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Strategies to Sustain Small and Medium-size Manufacturing Enterprises in Jamaica

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Hugh Blake

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

Strategies to Sustain Small and Medium-Sized Manufacturing Enterprises in Jamaica

by

Hugh Blake

MBA, Barry University, 1995

BBA, University of Technology, 2005

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2018

Abstract

Jamaica's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have a high failure rate. In 2016, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) recorded Jamaica's SME start-up rate at 4.06% and the discontinuance rate at 9%. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive multiple case study was to explore the strategies some Jamaican SME owners used to achieve business sustainability in the manufacturing sector for longer than 5 years of operation. The conceptual framework used was the entrepreneurship theory, which provided insights into business sustainability. A purposive sample of 5 owners of SMEs who had achieved business sustainability in the manufacturing sector for longer than 5 years of operation were the participants in this study. Semistructured interviews of participants and review of company documents produced in-depth insights into the strategies they used to achieve business sustainability. Coding keywords, sentences, and ideas from the interviews and company documents and categorizing them was the approach taken for data analysis, using methodological triangulation. The themes from the study were entrepreneurial characteristics, competitive advantages, resource management, customer relationship management, quality management, and marketing. Implications for social change include the potential to provide strategies that support SMEs' business sustainability and lead to greater job creation and ultimately the Jamaican government's ability to fund social projects.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my wife, Judith. Thanks for your support, love, and patience throughout this journey. I simply could not have done it without you. I also, wish to extend this dedication to my mother, whose love and admiration has been my main source of motivation.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The failure rate of start-up SMEs in Jamaica is high, and despite the numerous government initiatives, the problem persists (Lawrence, 2012). Notwithstanding the high failure rate, some SMEs in Jamaica manage to achieve long-term business sustainability. Jamaican SME owners need to determine and implement the strategies used in these SMEs to achieve long-term business sustainability.

In this study, I explored the strategies used by some of the Jamaican SME owners whose SMEs achieved business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector. The study included a qualitative approach with a descriptive multiple case study design. The results from this study will provide business owners, particularly start-up SME owners in Jamaica, with the knowledge necessary to succeed. Blowfield and Dolan (2014), Mutoko (2014), and Yildirim, Akci, and Eksi (2013) all concluded that SMEs are significant contributors to economic progress, as well as the creation of employment. The result of the study may benefit and positively affect the standard of living in Jamaica.

Background of the Problem

For 2016, The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM, 2017) recorded Jamaica's SMEs new business ownership rate at 4.06% and a discontinuance rate at 9%. The discontinuance rate in 2016 was 22.22 times the new business start-up rate; for every 10 SME start-ups in 2016, 22.22 SMEs went out of business (GEM, 2017). Lawrence (2012) explained that the Government of Jamaica (GOJ) had long recognized the failure rate of

Jamaican SMEs and implemented various SME development initiatives including financing and capacity building with the hope of rectifying the problem. Despite these efforts, the failure rate of SMEs in Jamaica remains higher than the new business start-up rate, which contributes to a crisis in the entrepreneurial base of the country (Lawrence, 2012).

Problem Statement

For the year 2015, Jamaica recorded a decrease of 298 SMEs engaged in business activities (Planning Institute of Jamaica [PIOJ], 2016). In 2016, Jamaica's new SME business ownership rate was 4.06% and the business discontinuance rate was 9% (GEM, 2017). The general business problem was the lack of adequate preparation among Jamaican owners of SMEs before start-up, resulting in a higher than expected failure rate. The specific business problem was that some SME owners in Jamaica lacked strategies to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive multiple case study was to explore the strategies some Jamaican SME owners use to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector. The specific population for this study was owners of five SMEs in Kingston, Jamaica who have implemented strategies to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector. The results of this research will contribute to positive social change by improving commercial sustainability of SMEs, which can lead to improvement in Jamaica's gross domestic

product (GDP), employment, and general standard of living. Syed, Shah, Shaikh, Ahmadani, and Shaikh (2012), Sulistyowati (2014), and Manso, de Matos, Fernandes, and Carvalho (2015) advocated that improvement in the GDP and the number of persons employed within communities, will help to improve the social and human conditions of the general populace within any country.

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative method to explore strategies that some Jamaican SME owners use to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector. Lach (2014) and Yang (2016) explained that the qualitative study method is exploratory and involves a process that allows the researcher to directly interface with the participant to gain an in-depth understanding of a case or phenomenon within its context. The quantitative approach best serves the purpose of capturing numerical relationships between variables and evaluating the frequency of experiences related by the study's participants. The quantitative method was not suitable for this study because there was no need to quantify the participants' experiences. Mixed methods research combines qualitative and quantitative research to form a single study (McManamny, Sheen, Boyd, & Jennings, 2014; Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). Because there is no quantitative aspect or hypotheses to prove or disprove in this study, the use of a mixed methods study was inappropriate.

I used a descriptive multiple case study design to discover strategies some Jamaican SME owners use to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation

in the manufacturing sector. The multiple case study design occurs when a study involves more than one case and the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are obscure (Yin, 2017). Yin (2017) explained that a descriptive case study design is used by researchers to depict a case in its existing real-world context and is advantageous in research where *how* or *why* questions are used in explored a current phenomenon over which the researcher has little control. The other designs considered but not used, included phenomenology, ethnography, and narrative inquiry. The phenomenology design was inappropriate because of the lack of multiple data sources. The ethnographic design is best suited for the study of the culture of people (Goldstein, Gray, Salisbury, & Snell, 2014). The ethnographic design was not suitable because the culture of the participants is not the focus of the study. Stephens and Breheny (2013) and Schaefer (2013) explained that the narrative design focuses on storytelling in a narrative form. The narrative design was unsuitable for this study because it does not involve any narrative form of storytelling.

Research Question

The basis for an exploration of SMEs' business sustainability was the central research question: What strategies do some Jamaican SMEs owners use to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector?

Interview Questions

The aim of the interview questions was to contribute knowledge to the central question of the study. I structured the following interview questions to encourage conversations with participants:

1. What strategies do you use within your business to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector?
2. What strategies do you find most useful to the sustainment of your business and why?
3. How do you formulate business strategies?
4. How do you establish business strategies within your business?
5. How do you communicate business strategies to your employees?
6. What are the management skills you found most useful in guiding your business to sustainability and why?
7. What knowledge base did you find most useful in guiding your business sustainability and why?
8. How would you describe the context in which you do business in Jamaica?
9. What advice would you give to aspiring and new SME owners in Jamaica on how to achieve business sustainability?
10. What additional information would you like to add about the strategies you used to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is the entrepreneurship theory. Schumpeter (1934) advanced the view that entrepreneurs are agents of disruptive economic change, creative innovators, and bearers of risks. Jones and Wadhvani (2007) said the entrepreneurship theory advanced by Schumpeter invalidates the belief of some scholars that entrepreneurship is purely a biographical study of entrepreneurs. Cole (1946) expanded the concept of Schumpeter's entrepreneurial theory by including sociocultural aspects, the neoclassical economic aspects, and the evolution of the industry.

According to Schumpeter (1934), the primary constructs and propositions underlying the entrepreneurship theory are entrepreneurial characteristics, management skills, and strategic decisions, which are the main concepts supporting this study. Ahlstrom and Ding (2014) explained that entrepreneurial characteristics, resource management, and strategic decisions are critical inputs in achieving business sustainability. As applied to this study, the entrepreneurship theory permitted the exploration of the participants' perceptions and the essential issues related to the strategies used by some SME owners in Jamaica to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector.

Operational Definitions

Entrepreneur: A person who creates, organizes, manages, and shoulders the risk of a business venture (Kovalainen & Osterberg-Hogstedt, 2013; Stam, Arzlanian, & Elfring, 2014).

Entrepreneurship: The process of starting new business enterprises or operating an existing business with the objective of identifying and exploiting opportunities for the creation of wealth (Glaub, Frese, Fischer, & Hoppe, 2014; Raffiee & Jie, 2014; Trivedi, 2013).

Essential issues: A company's internal and external issues, along with current and future interests necessary for SME owners to understand how to achieve sustainability and improve performance (Prabawani, 2013). ‘

Small and medium-sized enterprise (SMEs): An independently owned business venture that has a maximum of 50 employees (Lawrence, 2012).

***Sustainability:* The capability to endure, which incorporates economic endurance, social survival, and environmental conservation (Bateh, Heaton, Arbogast, &**

Broadbent, 2013).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are conditions presumed to be factual but lack confirmation, and usually made in response to identified limitations (Thomas, Silverman, & Nelson, 2015; Wortham, 2015). Leedy and Ormrod (2013) explained that assumptions are essential to research problems and without them research problems would not exist. This study

included three necessary assumptions. The first assumption was that the study would provide insights into the strategies used by some Jamaican SME owners to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector. The second assumption was that SME owners would provide an accurate account of the strategies used to achieve business sustainability. The third assumption was that the semistructured interview questions and company documents would provide sufficient data to answer the study's central research question completely.

Limitations

Limitations are the possible flaws of a study out of the researcher's control, which make clear the study's restrictions (Thomas et al., 2015; Welch, 2014). This study's limitations included the reliance on participants' ability to give a comprehensive and accurate account of their current experience and real-life perspective of the phenomenon, which may not be communicated as accurately as when they actually occurred. The study included only SMEs in Jamaica's capital city of Kingston and may not be generalizable to other regions, cultures, and organizations.

Delimitations

Delimitations of the study are those parameters placed on a study by researchers that are used to limit and clarify the scope of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Lewis, 2015; Yin 2017). I delimited the study to the geographical location of Kingston, Jamaica and participating SME owners from the manufacturing sector who have

sustained their SMEs beyond 5 years of operation. I used purposeful sampling and a sample size of five SME owners.

Significance of the Study

This study may be of value to researchers, governments, practitioners, and existing and aspiring entrepreneurs in the Jamaican manufacturing sector because it produced information that could assist Jamaican SME owners to develop or adopt strategies to enhance the sustainability of their businesses. Blowfield and Dolan (2014) explained that sustained businesses may contribute to improvement in the socioeconomic state of a country. The study may also advance the existing literature related to Jamaican SMEs' business sustainability and has indicated important areas for further study.

Contribution to Business Practice

The study contributes to business practice because the results provide information on proven strategies that may be adopted by other Jamaican SME owners in the manufacturing sector, or used as an approach to developing similar strategies for business sustainability. Shipley, Shipley-Lozano, and Khoja (2016) explained that the sustainability of SMEs depends on the strategies they adopt. Understanding these strategies may provide Jamaican SME owners with the necessary information and insights to develop suitable strategies for the achievement of business sustainability.

Regardless of the level of economic development, SMEs provide a significant source of growth for most countries (Hessels & Parker, 2013; Narteh, 2013). Recognizing the significance of SMEs to economic progress, many countries including Jamaica

introduced support measures to enhance their SMEs' development (Lawrence, 2012). Lawrence also related that despite these efforts, the failure rate of SMEs in Jamaica has not shown any significant improvement. The exploration of the strategies used by successful SMEs may also provide the opportunity for Jamaican SMEs to adopt proven strategies to enhance their business sustainability.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for positive social change may be significant because helping SMEs to achieve sustainability should lead to economic progress, which would provide the Jamaican government with more tax revenue for funding social development projects. Humphrey, Spratt, Thorpe, and Henson (2014) asserted that a clear link exists between economic development and implementation of social programs, which gives credibility to those who believe money is needed to effect social change.

Providing information on the business sustainability strategies used by some Jamaican SME owners may give aspiring and new SME owners useful insights to orient their businesses to incorporate, emphasize, and capitalize on the recognized strategies that could enhance the business sustainability of their SME. Syed et al. (2012) posited that improvements in the economy may lead to a reduction in unemployment levels, which would help to improve social and human conditions. Jamaicans, therefore, could also benefit from greater levels of employment.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The objective of a literature review is to describe, assess, summarize, and synthesize the literature that pertains to the research topic and provide a theoretical basis for the research (Holloway & Wheeler, 2013). This qualitative descriptive multiple case study explored the strategies some Jamaican SME owners use to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector. Bamiatzi and Kirchmaier (2014) and Furlan, Grandinetti, and Paggiaro (2014) explained that the strategies used by entrepreneurs may have a positive effect on the firm's business sustainability. Despite the importance of SMEs in driving business growth in Jamaica, their failure rate exceeds their start-up rate (Lawrence, 2012). The GEM (2017) reported that Jamaica's SME failure rate is at 9% and start up rate at 4.06%, or for every 10 SME start-ups, 22.22 went out of business. The significance of strategies for sustainability and the high failure rate of Jamaican SMEs substantiate the need for this study.

Five sections constitute this literature review. The first section is a review of the conceptual framework of the study. The second section focuses on entrepreneurial characteristics. The third section focuses on various aspects of SME management. The fourth section is a discussion of Jamaican businesses and the settings in which businesses operate in Jamaica. The fifth section focuses on SME success and sustainability factors derived from the findings of earlier related studies in a cross section of industries. The fifth section also includes identified gaps in the literature that point to areas for further

study as well as diverse opinions and the relationship between this study and prior research outcomes in the area.

The literature review involved content searches of scholarly sources from journal articles, books, dissertations, and web pages using research materials accessed through the Walden University Library and Google Scholar. Databases included Academic Search Complete/Premier, Business Source Complete, SAGE Premier, EBSCOhost, Emerald, ScienceDirect, and ProQuest. I will incorporate 277 professional and academic peer-reviewed sources published between 2013 and 2017, which represented 87% of the 318 references that pertain to this study. Ulrich's Periodicals Directory provided a means to verify that articles were from accepted peer-reviewed sources. The keywords used for the content searches included *entrepreneurship*, *SMEs sustainability*, *SME strategic management decision*, *success factors*, *entrepreneurial theory*, *entrepreneurial skills*, *SMEs and economic development*, *SMEs and social development*, *SME financing*, *SMEs marketing*, *SMEs and innovation*, *human resource management in SMEs*, *SMEs and technology adaptation*, and *internal and external factors affecting SMES performance*.

Review of the Conceptual Framework

The entrepreneurship theory conceptualized by Schumpeter (1934) was that entrepreneurs are agents of disruptive economic change, creative innovators, and bearers of risks. Entrepreneurial characteristics, management skills, and strategic decisions are key elements of entrepreneurship theory, and these elements are also the critical inputs into achieving business sustainability (Ahlstrom & Ding, 2014). The entrepreneurship

theory is applicable for this study because it includes key insights into business sustainability.

Entrepreneurship theory. Despite entrepreneurship being a significant issue which adds to the formation and economic progress of an organization, no universally accepted theory of entrepreneurship exists among scholars. Because of the absence of agreement regarding what establishes entrepreneurship theory, no commonly accepted theory emerged (Chiang & Yan, 2011). Teece and Al-Aali (2013) explained that entrepreneurship is about exploiting opportunity, which results in the creation of a new firm or starting new activities in an existing firm. Entrepreneurship involves the identification of a demand that remains unsatisfied and acting on the measures required to satisfy the demand (Kinder, 2014). Kuratko (2013) described entrepreneurship as ideas that create future businesses.

Udu (2014) posited that ideation and valid ideas are significant aspects of entrepreneurship. Udu also explained that entrepreneurship is about generating pertinent or applicable ideas with economic and commercial value for the whole range of human endeavors. Entrepreneurship generates good concepts that positively contribute to the socioeconomic and cultural growth of a community or nation (Udu, 2014). Teece and Al-Aali (2013) said that entrepreneurship generates ideas for new firms, new jobs, and innovative methods of production, new relationships, and new ways of conducting business. Santos Góes and Vianna Brugni (2014) said that entrepreneurship as a phenomenon and the entrepreneur as a historic representative of transformation can be

essential parts of the economic organization of society. Udu (2014), Teece and Al-Aali (2013), and Santos Góes and Vianna Brugni (2014) argued that entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs produce good economic, financial, social, and ecological outcomes for the benefit of humanity. The socioeconomic gains suggested by these scholars support the benefits of exploring the strategies some Jamaican SME owners use to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector.

The entrepreneurship theory embodies three distinct theories, the psychological theory, the sociological theory, and the economic theory (Udu, 2014). The psychological theory of entrepreneurship includes identification of human traits, motives, and character as the main drivers of entrepreneurial spirit in individuals (Udu, 2014). The sociological theory of entrepreneurship also include that an individual's environment provides the most stimulating factor for entrepreneurship (Othman & Ab Wahid, 2014). The theory also holds that the psychological factors of idea, traits, and motives are by themselves insufficient for the manifestation of entrepreneurship. Udu (2014) explained that entrepreneurs arise from society's social, cultural, political, legal, and secular influences. Brown and Thornton (2013) clarified that the economic theory of entrepreneurship includes that the decision to become an entrepreneur is purely economic, focusing on the doctrine of demand and supply. The varying perspectives of entrepreneurship present in the literature require that the exploration of the strategies some Jamaican SME owners use to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector must incorporate social, cultural, political, legal, and secular considerations.

Entrepreneurship remains centered on wealth creation, produced from creative and innovative activities (Kuratko, 2013). Creativity resides when innovation changes abstract information and phenomena into workable solutions that solve the needs of society (Udu, 2014). Matthews, Stowe, and Jenkins (2011) suggested that true entrepreneurs seek to establish, run, and grow a business to increase its value, achieving the increased value through a suitable exit plan. Entrepreneurs typically apply intellectual capital creatively and innovatively to solve problems for others, earning a profit and generating wealth in the process (Matthews et al., 2011).

The entrepreneurial life cycle usually proceeds through five phases. The phases are: (a) identifying problems and generating ideas to solve them creatively and innovatively, (b) identifying and assessing opportunities and choosing the best opportunity, (c) creating the enterprise, (d) developing the enterprise and generating value, and (e) reaping the value upon leaving (Matthews et al., 2011). Matthews et al. (2011) expounded that the process is inherently risky, and a large percentage of businesses fail to achieve sustainability beyond their first 5 years. The lifecycle might be interrupted or prevented by various economic or noneconomic factors that are internal or external to the enterprise (Lipi, 2013). The entrepreneurial lifecycle presented in the literature provides a source for making comparisons with Jamaican entrepreneurial undertakings and their impact on business sustainability.

Three aspects of entrepreneurship often identified in the literature are opportunity, coordinating assets, and organizing institutions (Chiang & Yan, 2011). Chiang & Yan,

further related that an enterprise needs these three perspectives to interrelate with each other (Chiang & Yan, 2011). Hunter (2013) mentioned that entrepreneurship is alertness to undiscovered opportunity. Entrepreneurial opportunities are situations where novel goods, services and organizing methods provide new and lucrative business opportunities (Chiang & Yan, 2011). Hunter (2013) explained that entrepreneurial discovery means gaining insight into new ways of achieving entrepreneurial success.

Economic equilibrium, which is a state in which the economic forces of supply and demand are balanced, lessens entrepreneurial opportunities, while economic disequilibrium, which is a state in which demand and supply are not in balance, increases entrepreneurial opportunities (Renko, Shrader, & Simon, 2012). Eckhardt and Shane (2003) contended that where an economy is under a state of disequilibrium, entrepreneurial opportunities abound. Schumpeter (1934) related that competition diminishes profitable opportunities; innovations cause disequilibrium by terminating existing opportunities and providing new opportunities. Chiang and Yan (2011) posited that this creative disruption pushes growth in firms. The study included a determination of the stability of the Jamaican economy and the consequential impact on the strategies employed by SMEs to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector.

Entrepreneurship. Stull (2014) advanced that entrepreneurship is an active process of visualization, modification, creation, and application of novel thoughts and innovative solutions to a business problem. Entrepreneurship can drive the creation and

development of new technology and industries (Woolley, 2014). Meyers and Pruthi (2011) said that the practice of creating value for customers through innovation is entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is a process that is creative, productive, and a means by which customers develop perceived value (Meyers & Pruthi, 2011). Burg and Romme (2014) argued that holders of this view of entrepreneurship might embrace the concept that entrepreneurship is about the identification and exploitation of resources. Hassan and Mohamed (2014) said that entrepreneurship is an area of study with a focus on the entrepreneurs, as well as the socioeconomic effect of their behaviors.

Differing interpretations of entrepreneurship found in the literature all have recognized characteristics of risk-taking, creativity, and independence. Dinis, Arminda, Ferreira, Raposo, and Ricardo (2013), Dugassa (2012), and Erol and Kanbur (2014) conducted independent studies that identified creativeness, risk-taking, and individuality as the three top characteristics of entrepreneurship. Scholars' understanding of entrepreneurship continues to evolve, which further supported the need for this study.

Entrepreneurial Characteristics

Entrepreneurs personal characteristics are key constructs of the entrepreneurship theory (Brown & Thornton, 2013). The Schumpeter (1934) viewed the entrepreneur as a distinct type of person with specific characteristics and personality traits that combines to produce entrepreneurial behavior (Obschonka et al., 2013). Pinho and Elisabete Sampaio (2014) argued that entrepreneurial performance results from a combination of personal entrepreneurial characteristics and contextual factors and is not explained by only

personal entrepreneurial characteristics. Chatterjee and Das (2015) underscored that entrepreneurship is a cognitive process where the economic, social, demographic, cultural and other contextual factors influence decision-making. Chatterjee and Das were adamant that entrepreneurship is cognitive because the individual foresees the possibility of a venture and generates the will and motivation to make it happen. This study included exploration of business sustainability strategies within the Jamaican business context.

The necessity for achievement, self-efficacy, internal and external locus of control, innovativeness, tolerance of ambiguity, activeness, and risk-taking are among the most significant entrepreneurial characteristics that influence the performance of a firm (Jain & Ali, 2013). In addition, successful entrepreneurs tended toward external orientation and maintained a broad and multifarious network of ongoing relationships with people both internal and external to the firm. Jain and Ali (2013) also noted that an entrepreneur who is deficient in social networking is at a disadvantage in growing and sustaining the firm.

Need to achieve. Chen et al. (2015) posited that needs are nutrients for optimum functioning irrespective of individual and cultural differences. Aramand (2013) recognized the need to achieve among the most evident of all the entrepreneurial characteristics. McClelland (1965) conducted a study with 55 Wesleyan graduates assessed for their level of need to achieve while they were students and found that most of the students who scored high, became entrepreneurs. Based on the results, McClelland

concluded that the need for achievement as a characteristic directly related to the career choice of entrepreneurship.

McClelland (1965) concluded that the need for achievement is a prominent entrepreneurial characteristic that supersedes even the need for financial rewards. The personal characteristics of business owners are among the main contributing factors to the success of small businesses (Parilla, 2013). Aramand (2013) recognized the need to achieve characteristic as an important personal characteristic of a successful entrepreneur. Consequently, this study discussed the influence of SME owner's personal characteristics on the strategies employed for business sustainment.

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to the extent of an individual's belief in his or her own capability to successfully perform as an entrepreneur (Alqurashi, 2016; Dempsey & Jennings, 2014). Jeraj and Maric (2013) linked self-efficacy with opportunity recognition and contended that persons with a superior level of self-efficacy usually have a higher probability of success at exploiting opportunities. Self-efficacy contributes significantly to entrepreneurship success and is a main entrepreneurial characteristic (Abdollahi, Taghizadeh, Hamzehgardeshi, & Bahramzad, 2014). In behavioral approaches to the study of entrepreneurship, an entrepreneur is considered to be a person who executes a group of actions associated with the making of a business, whereas in the trait approaches, an entrepreneur is understood to be a group of character traits and individualities displayed by a person (Farahbod et al., 2013).

Persons with high levels of entrepreneurial self-efficacy possess confidence in their ability to successfully own and operate a business (Farahbod et al., 2013). Jeraj and Maric (2013) linked entrepreneurial curiosity with entrepreneurial self-efficacy and conclude that self-efficacy foretells several important work-related results such as work attitudes, training proficiency, and work performance. Jeraj and Maric expounded that entrepreneurial curiosity deals with determining new markets to grow the business, spotting the environment's discriminating markets, and probing into a broad range of entrepreneurship matters. This study includes an assessment of the participant's entrepreneurial self-efficacy and its impact, if any, on the strategies used to achieve business sustainability. In addition to self-efficacy, the study also includes an exploration of how the participant's locus of control influences the approach to strategies used to achieve business sustainability.

Locus of control. Locus of control is a key concept, which refers to whether individuals trust that the results of their activities are internal or within their control or external and outside their control (Schjoedt & Shaver, 2012). Schjoedt and Shaver (2012) submitted that entrepreneurs naturally have elevated levels of internal locus of control and bear the feeling that they are in control of the outcome of their efforts, which usually motivate them to work harder. Lee-Ross (2015) submitted that internal locus of control is the freedom of an individual to be in control of his or her destiny and Joo, Lim, and Kim (2013) opined that this characteristic contributes to persistence and determination in entrepreneurs. The literature reviewed suggested that those persons with strong internal

locus of control cope better with work pressure and change. Dinis et al. (2013) listed high self-confidence as an entrepreneurial characteristic, which relates to additional psychological features, such as locus of control, the inclination to be a risk taker, and open-mindedness to uncertainty. Dinis et al. also indicated a strong relationship between self-confidence and internal locus of control. Subsequently, the exploration of the internal locus of control of the participants in this study provided important insights into the participant's level of confidence in the strategies used to achieve business sustainability.

SME innovation. A significant consensus among scholars is that innovation is an important contributing factor to SMEs' success and sustainability. Oncioiu and Balamaci (2013) conducted a study that included investigation of the prevailing state of innovation in Romanian businesses and concluded that with the rapid transformation of modern markets, innovation is the primary factor that guides the strategy of economic activity of SMEs. The results revealed that the company size, the personality of owners and managers, and the attitude toward innovation are factors that influence the level of innovation in SMEs (Oncioiu & Balamaci, 2013). In some SMEs, owners and managers have a defeatist attitude toward the innovation process in SMEs (Oncioiu & Balamaci, 2013). The study also included an exploration of the attitude of participants to innovation.

Using a collaborative study, Demirbas, Hussain, and Matlay (2011) examined the obstacles to innovation, as stated and experienced by Turkish SME owners. The study revealed the lack of government research and development policy, the underground economy, the deficiency of suitable providers of finance, and lack of available skills as

informal barriers that impede SMEs' innovation (Demirbas et al., 2011). Nikolic, Despotovic, and Cvetanovic (2015) showed agreement with Demirbas et al. and contended that the most significant internal factors that affect SMEs' innovation are accessibility to suitable human resources, the ability to invest, and the absorptive ability of SMEs. Laforet (2011) cautioned that the financial effect of innovation on SMEs are more significant than that of larger firms because of limited resources, which includes labor, finance, and materials; SMEs need to avoid the adverse outcomes of innovation. The importance of innovation to SMEs' success is well highlighted in the literature; therefore, this study included an exploration of the strategies used by participants to achieve innovation in their SME.

Profit margin, product lifecycle, business model, short-term gain, quality, financing, the capability of the workforce, external sources, pride, the aspiration for success, and improved working environments are the main drivers of innovation in SMEs (Xie, Zeng, Peng, & Tam, 2013). Xie et al. concluded that the positive relationships between innovation environment, technology capacity, management systems, research, and development capacity, and finance, determines the innovation performance of SMEs. Wang, Hermens, Huang, and Chelliah (2015) opined that the main driver of innovation in SMES is entrepreneurial orientation. The views Haron, Said, Jayaraman, and Ismail (2013) provided supported arguments by Xie et al. (2013) that focused on access to financing, human capital, technology and the market as among the main factors that influence SMEs' success and sustainability. The need for requisite skills, technology

capacity, and access to financing are a common finding in most studies reviewed. The study included from a strategic perspective, an exploration of the impact of innovation on Jamaican SMEs' ability to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector.

Golovko and Valentini (2011) analyzed the effect of innovation and exports regarding the growth of an organization and concluded that export could promote learning and enhance innovation performance. Golovko and Valentini also explained that a significant positive correlation occurs between the rate of sales increase and the export and innovation decisions of leaders. Innovation and export are complementary activities for SMEs' sales performance and participating in export markets provide SMEs with the opportunity to access knowledge not available in their domestic market (Golovko & Valentini, 2011). Through innovation, enterprises could enter different geographical markets with new and improved products, which boost sales (Golovko & Valentini, 2011).

Technology Use in SMEs

Similar to innovation, technology is also a competitive resource that can strategically help to maintain organizational effectiveness (Abdullah, Wahab, & Shamsuddin, 2013). An organization's ability to adopt technology is significant to determine its capacity to compete and its survivability in a fast pace business environment (Abdullah et al., 2013). The adoption of technology in SMEs gives them an equal chance to succeed and compete more effectively with larger competitors.

Venkatesh, Brown, and Bala (2013) asserted that despite the benefits owners and managers of SMEs generally show resistance to technological adoption and advancement even in industrialized countries. Technology orientation, however, is a characteristic that allows firms to overcome unfavorable operational and competitive conditions (Batra, Sharma, Dizit, Vohra, & Gupta, 2015). The literature reviewed provided a clear insight into the general attitude of SMEs to technology adoption and its impact on enterprise success and sustainability. The exploration of the Jamaican SME owner's attitude to technology was significant to understand the role of technology adoption in SMEs' business sustainability.

Because of the rapid development of information and communication technology (ICT), scholars viewed the acceptance of technology as a factor for firms' survival irrespective of their size (Lip-Sam & Hock-Eam, 2011). The achievement of sustainable development required the use of efficient, reliable, and innovative technology tools. The most identified technological tools required for sustainability are the ICT's such as the mobile phones, microcomputers, e-mail, and the Internet (Ardjouman, 2014). Kozak (2007) advanced that businesses must adapt to the use of ICT to thrive. Bringing SMEs into the digital epoch is not just a matter of enhancing their profitability, but also enabling them to achieve sustainability and create growth and jobs.

Kozak (2007) advanced that SMEs triple their growth rate when they adopt to technology. ICT is an enabler for businesses, irrespective of the type of enterprise or its size. With the Internet and other ICT tools, SMEs can expand their business reach to new

clients and markets with relative ease (Ardjouman, 2014). This study included exploration that seeks to determine if the strategies employed by the Jamaican SMEs for the achievement of business sustainability includes the use of ICT tools.

The incorporation of nontraditional mobile technology in business resulted in higher levels of operational efficiencies (Salo, 2012). Mobile technology plays an essential part in primary business relationships and improves coordination within and between business entities (Salo, 2012). Wi-Fi based systems, which uses mobile devices such as personal digital assistants that buyers and sellers use to expedite and lessen the costs and the processes of transactions are gaining widescale acceptance (Salo, 2012). Mobile technology allows employees to enjoy the freedom to transact business outside of the customary work times and workplaces (Harris & Patten, 2014). Yu and Buahom (2013) supported this view and added that companies should see mobile commerce as a more progressive means of doing business. This study includes an exploration of the mobile technology use in the Jamaican business environment to determine the extent to which mobile technology is being used to support strategies aimed at enhancing SMEs business sustainability.

In an exploratory study conducted in Cote d'Ivoire that focused on SMEs adoption and use of technology, Ardjouman (2014) revealed barriers to technology adoption by SMEs, highlighting that barriers such as the high cost, lack of technology tools and skills, uncertainty about business benefits, insufficient infrastructure, and limited access to the Internet, affected the smooth adoption of technology by SMEs. The

study also concluded that a significant recognition exists for the need for technology adoption in SMEs to enhance their sustainability (Ardjouman, 2014). Marnewick (2014) contended that technology adoption could assist the owner of SMEs to grow their businesses if adopted and made a part of the daily operation of the business.

Lip-Sam and Hock-Eam (2011) showed that experienced owners of SMEs with tertiary education, who regularly uses a computer would more likely accept new technology use in business. Lip-Sam and Hock-Eam opined that issues such as costs of technology, IT security, SMEs readiness, competition, external support, and Internet quality influenced the decision to implement such technology. Because of the importance of technology adoption to the success of SMEs as highlighted in the literature, this study included an exploration of the impact of technology adoption in some Jamaican SMEs that achieved sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector.

SME Access to Financing

Access to financing plays a significant role in SME success (Haron et al., 2013; Pandula, 2011; Zarook, Rahman, & Khanam, 2013a). Strong performing enterprises with growing income from sales have less difficulty accessing credit, while weak performing firms have limited access to financing, particularly bank financing (Zarook et al., 2013a). Other factors also influence access to financing, including the enterprise's size, ownership type, age, and industry sector (Zarook, Rahman, & Khanam, 2013b). Because of their relatively smaller size, SMEs have more credit constraints compared to larger firms, because they are usually small, owned, and operated privately, with no obligation

to report their financials (Pandula, 2011). Also, SMEs usually lack the assets to use as collateral to secure loans, are associated with higher failure rates and viewed as riskier compared with larger firms (Pandula, 2011). Leaders of older firms have easier access to financing because they usually have records of performance and readily available financials (Pandula, 2011). Based on the identified challenges faced by owners of SMEs, this study included an exploration of the strategies owners of Jamaican SMEs used to obtain financing for their enterprise.

The ability of SMEs to grow, achieve sustainability, and build themselves up significantly depends on their ability to obtain and manage finance (Abe, Troilo, & Batsaikhan, 2015). The requirement for funding usually takes place earlier in the life cycle, characterized by the expansion that requires investment in asset acquisition and research and development (Sánchez, Popescu, Chivu, Ciocârlan-Chitucea, & Popescu, 2011). This situation generates a higher need for external sources of financing (Sánchez et al., 2011). SMEs raise their funds from diverse sources dependent on their ability to be convincing (Raju & Rajan, 2015).

Fatoki and Asah (2011) explored the effect of the enterprise and entrepreneurial characteristics regarding SMEs' access to debt financing and explained that funding institutions minimize their risk with collateral. The availability of collateral is an important determining factor of SMEs' access to credit and suggests that SMEs without collateral will experience difficulty in getting debt financing from commercial banks and similar financial institution. Pandula (2011) explained that the industry sector of the

enterprise has a bearing on the accessibility of financing because lending institutions prefer to lend to growing industry sectors. Service sectors also usually find access to financing difficult because firms in this sector have less collateral to offer as security. The literature implies that owners of SMEs prefer to either use business or personal assets as collateral when seeking finance. This study included an exploration of the role collateral played in the strategy used by participants to obtain finance for their respective businesses.

Fatoki and Asah (2011) posited that owners and managers of SMEs must become aware of financing institutions and investors needs, and make themselves investment ready through training that will improve their access to debt financing. Owners of SMEs must engage in personal development in the areas of finance and business management to improve their access to financing. Many SMEs have financial difficulties such as insufficient capitalization, unnecessary debt, and inadequate book keeping that result from a deficiency of financial education (Forte, Barros, & Nakamura, 2013).

SME Capital Structure

The capital structure of an enterprise consists of a combination of debt and equity used to fund the operations (Benkraiem & Gurau, 2013). Serrasqueiro, Nunes, and Da Silva (2012) examined whether ownership structure is a significant determining factor in capital structure choices. Serrasqueiro et al. posited family-owned businesses are more aligned with the trade-off theory and those not owned and operated by the family are

closer aligned with the pecking order theory. Köksal and Orman (2015) contributed that the trade-off theory exists when owners of enterprises work the costs and benefits of debt to achieve a capital structure that has an optimal debt ratio in which the marginal benefits of debt match the marginal costs of debt.

The pecking order theory stated that the decision makers of the firm follow a hierarchical order; they look to internal sources of funding before resorting to external sources of funding (Köksal & Orman, 2015). Köksal and Orman (2015) further related that internal financing reflects the desire of the enterprise owners to retain control of the firm and is a less costly means of financing that does not require disclosure of financial and other proprietary information to outsiders. Komera and Lukose (2015) posited that inherent in the pecking order theory is asymmetric information. The pecking order theory assumes that firms holding more tangible assets will be less disposed to asymmetric information situations (Obi & Ibe, 2016). From the literature reviewed, led to the conclusion that both the pecking order and trade-off theories, depending on the SMEs' preference, which influences where they go to access financing. Based on these theories, this study included an exploration of strategies used for financing Jamaican SMEs achieving business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector.

Muscettola (2013) conducted a study that reviewed the relationship between borrowed capital and the likelihood of firms in the SME category defaulting on their loan obligation. Ju and Young Sohn (2015) advised that SME's loan default may happen in four ways, as follows: (a) delay or overdue repayment, (b) bad credit or failure to adhere

to loan agreement, (c) bad check or check drawn on account with insufficient funds, and (d) closure of business or permanent end to business activities. Resulting from the study, Muscettola posited that an analysis of a firm's financial structure is required in assessing the probability of profitable progress or default. An increase in financial debt position relates to a decrease in insolvency, although debt financing makes available more openings for productive investments; it escalates the firm's likelihood of default (Muscettola, 2013). Narteh (2013) related that banks should differentiate reliable from risky firms and that banks that can do this assessment find offering to finance SMEs significantly easier. Lack of adequate information about SMEs affects a banks' ability make the necessary assessment and consequently escalate their perceived default risk for loans (Yoshino & Taghizadeh-Hesary, 2015).

SME Marketing

Because of their relatively small size and cost restraint, SMEs usually find difficulty in exploiting markets to their full potential (Goel, 2014). Lecic-Cvetkovic, Kostic-Stankovic, Cvijovic, and Kompirovic, (2014) presented a different view, which suggested that the small size of SMEs is an advantage. Lecic-Cvetkovic et al. explained that the advantage occurs because of the relatively small size of SMEs, which allows more business flexibility, acceptance of innovation, superior customers relationship, and levels of employee's initiative. Lecic-Cvetkovic et al. further explained that these factors allow them to be more responsive to their markets and give SMEs the capability to exploit emerging market opportunities. A review of the literature revealed a consensus

among researchers that marketing plays an important part in the success of any business and is the means by which the markets become aware of products and services. Ashworth (2012) supported this finding and further opined that a purchaser, who is not aware of the existence of a product or service, will not make the purchase. Consequent on the importance of marketing this study included an exploration of how marketing supports the strategies used by some SMEs to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector.

The extent of adoption and implementation of a marketing program and concepts within an organization reflect the degree of marketing orientation (Mokhtar, Yusoff, & Ahmad, 2014). Urde, Baumgarth, and Merrilees (2013) contributed that market orientation perspective is from the outside in, as market-oriented firms see the needs and wants of the consumers as paramount. When an organization's market orientation produces a sense of worth for customers, which is uncommon and not easily replicable, this sense of worth could become a supportable base of competitive advantage that allows the enterprise to outperform competitors that have weaker market-orientation (Kumar, Jones, Venkatesan, & Leone, 2011). The degrees of market-orientation of the SMEs participating in this study, therefore, provide valuable information on the competitive strategy used to support the sustainability of their businesses.

Marketing oriented organizations take responsibility for the marketing concept and plan and institute the marketing functions best suited for the existing situations (Mokhtar et al., 2014). Sukato (2014) found that a strong emphasis on market orientation

tends to produce a higher level of innovation because the commitment to market orientation forces firms to engage in significant levels of innovative activities. This interaction between market orientation and innovation leads to success (Sukato, 2014). Chang, Franke, Butler, Musgrove, and Ellinger (2014) related that studies confirmed that innovation facilitates the relationship between market orientation and company performance.

Keh, Park, and Shin (2015) argued that no guarantee exist that enterprises with an elevated level of market orientation will produce a superior level of profitability and suggested that a firm with a high market orientation could perform poorly. Enterprises are better off focussing on efficiency and output, instead of on market orientation as such (Keh et al., 2015). Keh et al. received support from Long (2013) and Wang, Chen, and Chen (2012) berated the central tenets of market orientation, which included: intelligence gathering, intelligence dispersal, and organization-wide alertness, as possessing any significant direct influence on business performance.

Goel (2014) explored the significance of market research to the growth and sustainability of India's SMEs and found that globalization and technology advances cause significant changes to marketing dynamics, which is an important challenge for SMEs. Goel argued that market research makes possible the ability to identify target customers, determine customers' perception of the product or brand, and gather insights in evaluating the correct target market (Goel, 2014), expressing the opinion that market research should be part of the business strategy of SMEs. The literature reviewed

suggested that traditional marketing research methods have transitioned towards digital market research methods (Goel, 2014). Digital marketing involves the use of mass media technology like the internet to assist in improving customer knowledge and matching of customer needs (Khan & Siddiqui, 2013). Other researchers such as Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2015) noted that SMEs do not make use of the potential of the new digital tools and, miss the full benefits of digital marketing. The degree of engagement in marketing research should have a bearing on the SMEs ability to achieve business sustainability and was explored in this study.

SME Social Networking

SMEs could garner informal information from external sources and use the knowledge to develop new and innovative ideas to solve problems, giving themselves a significant competitive advantage to enhance their success (Sawyer, Evans, & Bosua, 2014). Sawyer et al. piloted an inquiry in South Australia, which explored the experiences and opinions of SME owners regarding how they obtain and absorb external knowledge toward innovation from their social networks. The literature confirmed that innovation in organizations depend on the human capacity to obtain, absorb, generate and share new knowledge and that the successful adaptation of this information into new products and services can provide the reason for superior performance and give companies a competitive edge (Sawyer et al., 2014).

Gardiner and Hajek (2016) contributed that a nexus exists between healthy SMEs and innovation and the use of technology. Al-Ansari, Pervan, and Xu (2013) supported

these points of view and further contended that a significant factor in the effort to achieve growth led by innovation is the capability of a business and its employees to recognize, absorb, convert, and exploit external knowledge. Because of the established nexus between healthy SMEs and innovation, this study included an exploration of the role innovation play in Jamaican SMEs achieving business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector.

In an SME the absorption of knowledge comes from formal and informal activities (Sawyer et al., 2014). Adriansyah and Afiff (2015) acknowledged that an organization's innovative ideas could come from internal formal or informal sources as well as from external sources, making the point that an enterprise's absorptive capacity has a beneficial influence on its innovation, and innovation that has positive effects on competitive advantage. As a result, leaders who want to develop a competitive edge should improve their information flows and absorptive capacity. A consensus among researchers in the literature is that the successful conversion of this knowledge into innovative products and services boost the enterprise performance and competitive situation (Sawyer et al., 2014). SME owners and managers need to recognize the benefits of formal and informal networking and use these networks to achieve success for their firms (Sawyer et al., 2014). Because a consensus exists in the literature review that the successful conversion of knowledge into innovative products increases the enterprise's performance, this study included exploration of the influence of informal and formal

flows of information on the strategies adopted by Jamaican SMEs to achieve business sustainability.

SME Knowledge Management

In the literature, scholars agree that SMEs operate in a knowledge-based economic environment as knowledge exceeds the traditional features of production, for example, land, capital, and labor to become the most significant factor driving business development (Durst & Edvardsson, 2012). Durst and Edvardsson also confirmed the significance of knowledge management and posited that knowledge is the most important strategic consideration in corporate operation, as knowledge links with the firms' capabilities to gain competitive advantages. Cruceru (2015) opined that knowledge resources are required for attaining competitive advantage. Heavin and Adam (2013) supported Cruceru's opinion and further added that knowledge is the source of organizational empowerment. Given the identified importance of knowledge resources to a firm's success, this study included exploration of how knowledge resources influence the strategies used by Jamaican SMEs to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector.

Chen and Chang (2012) conducted a study that explored how knowledge characteristics affect employee's absorptive capability and influence the quality of knowledge transfer. Chen and Chang contended that knowledge sharing is a primary source for SMEs to access knowledge. Knowledge sharing transpires through cross functionality, coinciding roles, and by physical closeness in open working areas, which is

typical of SMEs (Chong, Ooi, Bao, & Lin, 2014; Wee & Chua, 2013). In SME owners' opinion, knowledge sharing becomes improved when among employees there is an awareness of roles, reciprocated respect, and trust (Wee & Chua, 2013). Chen and Chang's research also reinforced the view that interdepartmental knowledge transfer contributes to the SMEs' success and management performance, and that the main enablers of successful knowledge transfer is the employee's absorptive capacity. Employee absorptive capacity lies in the capability of the employee to assess, internalize, and apply knowledge (Chen & Chang, 2012). Minbaeva, Pedersen, Björkman, Fey, and Park (2014) advanced that higher absorptive capacity results in higher levels of knowledge transfer and that employees' ability and motivation need to be present for best absorption of knowledge to occur.

Heavin and Adam (2013) found that an effective approach to managing knowledge is to align closely with the needs of the firm. Heavin and Adam argued that this approach seeks to identify the firm's needs and to assess knowledge approach by the firm's long-term plans. Management should use the knowledge competencies in the firm to respond to changing objectives of the firm, stand behind innovative product development activities, improve sales approach, and enhance customer relationship activities (Heavin & Adam, 2013). Managers of SMEs must consider proper knowledge management as a means of supporting their decision-making needs (Heavin & Adam, 2013). Knowledge management should address whether an organization has the knowledge needed for growth and whether management has relevant and up-to-date

information to make informed decisions (Laihonen, Lönnqvist, & Metsälä, 2015).

Albors-Garrigos, Ramos-Carrasco, and Peiro-Signes (2016) provided support for Heavin and Adams' findings and further opined that knowledge is a valuable and useful asset for the achievement of competitive advantages and needs effective management.

SME Management

Business failure is often because of a deficiency of entrepreneurial knowledge and business management skills (Urban & Naidoo, 2012). Inadequate education and training and weak business skills are causal factors for the lack of capacity and a low level of business efficiencies among SMEs (Shonubi & Taiwo, 2013). Shonubi, and Taiwo related that entrepreneurs are often ignorant of many important dimensions of operating their enterprises and must attain the needed skills if they are to survive. The literature suggested that an awareness of all functional areas of business, to include entrepreneur's skills such as innovation and risk taking, are essential ingredients for SMEs' business success (Ramukumba, 2014; Shirokova, Vega, & Sokolova, 2013; Wang et al., 2015). This study includes an exploration of the qualification and experiences of the participants and the impact such qualification and experience have on the strategies employed to achieve business sustainability in their respective SMEs.

SME managers often rely on their overestimated intuition to manage the enterprise (Urban & Naidoo, 2012; Ramukumba, 2014). Hatak, Harms, and Fink (2015) explored the fragile relationship between operation skills and SME sustainability and indicated that the use of management tools is essential; however, the tools are not to

replace the traditional way of management, but to enhance entrepreneurs' instinctive management skills. Hatak et al. explained that in established businesses, management practices would intuitively develop with experience, but because people have a changing perception of management, this influences their opinions about the development of managers. Furthermore, this situation often causes contradictions and tensions to develop. This study included an exploration of the role of the use of management tools compared to the use of instinctive and intuitive management skills in achieving SMEs' business sustainability.

Callaway and Jagani (2015) posited that with dispersed knowledge, coordination becomes essential for the proper operation of a market economy, asserting coordination is an essential aspect of management that is essential for the organization's management to create and pursue suitable strategies, develop fitting organizational structure, and improve its source of competitive advantage. To move from a state of disequilibrium toward a state of equilibrium characterized by efficient use of resources, real discovery and entrepreneurial coordination are essential (Chiang & Yan, 2011). To reach this efficiency objective, the respective firm's activities need coordination with others (Chiang & Yan, 2011). Coordination of the physical and human capital of an enterprise, therefore, takes place to create wealth and capabilities. Gruber-Muecke and Hofer (2015) contended creating superior value for customers require coordinated use of resources.

The organization of a firm takes different formats, depending on whether the objective is to take advantage of, or explore revenue prospects, or to avoid unnecessary

business costs. Typically, an organization will take the form of vertical integration or horizontal diversification. Firms with high asset uniqueness and specificity show better suitability to vertical integration (Fernandes, Gouveia, & Pinho, 2012). Chiang and Yan (2011) advanced that horizontal diversification becomes preferred in circumstances where the economies of collaborative production, or scope, give substantial cost benefit. The exploration of strategies used by some Jamaican SME owners to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector would necessitate an assessment of the firms' organizational format, and an assessment of how such format influenced the strategies employed.

Fundamental distinctions exist between the traditional management theories and disciplines that include planning, organizing, controlling, and coordinating. The daily lived experiences of managers are less structured and more focused on what managers need to accomplish at a specific place and time (Urban & Naidoo, 2012). Entrepreneurial capability does not rest solely on their ability to produce a business plan, but also on their ability to spot and respond to new prospects (Shonubi & Taiwo, 2013). Ekpe (2011) indicated that inborn personality and abilities also influence the entrepreneurial competence. In general, the literature reviewed implies that skills development and education form part of human capital and can improve SME productivity significantly. Successful entrepreneurs who achieve high growth companies usually have good entrepreneurial and management skills, which lead to the business sustainability and profitability.

Strategic Management Decisions

The field of strategic management is vast and includes the topic of enterprise profitability and growth (Drouin & Jugdev, 2014). Drouin and Jugdev explained that strategic management involves considerations of the nature of the firm's resources and how they are developed to become unique and protected from rivals. Parnell, Long, and Lester (2015) posited that strategic mindset, strategic resource management, and organization self-adaption and renovation represent the key capabilities of SMEs. Identifying and exploiting opportunities that improve decision-making reflects the organization's strategic mindset (Parnell et al., 2015). Subsequently, exploring the strategic management, particularly the strategic mindset of the participants, would be essential to understanding the participant's decision-making process and the impact of such a process on strategies developed to achieve business sustainability.

Linking capabilities to strategic resources are core functions of the strategic manager and are significant to strategic resource management (Parnell et al., 2015). Adapting to changing external environment represents an organization's self-adaption and renovation capability (Parnell et al., 2015). The idea of strategic capabilities underscores the distinctiveness of an organization. Parnell et al. (2015) also suggested that strategic capabilities are uncommon and vary among different organizations within an industry. Cheng, Kadir, and Bohari (2014) presented similar views to Parnell et al. and further posited that strategic management is required for growth in SMEs; however, most SMEs do not usually conduct strategic planning and find difficulty obtaining external

information (Cheng et al., 2014). Sandada, Pooe, and Dhurup (2014) conducted a study in which they concluded that strategic planning allows businesses to determine reasons and resolutions to problems, to exploit the operating environment, and to create business stability. Cooper and Winsor (2015) posited that the response of strategic managers to uncertainty depends on their disposition to risk. Chattopadhyay and Dasgupta (2015) suggested that individuals who have low risk tolerance are usually risk averse and that demographic and socioeconomic factors influence an individual's disposition to risk taking. Risk-averse managers are more conservative in their approach to product development, markets, alliances, and investments than managers more inclined to take risks (Cooper & Winsor, 2015). Managers who are less risk-averse have a higher probability of taking on new ventures and opportunities with less concern for uncertainty (Cooper & Winsor, 2015). Parnell et al. (2015) presented a similar view to that of Cooper and Winsor and further suggested that increased environmental certainty enhances performance. The risk profile of participants were explored to determine the effect of their disposition to risk on the choice of strategies used to achieve business sustainability.

Mintzberg (1994) posited that compared to larger companies, SMEs include the inclination to avoid planned activities. SMEs usually lack useful data and knowledge, operate on restricted resources, and follow larger firms cost leadership-differentiation strategies (Mintzberg, 1994). Mintzberg made the point that most SME owners lack the business erudition necessary to specify the association between competitive strategies and their performance. Managers of firms who practice a reactor strategy experience

significantly lower levels of performance satisfaction, unlike companies that are more proactive and engage prospector, protector or evaluator strategies (Parnell et al., 2015). Parnell et al. contended that firms that have strategic clarity enjoy higher levels of performance satisfaction than those with lower strategic clarity. Parnell et al.'s study included an exploration of the type of strategy practiced by participants, to determine if they engage in the reactor, prospector, or protector strategies, which according to the literature would have an influence on the level of success and sustainability achieved.

The Jamaican Context

Jamaica's economy historically suffers from low growth and high debt. Fifteen years before the global financial crisis in 2008, Jamaica's actual GDP growth averaged only 1.1 % per annum (Johnston & Montecino, 2012). Average GDP per capita grew at approximately 0.4 % per annum for the same period, while maintaining a debt-to-GDP ratio of over 100% since 2001, which makes Jamaica among the most indebted countries in the world (Johnston & Montecino, 2012). The enormous debt burden stifled public expenditure as debt servicing is approximately 50% of the country's total budgeted expenditures, while health and education combined accounts for only 20% (Johnston & Montecino, 2012). This situation causes a crisis for a country such as Jamaica with such a low level of income. Jamaica needs investment in infrastructure and the development of its human capital. Qadri and Waheed (2013) showed a positive correlation between economic success and investment in the development of human capital. An in-depth understanding of the Jamaican business context was relevant to this study because the

participants to the study are owners of SMEs operating in Jamaica who are faced with the challenge of doing business in Jamaica. The context differentiates this study from other studies that explore SMEs' sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector.

In December 2015, Jamaica recorded a GDP of US \$14.36 billion, GDP per capita of US \$5,133.66, trade balance of 11% of GDP, the public debt of 124% of GDP, unemployment of 16.3%, and an inflation rate of 9.3% (World Bank, 2016). The economy depends heavily on services, which accounted for approximately 60% of GDP (Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 2016). The country continues to obtain the majority of its foreign exchange from tourism, remittances, and bauxite and alumina (Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 2016). Johnson (2014) explained that Jamaica's exceptional accomplishments in the areas of sports, music, and tourism, faces annulment because of the economic instability characterized by high debt, poverty, and unemployment among other socio-economic factors. This economic overview gives a good synopsis of the economic situation that prevails in Jamaica and provided this study with an understanding of the economic context in which Jamaican SMEs operate.

Regarding business competitiveness, Jamaica ranks 94 out of 148 economies in the world as stated in the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness standing (Schwab, 2014). The World Economic Forum 2014 / 2015 report listed challenges facing the Jamaican businesses as the costs of crime, violence, corruption, limited venture capital availability, and inefficient government bureaucracy (Schwab, 2014). Also,

Schwab (2014) indicated that significant levels of unemployment and underemployment and crippling levels of debt are among the challenging issues that characterize the Jamaican economy. Despite these challenges, Jamaica performed respectably in its ranking for the number of days to start a business, the prevalence of trade barriers, regulation of securities exchanges, and hiring and firing practices (Schwab, 2014). The socioeconomic factors highlighted by Schwab helps to establish the context in which, participants to this study operate their businesses.

For purposes of tourism, the Jamaican government portrays Jamaica as white sandy beaches, coconuts trees, sunshine, beautiful people, waterfalls, and reggae music (Lawrence, 2012). Despite its natural beauty and recognition, numerous social and economic issues exist. The challenge for the Jamaican government is to maintain and improve the standard of living of a progressively impoverished country made worst by the tasks of addressing Jamaica's high level of crime and corruption with limited resources (World Bank, 2014). Incidences of crime are a hindrance to creating and maintaining sustained strategies of economic development for advanced and emerging nations alike (K'nIfe & Haughton, 2013). The cost of dealing with crime and violence manifests in significant health care costs, significant security costs for enterprises, and the opportunity cost of deploying resources to fight crime (K'nIfe & Haughton, 2013). The threats that criminality and corruption present in Jamaica apply to all stakeholders in the society. Jamaica, as with all member states within the Caribbean Community, includes crime among the most significant concerns faced by adolescents (**GEM Country Report**,

2013). Consequently, this study also includes these factors as part of the context in which businesses operate in Jamaica and the effect of these factors on the strategies employed by SMEs to achieve business sustainability.

Other factors such as the lack of investment in training and social challenges produced a Jamaican workforce characterized by a poor work attitude and skills level (Cowell, 2004). A perception exists among Jamaican managers that a poor work attitude explains in larger measure the perilous situation of many Jamaican businesses and from a broader perspective the state of Jamaican economy (Cowell, 2004). The skill of a country's labor force relies on its education and training systems, and countries that include these investments have a higher probability of experiencing economic growth (Holzer, 2012). Holzer explained that failure to recognize the importance of these factors are usually reflective of managerial weaknesses. Cowell (2004) identified that managerial weaknesses characterize the Jamaican workforce and contribute to the context in which Jamaican businesses operate. Hidalgo (2013) concluded that the chief impediment to productivity is the area of management. Hidalgo specified that the factors contributing to this finding included poor communication, indecisiveness, poor accountability, apathy, disdain for manual labor, weak interpersonal relations, poor maintenance, poor marketing, and pricing. The study also included an exploration of the managerial strengths of participants, and how such strengths, influence the strategies employed to achieve business sustainability.

Success and Sustainability of SMEs

A strong nexus exists between success and performance of SMEs.

Business success is largely a matter of opinion, which depends on the extent to which businesses achieve or exceed their objectives (Simpson, Padmore, & Newman, 2012). Success in SMEs is subjective, depending on the perspective and perceptions of owners. Success may also be multidimensional and different from the traditional view of business success as profitable (Simpson et al., 2012). Despite the numerous studies about the success of SMEs, no consensus exists about the measurement of SMEs' business success or on the critical factors, which contribute to successful performance (Sefiani & Bown, 2013). Simpson et al. (2012) posited that the meaning of success is unclear because many factors may influence an SME's success, including the uniqueness of the business environment and the proprietor's objectives. The subjectivity of SMEs' success as seen in the literature would provide an opportunity for this study to obtain from the respective participants their opinion of success. The participant's view of SMEs' success could provide useful information for making comparisons between SMEs' planned business objectives, actual performance, and achievement of business sustainability.

Suter and Bwisa (2013) provided a broad view of entrepreneurship success, which suggested that success of enterprises occur both quantitatively and qualitatively. In addition, Suter and Bwisa advised that quantitative growth

reflects the magnitude of the company's annual turnover, **benefits**, capacities, profitability, and growth in shareholder value; whereas qualitative growth takes account of an enterprise's competitive position and customer service. Scholars such as Fisher, Maritz, and Lobo (2014) and Lin, Rogoff, Foo, and Liu (2015) presented a more opened perspective of entrepreneurial success. They contended that such success is normally understood based on the context in which it occurs and from the differing viewpoints of scholars, policymakers, critics, and entrepreneurs. The context approach to assessing business success aligned with this study, which included the exploration of business sustainability strategy from the perspective of the Jamaican business context.

SMEs sustainability includes support as a principal measure of entrepreneurial success among scholars (Arena & Azzone, 2012; Haugh & Talwar, 2012; Nikolic & Robinson, 2013). Three dimensions of SME sustainability are the environmental dimension, the economic dimension, and the social dimension (Haugh & Talwar, 2012). Arena and Azzone (2012) presented similar views and identified environmental, economic, and social dimension factors as significant dimensions of SME sustainability. Ciasullo and Troisi (2013) explained that the economic dimension is how firms operate in the interest of their owners by increasing their wealth. Ciasullo and Troisi also elaborated that the environmental dimension is where firms operate within a tolerable capacity of the ecosystems. Regarding the social dimension, Ciasullo and Troisi

expounded that this dimension relates to firms accepting more accountabilities toward the interested party and the social situation in which they function. These dimensions combine to give a more comprehensive view of sustainability than narrowly viewing sustainability from only an environmental perspective.

Success and Sustainability Factors of SMEs

Business success is a matter of opinion linked to how much of the business targets management achieved or exceeded (Simpson et al., 2012). Simpson et al. also advanced that a broadly held view among scholars is that SMEs operate in exceedingly challenging and dynamic environments that are so diverse that SMEs could have dissimilar experiences and dissimilar conditions despite being in the same industry. This situation makes reaching a conclusion of the critical success factors (CSFs) of SMEs, exceedingly difficult. The industry structure, government policy, supporting agencies, financing organizations, and the total groundwork supporting an industry gives rise to a set of factors essential for SMEs success (Simpson et al., 2012). Simpson et al. (2012) produced a study aimed at critically evaluating existing ways of determining performance and producing SMEs' critical success factors (CSFs). In their findings, Simpson et al. opined that while managers may select a sub-optimal collection of factors that can be used to control, develop, and maintain an enterprise, no accepted collection of CSFs exist that is germane to every SME.

Federico, Rabetino, and Kantis (2012) conducted an inquiry into SME's growth determinants across regions. The results showed the importance of entrepreneurs' human

capital endowments to determine the business development and continued growth (Federico et al., 2012). Federico et al. concluded that the results of the study confirmed that a company's growth determinants, as well as their significance, vary based on country or regional context. Akinboade (2015) also expressed the view that location or region also have a bearing on the growth of an enterprise. Consequently, policy interventions should consider the specificity of each region when developing entrepreneurial strategies, avoiding the acceptance of *one size fits all* solutions. Freeman and Styles (2014) confirmed that the location or region in which an SME operates has an impact on the SME's success because access to sources of supplies, markets, business agencies, and the suitable human resource (HR) may vary with the location or region.

Sefiani and Bown (2013) performed a qualitative study with owners and managers of SMEs to explore participant's experiences, beliefs, and attitudes on the external factors of success. The study revealed that availability of financial resource presents a significant factor that influences the success of SMEs, and access to this resource is affected by inadequacies in the business plan, lack of experience, high-interest rates and availability of adequate collaterals (Sefiani & Bown, 2013). Abe et al. (2015) opined that financing is a significant restraint for SMEs because owners fail to manage working capital efficiently, problems encountered with financing application because of information asymmetry between banks and SMEs, and equity markets lack of enthusiasm toward SMEs. Yildirim et al. (2013) are also of the opinion that the lack of available financing is the main cause of SME failure in developing countries. Because of the

consensus in the literature that SMEs owners faced with the difficulty of obtaining financing, which is a main cause of failure, this study included an exploration of the strategies the participating owners of Jamaican SMEs use to overcome this challenge.

Thomas, Francis, Elwyn, and Davies (2012) are of the opinion that sustainable businesses may evolve from experiences and learn from those experiences how to cope with similar situations in the future. Thomas et al. also recognized that many extraneous factors are present in a company that could affect experience based decisions. Soriano and Castrogiovanni (2012) provided support to Thomas et al. who posited that profitability and productivity as measures of performance are positively related to the industry knowledge of the manager or owner before starting up a business and to the knowledge gained from operating the business.

Firms with experienced and educated owners perform better than firms whose owners lack these characteristics (Asah, Fatoki, & Rungani, 2015). Soriano and Castrogiovanni (2012) shared a similar view on the matter of owners' experience and explained that prior experience and productivity shows a positive correlation. Given the significance of SME owners experience as contained in the literature, this study included an exploration of the commercial experience of participants in this study to determine the impact on the performance of the firms, particularly, the strategies employed to achieve business sustainability.

The rapid changes occurring within the business environment and the emergence of knowledge-based economies led to a fiercely competitive situation as related to

pricing, quality, time duration, innovation, and product knowledge (Wingwon, 2012). These issues pushed SMEs to change their strategies for business sustainability. SMEs need to adopt a strategic alignment that meets the continuing changes and development tendencies that generate long-term economic success (Pop, Stümpel, Bordean, & Borza, 2014). Organization capability, innovation, and competitive advantage are all significant issues influencing the enterprise's strategic decisions and their business sustainability (Wingwon, 2012).

Teng, Bhatia, and Anwar (2011) examined the potential success and failure factors of SMEs and produced an entirely different set of factors to that of Wingwon (2012). Suggesting that the ability of SMEs to employ, train, and retain quality employees, and provide the right products and services are important factors that contribute to their success. These differing findings support the idea that no standard set of factors exist that is germane to all SMEs success. In exploring the strategies used by Jamaican SMEs to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years, this study included an exploration of whether there are standard sustainability factors.

Transition

Section 1 included background information regarding the business problem selected for the study. The failure rate for SMEs among developing countries remains disturbingly high despite government's intervention (Yildirim et al., 2013). GEM (2017) identified Jamaica as one of its members with a failure rate that is more than twice its new business start-up rate. The information and background discussed in Section 1

include the foundation for exploring the strategies some Jamaican SME owners use to achieve sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector.

A review of the literature includes various perspectives related to the issues that impact SMEs' sustainability. The literature also included exploration of the Jamaican business context to provide an adequate background against which the researcher can assess the sustainability issues identified in prior studies of the phenomenon. Various authors have used the qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research to investigate the business sustainability issues of SMEs, but this would be the first study that explores the phenomenon in the Jamaican *context*. The qualitative approach selected for this study provides the means for a thorough exploration of the targeted phenomenon.

Section 2 includes the details related to participants, research methods, data collection and analysis, and reliability and validity of the study. Section 3 will begin with a reiteration of the purpose and research question, followed by a discourse of the outcome of the study, a discussion of the application of professional practice, and implications for social change. Section 3 concludes with reflections and recommendations for actions and further study.

Section 2: The Project

This section includes an explanation of the purpose of the study and the research process. Also included is information regarding the method selected and the rationale that supports this selection. This qualitative descriptive multicase study included in-depth interviews designed to gather information from Jamaican entrepreneurs in business for more than 5 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive multiple case study was to explore the strategies some Jamaican SME owners use to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector. The specific population included five SME owners in Kingston, Jamaica who have strategies for achieving business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector. The study's outcome may contribute to positive social change by improving SMEs' commercial sustainability, which in turn may lead to improvement in Jamaica's GDP, employment, and general standard of living. Syed et al. (2012) posited that improvement in the GDP and employment would help to improve the social conditions of the general populace.

Role of the Researcher

In the role of the researcher, I assumed responsibility for collecting, assessing, and assigning meaning to the data. Khan (2014) emphasized that the researcher acts as the lens through which to gather and interpret data. The study is a qualitative study, which necessitates the researcher taking on the role of data collection instrument (Leedy

& Ormrod, 2013; Yin, 2017). Bryman and Bell (2015) and Morse, Lowery, and Steury (2014) advanced that a researcher must collect valid and reliable data from interviews with participants, sample observations, and examination of relevant company documents. In the role of the data collection instrument, I assumed the responsibility for recruiting participants, conducting the interviews, and transcribing interviews. I also reviewed company documents relevant to the study.

I have limited experience operating an SME, having started and operated a small landscape business that failed within 3 years. This outcome is the extent of my experience with operating and sustaining a small business. Additional experience includes work in senior management positions of prosperous and growing organizations in the agriculture, automobile, and manufacturing industries.

In the role of data collection instrument, I directly interacted with the participants in the study in face-to-face interviews, which provided the opportunity to observe their body language, facial expressions, and other nonverbal signs. The interview process included an interview protocol (see Appendix A) and a set of interview questions (see Appendix D). Jacob and Furgerson (2012) advocated that the interview protocol is a process guide, which guides a researcher in a qualitative study through the interview process, vital for obtaining the most relevant information from participants.

The interview protocol used in this study allowed the ability to ask each participant the same predetermined and open-ended questions in the same sequence as part of a strategy to reduce the possibility of introducing any research biases. In addition,

the study included the use of member checking and bracketing to assist in reducing the introduction of personal biases. Member checking is a participant corroboration process that enhances the credibility and trustworthiness of the research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Bracketing is a technique employed in qualitative research to lessen the possible negative consequences of prejudices that could affect the research process (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

Anyan (2013) said that both the researcher and participants can negatively influence a study with their personal biases. Fusch and Ness (2015) cautioned that the researcher and other participants' worldview and culture could also introduce biases in a study. I used bracketing methods to reduce any personal biases by (a) maintaining a written transcript during data collection and analysis, (b) audiotaping the interviews, and (c) maintaining a journal during the process (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Researchers should do no harm, maximize possible benefits from the study, and minimize possible harms to uphold the beneficence principle, which requires the researcher to have the participants' welfare as a goal (Cseko & Tremaine, 2013). Because the study involved human subjects, it was necessary to abide by the three principles outlined in the Belmont Report relating to ethical research: (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2014). Researchers should respect the independence of research participants to uphold the principle of respect for persons (Adams & Miles, 2013).

Participants

Robinson (2014) advised that a researcher must exercise caution selecting the study's participants to guarantee that data collected is valid and meaningful to the study. I used the purposive sampling method to select eligible participants from five SMEs. The purposive sampling method allows the researcher to select participants from a targeted population to obtain the most reliable data that leads to the emergence of reliable concepts and themes for answering the research question (Tong, Winkelmayr, & Craig, 2014). Yin (2017) advanced that a researcher must meticulously choose each case to predict comparable outcomes or achieve different anticipated outcomes for literal replication and theoretical replication, respectively. The participants were comprised of owners drawn from the list of SMEs registered with the Jamaica Manufacturing Association (JMA). To be eligible for the study, the owner selected must have sustained their SME beyond 5 years of operation in the Jamaican manufacturing sector. In addition, they must have met the definition of an SME given in the 14th draft of the Jamaica's MSME and Entrepreneurship Policy 2012. The policy includes a definition of the SME as having one to 50 employees with yearly revenues of less than 150 million Jamaican dollars (Jamaica Ministry of Industry, Investment, & Commerce, 2012).

To gain access to appropriate participants, I accessed the public database of SMEs registered with the JMA and obtained their contact information. The database includes the registered names of SMEs, date SME was established, nature of business, industry, and business contact details. I selected from the JMA's list of SMEs in Kingston the first

five owners of SMEs who had a business in operation for more than 5 years and consented to participate in the study. This process ensured the ability to obtain a random selection of qualified SME owners to participate in the study. A random selection of participants ensures that each qualified participant has an equal chance of being selected to avoid any possible biases (Leahy, 2013). Upon selection, I phoned each potential participant to introduce myself and explain the research and its value to society and businesses. To ensure that there were no ethical issues related to the collection of data from participants, I used as a guide the principles of empathy, morality, concern, awareness, and respect for participants as recommended by Metz (2013). Ross (2015) and Yanchar (2015) recommended that the researcher should always strive to establish a respectable and truthful working relationship with research participants. I ensured, therefore, that the working relationship with participants was ethical, honest, and objective, and that clear communication took place at all times.

To establish a working relationship with participants, the initial contact was followed up by an email containing information regarding the nature and objectives of the study. Participants received a consent form clarifying that there is freedom to end participation in the study at any time, as stated in the invitation letter and interview protocol (see Appendix A). Consent forms help to clarify the requirements of the study, as well as the ability to avoid any ethical issue that may arise (Morgenstern, Hegele, & Nisker, 2015). Interested participants reviewed, signed, and returned the consent form. To safeguard participants' anonymity, their personal names, business names, and addresses

do not appear in the study. Høyland, Hollund, and Olsen (2015) said that maintaining the anonymity of participants strengthens their trust in the researcher and that trust helps to validate the results of the study.

To align participants with the overarching research question, I restricted the selection of participating SMEs to those who have experience formulating and executing business sustainability strategies. Participants with this level of business sustainability experience would provide data that allows for a comprehensive and real-world discernment of the particular phenomenon, which forms the focus of the study. Tong et al. (2014) posited the necessity that a study's participants have the experience and abilities to provide valuable and reliable data that contributes to answering the research question. Yin (2017) noted that a case study is an experiential study that explores a current phenomenon or case thoroughly and within its actual setting, which was the focus of this study.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

I used a qualitative method. Researchers used the qualitative method for exploration of the meaning individuals ascribe to social issues or problems (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). The qualitative method does not involve non-numerical data to conduct an analysis of human actions that seeks to obtain a thorough understanding of the reasons that influence such actions (Ritchie et al., 2013). Denzin and Lincoln (2012) posited that researchers use a qualitative approach to explore a problem

thoroughly, taking note of viewpoints, happenings, and methods to gather a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon. The qualitative approach provided a thorough exploration of the strategies used by SMEs to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector.

This method of research involved the use of open-ended questions, which begin with *what* and *how* to explain the phenomenon subjected to exploration (Bryman & Bell, 2015). An advantage of the qualitative researcher method used in this study is that it provided a deep and insightful understanding of the strategies some Jamaican SME owners used to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector. Moustakas (1994) advanced the view that researchers use a qualitative approach to explore a phenomenon rigorously and for increasing the objectivity of studies as themes emerge from the participants' perceptions. Despite these advantages, the qualitative method is susceptible to the biases of the researcher (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Shepperd, 2015).

I considered two other research methods, quantitative and a mixed method. Researchers use quantitative research to examine the relationship between research variables used to test objective theories (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The quantitative method of research did not meet the needs for this study, because, as explained by Bansal and Corley (2012), such a method does not support exploration to achieve an understanding of a phenomenon. Heyvaert, Maes, and Onghena (2013) advanced that the mixed method

research involves combining qualitative and quantitative methods of research into one study, which does not meet the needs of this study.

The combined strength of the qualitative and quantitative methods may compensate for the weakness of each other (Kwok, 2012). Despite this advantage, the mixed method research involves simultaneously conducting several studies with diverse sets of research skills, which could significantly increase the scale of the research and the amount of time required (Kwok, 2012). In addition, attempting to combine both processes may cause difficulty in controlling the research process. The most significant advantage of using the qualitative approach is its capacity to produce explanatory, comprehensive, and informative data (Kwok, 2012).

Research Design

The conduct of this study involved using a descriptive multiple case study design. Leedy and Ormrod (2013) explained that a research design is a chronological plan for exploring a research questions and, eventually, to its conclusions. A case study design involves a thorough exploration of a limited amount of cases or a single case (Verner & Abdullah, 2012). Case studies provide additional benefit in cases in which *how* or *why* questions are used, which relates to a contemporary set of activities, for which the researcher hardly has any control (Yin, 2017). Yin advanced that the case study design more appropriately suits situations where the researcher must consider the context in which the phenomenon exist. Researchers usually use the case study design to research nascent ideas from multiple sources (Yin, 2017), which was the case for this study.

The other designs considered included ethnography, narrative inquiry, and phenomenology. Petty, Thomson, and Stew (2012) advised that ethnography, phenomenology, and case study are the primary designs used in qualitative inquiry. Ethnography better suits the study of a cultural group in a natural setting and focuses on in-depth interviews and detailed observations over an extended period to gain understanding (Goldstein et al., 2014). The narrative design would be unsuitable because the focus is on studying the lives of individuals and the stories about their lives as narrated chronologically by the individuals (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

The phenomenological research design best suits exploring lived experiences from the viewpoint of the research participants to appreciate and give them meaning (Bahn & Weatherill, 2013; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). The phenomenological study needs to capture subjective evidence based only on individuals' views to garner detail and varied understanding of a phenomenon (Forster, 2013). In contrast, the case study design requires a minimum of two sources of data (Yin, 2017). Although the goal of this study was to explore the lived experiences of the participants using in-depth face-to-face interviews, I also included company documents as another source of data. The phenomenological design increases the difficulty for the research to reach data saturation, because it restricts the researcher to one source of data. This fact influenced the decision not to use the phenomenological design for this study.

Yin (2017) posited that the case study design is the favored design in which (a) a researcher has limited control over behavioral happenings, (b) *how* or *why* are the

primary research questions, and (c) the emphasis of inquiry is a present-day, not a past phenomenon. Yin also posited that case study research can be descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory, however, a descriptive case study best suits exemplifying events in their distinct context (Yin, 2017). Yin further explained that the explanatory case study best suit exploring the causatives of an event and the exploratory case study research is better suited to define research questions and hypotheses. Because the descriptive case study exemplifies events in there distinct context, a descriptive multiple case study was best suited for the exploration of strategies used by Jamaican SME owners' to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector. Consequently, I obtained the related data from interviews and company documents.

For this qualitative descriptive multiple case study, five participants contributed data through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Interviews with the participants continued until I achieved adequate information for a thorough and credible analysis. The interviews continued to the point of data saturation. Kieft, De Brouwer, Francke, and Delnoij (2014) explained that the data saturation point occurs when no new information emerges from additional interviews. Fusch and Ness (2015) and Zeldenryk, Gray, Gordon, Speare, and Hossain (2014) reinforced the point that once the data becomes repetitive, without the addition of new information, evidence exists of data saturation.

Population and Sampling

The population from which the sample for this study comes includes entrepreneurs of SMEs registered with the JMA and who achieved business sustainability

beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector. The study included the use of a purposive sample consisting of five SME owners in Kingston, who used strategies for achieving business sustainability. Purposive sampling occurs where researchers use their assessment to choose the study's participants based on established criteria (Bryman, 2012). In addition to achieving business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation, eligible participants came from entities that met the Jamaica Government's National Export-Import (EXIM) Bank of Jamaica classification of a Jamaican SME.

The study included a selection of participants who were likely to produce rich data that affords an understanding of the real-world perspectives of the phenomenon related to the research question. Sequential selection of qualified participants from the JMA's membership list contributed to the validity of the sample. I skipped any owner on the list who did not wish to participate and moved to the next qualified prospect.

The suitability of the sample size in a qualitative study depends on the experience and judgment of the researcher in evaluating the appropriateness of the sample to meet the research objective (Bernard, 2013). Other authors such as Henry (2013) noted that the sample size might restrict the study. A qualitative study requires a sample size large enough to allow the researcher the opportunity to explore the research question in a thorough manner (Bernard, 2013). Bernard further advanced that the objective of the qualitative research is to grasp the important aspects of a phenomenon, its deep and profound interpretation, independent of the size of the sample used in the study. Ensuring availability of enough data is a precursor to credible analysis and reporting (Marshall,

Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). This study had a sample size of five, which was proved to be large enough to provide sufficient data and to execute a thorough research.

Vohra (2014) contended that the number of interviews in a qualitative inquiry is one of the ambiguities of a qualitative study because there are no rules which determine the numbers of interviews. Instead, what the researcher wants to know and what would be credible are the main determinants of the number of interviews (Vohra, 2014). The interviews with the purposive sample continued until there was data saturation and sufficient information for a comprehensive and credible analysis. The data saturation point occurs where no new information emerges from additional interviews (Kieft et al., 2014). Walker (2012) posited that demonstrated saturation is an indication of the quality and adequacy of the data supporting the study. Robinson (2014) advanced that in qualitative studies; data saturation improves trustworthiness and reinforces the validity.

For this qualitative descriptive multiple case study, five participants contributed data through interviews. These participants participated in additional follow-up interviews based on their responses to questions asked. The follow-up interviews allowed me to expand on their perspectives and provided the opportunity to discover developing themes and categories and to examine relationships between these themes and categories as needed. The process continued until there was evidence that I would not obtain any new information. Once the themes are repetitive with no new themes, emerging that is evidence of data saturation (Walker, 2012; Zeldenryk et al., 2014).

The interviews began with general questions, which lead to further questions based on the interviewee's response. Additional questions provided the opportunity for follow-up and for further stimulation of participants, which expanded their views without introducing any previously determined issues. As the collection and analysis of data progressed, the interviews became more semistructured with the aim of exploring emerging themes and categories. The process continued until no added data contributed to the study of the phenomenon. Zeldenryk et al. (2014) suggested that the saturation point reached contributes to the validity of the study.

The JMA's register, which records the relevant contact details of owners of SMEs, as well as the place and nature of the business provided an easy source for identifying and contacting the participants to this study. In-person visits occurred to potential participants not reachable by phone or emails. I made provision that if any prospective participant were unable to participate the selection would come from the next qualified entrepreneur on the list.

Ethical Research

For successful completion of the study, researchers must conform to strict ethical standards (Foster, Hays, & Alter, 2013). The ethical research guidelines for qualitative research are (a) confidentiality, (b) honesty, (c) written informed consent, and (d) right to privacy (Seidman, 2013). Dealing ethically with participants is an obligation of researchers and an essential condition of obtaining approval from an ethics committee to carry out research involving humans (Foster et al., 2013).

So that the required ethical standards were met, potential research participants received a printed version of an informed consent form. Grady et al. (2016) indicated that researchers should not view the consent form as an ordinary document for obtaining the signatures of participants, but a conversation process with the intent of obtaining the understanding of the participants. I called potential participants and discussed the consent form as well as gave a detailed account of the conduct and purpose of the study to ensure their understanding. I ensured that each participant returned a copy of the informed consent form, duly signed as evidence of understanding the requirements and conditions for participation before they provided any data. The participants received the assurance of anonymity and an explanation of the perceived benefits of the research outcomes to society and their business, similar to the process used by Pick, Berry, Gilbert, and McCaul (2013).

To keep Holgate, Pollert, Keles, and Kumarappan's (2014) process, involvement in this study was voluntary, with all data obtained from interviews treated confidentially. The study participants did not include any children or minors. Afolabi et al. (2014) recommended that participants must be free to end participation in the study at any time that they perceive the need to do so, as this will give more confidence in the process. I advised participants of their freedom to end participation in the study at any time if they wanted by sending an email to me at the pre-agreed email address, or by telephone (verbal or message), or in person (face-to-face) advising me of their intention to quit participation.

Participants were not encouraged or induced to participate in the study by any form of incentive. Providing incentives to participants may cause dishonesty, which might have a negative effect on the reliability and credibility of the data (Finkelstein et al., 2015). The participants advised me of the most convenient time for interviews that would minimize business interruption. The identity of all participants will remain confidential as recommended by Morse and Coulehan (2015); therefore, the names and other unique and identifiable attributes of the organization and participants were unspecified. I used secure and retrievable codes to represent the names of the participants, to maintain confidentiality. The code P1, for example, represents participant number one. I locked away the field notes and electronic files in a secure vault, which will remain secured for 5 years after which I will remove and destroy them by burning.

Data Collection Instruments

Yin (2017) posited that in a qualitative case study, data collection takes two forms, interview of participants and review of company documents. Within a qualitative study, the researcher assumes the role of the data collection instrument (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Roulston & Shelton, 2015). As the researcher, I was the primary instrument used to collect data for this study. Moustakas (1994), Seidman (2013), and Bryman and Bell (2015) considered a researcher as an integral part of the study, with the responsibility for the collection of reliable and valid data from participants. Reliable and valid data depends on a trustworthy and consistent data collection process (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Paine (2015) and Doody and Noonan (2013) recommended

semistructured open-ended questions in face-to-face dialogue as the best method of obtaining data from participants in a qualitative study. Semistructured questions posed to participants allowed rich, in-depth, contextual information to emanate from their views and lived experiences (De Ceunynck, Kusumastuti, Hannes, Janssens, & Wets, 2013; Gikas & Grant, 2013)

A researcher may develop a data collection questionnaire or use one that already exists with the permission of the original owner (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Sarker, Xiao, & Beaulieu, 2013). The collection of data from interviews conformed with the interview protocol (see Appendix A). The interviews involved the use of an in-depth interview format from which I asked 10 semistructured open-ended questions developed for this study, during face-to-face dialogue with participants. The in-depth interview format provided the flexibility to encourage participants to expand on their answers or freely introduce new topics and perspectives (Labaree, 2014). Zhou and Miguel (2013) identified interviews as the most efficient way to garnering data about the lived experience of participants in a qualitative study. Onwuegbuzie and Byers (2014) posited that interviews are dialogues between the researcher and the research participants who give answers to the research question.

A valuable secondary source of data is company documents (Yin, 2014). With the SME's owners approval, I also reviewed relevant company documents as a source of secondary data. De Massis and Kotlar (2014) and Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick, and Robertson (2013) contended that the use of multiple sources of data strengthens the

research, and assists the researcher in achieving triangulation, which reinforces the validity of the research. Hussein (2015) submitted that researchers might achieve methodological triangulation when conducting a case study by using data obtained from interviews and data obtained from company documents to cross-check and validate information. Included in the targeted company documents were financial documents, policy documents, procedure manuals, business and strategic plans, training plans, vision and mission statements, and minutes or notes of meetings.

Data Collection Technique

The researcher in a qualitative study must determine the most efficient technique to obtain data about the real-life experience and perceptions of the study's participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). In a qualitative case study, documentation, archival records, direct observations, and interviews are usually the most useful methods of data collection (Yin, 2017). Yin further related that interviews are the most efficient ways to obtain data, record, and retain evidence in a case study. Zhou and Miguel (2013) is of like mind and posited that in qualitative studies, interviews are the most useful data collection techniques. The interview process allows the researcher to ask targeted questions while permitting the interviewee to respond to the phenomenon through open-ended questions (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Yin, 2017). Yin also stated that case study should not rest solely on a solitary source of evidence. A study's validity is improved when the conclusions of the researcher are derived from multiple sources (Fusch & Ness, 2015). This study's data collection included data from multiple sources, primarily interviews and

company documents. The interviews of participants involved the use of a semi-structured interview questions, guided by a protocol, which allowed for in-depth interviews and open exploration of the research case (see Appendix A).

I scheduled a face-to-face interview with participants at their place of business and conducted interviews guided by a structured interview protocol. During each interview, participants responded to 10 semistructured open-ended questions (see Appendix D) related to the central research question of; what strategies do some Jamaican SMEs owners use to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector? I also took the opportunity while at the participant's location to ask for company documents that they were willing to share with me. At all locations I was shown some financial documents, internal memos, which recorded decisions taken regarding marketing strategies and general management decisions and directives to staff. These documents provided useful insights into the business strategies of the firm and made it possible to crosscheck information. Gorissen, van Bruggen, and Jochems (2013) posited that secondary data is useful for crosschecking of information.

To conform to the interview protocol, the interviews of participants began with an initial question aimed at establishing rapport, followed by conceptual questions associated with the research inquiry. I used open-ended interview questions to explore the research question with participants. Follow-up questions to encourage participants to provide additional information were an integral part of the process. Seidman (2013)

recommended this type of follow-up process to obtain a more thorough understanding of the case.

Interview with participants lasted one hour and took place at a mutually convenient time. Additionally, as recommended by Seidman (2013) and Kasprzak (2016), the interview did not include any intimidating questions; interviews took place in an atmosphere conducive to participant relaxing and freely expressing their opinions and recall of their experience with the phenomenon under exploration. During the interviews, I noted all the participants' body language. Knapp, Hall, and Horgan (2013) contended that keen scrutiny of nonverbal communication enhances the interviewer's interpretation and understanding of the interviewees' related experiences.

I conducted each interview and used a notebook to take handwritten notes in addition to digital recordings. Interview notes allowed for easy cross-checking of the data. In addition, the process ensured that each digital recording of participants has a label that corresponds to a notebook label created for each specific interview as recommended by Roulston (2014). Johnson, Boutain, Tsai, Beaton, and Castro (2015) suggested labeling as a means of keeping the data organized, of each participant, and interview notes, which permits easy cross-checking of data.

I meticulously transcribed the recorded data to ensure accuracy. Cole and Harbour (2015) explained that the validity of the findings in qualitative research depends significantly on accurate transcription of the recorded data. I did transcript review of the data by asking the participants to review and verify that the transcript of their respective

interview accurately reflected their related experiences and views. To improve data validity; I also engaged participants in member checking, where participants reviewed transcriptions, verified information or researcher's analysis, and provided clarification where necessary. Tunheim and McLean (2014) noted that the member checking process serves to enhance participant's interest and participation in the study and promotes the accuracy of transcription, the study's objectivity, and the study's validity. To validate the quality of the data, I engaged in the methodological triangulation of data by comparing the data gathered from interviews with the data gathered from company documents to find similarities and differences. Yin (2017) posited that methodological triangulation serves to confirm the validity of the data.

The primary data collection tools for the study included an interview template, a digital voice recorder, and the Audacity computer software with the capability of editing audio files. The computer that hosted the Audacity software is a Dell Inspiron computer. The digital voice recorder was a Sony ICD-PX333 portable device. Also, I used a notepad and pen to make written notes, particularly of the participants' nonverbal communication.

Data Organization Technique

The Sony ICD-PX333 recorder is a personal computer (PC) compatible digital audio recorder, with mark track capability that enables ease of playback and identification of respective recordings. The target time of each interview was approximately 55 minutes. I transcribed and analyzed the data recordings, which

produced the required text data. Data organization phase occurred after a comparison of the transcribed data with the interview notes. This phase involved (a) data checking that involves verifying data integrity and quality and noting the relationships between data items (Symon & Cassell, 2012), (b) maintaining and reviewing of a reflective journal that allows monitoring and keeping personal biases bracketed (Marshall & Rossman, 2014), (c) populating qualitative analysis software with raw data and using a computer-based coding system to organize the raw data into themes, and (d) review of field notes, to assist with the identification of themes, patterns, and prominent topics in the data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

I labeled the field notes, developed an electronic index to facilitate efficient data retrieval and removed all identifiers during the transcription of the data to safeguard each participant's privacy and identity. Bryman and Bell (2015) suggested that the mechanisms to safeguard participant's identity are central to the design and practice of ethical research. The identity of participants will remain confidential, and the field notes and electronic files locked away for no less than 5 years and after that destroyed permanently.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in a qualitative research entails addressing data, organization of gathered data, breaking down the data, recognizing patterns, synthesizing, determining what is necessary to learn and what information to include in the written study for others to read (Lawrence & Tar, 2013). The data analysis phase must include rigorous and in-

depth analysis of the data obtained to assist the researcher in suitably answering the research question (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). A researcher needs to use a comprehensive analysis procedure because of the large quantity of data from various sources, and the need to describe the analysis process accurately to ensure rigor in reporting of qualitative research (Yin, 2017). In a qualitative multiple case study, the data analysis involves manipulating the data and searching for likely patterns and perceptions with the objective of arranging what to analyze and why (Lawrence & Tar, 2013). In this qualitative multiple case study, I used the data analysis process recommended by Yin (2017), which include five steps: (a) compilation of the data, (b) disassembling the data, (c) reassembling the data, (d) interpreting the meaning of the data, and (e) concluding the data. Merriam (2015) applied Yin's data analysis method to analyze qualitative case studies and confirmed its appropriateness, further supporting its use for this study.

Houghton, Casey, Shaw, and Murphy (2013) advanced that methodological triangulation and member checking are two methods used for establishing the credibility of a study's results. Following the collection and interpretation of the data, I used member checking and methodological triangulation to compare the data gathered from interviews with the data gathered from company documents to find similarities and differences. Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, and Neville (2014) posited that the triangulation of a study's data increases the credibility of its conclusions and allows the researcher to determine themes. Cross checking the sources of data in this study supports the accuracy of the findings.

Data Analysis Using Yin's Five Step Method

The data analysis for this study involved a repetitive process that continued until there was data convergence. As recommended by Yin (2017), in this process, I looked for potential themes for answering the research question. Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013) described the process as iterative within the data set and the coded excerpts of the data to identify the most suitable themes for answering the research question.

Compiling the data. Upon completion of the data collection process, I transcribed the recorded interviews and triangulated data sources by comparing the transcribed data with the written interview notes to ensure reliability. Oleinik (2011) proposed this approach as a way of guaranteeing the reliability of the data. Member checking of the data took place by asking the participants to review and verify the transcript of their respective interview to ensure accuracy in the representation of their related experiences and views. I then compiled the data by importing the written reports into Microsoft Word's NVivo 11 application.

Disassembling the data. Disassembling the data is a recognized process of coding the data, according to Yin (2017). Researchers identify a theme using code names; a code name represents the name given to in-depth qualitative description (Chowdhury, 2015). I did not name the codes in the study based on any preconceived framework; rather, assignment of names occurred concurrently upon receiving data, which aligns with Lichtman's (2012) description of an inductive approach to thematic analysis. Cole and Harbour (2015) provided a comprehensive explanation of data coding, which

included categorizing and sorting the common features found in the entire dataset and the analysis and synthesis process. The placing of line labels on the transcripts provides significant traceability of codes to data extract (Chowdhury, 2015). Consequently, this study included the use of the NVivo 11 software auto-coding feature to find similarities in the data and predominant themes.

Reassembling the data. Yin (2017) explained that reassembling the data involves placing the data in-groups or categories until the researcher can sufficiently substantiate the emerging themes and that data reassembling occurs in the emergence of themes. Marshall and Rossman (2015) asserted that thematic analysis involves organizing themes and codes relevant to the research questions. I took the NVivo 11 results and searched for similar patterns to develop themes for determining what strategies some owners of SMEs use to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector. As recommended by Marshall and Rossman (2015), the final step in the thematic analysis involved organizing the themes and codes relevant to the research questions.

Understanding and interpreting the meaning of the data. Davidson, Paulus, and Jackson (2016) noted that the process of interpreting the meaning of the data involve the researcher making sense of the data and assigning their own meanings. Yin (2017) asserted that the researcher must be able to understand the data during the interpretation process as failure to understand the data will have a negative impact on the study's

findings. I ensured that there was rigorous research of any aspect of the data that was difficult to understand and sought clarification from experts in the field.

Concluding the data. Merriam, (2015) stated that in the concluding phase, the researcher puts into writing the findings of the study derived from the data gathered and analyzed. I included the themes that will help readers to understand the findings and the answer to the research question. Yin's (2017) recommends a comprehensive conclusion comprising all the evidence that emerged in the study.

As the researcher in this study, I recorded, transcribed code, identified themes, interpreted the data, and presented the study's findings. NVivo 11 as a CAQDAS tool was the technology that I used to conduct the analysis process. The use of NVivo software makes it possible to perform a quick, but detailed analysis through importing, analyzing, and coding the data (Zamawe, 2015). Zamawe explained that the use of NVivo makes it easier to search for patterns from the information provided by participants. NVivo will facilitate keeping the data gathered in one location while providing easy access to information and continuous coding (Zamawe, 2015). The use of NVivo 11 provided an increased level of diligence to the data analysis process of this study.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity occur when there is accurate recording, documentation, and interpretation of data (Gringeri, Barusch, & Cambron, 2013). Noble and Smith (2015) advocated that research needs to be thorough if the outcome is to be trusted. Thoroughness in research helps to establish the reliability and validity factors, which are

essential for the trustworthiness and consistency of the outcome (Noble & Smith, 2015). This section includes the details of the initiatives for enhancing reliability and validity to ensure the trustworthiness of the data and the findings. Houghton, Casey, Shaw, and Murphy (2013) determined that the most common standards used to evaluate the validity and trustworthiness of a qualitative study are (a) dependability, (b) credibility, (c) transferability, and (d) confirmability.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the use of consistent and methodical processes and the considering the researcher's biases that may influence the outcome of the study (Noble & Smith, 2015). In qualitative studies, data dependability is a component in achieving reliability (Hess, McNab, & Basoglu, 2014). Elo et al. (2014) advanced that dependability standard in a qualitative study refers to the data constancy over time and in diverse conditions. The achievement of dependability in a qualitative study allows other researchers to use the same process, with the same participants, to arrive at the same findings (Noble & Smith, 2015). I used notes, recordings of interviews and observation to gather data and meticulously documented the data collection, analysis, and interpretation process so that readers and other scholars may easily audit the methods used to arrive at the findings.

Qualitative researchers also achieve dependability by ensuring that the outcome of the study is trustworthy and credible to participants (Trochim, Donnelly, & Arora, 2014). I enhanced the dependability of the study by ensuring the accuracy of the data

transcription and interpretation through engaging in transcript reviews and member checking. Transcript review occurs when the researcher gives the participants an opportunity to check their transcribed interview for errors or inconsistencies (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Member checking occurs when the participants who provided the data, review and say if they concur with the researcher's interpretation and deductions from the data (Houghton et al., 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Member checking gave participants the opportunity to appraise and analyze the outcome of the research and to provide valuable feedback, which improved the study's reliability.

Wahyuni (2012) suggested that to improve the trustworthiness and validity of the study the researcher must explain to readers and other scholars the methods used to achieve the study's outcome. I highlighted Walden's doctoral study rubric sections 1, 2, and 3, and provided detailed information related to the study method and the rationale for the choice. In addition, I included detailed presentations of the findings to facilitate easy audit of these methods by other scholars

Validity

Validity, as distinct from reliability, is the degree to which an instrument measures what the researcher envisioned measuring (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Fan and Sun (2014) and Mangioni and McKerchar (2013) explained that validity denotes the strength and accuracy of the findings generated. Elo et al. (2014) posited that validity and reliability are not mutually exclusive; they play a supporting role to each other. This study is a qualitative descriptive multiple case study, which is concerned with

researchers' use of suitable methods, instrument, and protocols to ensure that the outcome of the study is authentic (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013; Ritchie et al., 2013; Trochim et al., 2014). Researchers safeguard internal validity with the quality and value of the research results (Yin, 2017).

The quality of a study depends on its credibility or its believability (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994). Munn, Porritt, Lockwood, Aromataris, and Pearson (2014) posited that credibility determines if a suitable match exists between data provided by participants and the researchers understanding. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2012) identified credibility as being most relevant to qualitative studies because of the correlation to the plausibility of the study. Houghton et al. (2013) advanced that methodological triangulation and member checking are two methods used for establishing the credibility of a study's results.

Methodological triangulation involves the use of multiple sources of data within a single study to obtain more than one interpretation about a social phenomenon for the purpose of supporting the validity of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville 2014). Methodological triangulation also includes assessing and comparing collected primary data with data from secondary sources to find similarities and differences (Albino & Berardi, 2012). I triangulated the data gathered from interviews and review of relevant company documents using methodological triangulation. Carter et al. (2014) posited that the triangulation of a study's data increases

the credibility of its conclusions. Cross checking of the sources of data in this study strengthened the credibility of the findings.

Mero-Jaffe (2011) presented that a researcher in a qualitative study also uses member checking as a participant corroboration process that enhances the credibility and trustworthiness of the research. Leedy and Ormrod (2013) suggested that member checking is an essential strategy for strengthening the internal validity of qualitative research. I engaged participants in member checking to ensure research quality, credibility, and reliability. Morse (2015) explained that member checking gives participants an opportunity to verify the accuracy of information or researcher's interpretation and analysis of data. The Data Collection Section of this study has a more detailed description of the member checking process. Anney (2014) and DeVault (2016) suggested that accurate and credible studies are more likely to produce the same or similar results if the study is replicated, or the findings transferred to other similar situations.

Transferability, in research, refers to the degree to which the finding of a specific study is generalizable or applicable to other similar situations without changing the substance of the findings (Anney, 2014; DeVault, 2016; Houghton et al., 2013). Morse (2015) advised that for a qualitative study, the degree of transferability depends on the researcher's ability to provide thorough descriptions of the study's context that allow the relevant audiences to make well-informed decisions about the applicability of the findings to similar contexts. Marshall and Rossman (2014) also explained that the study

should contain a comprehensive description of the study method, design, and data, which assists other researchers or readers to determine the applicability of the findings to similar studies. To achieve transferability, I provided readers with a comprehensive presentation of the study method, design, outcome, and the details of participants' feedback.

Confirmability is the degree to which others can endorse or corroborate the results of the research (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994). Denzin (2012) posited that confirmability requires objectivity in the assessment and interpretation of the study's data and in presenting the outcome of the study. In addition, Denzin suggested that confirmability also requires that more than one person agree on the accuracy of the study's findings. As recommended by Denzin, the strategy I adopted to support the achievement of confirmability was to document the procedures and engage in the rigorous proving of the data during the study. I also maintained the integrity of the participants' real-life experiences free from personal biases through bracketing.

Bracketing is a procedural means of a qualitative study, which necessitates thoughtful repose of a researcher's personal thinking about a phenomenon or case or one's prior knowledge of the topic before and during the entire inquiry (Danielsson & Rosberg, 2015). The innate human issues and the capacity to be cognizant of the researcher's biases are traits that may affect bracketing (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). Crotty (1996) indicated that humans could not be entirely objective in the conduct of qualitative research. Crotty also highlighted that if researchers are ignorant of their prejudices and opinions they are likely to be biased. Sepehr and Kaffashpoor (2012)

contended that researcher's biases could affect the reliability of a study and the credibility of the research. Crotty also opined that the capability to be conscious of one's ideals, interests, insights, and opinions becomes a prerequisite to bracketing one's biases, which could influence the research process.

For this study, I achieved bracketing by using a reflective diary before and during the inquiry. Chan et al. (2013) suggested that the use of a reflective diary helps to enhance bracketing skills and decision considerations in the course of qualitative research. To be aware of reflectivity, the researcher could use a reflective diary to record thoughts, feelings, and perceptions (Chan et al., 2013). Bernard (2013) posited that the reflective journal shows the thinking behind decisions, the researcher's intuitions, and personal challenges, which enhances the credibility of the study and its conformability. This study includes a statement of my experience with the subject of the study, as well as any relevant personal biases, which will assist readers to understand better what informed my interpretation of the data. Chan et al. also posited that bracketing also allows researchers to re-examine their positions in the face of issues that might affect the research process.

This multiple case study included the interview of five participants until the point of data saturation. Kieft et al. (2014) advised that data saturation occurs when no new information comes from additional interviews. Tong et al. (2014) also confirmed that data saturation takes place when little or no new concepts or themes emerge from each additional data collected. To reach data saturation, I transcribed each interview, member

checked its content with the relevant participant, reviewed and compared the respective transcripts for recurring themes, and continued this process to a point where no new information was obtainable.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I restated the purpose of the study, which is to explore strategies that five Jamaican SME owners used from Kingston to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector. The section also includes the justification for the population chosen, which explains the mix of SMEs as representative of the wider population of SMEs in Jamaica. Contained within this section is also an explanation of how the findings of the study contribute to an improvement in social and human conditions, as well as its potential positive effect on businesses. The role of the researcher is included, which explained that the researcher undertook the function of the data collection instrument, collected valid and reliable data, assessed the data, and assigned meaning to the data.

In addition, Section 2 also includes a discussion of the chosen descriptive multiple case study research design and qualitative method. Finally, the section also includes a discussion of the details of the ethical research considerations, the data collection and organization techniques, the data analysis, as well as the data reliability and validity considerations applicable to this study.

The objective of Section 3 was to include a detailed discussion of the themes, patterns, and relationships that developed from the analysis of the data, as well as present

the conclusions reached. The section includes a discussion of the implications for societal changes, recommendations for action and additional research, as well as thoughts on the researcher's experience. Section 3 concludes with a statement presented in the form of a seminal message that represents the crux of the research findings and recommendations.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The objective of this qualitative descriptive multiple case study was to explore the strategies some Jamaican SME owners use to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector. In 2016, Jamaica had an SME start-up rate of 4.06% and a discontinuance rate of 9% (GEM, 2017). The discontinuance rate in 2016 was 22.22 times the new business start-up rate, which indicates a declining SME sector (GEM, 2017).

I used 10 semistructured open-ended questions to interview five participants who have experience in sustaining their SMEs beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector. Semistructured questionnaires allow participants to relate their knowledge and insights (Yin, 2017). I used methodological triangulation to examine the data consecutively and logically to ascertain the findings and come to conclusions. Researchers use methodological triangulation to gather data from interviews and secondary sources of documents (Yin, 2017). I assigned a number for each participant, specifically, P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5. After data saturation occurred, NVivo 11 software analysis revealed the main strategies derived from the participants' responses to the research questions. In Section 3, I provide a detailed report of the outcomes of the study, which includes a presentation of the findings, application of professional practice, the implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations of further research, reflections, summary, and study conclusions.

Presentation of the Findings

I used the following central research question to guide the study: What strategies do some Jamaican SME owners use to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector? I conducted semistructured interviews with the owners of five SMEs in the manufacturing sector and reviewed secondary source documents. These participants were from a cross-section of SMEs in the manufacturing business, and all had sustained their businesses for over 5 years in Kingston, Jamaica. All SMEs met the definition of a SME given in the 14th draft of Jamaica's MSME and Entrepreneurship Policy 2012. During the interview process, participants related ideas, valuable information, and insights regarding the operation of their SMEs in the manufacturing sector.

I used the entrepreneurship theory as the conceptual framework for this study and found that many of the participants' responses as well as the review of their company documents were aligned with this theory. As identified by Kuratko, Morris, and Schindehutte (2015), when the tenets of the entrepreneurship theory are applied to an entrepreneur's personal characteristics, resource management, and strategic decisions, the outcome is usually the creation and sustainability of a firm. Decker, Haltiwanger, Jarmin, and Miranda (2014) posited business sustainability supports the making of individual entrepreneurial prosperity, jobs, and economic development.

Themes

From the contents of the semistructured interviews of five participants and review of their company documents, I determined the themes to be entrepreneurial characteristics, competitive advantages, resource management, customer relationship management, quality management, and marketing strategy. These themes, which emerged from the analysis of the research data are the strategies some Jamaican SME owners use to achieve sustainability beyond 5 years of operations. I gained clear perceptions of the strategies used by some owners of SMEs in Jamaica to sustain their businesses. The following is a discussion of each of the six themes.

Theme 1: Entrepreneurial Characteristics

Kenworthy and McMullan (2013) posited that entrepreneurial characteristics include self-efficacy, innovativeness, and internal locus of control. Entrepreneurial characteristics emerged as one of the themes derived from the interviews and review of company documents. This emergent theme aligns with the conceptual framework of this study in which Schumpeter (1934) explained that the primary constructs and proposition underlying the entrepreneurship theory are entrepreneurial characteristics.

The first theme to emerge from the data collected is entrepreneurial characteristics. Entrepreneurial characters have three associated sub-themes, self-efficacy, innovation, and internal locus of control. These sub-themes are included in table 1 below.

Table 1

Theme #1: Entrepreneurial Characteristics

Theme	References	% of participants support
Self-efficacy	18	100%
Innovation	18	100%
Internal locus of control	14	100%

Self-efficacy. All five participants expressed strong self-confidence and the ability to succeed in their respective businesses. Abdollahi et al. (2014) explained that confidence in one's capacity to accomplish a task and effectively execute a specified behavior is self-efficacy. All participants who related that they have confidence in their ability to successfully sustain their businesses repeatedly expressed this important aspect of entrepreneurship. Three of the five participants also explained that their self-confidence served to motivate and inspire their employees. Chatterjee and Das (2015) said that entrepreneurs' self-efficacy positively influences the company's performance and business outcomes. DeNisi (2015) said that too much self-efficacy might lead to entrepreneurs becoming self-absorbed, egotistical, and callous, which could have a negative impact on the business.

Innovativeness. Innovativeness is a key construct of entrepreneurship theory (Udu, 2014). Senyard, Baker, Steffens, and Davidsson (2014) explained that

innovativeness speaks to the ability of the entrepreneur to be creative and original in business activities. The data obtained from the interviews show that all five participants are of the view that they have to generate new or improved products to attract and maintain the interest of their customers. P4 said “customers like new things; they don't like the same old things all the time”. P5 said that innovation was an essential factor to start his business and now plays a strategic role in its sustainment. In this research, four of five participants said that they used their creativity and innovativeness to produce products that gave them the opportunity to differentiate and stay ahead of the competition. Oncioiu Balamaci (2013) said that with the rapid changes occurring in modern markets, innovation is the main factor that guides the strategic economic activities of SMEs. Udu (2014) also supported the importance of innovation and further explained that entrepreneurship is about coming up with pertinent or applicable ideas with economic and commercial value.

Internal locus of control. Lee-Ross (2015) submitted that internal locus of control is the freedom of an individual to be in control of his or her destiny and Joo et al. (2013) opined that this characteristic contributes to persistence and determination in entrepreneurs. The participants conveyed that one motivation to start their own business was the desire to be their own boss. This common outlook of the participants align fully with Lee-Ross (2015) who defined the locus of control as the desire to take control of one's own destiny. P1 related that he worked as an employee in a similar firm and had to report to a manager, which was unsettling for him because he wanted to operate his way

and to be answerable only to himself. P 2 also related that the motivation for quitting his job and focusing on his own business despite the many challenges was to be in full control of his source of livelihood. P3 and P4 related that in the early stages of their business they struggled with inadequate financing, competition from larger companies, and numerous disappointments. Despite these challenges, however, they were determined to make a success of their business to achieve financial independence and avoid returning to the status of an employee. P5 shared that he has never worked for anyone and cannot imagine himself doing so. All participants related strong characteristic of internal locus of control through their desire to take control of their own destiny. Dinis et al. (2013) argued that there is a strong relationship between self-confidence and internal locus of control and opined that there is a positive correlation between these factors and the inclination to be a risk taker, and open-mindedness to uncertainty. Hsiao, Lee, and Chen (2015) posited that individuals endowed with internal locus of control positively affect entrepreneurship and the firm's performance, which in turn enhances business sustainability.

Theme 2: Competitive Advantages

The second theme to emerge from the data collected is Competitive Advantage (see Table 2).

Table 2

Theme #2: Competitive Advantage

Theme	References	% of participants support
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Competitive advantage	22	80%
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Competitive advantage aligns with the conceptual framework of this study, particularly, where it relates to strategic management. The concept of competitive advantage is embedded in the strategy management literature (Sigalas, 2015). Competitive advantage does not have a definition that is universally accepted among scholars (Eloranta & Turunen, 2015). Sigalas (2015) identified resource based and market based as the two principal classes of competitive advantage. Tan and Sousa (2015) broadly defined competitive advantage as exploiting market opportunities and counteracting competitive threats relatively better than the industry average. This definition aligns with the firm's capability to provide customers with superior value, either by offering goods and services at lower prices or by giving superior benefits that justify higher prices. In contrast, the resource-based approach contends that dissimilarities between firms are principally the consequence of firm heterogeneity regarding their accumulation of resource and competence endowments (Eloranta & Turunen, 2015). Eloranta and Turunen expressed that firms achieve competitive advantage through strategic input to production, which enables them to improve their efficiency and effectiveness.

In this study, four out of five respondents related that they focus on strengthening and exploiting their assessed competitive advantage one strategy used to achieve sustainability. P1 explained that he invests a disproportionately larger amount of

resources in exploiting the competitive advantages identified within his business. P1 further explained that in marketing efforts both locally and abroad, he exploits the world-class reputation of the high-quality coffee beans grown in the Jamaica's Blue Mountain range, which gives him a very distinct competitive advantage. The exploitation of this marketing opportunity aligns with the market based competitive advantage concept. P4 recognizes and emphasizes her exceptional creative talent that gives her the opportunity to evolve her chocolate product and to customize her offering at a rate and price that is better than her competitors. This aligns with the resource-based competitive advantage concept. P3 and P5 related that they have been in their businesses for a long time and have developed a strong reputation as experts and producers of good work, which they can price competitively. They explained that they are able to price competitively because they have already paid for most of their fixed assets. P3 emphasized that he is better able to offer a more affordable high-quality alternative to that of their customers because of the length of time spent in the business. Both P4's and P5's business aligns with both the resource-based and the market based competitive advantage concepts because their low price offer allows for market advantage, while their inputs to production provide efficiency and quality advantages.

Theme 3: Resource Management

The third theme to emerge from the data collected is resource management, which has three associated sub-themes: financial capital, human capital, and social capital (see Table 3).

Table 3

Theme #3: Resource Management

Theme	References	% participants support
Financial capital	20	100%
Human capital	16	100%
Social capital	14	80%

Resource management has three segments: financial capital, human capital, and social capital. Resource management aligns with the conceptual framework of this study and as explained by Lin and Nabergoj (2014) is a fundamental concept of entrepreneurship theory. Desa and Basu (2013) opined that resources play an essential role in entrepreneurship, particularly in the progress of an entrepreneurial undertaking. Ge, Sun, Chen, and Gao (2016) advanced the view that firms with inadequate resources usually experience challenges in their startup phase, which lowers the likelihood of success. Ge et al., further contributed that the entrepreneur usually does not have all the resources needed; therefore, the ability of the entrepreneur to efficiently and creatively use limited resources to exploit entrepreneurial opportunities when they arise is essential

for the sustainment of the business. The prevailing body of information reinforced the finding of this theme particularly relating to the significance of human and social capital in the development of strategies that leads to business sustainment (McGowan, Cooper, Durkin, & O'Kane, 2015)

Financial capital. The ability of SMEs to grow, achieve sustainability, and build up themselves significantly depends on their ability to obtain and manage finances (Abe et al., 2015; Cole & Sokolyk, 2014). The requirement for funding usually takes place earlier in the life cycle, characterized by the expansion that requires investment in asset acquisition and research and development (Sánchez, Popescu, Chivu, Ciocârlan-Chitucea, & Popescu, 2011; Winborg, 2015). SMEs obtain funds from various sources dependent on their ability to be convincing (Raju & Rajan, 2015). SMEs, however, find it more difficult to obtain financing because they lack collateral to secure loans and operate a private business without obligation to report their financial performance, which causes financial institutions to view them as risky (Pandula, 2011).

In this study, all five participants indicated that management of the financial capital is a key aspect of sustaining the business. P2 emphasized the importance of possessing adequate financing to establish and operate the business. In P2's situation, he collaborated with a large supplier of poultry meat who provided him with significant levels of assistance in exchange for a contractual obligation to supply all the chickens produced (company document, July 19, 2017). P2 further related that if he had undergone the venture alone he would not have been able to sustain the business as the working

capital requirement was quite onerous and the banks were reluctant to take the risk with him. P1 explained that the management of the financial capital is so important that as soon as the accountant releases the financials, he would review them and act immediately if the situation warrants doing so. P3 related that he keeps a tight watch on the working capital of the business at all times because he views it as a critical component of maintaining the business. In addition, P3 spoke to the need to make sacrifices and restrain spending for personal purposes to sustain the business. He related that he started small with his own funds and in the early years of his business plowed back the earnings into the development of the business, which allowed him to minimize debts. P4 related similar experiences to that of P3 and further explained that she makes all the sacrifices to ensure that she maintains the product standards because that is the key reason for the sustainment of her business. P5 related that he used his own funds to start the business and worked two jobs to raise the finances to support the business because the banks were reluctant to assist him and wanted him to produce a business plan that he did not know how to write. P5 also expressed the personal sacrifices he made to ensure that the business had enough funds to operate and to withstand unexpected situations that require financial resources to resolve. This theme of access to financial resources aligns with other studies that found access to, and proper management of financial capital contributes significantly to the sustainability of the business (Aldén & Hammarstedt, 2016; Theriou & Chatzoudes, 2015).

Human capital. Human capital aligns with the conceptual framework of this study and is a key construct of the entrepreneurship theory. As a key construct of the entrepreneurship theory, human capital is comprised of a set of knowledge, skills, and competences possessed by employees, which when integrated into economic undertakings produces goods and services that contribute to the growth and economic value of the firm (Đekic, 2015). Human capital also includes business experience and education acquired by an entrepreneur (Jaskiewicz, Combs, & Rau, 2015). Crum, Sherony, and Rayome, (2015) explained that human capital plays an essential function in a firm's achievement of business sustainability. Prior researchers have shown positive correlation between economic success at the macro and micro levels and the investment in human capital development (Qadri & Waheed, 2013).

The data gathered shows that all of the participants recognize the significant contribution of the human capital of their respective firms. P1 contributed that in his experience the human aspect was a key factor in building his business and that his staff supported him at every stage; therefore, he invested in their development to the benefit of the firm. In addition, P1 also related that he is not a business graduate but recognize the importance of acquiring the knowledge to strengthen the human capital of the business, so he and his brother sought to learn from the experience of others, both in Jamaica and abroad, which involved fact-finding visits to other coffee producers. P2 related that in recognition of the importance of the human capital to the sustainment of the business he recruited the experiences and competences that the business needed. Additionally, P2

related that in his experience the job gets done through people and without their support and knowledge, the business would not thrive. P3 expressed that the firm's biggest asset is the experience he has acquired over the years; however, he emphasized that for him and his employee's learning is a continuous process both on the job and from external sources. P3 also attributes the firm's reputation for high-quality kitchen finishes to the continuous development of its human capital.

The reinforcement of the value of human capital to the sustainment of the firm was also supported by P4 and P5. P4 explained that her business depends on the innovation and creativity that comes from the human capital of the firm and that these inputs are essential for sustaining the business. P4 also expressed that the combined experience, knowledge, and creativity of her firm is her most valuable asset. P5 related the struggles he had with getting the business off the ground, which was mainly due to a lack of experience and knowledge. The experience gained over the years provides him with knowledge to accelerate the progress of the firm, mainly in the accounting and marketing aspects of the business. P5 also related that he recognizes the value of the human capital to his business. Research findings confirm that the integration of suitable human capital in the firm is positively linked with value creation and business sustainability of the firm (Crum et al., 2015; Frid, Wyman, & Gartner, 2015; Guo, Chen, & Yu, 2016).

Social capital. Social capital is a significant aspect of human resource management, which is a key construct of the entrepreneurship theory and aligns with the

conceptual framework of this study. Scholars have defined social capital as a part of the wide network of connections and relationships that an individual accumulates over time, which amounts to a resource that can be exploited by an entrepreneur (Chen, Wang, Wegner, Gong, & Al, 2015; Jonsson, 2015). Hu and Hafsi (2015) posited that an entrepreneur, who uses social capital appropriately, enhances the performance of the firm. Social capital is especially useful to small businesses as a means of driving revenues through favors and access to opportunities (Omrane, 2015). Despite its significance to the success of businesses, social capital is under-rated as a factor, which influences the firm's performance (Al Mamun et al., 2016)

In this study, four of the five participants noted the importance of social capital to the growth and sustainment of their businesses. P1 shared that in the initial stages of the business he and his bother networked with established entrepreneurs in the coffee industry in both Jamaica and other countries, which proved a valuable source of useful information in their decision-making process. P1 also opined that the information he obtained from the network of relationships, helped him to avoid making many mistakes, which could have affected the sustainment of the business. P3 related that in the startup stage of his business when access to financial resources for marketing was difficult, family, friends, and associates helped significantly in getting the word out about his products, which significantly helped him to grow his business. P4 shared that her network of friends is like family to her and together with business associates provide a strong source of motivation to stick to the businesses even in difficult times. In addition, she

also explained that her network provides her with valuable creative ideas for product diversification and valuable business leads. P5 credited his firm's survival to the relationship he formed with his larger clients. He related that his company became infected with a microscopic insect, which showed up in the quality checks at his factory. He had to shut down his business for a couple of months to solve the problem. The problem could have led to the permanent closure of the business had it not been for his personal relationship with some of his major clients who decided to wait instead of migrating to other suppliers. This theme is consistent with research findings, which indicate that an entrepreneur's effective use of social capital, positively affects the firm's performance, and enhances its sustainability (Al Mamun et al., 2016; Clarke, Chandra, & Machado, 2016; Hu & Hafsi, 2015).

Theme 4: Customer Relationship Management

The fourth theme to emerge from the data collected is Customer Relationship Management (CRM). The table below shows the number of references that were made to CRM by participants to the study. In addition, the table shows the percentage of participants' support for CRM. (see Table 4).

Table 4

Theme #4: Customer relationship management (CRM)

Theme	References	% of participants support
CRM	22	100%

Customer relationship management (CRM) is an approach to understand and guide customer actions through evocative communication that leads to improving customer purchase, customer loyalty, and customer profitability (Bagasworo, 2017; Sakunthala, 2016; Vu & Huan, 2016). CRM involves the whole method of building and retaining lucrative customer relationships through the provision of superior customer value and fulfillment. CRM also lowers the cost of serving existing customer and makes it easier to obtain similar customer (Singh & Kumar, 2015). Sakunthala (2016) explained that customers are not making purchase decisions solely on the comparison of product quality but also based on the relationship they have with the seller. Vu and Huan (2016) posited that customer satisfaction, customer service, and customer loyalty are all interdependent factors as customer satisfaction significantly relies on the service quality and customer loyalty relies on customer satisfaction.

In this study, all of the participants related that their focus on good customer relationship management has been a major contributor to the sustainment of their businesses. P1 related that his business is highly focused on customer satisfaction, which requires him to remain attuned to his customers' needs at all times. He believes that his firm earns customer loyalty through the provision of quality products and good service. P1 also emphasized that he places great emphasis on knowing his customers, which puts him in a position to determine when new needs arise so that he can be the first to satisfy

them. Additionally, P1 believes that his firms' focus on customer satisfaction is responsible for a large amount of repeat business it gets from customers.

P2 also emphasized the importance of customer relationship management to the sustainment of the business. He related that one of the uncompromising values of his firm is the requirement of employees to remain in close contact with customers to determine their needs and to obtain their feedback. P1 opined that the service provided to customers could only improve when you develop a good relationship with them and learn their likes, dislikes, and specific needs. P3 related that he makes it a point of duty to personally deal with his customers and quipped that often the customers remember his name and not the name of the company. He recognizes the importance of good customer relationship to his firm and found that along with quality products and service, the treatment of customers plays a significant role in customer satisfaction. P3 ensures that each customer gets a visit from him, so that they can establish personal contact, and avail themselves of his year of experience in kitchen design and construction.

P4 described her customers as family and advised that they invariably become her friends. She emphasized the significance of meeting her customers' needs and incorporating their suggestions and ideas into the creative presentations of her chocolate products. P4 also related that she engages in open communication with her customers and is constantly in touch with them to obtain their feedback and to determine their needs and believes the relationship she has with her customers has been a significant factor in sustaining her business through referrals and repeat businesses. P5 believes that the

relationship with customers comes out of being reliable and in staying in close contact with them to determine and satisfy their needs. He explained that reliability includes quality, delivery commitments, and responsiveness to their requests. P5 also identified good customer relationship management as a major contributor to his firm's sustainability and stressed how important customer word of mouth and referrals were to establishing his business in the community in the initial stages when there were insufficient funds to advertise. The findings of this theme is consistent with research that indicated customer relationship management improves the relationship of the customer with the firm, which significantly improves the performance of the firm (Javed & Cheema, 2017; Singh & Kumar, 2015; Yeh, 2015).

Theme 5: Product Quality

The fifth theme to emerge from the data collected is product quality. The table below shows the number of references that were made to product quality by participants to the study. In addition, the table shows the percentage of participants' support for product quality as a strategy for achieving business sustainment. (see Table 5).

Table 5

Theme #5: Product Quality

Theme	References	% of participants support
Product quality	19	100%

Product quality. Reliable, durable, and properly designed products influence consumers' views of quality, which lead to product satisfaction and loyalty (Paulssen & Catenazzo, 2015). Traditionally, product price increases with improvement in quality; however, despite an increase in cost because of improved product quality, the firm may decrease product prices because of the likelihood of achieving increased sales from combining better quality with a lower price (Chenavaz, 2017). Paulssen and Catenazzo (2015); Roach, Ryman, and Makani (2016) presented the view that the driver for quality products is innovation and quality products increases consumers' interest, which in turn increase demand for the product; therefore, producing high quality products that satisfy customers' performance expectations is important for sales and profitability. Paulssen and Catenazzo (2015) also explained that in the event of performance failure, the manufacturers and retailers must take urgent action to reduce the adverse effects of the failure on the relationship with customers.

All participants to this study (5/5) expressed how significant product quality is to the sustainment and progress of their firm. P1 related that he views the production of quality products as necessary for growth and sustainment of the business. To embed quality into the culture of the company and to ensure consistency, he has engaged the firm in quality system certification. P1 also explained that the quality system helps the firm to stay focused on producing products of the highest quality. P2, P3, and P5 also identified the importance of getting certification from recognized quality system organizations such as the Jamaica Bureau of Standards and the International Standard

Organization (ISO). Aba, Badar, and Hayden (2016) concluded that firms with quality system certification such as ISO, performed better than firms that were not certified. P2 and P3 also related that they do not compromise on product quality and credit their business growth with the progress they have made in this area. Aba et al.'s findings align with this product quality theme. Additionally, P3 noted that producing quality products require switched on management and investment in providing workers with the right equipment and training.

P4 expressed the significance of maintaining consistent and good quality products to the sustainment of her company. She noted that she plays the role of gatekeeper for all products produced and distributed by her firm; to this end, she is involved in the tasting and approval of all chocolate products leaving her firm. P4 advised that she gets personally involved in training her staff and in ensuring that they meet required standards. P5 believes that the trustworthiness, reliability, and commitment customers show to the firm are a direct consequence of the consistently high product quality maintained. Additionally, placing emphasis on good product quality is responsible for the many referrals and recommendations the firm receives, which has helped to reduce expenditure on advertising. One of the strategies he uses to win customers is engaging in promotions where customers actually taste his products and experience the quality for themselves. This theme is consistent with research findings, which reveal that product quality adds to customer satisfaction and influences the performance of the firm (Kafetzopoulos & Psomas, 2015; Roach et al., 2016; Xu, Blankson, & Prybutok, 2017).

Theme 6: Marketing Management

The sixth theme to emerge from the data collected is marketing management. The table below show the number of references that were made to marketing management by participants to the study. In addition, the table shows the percentage of participants' support for marketing management as a strategy for achieving business sustainment.(see Table 6).

Table 6

Theme #6: Marketing

Theme category	References	% of participant support
Marketing	19	100%

The sixth theme to emerge from the data collected is marketing management, which aligns with the conceptual framework of this study, particularly, where it relates to entrepreneurship. Darroch, Miles, Jardine, and Cooke (2004) defined marketing as an organizational function which involves the creation, communication, and provision of value to customers, as well as the fostering of relationships that benefit the whole organization and its stakeholders. Drury (2015) explained that in SMEs marketing and entrepreneurship have significant commonalities because usually there is no dedicated marketing role, and marketing, like entrepreneurship, becomes the sum of activities carried out by different individuals at different levels of the firm. This research revealed

that the SME owner-manager is the most significant marketing tool in the firm because through their knowledge, skills, and network of relationship, usually establish their own distinctive marketing program. This finding aligns with Resnick, Cheng, Simpson, and Lourenço (2016); Khanal, and Mishra (2016) who advised that the owner-manager through networking and relationship building usually become the chief marketer and the “face” of the business.

In this study, 100% (5/5) participants emphasized the value of marketing for the growth and sustainment of their SME. P1 noted that he found it necessary to do a proper market test of his firm's product. He cautioned against just asking friends to give their opinion of your product because they may not want to offend you and tell you what they think you want to hear instead of telling you the truth. To work around this problem, he gets a random cross-section of persons to give their opinion and take their response seriously. P1 also related that he sees himself as the chief marketer of his business and never misses an opportunity to interact with potential customers about their needs and his products, which has resulted in many beneficial relationships. P2 also emphasized the need for market research and acknowledged that he is the chief brand representative for his company. In addition, advise that the growth of his business comes mainly through referrals from his network of customers and business associates that he has been careful to nurture beneficial relationship with over the life of his business.

P3 advised that his marketing comes through his personal communication with existing and potential customers; he believes the quality of his work speaks for itself, and

many of his customers come to him after seeing high quality and creativity of his kitchen finishes. He does not believe in the traditional marketing strategies of larger companies and refrains from advertising in the media. Instead, he resorts to being in the right places at the right time, particularly, at building expos and home and gardens shows. He also related that he would establish contact with developers and invite them to review his catalog of work, which has worked well for his business. P4 opined that the growth of her business comes through her network of relationships most of whom have personal experience with her chocolate products. She also advised that she leads the marketing charge of the firm but also encourages every member of her staff to play a role in the marketing. In addition, she incorporates creative ideas from her customers, which deepens their connection to her business. P5 admits that although he engages in marketing, his focus is mainly on innovation and producing quality products. He believes, in the final analysis; the quality of the products allows the firm to win new customers and to retain them. He advised that he has found advertising his food products in the mass media results in superior brand recognition; but the customer experience with the product is of most value. This theme of marketing management is aligned- with research findings, which indicate marketing through the creation, communication, and provision of value to customers, as well as the fostering of relationships have positive benefits for the growth and business sustainment of the firm (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015; Resnick et al., 2016).

Applications to Professional Practice

The objective of this qualitative descriptive multiple case study was to explore the strategies some Jamaican SME owners use to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector. Ascertaining the strategies used by Jamaican SMEs to achieve business sustainment is essential. GEM (2016) conveyed that Jamaican SMEs' failure rate exceeds their start-up. In the conduct of this study, I explored the experience of five SME owners in Kingston, who achieved business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector.

The findings of this study are comparative to entrepreneurship theory because they provide an understanding of the participants' characteristics, their strategic decisions, and the management of the firm's resource. The factors of personal characteristics, strategic decisions, and management of resources are three significant aspects of the entrepreneurship theory and determinants of business success and sustainability (Ahlstrom & Ding, 2014; Kuratko et al., 2015). In the findings of the study, I identified the participants' characteristics of internal locus of control, self-efficacy, and innovativeness as themes. In addition, the management of resources, customer relationship, quality management, marketing, and competitive advantages also emerged as strong themes. The study applies to professional practice because these emergent themes provide insight into the strategies that entrepreneurs may use to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector.

Jamaican owners of SMEs in the manufacturing sector who adopt the entrepreneurial characteristics of internal locus of control, self-efficacy, and innovation will improve their likelihood of achieving business sustainability. This view is supported by Brown and Thornton (2013) and Kenworthy and McMullan (2013) who suggested that the entrepreneurial characteristics are essential traits for the success and sustainability of SMEs. Similarly, Sigalas (2015) suggested that entrepreneurs who focus on exploiting their competitive advantage as part of their strategy increase their chance of achieving business sustainability. Desa and Basu (2013) expressed similar views about the management of resources and posited that entrepreneurs who properly integrate and exploit prevailing financial, human, and social capital of the firm, as part of their business strategy, normally achieve higher levels of success and business sustainability.

Jamaican SME owner could also enhance their sustainability through the adoption of good CRM. Bagasworo (2017) advised that an SME may be strengthened by the building and retaining lucrative customer relationships. SMEs owners who learn to produce consistently good quality products also increase their chance of achieving business sustainability. Paulssen and Catenazzo (2015) posited that reliable, durable, and properly designed products lead to product satisfaction and loyalty, which enhances business sustainability. Jamaican SME owners in the manufacturing sector who learn to recognize their role as the principal marketing tool in the firm through their knowledge, skills, and network of relationships will increase their chance of achieving success and business sustainability. Resnick, Cheng, Simpson, and Lourenço (2016) supported this

view and posited that owner-manager through networking and relationship building is the chief marketer of the firm.

Implications for Social Change

The knowledge derived from this study may have significant implications for positive social change because it provides information that entrepreneurs may use to enhance their sustainability and consequently grow the SME sector, which has the potential to accelerate Jamaica's economic progress and shrink poverty. Economic progress will provide the Jamaican government with more funds for social development projects. Humphrey et al. (2014), Inyang (2013), and Schuch and Wang (2015) asserted that a link exists between economic development and implementation of social programs.

The focus of this study was on exploring the strategies that some Jamaican SMEs used to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector. Focus on these strategies provided information that may give aspiring and new SME owners useful insights to orient their businesses to incorporate, emphasize, and capitalize on the recognized strategies that enhance the sustainability of their venture. The economic benefits derived from -a sustained SME sector in Jamaica would have implications for positive social change using increased tax revenues to fund social development projects. Bates and Robb (2014) and Syed et al. (2012) explained the impact of the economic conditions on positive social change and posited that improvement in the economy and by extension employment would help to improve the social and human conditions of the general populace.

Recommendations for Action

The objective of this qualitative descriptive multiple case study is to explore the strategies some Jamaican SME owners use to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector. The results of the study revealed six themes: (1) entrepreneurial characteristics, specifically innovativeness, internal locus of control, and self-efficacy, (2) resource management, specifically human, social, and financial capital, (3) competitive advantage, (4) customer relationship management (CRM), (5) Quality management, and (6) marketing. The identified themes may assist existing and potential entrepreneurs of SMEs in the Jamaican manufacturing sector to develop strategies to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years of operation. These strategies may include focusing on strengthening the identified entrepreneurial characteristic, more suitably leveraging the human and social capital of the firm, engaging in more efficient use and management of the financial resources to achieve higher level of business sustainability. An entrepreneur could use the firms identified competitive advantages to exploit market opportunities and to counteract competitive threats (Tan & Sousa, 2015). Sakunthala (2016) advised that entrepreneurs should focus attention on customer relationship management to improve customer loyalty, purchases, and profitability, which is one of the insights provided by the findings of this study.

The results of the study also point to the need to incorporate product quality management in the firms' strategies. Paulssen and Catenazzo (2015) explained that product quality management will lead to greater product satisfaction and loyalty.

Likewise, recognizing the potential of the entrepreneur as the most significant marketing tool of the firm, gives the entrepreneur insights into communicating with customers and in building relationships for improved business success and sustainability (Khanal & Mishra, 2016; Resnick et al., 2016). These identified themes may assist Jamaican SME owners-managers in developing strategies to sustain their business beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector.

I will circulate the findings to all the study participants, the Jamaica Manufacturing Association, the Private Sector Organization of Jamaica, academic and business journals, and where allowed, present excerpts of the findings at entrepreneurship conferences. Further, I will make governmental agencies such as the Ministry of Commerce, and the Planning Institute of Jamaica aware of the results from this study and submit the finding to the Management Faculty of the University of the West Indies (Jamaica) and to the University of Technology Jamaica. The findings of this study should, provide existing and potential entrepreneurs with knowledge, insights, and strategies required for reducing the high SME failure rate in Jamaica.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings of this study add to the limited research on the strategies used by Jamaican SMEs' in the manufacturing sector to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years. I, however, recommend two areas for future studies. The first study could focus on the approach taken by Jamaican entrepreneurs to the strategic planning process of SMEs. Shields and Shelleman (2015) explained that many SME owners-managers do not have a

structured approach for developing strategy. The second recommended study could compare the performance of Jamaican SMEs who have formal strategic plans and those who do not have formal strategic plans. Cheng et al. (2014) related that strategic planning is important for the progress of SMEs particularly in the early stage of their operation. Despite being able to sustain their SME beyond 5 years, none of the participants of this study had prepared any formal or documented strategic plan for their respective firm.

This multiple case study had two limitations; the first is that this study had to rely on participants' ability to give a comprehensive and accurate account of their current experience and perspective of the phenomenon. Perhaps a phenomenological study would give the researcher an opportunity to collect data that gives a better understanding of the participants' lived experiences with the strategies used to achieve business sustainability. Sloan and Bowe (2014) explained that the phenomenological research design is better for exploring the lived experiences from the viewpoint of the participants to appreciate and give them meaning. The second limitation of the study was that it included only SMEs in the geographic area of Jamaica's capital city, Kingston, and may not relate to other regions, cultures, and organizations. I would recommend a similar study in a location other than Kingston, Jamaica. A similar study conducted in another geographic location would make it possible to determine if the results have applicability elsewhere.

Reflections

To keep with the processes given by Leedy and Ormrod (2013), I made every effort to avoid error and research bias, particularly in the conduct of the interview. I

followed the interview protocol (see Appendix A) and suppressed the biases I harbored, particularly in preconceiving the answers to the interview questions and assuming that, SMEs were unstructured and largely reactive as opposed to proactive in their approach to business. Bracketing these personal biases allowed me to open my mind to the participants' responses, which broadened my understanding of their operations, challenges, and mental disposition.

In the conduct of the study, I conformed to the ethical research standards at all times. I asked all participants the same set of interview questions in the same order and refrained from introducing any bias in the data collection and analysis processes. The process of interviewing participants was exciting as they related the degree of risk they took in starting their respective business. I had to resist many temptations to offer suggestions and to give my opinion. I appreciate the necessity for following an interview protocol and the rigor involved in conducting a qualitative study. The participants enthusiastically responded to the interview questions and gave detailed responses. In addition, the participants have expressed an eagerness to receive a copy of the completed study.

Conclusion

The intent of this qualitative, descriptive multiple case study was to explore the strategies some Jamaican SME owners used to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector. Blowfield and Dolan (2014); Mutoko (2014); and Yildirim, Akci, and Eksi (2013) concluded that SMEs are significant

contributors to economic progress, as well as the creation of employment. GEM (2017) reported that Jamaica records the highest failure rate of all its member countries with an SME start-up rate of 4.06% and a business discontinuance rate 9%, while the average business discontinuance rate in Latin America and the Caribbean was 9.6%. In the conduct of this study, I used semistructured questions to interview five Jamaican SMEs operating in the manufacturing sector for over 5 years. In the analysis of interview transcript and secondary sources of data, I used methodological triangulation. I accepted data saturation when the data became repetitive, and no new or relevant information emerged.

Six substantial themes emerged after I coded and analyzed the data: (a) Entrepreneurial characteristics, (b) Competitive advantages, (c) Resource management, (d) Customer relationship management, (e) Quality management, and (f) Marketing. These themes all linked to the entrepreneurship theory, which Ahlstrom and Ding (2014) explained embodies entrepreneurial characteristics, management skills, and strategic decisions which are critical inputs into achieving business sustainability. Evidence suggested that SMEs in the Jamaican manufacturing sector who incorporate these themes in their business strategy became resilient and achieved business sustainability beyond the 5 years of operation.

Humphrey et al. (2014) and Inyang (2013) identified the link between economic progresses and increased spending on social development programs. The knowledge derived from this study may also have significant implications for positive social change

because it provides information that entrepreneurs may use to enhance their sustainability and consequently grow the SME sector. Growth in the SME sector would accelerate Jamaica's economic progress and improve the funding of social development projects.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

I have selected you for this interview because you meet the criteria of someone who may have a lot to share about SMEs achieving sustainability beyond five years of operation in Jamaica. The study does not aim to evaluate your techniques or experiences. Rather, the goal is to learn more about the strategies used by some Jamaican SME owners to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector.

To facilitate note taking, I would like to audiotape the interview. Please sign the consent form. Essentially, this document states that: (a) all information will be held confidential, (b) your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (c) we do not intend to inflict any harm.

For your information, I will be the only one privy to the tapes, which will be eventually destroyed after transcription. In addition, you must sign a form devised to meet our human subject requirements. You may take this opportunity to clarify any doubts you may have about the confidentiality of this exercise.

I planned the interviews to last no longer than one hour. During this time, I have several questions to cover. If time begins to run short, you may interrupt to push ahead and complete this line of questioning.

Hugh Blake

Appendix B: Interview Questions

The basis for an exploration of the SMEs business sustainability is the following central research question: What strategies do some Jamaican SMEs owners use to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation in the manufacturing sector? The interview questions are as follows:

1. What strategies do you use within your business to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years of operation?
2. What strategies do you find most useful to the sustainment of your business and why?
3. How do you formulate business strategies?
4. How do you establish business strategies within your business?
5. How do you communicate business strategies to you employees?
6. What are the management skills you found most useful in guiding your business to sustainability and why?
7. What knowledge base did you find most useful in guiding your business sustainability and why?
8. How would you describe the context in which you do business in Jamaica?
9. What advice would you give to aspiring and new SME owners in Jamaica on how to achieve business sustainability?
10. What additional information would you like to add about the strategies you used to achieve business sustainability beyond 5 years?