Van Der Lans, and Phan (2017), problems associated with word ambiguity and the limitations of everyday language are from lack of clarity. I controlled my reactions during the interviews to help mitigate bias. I am not and have

never been a small business owner. I do know many small business owners so this subject is of interest to me. I do have a desire to open a small business in the future. I frequently support small restaurants in southeastern United States. I have a great passion for small businesses in the community and hope to assist others to succeed in their entrepreneurship.

I have read the Belmont Protocol Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Also, I have taken the National Institutes of Health web-based training course as a means to certify compliance with ethical standards and the protection of human research participants. I employed an interview protocol, which aided in ensuring consistency and clarity of questioning of the participants. Cheng, Wang, Zhang, and Zhao (2017) suggested that researchers using the qualitative method depend on interview protocols as an instrument to achieve commonality and reliability. The study involved data collection that may provide performance trends and marketing strategies regarding the success or failure of small businesses in southeastern United States. A qualitative approach to the study helped me explore the interdependence between marketing strategies and profitability for small restaurants operating in southeastern United States.

Participants

Qualitative researchers focus on a smaller number of participants with a deeper exploration of their experience to gain in-depth understanding missed by quantitative research (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Falasca, Zhang, Conchar, and Li (2017) screened study participants for experience, current role, and knowledge of research topic and

acquired prior consent of each participant. I used a similar eligibility criterion. Prospective participants for this study met the following criteria: they (a) had experience with marketing strategies to sustain their business beyond 5 years, (b) were a small business restaurant owner, and (c) had been in business for at least 5 years. Screening of small restaurant owners ensured alignment between the participants and the overall research question (Bundy, 2017).

Similar to Shi, Sridhar, Grewal, and Lilien (2017) study, access to three successful small restaurant owners occurred through personal research and local business directories. I fostered a working relationship with potential participants through personal communication at the onset of the study via e-mail, Facebook, phone, and in-person visits. Other working relationship strategies included screening participants' eligibility, explaining the study's intent, and asking them to sign a consent form at the beginning of the relationship. Interviewers should create a relationship with participants, ask open-ended questions, understand how to keep interviewees focused, and limit bias during the interview (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Allowing research subjects to participate at a convenient location and time can promote a positive outlook regarding the study (Lunnay Borlagdan, McNaughton, & Ward, 2015). Interviews of participants took place at their restaurants during a time when the business was not open and when the participant was not distracted, which encouraged willingness and full disclosure.

The participants of this study included small restaurant owners who have used marketing strategies to sustain their business beyond 5 years. Similar to Shi et al. (2017), I used a small participant base to explore marketing strategies small restaurant owners

use to sustain profitability beyond the initial 5 years. The chosen participant group for this study aligned with the overall research focus of determining what marketing strategies small business restaurant owners use to sustain profitability beyond the initial 5 years.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

Qualitative research aims to dig deeper into participants' experiences by focusing on the *how* (Filip, Jackowicz & Kozłowski, 2017). The qualitative method allowed me to explore what marketing strategies small restaurant owners use to sustain profitability beyond the initial 5 years. Bundy (2017) used a qualitative method to explore the perceptions and experiences of consumers. I also employed the same method when exploring the perceptions and experiences of small restaurant owners. Using a qualitative approach allowed me to gather information and analyze participants' answers. By using this method, I provide valuable information in establishing best marketing strategies for small restaurant owners.

Qualitative researchers gain in-depth knowledge by focusing on a smaller number of participants with a deeper exploration of their experiences (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). If I had used the quantitative research method, I would have missed these experiences. A quantitative approach would not have allowed me to frame questions in an open-ended manner and would not have permitted flexibility like the qualitative approach (Long et al., 2017). A quantitative approach would have limited the in-depth responses from participants, which would have been necessary to gain an understanding of how and why

small restaurant owners use marketing strategies to sustain profitability beyond the initial 5 years.

Bailey (2014) suggested a qualitative approach in marketing and consumer research, which includes interviews to gain expert insight into consumer motivation. Qualitative researchers also aim to provide a deeper understanding of the meaning behind participants' responses. Data from a quantitative study would not provide this. Quantitative or mixed methods studies may indicate success through collected data numbers, but they do not tell the *how* or *why* story that qualitative research aims to provide (Huhn Nunes, Sabino de Freitas, & Leão Ramos, 2018). I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences. A quantitative or mixed methods approach would not have yielded the desired data. Fuller (2017) suggested the most appropriate research method depends on the research question and goals. I wanted to obtain a deep understanding of marketing strategies small restaurant owners use to sustain profitability beyond the initial 5 years.

Research Design

I used a multiple case study design to explore marketing strategies that small restaurant owners used to sustain profitability beyond the initial 5 years. A multiple case study approach is preferred over a single case study when comparing subjects' practices to gain an enhanced understanding of those practices (Wahyuni, 2012). A multiple case study design allowed me to gather in-depth responses via open-ended interviews with small restaurant owners who used marketing strategies to sustain profitability beyond the initial 5 years.

Case studies are the most appropriate research design when the goal is to explore a complex concept via an intensive real-world analysis (DeMassis & Kotlar, 2014). El Haddad (2015) agreed that a case study design is most appropriate when there is a lack of research on a problem within a specific sector. I explored the marketing strategies of small restaurant owners, which had not been addressed in previous studies. A multiple case study approach also allows researchers to use multiple subjects and data sources to analyze a phenomenon in its natural setting (Wahyuni, 2012).

Similar to de Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang (2017), I triangulated the interview data by reviewing data including marketing strategy documentation, customer base information, and financial records. Wahyuni (2012) suggested the use of documentation for triangulation to answer the research questions. Case study researchers use triangulation to enhance validity by using multiple data collection methods with different strengths that compensate for the weaknesses of each other (Sheppard & Vibert, 2016). The exploration of additional data sources balanced any weaknesses found when conducting in-depth interviews.

Other qualitative designs, were not appropriate because they did not include using different methods of collecting data. The phenomenological design includes in-depth interviews so that researchers can understand the lived experiences of participants (Graham, Dixon, & Hazen-Swann, 2016). A narrative or phenomenological design would not permit a substantial contribution to the business environment, given the lack of analysis of data such as marketing strategy documentation, customer base information, and financial records.

Ramadan (2017) suggested that selecting a sample size assists researchers in achieving data saturation. I used member checking to ensure data saturation. To achieve data saturation, a researcher must conduct interviews until new information ceases and participants are providing recurring responses and data (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). I followed the data saturation protocol by interviewing multiple small restaurant owners until no new information was provided.

Population and Sampling

Öberseder et al. (2011) developed a sample population of knowledgeable participants to ensure an appropriate and effective sample size. I selected the population for this study to gain insight from a specific subset of small restaurant owners in southeastern United States. The sample size included a total of three owners of small restaurants located in southeastern United States. The study included the experiences of participants regarding the use of marketing strategies. I used the purposeful sampling method to select the participants for the study. Researchers use purposeful sampling to select participants that fit the criteria required for the study and who will provide adequate information to answer the research question (Wahyuni, 2012).

Qualitative researchers reach data saturation when they receive recurring data and no new data is identified (Marshall et al., 2013). The quality and number of interviews, along with the researcher's experience and sampling method, can affect saturation. I used transcript review to verify accuracy of the participant's responses to the transcriptions. Marshall et al. (2013) suggested conducting interviews until there is no new data. Similar studies reached data saturation with three participants. Similar to Marshall et al., I would

have interviewed additional small restaurant owners to achieve data saturation if new data had continued to develop after interviews with three restaurant owners.

Screening participants ensures alignment between the study sample and the overall research question (Bundy, 2017). Similar to Haenlein and Libai (2017), I screened participants to determine whether they met the criteria of being small restaurant owners who have used marketing strategies to sustain their business beyond 5 years. Lunnay et al. (2015) suggested allowing research subjects to participate at a convenient location and time in order to promote a positive outlook regarding the study. I conducted interviews at the restaurants when they were not operating and when the participants were not distracted to promote willingness and full disclosure.

Ethical Research

It is the researchers' responsibility to build a credible and valid research method by gaining user consent and being clear about the parameters of the study. Researchers' must aim to create work that is ethical and in a reliable setting while providing value to the field (Fry, 2014). I ensured ethical research throughout the doctoral study process via several methods, including completion of the National Institutes of Health's Protecting Human Research Participants training course. I provided each participant with a consent form. I informed the participants, via the consent form, of their right to withdraw either before, during, or after the interview. They could have withdrawn from the interview by contacting me via email or phone. The consent form was used to indicate to participants that participation in the study was voluntary and participants would not receive any compensation.

Lunnay et al. (2015) concluded that researchers must ensure that questions are ethical, and participant solicitation is in-depth and respectful of participants. Each participant was required to sign a consent form that provided ethical protection of the study, researcher, and participants. I saved data both electronically on a portable hard drive and on hard copies to keep in a fireproof safe for 5 years to protect the confidential nature of the interviews. Before I began collecting data, I received the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval number 05-29-18—0652578 to ensure adequate ethical protection of participants. It is vital to remain ethical during research, which can be accomplished by adhering to a governing body, attaining informed consent, informing participants about the role of the researcher, intention for the interview data, and ensuring the privacy of the participants (Qu & Dumay, 2011). I ensured the adequate and ethical protection of participants by keeping all participants' responses confidential via assigned numbers to each interviewee to mitigate bias, respect participants' privacy, and protect their interests. I used assigned interview numbers throughout the study to remove any confidential or personal information about the interviewee or organization and provided confidentiality and security for participants.

Data Collection Instruments

The primary data collection instrument was the researcher for this multiple case study by using semistructured interviews with three small restaurant owners who have used marketing strategies to sustain profitability beyond the initial 5 years in southeastern United States. In-depth interviews, a popular qualitative method tactic, can gain expert insight into the why and how questions about consumer motivation, developing new

services, testing advertising, and exploring the meaning behind these concepts (Bailey, 2014). The semistructured interviews contained 6 open-ended questions to determine how each small restaurant owner used marketing strategies to sustain profitability.

Interviews are an efficient way to gather rich data from participants with different perspectives on the same concept (DeMassis & Kotlar, 2014). I explored what marketing strategies each small restaurant owner used to sustain profitability. Previous restaurant marketing research such as Perry (2014) used semistructured interviews to gain in-depth responses from participants about the usage of marketing tactics. Öberseder et al. (2011) employed a qualitative in-depth interview method to understand the perception consumers have of CSR and actual purchasing behaviors versus agreeing with others that CSR could be an influence. The qualitative method explored the meanings of consumers' actions, perceptions, and values rather than predict future behaviors (Öberseder et al., 2011). Similarly, I used semistructured interviews to explore the meanings of small restaurant owners' experiences and gain an in-depth understanding of the marketing strategies used to sustain profitability beyond the initial 5 years.

I built validity by conducting interviews with open-ended questions to encourage participants to include in-depth responses and true feelings regarding the research topic. Open-ended questions create validity and identify gaps in the current understanding of the subject (Long et al., 2017). Transcript review along with audio comparison of each interview transcript and my notes ensured reliability of the study. A semistructured interview format with an outline allows researchers to divide questions into themes under

examination (Bundy, 2017). An interview guide with research questions assisted in the flow and flexibility of the interviews.

Data collection allows the triangulation of data collected from interviews and enhances the findings and credibility of a study (Wahyuni, 2012). I collected data from the restaurants including marketing strategy documentation, customer base information, and financial records. Documents collected from restaurant owners included formal reports, publications, meeting minutes, social media usage, and other relevant marketing and business materials. This type of document collection can add value to case studies as they provide historical data (El Haddad, 2015). Conducting in-depth interviews and other means of collecting data can create a robust probe into the complex phenomena of what marketing strategies restaurants use to develop a customer base during the first year of operation.

Data Collection Technique

Bundy (2017) conducted one-hour interview sessions recorded via video and audio, with the audio transcribed. I recorded my 30 minutes to 1-hour, face-to-face interviews via Livescribe and then transcribed and analyzed the interviews. Livescribe is a voice-recorder and note-taking smartpen that allows a researcher to record interviews efficiently while taking corresponding notes. The advantage of Livescribe is the audio and written data transfers to your computer as one document for further analysis. A recording device that does not function properly is a disadvantage to this type of data collection technique. I took detailed notes in case the software did not operate.

Interviews are a vital component of all research approaches and used as a primary

method in qualitative research (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Researchers use focus groups in

qualitative research, but focus groups are not a recommended method when exploring

topics that participants may be hesitant to discuss publicly (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

Conducting in-depth interviews encourage participants to divulge real-world experiences

and provide intricate responses (Öberseder et al., 2011). Semistructured interviews elicit

in-depth responses from participants using their verbal and nonverbal communication to

the interviewer, which fosters a deeper understanding of the research topics (Qu &

Dumay, 2011).

Alvesson's localist framework suggested that interviews are a tool permitting

researchers to explore the account of a situated perspective of a phenomenon, and thus

considered interviews as conversations that promote the exchange of knowledge between

two people rather than a simple research tool (Qu & Dumay, 2011). A successful

interview requires pre-planning, listening ability, and extensive note taking while

allowing the most in-depth exposure to participants' experiences (Qu & Dumay, 2011). I

took notes via Livescribe, which transcribed notes, along with the participant's interview

answers. This method includes the ability to analyze the transcripts through review of the

audio recordings and notes. I did not use a pilot study; I engaged participants through

member checking. Member checking enhances the reliability and validity of the data

collection instrument and data collection process (Guest, Namey, Taylor, Eley, &

McKenna, 2017). Member checking gives participants the chance to review the

researcher's analysis of interview responses to determine if that is what they meant

(Haski-Leventhal, Roza, & Meijs, 2017). I made corrections as required to ensure data credibility.

I collected data from the small restaurant owners including marketing strategy documentation, financial records, and customer base information. Collecting data allows the triangulation of data collected from interviews and enhance the findings and credibility of a study (Wahyuni, 2012). Documents collected from small restaurant owners included formal reports, publications, meeting minutes, social media usage, and other relevant marketing and business materials. This type of document collection can add value to case studies as they provide historical data (El Haddad, 2015).

Potential disadvantages of data collection were missing or incorrect documents and lack of participant willingness to provide documentation. All potential participants knew which documentation I would ask them for before the interview. In-depth interviews and collection of data created a robust probe into the complex phenomena of exploring what marketing strategies small restaurant owners use to sustain profitability beyond the initial 5 years.

Data Organization Technique

Livescribe recorded, transcribed, and digitally saved each of the interviews. Graham et al. (2016) recorded and then transcribed each interview before applying data analysis approach which validated the credibility of the findings. Researchers use interview protocols to collect participant's data and as a basis for recognizing and understanding emerging themes of the data. Ritch (2014) examined transcripts utilizing double hermeneutics to understand the participants' application and meaning by

developing themes and grouping data into relationships with other broader themes. Organizing the interview data into emerging themes benefit further data analysis (Rich, 2014). I safeguarded all electronic records, saved, and backed-up data on an external hard drive to maintain an organized and secure environment for 5 years.

Data Analysis

To establish themes within the data, I used transcript review to analyze interview transcripts and methodological triangulation to analyze documentation. Methodological triangulation is a popular method used in qualitative research to collect, store, transcribe, clean, and analyze raw data (Wahyuni, 2012). Methodological triangulation added to the validity and reliability of the study by requiring multiple sources of data. Case study researchers use triangulation to create validity by using multiple data collection methods with different strengths that support the weaknesses of each other (Sheppard & Vibert, 2016). Fusch and Ness (2015) agreed that triangulation increases the depth of research and assists in exploring different perspectives.

Bundy (2017) classified interview data into corresponding themes, concepts, and meanings before using content analysis. I used Microsoft Excel for the database and content and ensured labeling for proper identification. Öberseder et al. (2011) analyzed data through code creation and establishing patterns of the interview responses. Kähr et al. (2010) conducted an exploratory study asking 61 participants to complete three tasks and then coding the information into themes, which allows researchers to explore themes with the frequency of codes. Using this coding method can allow researchers to compare themes with the frequency of codes (Kähr et al., 2016).

Paul, Sankaranarayanan, and Mekoth (2016) used a qualitative method to study how the hard and soft components of marketing within the retail industry impacted young consumers. The researchers coded the interview data and established recurring themes from the interviews Paul et al. (2016). Coding based on Marshall and Rossman's comparison analysis method can link data by comparison and contrast Paul et al. (2016).

I also performed content analysis on the data collected from restaurants to organize themes found within the marketing strategies documentation, customer base information, and financial records. Performing content analysis in qualitative research assists in interpreting the meaning from textual data (Wahyuni, 2012). I applied coding to the themes found during content analysis of the data that aligned with themes found in the interview transcripts. Coding themes assign labels to each recurring topic or theme during the analysis of data and assists in establishing core categories found within the research (Wahyuni, 2012).

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Reliability and Validity

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Reliability

Dependability. Dependability of a study considers how repeatable a study is, based on changes in settings (Wahyuni, 2012). Houghton et al. (2013) suggested researchers increase dependability by maintaining records about research decisions made during the entire study process. I was transparent in describing how I chose participants for the study, the interview methods, analysis software and coding theories, and how the study maintained ethical and unbiased throughout the process. Researchers can increase a study's dependability by being clear in describing the steps taken within the study and

specifying the research methods (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). I maintained participant confidentiality throughout the data collection process via a signed consent form from each participant that includes the steps of the study.

Validity

   Credibility. One method of ensuring credibility is careful selection of the study's population (Wahyuni, 2012). The purposeful sampling method added to the study's credibility because the participants developed their business marketing strategies and efforts. Graham et al. (2016) audio recorded and transcribed each interview before applying Wahyuni (2012) data analysis approach to maintain validity and credibility. Transcript review also increased this study's credibility by giving participants an opportunity to confirm data. I used Livescribe to record my notes and indicate the time taken within the interview's transcript to add to the validity of the study. Similar to Houghton et al. (2013) I was persistent in my observations to demonstrate credibility in research. The data reliability increases through recording data and saving digitally for 5 years.

   Transferability. Thomas and Magilvy (2011) deemed a study valid if the findings applied to other situations, additional research studies, or fields. Wahyuni (2012) agreed that with modifications to settings a study could transfer to other industries. I included transferability of the study results in the findings section and detailed how medium and large businesses, nonprofit organizations, and various industries could apply the results. Increased transferability occurs by providing detailed descriptions so a reader

can apply findings to other situations (Houghton et al., 2013). Previous literature contributes to the transferability of the study and leads to inclusions for future research.

Confirmability. A study's confirmability takes place after establishing dependability, credibility, and transferability and expands on the holistic view of the phenomenon (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). A well-detailed record of the study process and findings can increase others conformability of the study's findings of participant data (Wayhuni, 2012). Saving all procedures, data, and results on a portable hard drive and hard copy in a fireproof safe for 5 years adds to confirmability. Thomas and Magilvy (2011) suggested that others conducting qualitative studies attempt to remove bias by focusing on participant's experiences and their meanings rather than inserting personal insights on a topic. I developed confirmability in the study by asking open-ended questions and recording all interviews to establish validity in the participants' responses. Conducting in-depth interviews and collecting documentation from multiple small restaurant owners achieved data saturation in the study.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2 of this study, I addressed the chosen qualitative research method and the multiple case study design. The decision to use the qualitative research method over quantitative and mixed method was justified through peer reviewed sources. I discussed and justified through peer reviewed sources the choice to use the qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study research design over ethnography, discourse analysis, grounded theory, and phenomenology. I explored marketing strategies that small restaurant owners use to sustain profitability beyond the initial 5 years. Section 2 also details reaching data

saturation with three semistructured interviews and document collection to gain an in-depth understanding of developing and establishing marketing strategies small restaurant owners. In Section 2, I explained and supported every procedure used in this study by previous research.

In Section 3, I offer a comprehensive synopsis of my study, results, and recommendations. This section comprises of an introduction, application to professional practice, presentation of findings, recommendations for action, future research, implications for social change reflections, and conclusion.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore marketing strategies small business restaurant owners use to sustain profitability beyond the initial 5 years. The data came from owner interviews and company documentation at three small restaurants in southeastern United States. The findings showed strategies that the owners used to sustain profitability and attain business success. Three themes emerged from data analysis: (a) social media, (b) word of mouth, and (c) brand differentiation.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question was as follows: What marketing strategies do small business restaurant owners use to sustain profitability beyond the initial 5 years? The participants in the study included three owners of small restaurants. All three participants were located in southeastern United States. To maintain confidentiality and privacy, I utilized codes PT1, PT2, and PT3 instead of using the participant's names in the study. PT1 identified Participant 1, PT2 identified Participant 2, and PT3 identified Participant 3. All owners in the study have extensive experienced in operating a small restaurant in southeastern United States. PT1 has owned and operated the small restaurant for 8 years from inception. PT2 has owned and operated the small restaurant for 6 years from inception. PT3 has owned and operated the small restaurant for 9 years from inception. All participants reliably provided answers to the six questions, which along with the gathered company documents, enabled recognition of the themes during data analysis. I detected three themes after the review of interview responses and collected

company documents. The conceptual framework for the study included brand equity

model (Aaker, 1991). Particular findings from the study verified results from the

literature review and line up with the conceptual framework. Additional findings extend

the body of knowledge and lend insight for future research.

I conducted semistructured, face-to-face interviews with three owners of small

restaurants located in southeastern United States who have used marketing strategies to

sustain profitability beyond 5 years of inception. Semistructured interviews help get

information from different viewpoints and act as a critical source of data collection

(Wahyuni, 2012). I used methodological triangulation to combine the interview

responses along with the collected company documents. Methodological triangulation is

a popular process used in qualitative research to collect, store, transcribe, clean, and

analyze raw data (Wahyuni, 2012). After I reached data saturation, I utilized QSR Nvivo

software to enable data analysis and to identify the strategies that owners of small

restaurants use to sustain profitability beyond 5 years of inception. Three themes emerged

from data analysis which included (a) social media, (b) word of mouth, and (c) brand

differentiation. Table 1 depicts the frequency of the three themes that emerged from data

collection and analysis: (a) social media, (b) word of mouth, and (c) brand differentiation.

Table 1

Emergent Themes: Frequency of Mention by Participants

Themes	PT1	PT2	PT3	Total
Social media	12	8	9	29
Word of mouth	7	8	11	26
Brand differentiation	6	7	6	19

Theme 1: Social Media

All three small restaurant owners agreed on the importance of social media as a successful marketing strategy. All three participants emphasized the importance of having an active social media presence as a marketing strategy. As the participants explained, social media is critical as a marketing strategy as a means of generating and sustaining profits. Zailskaite-Jakste and Kuvykaite (2013) found that revenue and profits increase for businesses' brand equity when social media is used. The three participants identified that their sustainment of profits was due largely to a marketing strategy that relied heavily on social media.

Findings. Fry (2014) stated that small restaurant owners should apply market information via social media management to grow market value, profits, and enhance organizational performance. PT1 explained, "If you don't have a social media presence, you are losing money. Also, I save money by not paying for social media, unlike other marketing means such as radio, TV, and billboard." According to PT2,

> For the past 5 years, I have used a local marketing firm to manage my social media foot, and I have seen a continuous upward annual profit trend and return on my investment for every dollar I have invested in my social media marketing campaign.

PT3 added that "by using social media, I reach my targeted audience, high schoolers, because social media gives me direct access to get them into my restaurant so I can have them as a customer for years to come."

The three participants identified that a social media marketing strategy allows restaurant owners to engage with current and potential customers while having little to no impact on expenditures, which positively impact profits. According to Wellton et al. (2017), restaurants could use social networking to reduce costs and maintain a competitive advantage. PT1 stated that

> many of the other restaurant owners rely on marketing via local newspapers and
> radio which heavily diminishes their profits; on the other hand, I primarily use
> social media marketing which is free and allows me to reinvest in the restaurant.

PT2 noted that "because we are located close to the highway, I initially used billboards as my marketing strategy which was very costly, I later switched to a social media platform which was much cheaper." PT3 added,

> A lot of the other restaurant owners are much older than me, and they do not
> believe in using technology. Instead I embrace change and attempt to reach
> potential customers wherever they are via social media platforms such as
> Facebook and Twitter.

The finding that small restaurant owners' usage of social media as a marketing strategy to sustain profits confirms other peer reviewed studies from the literature review. The finding confirms social media is a pertinent strategy for profit sustainment, for which, according to Kim et al. (2015), there is a positive linear relationship between a small restaurant's social media activity and the business's profits. The theme also confirms, according to Jiang and Erdem (2017), social media influences consumer purchasing decisions, and business sales realize the benefit of having a social media

presence. The theme also aligns with the findings of Katona and Sarvary (2014) that

companies who used e-marketing (social media, e-mails, websites) were able to reach

consumers more quickly, which may have a positive impact on profitability and brand

expansion. The small restaurant owners' usage of social media as a marketing strategy

ties with the brand equity model, which was the framework used for this study.

Theme 2: Word of Mouth

All three participants agreed that using word of mouth is one of the most effective

marketing strategies to sustain profits. The participants acknowledged that word of mouth

is a primary driver of customer recruitment. The participants also noted that they employ

numerous forms of word of mouth marketing to attract customers in order to sustain

profits. Biroscak et al. (2015) underscored that when restaurants target customer

preferences and develop promotions or events that customers find satisfying, positive

word of mouth increases.

Findings. PT2 explained that

I find it very beneficial to use my existing customers to promote my business

using a customer incentive program. For every new customer that patronizes my

restaurant and whom they recommended, that existing customer will receive a

discount on their next meal.

All of the participants considered electronic word of mouth to be of critical importance to

profit sustainment. Electronic word of mouth is more effective with intangible services

such as with restaurants because customers tend to share evaluations after visiting;

however, little research has been conducted on the significance of electronic word of

mouth on the restaurant industry (Tabaku & Mersini, 2014). Small business owners need customers to spread the message about the company and products because the ultimate credibility source is customer to customer or customer to a new prospect (Swenson et al., 2012). PT1 stated, "I encourage current customers to provide comments on my social media platforms. Potential customers weigh heavily on these reviews". PT2 declared, "I encourage existing customers to subscribe to my social media account, to write a positive comment, and share my social media page. I then enter them into a drawing for a free meal." PT3 explained, "Roughly 60% of my new customers have previously read existing customer reviews on one my platforms whether in print or on social media." These findings are similar to those of Dadzie et al. (2017) that word of mouth communication is a powerful marketing tool.

The finding that small restaurant owners' usage of word of mouth is one of the most effective marketing strategies to sustain profits confirms with other peer-reviewed studies from the literature review. The theme of word of mouth as an important marketing strategy relates to the conceptual framework of the brand equity model. The theme confirms the effectiveness of the word of mouth strategy. According to Lekhanya (2014), viral marketing, through word of mouth communication, is fundamental to innovative marketing strategies; it is a good way for owners to promote and strengthen the brand and to encourage loyal customers to spread the word to other people. The theme corroborates that small restaurant owners may have a competitive advantage on sales and marketing opportunities when the brand image is high because of customers' brand loyalty and awareness (see Cheng, 2014). Also, the theme confirms the position, as

stated by Zailskaite-Jaste and Kuvykaite (2013), that using social media guarantees high consumer involvement in communications that may increase brand equity, determine brand loyalty, and increase revenue and profits.

The importance of utilizing word of mouth marketing in operating a small business also confirms the findings by Tabaku (2014) that poor usage of word of mouth marketing may impact customer recruitment and customer loyalty, which negatively impact revenue. Furthermore, the critical elements that result in a successful word of mouth marketing strategy leading to profit sustainment includes a good interaction between the customers and restaurant. As such, when small restaurant owners develop an active interaction with the customer and encourage them to recruit potential new customers, owners stand a better chance to sustain profits.

Theme 3: Brand Differentiation

The third theme that emerged from my data analysis was brand differentiation. Brand differentiation is a marketing strategy with which unique values are sought that are meaningful to consumers in each different segment (Aaker, 1991). All participants indicated that excellent cuisine and the design and mood of the restaurant atmosphere are attributes that guide marketing strategies, brand equity, and profitability. Tabaku and Mersini (2012) identified customer service and restaurant ambiance as marketing tools to build brand equity.

Findings. According to PT2, "I give customers a lasting and meaningful experience by presenting high quality food in a Christian based, and family-oriented

atmosphere." Giving meaningful differences to consumers brings less competition because these meaningful differences motivate consumers to buy products (Aaker, 1991).

Archer-Brown et al. (2017) emphasized that operating in a competitive environment and meeting customer needs are pertinent aspects of competitive advantage and marketing. PT1 added, "My restaurant is the only restaurant in the area that offers live comedy shows for customers to enjoy while dining." When a brand is highly differentiated from other competitors, consumers keep buying the brand because other brands cannot satisfy their demands, so the brand becomes more attractive to buyers (Bailey, 2014). This competitive advantage allows a brand to consistently attract buyers (Barnham, 2015). PT3 stated, "We are a soul food restaurant which aim to provide individual dining experiences. We provide customized dining experiences for customers based on their spending limit and desires." Differentiating a brand is an essential marketing activity to meet needs from different demographic segments (Estrella-Ramón, 2017). Brand success often depends on how well a brand is differentiated because differentiation is significant for obtaining long term sustainable brand power (Bundy, 2017).

The finding that small restaurant owners' usage of brand differentiation as a vital strategy to sustain profits confirms with other peer reviewed studies from the literature review. The finding confirms the literature, as stated by Agarwal and Dahm (2015), brand differentiation contributes to the success of a brand, it must be meaningful to customers; as if a brand fails to develop or maintain differentiation, consumers have no basis for choosing it over others, and thus a loyal customer base cannot be created or sustained.

The findings corroborate the role of brand differentiation and customer retention, as stated by Barnham (2015) if brands are distinctive, marketers will not lose potential consumers because the marketers can refresh and remind their brands to customers frequently.

All the participants have demonstrated the application of brand differentiation which meets the niche desire of consumers over their competitors and is a primary tool to retain customers. The theme of brand differentiation relates to the conceptual framework of the brand equity model. The need for brand differentiation as a marketing strategy for customer loyalty aligns with the findings of Aaker (1991) brand loyalty is cost-effective in sustainment of profits, as it is cheaper to keep current customers than to attract new customers. Increased customer loyalty contributes to business profitability (Jaisinghani & Kanjilal, 2017).

Ties to Conceptual Framework

Framework analysis. The brand equity model, developed by Aaker (1991), was the conceptual framework for this study. The five brand equity components of the model include: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary brand assets. Analysis of participants' data confirmed the brand equity theory of marketing developed by Aaker (1991) was appropriate and relevant to exploring the profitability of the marketing strategies used by three small, independent restaurants. Participant responses and themes aligned with the five components outlined in Aaker's brand equity model.

Perceived quality, brand awareness and brand loyalty. Responses from small restaurant owners linked to brand loyalty, brand awareness, and perceived quality, which coincide with the components of Aaker's brand equity model. All participants acknowledged theme 2 and theme 3, word of mouth and brand differentiation as unique branding mechanisms of marketing strategies that foster profitability. Participants stated that customers are loyal and continue to come to the restaurant because of brand loyalty. Brand loyalty supports with marketing via word of mouth (Aaker, 1991). Study findings confirmed marketing strategies, which include designing and redesigning products, as necessary, and could help small restaurant owners sustain competitive advantage and increase profits (Cheng, 2014). Positive customer relationships promote successful product launches and improve brand equity (Agarwal & Dahm, 2015).

Brand associations and brand loyalty. Each of the three participants advanced the importance of using innovative ways to advertise a business and expand a customer base. Small restaurant owners should distribute resources proportionately because of limited financial resources (Baker, 2013). The study results confirmed small restaurant owners should implement different marketing strategies because they do not have the resources of large restaurants owners (Henneberg et al., 2015). Findings of the study validated the need for small restaurant owners, with limited financial resources, to decrease marketing costs through the usage of word of mouth and social media marketing (Aaker 1991; Houghton et al., 2013). Perspectives from participants linked to brand loyalty and brand associations, which are components of Aaker's brand equity model.

Findings to Literature on Effective Business Practice

I used the results from the study to validate word of mouth as a powerful marketing strategy which small restaurant owners should use. Positive word of mouth marketing has a stronger influence on brand purchase probability (Aaker, 1991; Vanhamme et al., 2012). Small restaurant owners can use valuable resources and customer relationship marketing to influence marketing planning and develop marketing programs (Magnusson et al., 2013; Paulsen, 2017). The findings of the study confirmed limited financial resources could constitute barriers when developing and executing marketing plans to meet profit targets (Barnham, 2015).

Results confirmed executives should create a portfolio strategy that includes product development and brand equity to improve profitability levels (Khan, 2014b; Mohammed et al., 2014; Stahl et al., 2012). Theme 3 on brand differentiation aligned with literature on effective brand strategies. Small restaurant owners can drive brand development and create new platforms for market campaigns (Bundy, 2017). Small restaurant owners should incorporate marketing practices to promote the brand image, drive sales, and interface with customers for a high level of customer satisfaction (El Haddad, 2015).

Applications to Professional Practice

The results of this study provided strategies that small restaurant owners could use to sustain business profits beyond 5 years of inception. Small restaurants significantly contribute to the economic health of local communities, yet many face challenges to sustain profits beyond their 5 years of inception (Eryigit, 2017). The strategies depicted

in this study may be used by restaurant owners to better their chances of success to sustain profits beyond after inception. The findings of the study consist of three underlying themes (a) social media, (b) word of mouth, and (c) brand differentiation. The findings of the study could help restaurant owners improve business practice via the development and implementation of successful marketing strategies. Many small restaurant owners experience a failure to launch due to not using marketing resources and a lack of marketing strategies (Andrew, 2011). Marketing is a principal factor in the success or failure of small restaurants (Perry, 2014).

Small restaurant owners that understand the importance of developing and implementing successful marketing strategies might lead to sustain profits 5 years after inception. Small business restaurant owners can use marketing strategies to create a competitive advantage in the market and provide a product that satisfies individual needs of customers (Khan, 2014b; Mohammed et al., 2014). Furthermore, profit sustainment more likely occurs in small restaurants when owners implement successful marketing strategies anchored in brand differentiation, word of mouth and a social media presence (Zailskaite-Jaste & Kuvykaite, 2013). Small restaurant owners that desire sustained profits should invest in a marketing strategy which encompasses social media, word of mouth, and brand differentiation.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for positive social change of this study include the following integrated approaches to business sustainability: (a) business development for small businesses and strategies for financial resources, (b) training programs to support new

entrepreneurs and the public and, (c) free webinars on marketing strategies for communities and organizations. Small business owners should develop and foster relationships with communities and other organizations to help grow business development opportunities and identify marketplace opportunities (Tawanda et al., 2013). Small business executives can act as a liaison to gain an understanding of important trends and issues affecting the community (Fiore et al., 2013). Analysts for small businesses can use marketing strategies to manage business sustainability, increase opportunities for community growth, create jobs, and develop social resources through the investment of capital (Jasra et al., 2011).

Opening up resources centers in the communities and offering bi-weekly training programs promote positive social change through community engagement (Shaijumon, 2014; Tabaku & Mersini, 2014). Topics for training should include cost-effective marketing strategies, project management and policy development to gain and retain customers, and targeting investments to enhance profitability, to support new entrepreneurs and the public (Radu, 2013; Tabaku & Mersini, 2014). A network of small businesses should host community meetings and webinars monthly to present effective marketing strategies for profitability. Small business professionals should work closely with the communities and organizations to evaluate the effectiveness of training programs and apply metrics such as observational feedback and surveys (Mitchell & Olsen, 2013).

Recommendations for Action

Small restaurant owners need to pay attention to the findings from this study. Based on the three themes identified from semistructured interviews, analyzing participants' responses, and methodical triangulation of archival business records, I make some recommendations for actions that small restaurant owners can use to sustain profits beyond 5years of inception. First, I recommend small; restaurant owners allocate more resources toward social media marketing to increase brand loyalty, profits, and ROI. Small restaurant owners should ensure social media marketing activities align with business goals and profit strategies (Radu, 2013).

Small restaurant owners need to create ways to implement marketing strategies that promote business across social media channels such as Blogs, Facebook, Instagram, Linkedin, Twitter, YouTube, and local radio and television stations (Koutroumanis, 2011; Zailskaite-Jaste & Kuvykaite, 2013). Managers should use social media to engage current and new customers, which may lead to word of mouth referrals and communications. Mourad (2017) stated that small restaurant owners should apply market information via social media management to grow market value, profits, and enhance organizational performance. Small restaurant owners should establish a social media presence. This will allow them to effectively engage with current and potential customers while having little impact on expenditures as they gain and maintain a competitive advantage (Wellton et al., 2017).

Second, I recommend small restaurant owners to incorporate word of mouth as a marketing strategy to improve their brand. Word of mouth is one of the most effective

marketing strategies to sustain profits. Small restaurant owners should use electronic word of mouth as it is more effective with intangible services like restaurants; because customers tend to share evaluations after visiting. Potential customers weigh heavily on these reviews. Viral marketing, through word of mouth communication, is fundamental to innovative marketing strategies; and is a good way for owners to promote and strengthen the brand, and to encourage loyal customers to spread the word to other people (Lekhanya, 2014). Furthermore, the critical elements which result in a successful word of mouth marketing strategy leading to profit sustainment includes a good interaction between the customers and restaurant. As such, when small restaurant owners develop an active interaction with the customer and encourage them to recruit potential new customers, owners stand a better chance to sustain profits.

Third, I recommend small restaurant owners to apply a brand differentiation marketing strategy. Brand differentiation contributes to the success of a brand, it must be meaningful to customers as if a brand fails to develop or maintain differentiation, consumers have no basis for choosing it over others, and thus a loyal customer base cannot be created or sustained (Aaker, 1991). The usage of brand differentiation as their marketing strategy for customer retention will greatly aid in profits sustainment. Brand differentiation will aid potential repeat customers to remember and quickly choose their brand over their competitors with little discernment between competing brands. Brand differentiation is a concept which enables consumers to easily identify a certain brand among other brands, which helps them to remember brands more easily (Bierbooms et al., 2014). It is cheaper for me to retain a customer than to recruit a potential customer.

Brand differentiation as a marketing strategy will give small restaurant owners a competitive advantage on sales and marketing opportunities when the brand differentiation is high because of customers' brand loyalty and awareness. If used, brand differentiation will increase customer loyalty, which is linked to financial success and profitability and the sustainment of profits. Increased customer loyalty contributes to business profitability (Jaisinghani & Kanjilal, 2017). Small restaurant owners need to pay attention to the findings from this study. I will disseminate the results of this study at small business expos, business-networking events, the States Small Business Association, and through the ProQuest/UMI dissertation database. Also, I share the results of the study with the participants.

Recommendations for Further Research

The study was designed to explore marketing strategies small restaurant owners can explore marketing strategies small business restaurant owners use to sustain profitability beyond the initial 5 years. Limitations of this study were a multiple case study of three small restaurants, a sample size of three participants, and a target group of owners. I interviewed owners because they are primarily responsible for implementing marketing strategies. All three participants had between 6-9 years of experience operating their small restaurant. Often owners are the primary implementers of marketing strategies and have substantial input about marketing strategies in their restaurants. Owners, directly and indirectly, apply marketing strategies for competitive advantage and profitability as they establish and update their business plan. I obtained sufficient data to answer the central research question and identified pertinent themes from owners. I

recommend further studies to expand the multiple case study to include owners with more years of experience, 10 years or more, owning their small restaurant. This may be used to expound on marketing strategies which small restaurant owners with greater experience implement.

Another limitation of this qualitative study was obtaining approval from the owners to use the restaurants and review archival business records. Further studies can be based on large restaurants which may result in differing marketing strategies used to sustain profit. Initially, the participants were not eager in allowing me to review company documents. I presented the purpose of the doctoral study and potential benefits to the owners and addressed concerns before initiating the study. This was a qualitative case study; future researchers could use a quantitative or mixed method study which may enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Reflections

My passion for developing and implementing business processes and creating new approaches for business sustainability was the reason I chose to explore marketing strategies for sustaining profitability. In my community, five small restaurants closed within two years of operation, which prompted me to use three small restaurants in my study. I had a preconceived idea that once received approval from the IRB, collecting and analyzing data would be easy. I underestimated the amount of time and level of tediousness it took to transcribe the data personally. Interviews with each participant were rewarding. The business culture of all three restaurants was exceptional. Participant responses showed how the culture replicated in each restaurant. Policies and customer

retention strategies were similar at each restaurant. The results of this study confirmed

my proposition that innovative marketing approaches to services and brands should

include not only the owner but also the customers.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore marketing

strategies small business restaurant owners use to sustain profitability beyond the initial 5

years. Nine out of 10 restaurants are small businesses, and 50% of small businesses fail

within the first 5 years (SBA, 2015). I conducted semistructured interviews with three

small restaurant owners who have sustained profits beyond 5years after inception. I also

collected data from the restaurants' documents (artifacts such as financial records and

marketing material) and used methodological triangulation to get meaning from many

different sources of data.

I coded and analyzed data using the Nvivo software, and three themes emerged. I

linked the three themes to the literature sources and brand equity model, the conceptual

framework. Three themes emerged from the study: (a) social media, (b) word of mouth,

and (c) brand differentiation for the business can enable owners of small restaurants to

sustain profits beyond 5 years of inception.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview: Marketing Strategies for Small Business Sustainability beyond 5 Years	
What you will do	**What you will say- script**
• Introduction and staging	My name is Stetson King, I appreciate your efforts of finding time to participate in this research. Marketing strategies are plans and approaches used by restaurant owners to attract customers and generate revenue while devoted to sustaining profitability. I am researching marketing strategies for sustaining profitability beyond the initial 5 years in small businesses like your organization. My research question for which this study is centered around is: What marketing strategies do small business restaurant owners use to sustain profitability beyond the initial 5 years? During the interview, I will ask you 6 interview questions which align with the research question.
• Applicant Introduction	I currently am a business doctoral candidate at Walden University, where I have attended for about 2.5 years. I have worked with the Department of Defense (DOD) for approximately 21 years. I have worked numerous roles in the government/defense contracting sector. I invested more than 8 years specializing in working with businesses in attaining government contracts. Just as a reminder, you provided consent to participate in this research which include being interviewed. I must reiterate that your participation is voluntary. At any given time before the data analysis phase, you may withdraw as a participant of the study. Do you have any questions about the informed consent form? The interview will be recorded. In addition, I will take written notes. Your participation which include the interview will remain private. All of your responses will be kept confidential. Do you any questions related to privacy and confidentiality? Do you any questions pertaining to anything I have discussed thus

	far?
	For the purpose of this study marketing strategy is defined as a forward-looking business approach or formula to planning with the fundamental goal of competing and or achieving a competitive advantage. Let's start the questions.
• Pay attention to both verbal and non-verbal communication • Paraphrase as required • Ask follow-up questions to gain more insight	1. Describe how you evaluated your marketing strategies used for sustaining profits beyond the initial 5 years?
	2. Please describe your successful marketing strategies used for sustaining profits beyond the initial 5 years?
	3. Describe how you implemented marketing strategies for sustaining profitability beyond the initial 5 years?
	4. Describe how you overcame obstacles when you first attempted implementing your marketing strategies used for sustaining profits beyond the initial 5 years?
	5. What approach have you found successful for developing marketing strategies used for sustaining profits beyond the initial 5 years?
	6. What additional information would you like to add regarding marketing strategies small business restaurant owners use for sustaining profits beyond the initial 5 years?
Interview Wrap up thank participant	This is the end of the interview.
Schedule follow-up member checking interview	I will write out the interview session and via email send you a synopsis of your replies to the interview questions. interview and provide you a summary of your responses to each of the questions no later than 3 days from now. I would do this with the intention that you will verify that I have properly ascertained the essence of your replies to each interview question. A follow up interview will be required for clarification if I incorrectly captured the essence of your responses Thank you for your time. Have a great remainder of your day.