

2019

# Social Media Marketing Strategies Used by Owners of Small Retail Businesses

Curtis7 Dean  
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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Curtis Dean

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2019

Abstract

Social Media Marketing Strategies

Used by Owners of Small Retail Businesses

by

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MBA, University of Phoenix, 2005

BS, Livingstone College, 2003

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

June 2019

## Abstract

Implementing an effective social media marketing strategy campaign to engage customers and increase sales is a challenge for owners of small retail business owners. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies owners of small retail businesses used to increase sales. The conceptual framework for this study was the social media marketing strategy theory. Data were collected from 5 small retail business owners in North Carolina through semistructured, face-to-face interviews and a review of company documents, websites, and social media sites. Data analysis through Yin's 5-step process of compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding data resulted in 3 emergent themes: social media engagement strategy, outsourcing strategy, and target market strategy. Owners of small retail businesses might benefit from the findings of this study to increase sales by understanding how to integrate a mix of social media marketing platforms, improve customer engagement, use third-party social media experts to improve advertising, and target customers using social media. The implications of this study for positive social change include the potential for small business owners to increase job opportunities, lower local unemployment rates, and improve local economic growth and stability.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my entire family for their continued prayers, patience, support, and sacrifices you have made to make this process bearable. To my deceased parents, who were with me during the beginning of this journey but have now transitioned to heaven and now looking down and saying thank God you are finally done with school. To my extended family and friends who pushed me when I wanted to quit, but they motivated my stimuli to stay the course, and for that, words cannot express my sincere gratitude for your continued encouragement and support. To my children, Curtis Jr., Deitra, Katrice, Corey, Antuan, and Sterling, I pray that I have set an example for all of you to consider as you transition in life to what it brings. To my wonderful grandchildren, thanks to all of you for your encouragement as well. I love you all so much.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Developments in technology have taken place worldwide and have changed the way business leaders communicate with their customers (Allan & Ali, 2017; Hofacker & Belanche, 2016). Some small business owners use social media as a tool for marketing to improve customer attention, interest, desire, and action (Hassan, Nadzim, & Shiratuddin, 2015). Hassan et al. (2015) posited that many small business owners fail to make effective use of social media marketing.

Many small business owners implement social media marketing strategies to rebrand their business and reach new customers (Muralidharan, La Ferle, & Sung, 2015). Social media advertising includes blog sites, e-mails, social media websites, vlogs, forums, consumer ratings, and numerous platforms that consumers use to instantly post about products and brands that are frequently used (Zwick & Bradshaw, 2016). Marketers use social media platforms, such as Facebook, to enlist the participation of consumers using online comments and posts to increase brand awareness (Galati, Tinervia, Crescimanno, & Spezia, 2017). Social media marketing strategies are valuable tools for small business owners to reach new customers, increase sales, and grow profitability; yet, some owners lack the resources and expertise to implement effective strategies (Galati et al., 2017).

### **Background of the Problem**

Many small business owners underuse low-cost options for marketing, such as social media marketing (Castronovo & Huang, 2012). For small businesses to remain

competitive in a larger marketplace, use of low-cost marketing tools has become increasingly important (Perry, 2014). Small businesses fail at an alarming rate. Fifty-four percent of small businesses will fail within the first 5 years of operating (Atanassova & Clark, 2015). However, some small business owners use effective marketing to ensure success within their business (Atanassova & Clark, 2015; Perry, 2014). Many business owners use social media advertising to interact with consumers personally (Atwong, 2015). Small businesses could attract consumers' attention by creating rich content on their websites. The business owners remain tasked with meeting the demands of consumers while developing the business to be sustainable in a competitive market (Jara, Parra, & Skarmeta, 2014).

Roswinanto and Strutton (2014) posited that marketing, in generalized terms, was a way to introduce consumers to products or brands sold. Advertising is the resource used to market brands and products to consumers (Kurtin, 2016). Small business owners use advertising to identify markets to create a plan that will aid in product sales and sustainability while ensuring consumer demand (Yong-Gun, Byon, Ammon, & Park, 2016).

With the social media boom, many marketers use social media advertising to increase sales; however, some business owners lack the knowledge and technological expertise to implement social media marketing strategies (Stavrianea & Kavoura, 2015). Business owners have easier and quicker access when promoting a product online for loyal followers (Atwong, 2015). Marketers use social media advertising to target an

audience and build relationships with consumers who may not have discovered a product due to limited information. Marketing for small business owners will expand the product's appeal (Fisher, 2015). Traditional marketers focus on spreading branding and products through billboards, commercials, and printed advertising. Millions of people use Internet search engines to view products listed online (Todor, 2016). In this study, I explored the social media marketing strategies that small retail business owners use to increase sales.

### **Problem Statement**

Business leaders who do not use social media as a marketing tool experience decreased sales and profitability (Stavrianea & Kavoura, 2015). Taneja and Toombs (2014) posited that only 26% of small business owners use social media marketing to increase sales. The general business problem was business owners who do not use social media marketing limit profitability growth. The specific business problem was that some small retail business owners lack social media marketing strategies to increase sales.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies some small retail business owners use to increase sales. The target population consisted of owners of five small retail businesses in North Carolina who has successfully implemented social media marketing strategies to increase sales. The findings of this study may contribute to positive social change through increased local employment opportunities, lowered local unemployment rates, and improved local

economic growth. Small business owners who improve sales and profitability growth create additional local employment opportunities, reduce unemployment rates, and strengthen local economic stability (Popescu & Crenicean, 2013).

### **Nature of the Study**

The three research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (Moustakas, 1994). Qualitative researchers use the qualitative method to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon through open discourse with participants, discovery, and investigation (Patton, 2014). I selected the qualitative method to discover the in-depth meaning of a phenomenon through open dialog with participants. Quantitative researchers use statistical data to test hypotheses via the use of dependent and independent variables (Patton, 2014). Mixed-method researchers use both qualitative and quantitative elements (Yin, 2018). I did not collect numeric data for statistical testing of hypotheses, nor did I use a combination of the qualitative and quantitative methods; therefore, I rejected the quantitative and mixed-method approach.

I considered three research designs for this study: (a) phenomenology, (b) ethnography, and (c) case study. Phenomenological researchers focus on the lived experience of participants to explore a phenomenon (Bristowe, Selman, & Murtagh, 2015). The phenomenological design was not appropriate for this study because I was not collecting data on the lived experience of small business owners. The ethnographic researcher observes cultural groups of people for an extended period (Raab, 2013). I was not exploring the culture of a group of small business owners; therefore, the ethnographic



design was not appropriate for this study. Researchers conducting a case study explore, investigate, and describe a phenomenon within a bounded setting (Baškarada, 2014). The case study researcher seeks to explore a real-world problem that exists within a contextual setting (Van de Glind, Heinen, Evers, Wensing, & Van Achterberg, 2012). I selected the case study design because I sought to explore a real-world phenomenon within a bounded, contextual setting.

### **Research Question**

What social media marketing strategies do some small retail business owners use to increase sales?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What social media marketing strategies do you use to increase sales?
2. What social media marketing strategies did you find as most effective in increasing sales?
3. How did you measure the effectiveness of your social media marketing strategies used to increase sales?
4. What key challenges did you experience in implementing social media marketing strategies used to increase sales?
5. How did you overcome the key challenges in implementing social media marketing strategies to increase sales?
6. What other information can you provide about the social media marketing strategies you use to increase sales?

## Conceptual Framework

The social media marketing strategy theory, originated by Richardson, Choong, and Parker (2016), was the conceptual framework for this study. The key propositions of the social media marketing strategy theory are as follows: (a) successful marketing using social media remains dependent on the creation of many-to-many networks and strong integration ties between the social media platform and the advertising company, (b) sharing company media files occurs to improve marketing communications with prospective buyers, (c) using social media blogs and discussion boards is an effective means to increase awareness of products and services as well as obtain feedback from prospective buyers, (d) marketers must determine the optimal mix of social media platforms to maximize exposure of the company's products and services, and (e) marketers should appeal to the normal buying motives and habits of consumers through conspicuous product and service displays (Richardson et al., 2016). Business leaders who engage in effective social media marketing strategies create multiple linking one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-one, and many-to-many networks, resulting in increased sales (Richardson et al., 2016). Small business owners who use social media marketing strategies experience significant increases in customer engagement and company revenue (Tucker, 2012). Small business owners can create an inexpensive marketing campaign using social media, resulting in viral marketing, virtual word-of-mouth advertising, and increased sales (Richardson et al., 2016). I chose the social media marketing strategy

theory as being a useful lens for this study because social media marketing is an essential element of small business owners' strategies to increase sales.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Consumer marketing:* Consumer marketing is the selling of products to individual consumers with the use of commercials, word-of-mouth, printed ads, and social media (Roque & Raposo, 2016).

*Customer engagement:* Customer engagement is the concept that consumers are not passive but proactive contributors in cocreation through active and ongoing interactions (Islam & Rahman, 2016).

*Digital marketing:* Digital marketing is a marketing strategy used by companies regardless of sector, size, or country of origin to remain competitive, which brings benefits at low costs (Todor, 2016).

*Disruptive innovation:* Disruptive innovation is a process by which a product or service takes root initially in simple applications at the bottom of a market and then relentlessly moves up market, eventually displacing established competitors (Vecchiato, 2017).

*Many-to-many networks:* An electronic communication method to link the networks of multiple users to a variety of different networks, such as social media sites, blogs, Internet websites, and internal company intranets (Richardson et al., 2016).

*One-to-many networks:* The linking of one user's network to multiple external networks to improve the flow, efficiency, and speed of communications (Richardson et al., 2016).

*One-to-one networks:* The linking of one user's network with one external network (Richardson et al., 2016).

*Social media:* An Internet-based application built on ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 that people use for the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Malik, Asif, & Wali, 2016).

*Social media advertising:* Social media advertising is a marketing strategy used by business owners to interact with consumers personally using technology (Atwong, 2015).

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

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are beliefs about the study presumed to be true by the researcher, but no means of validation exists (Fisher & Stenner, 2011). Business owners who use social media marketing strategies to increase sales in North Carolina participated in 45-to 60-minute interviews. I assumed that the participants answered the interview questions completely and honestly. The business owners provided relevant documents and access to social media sites. I assumed the business documents were accurate and complete. I assumed that I accurately captured, understood, and analyzed the participants' responses.

**Limitations**

Limitations are the deficiencies in the study that are beyond the researcher's control (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The restriction of only five small retail business owners in North Carolina was a limitation of this study. The accuracy of the interview data collected relied on the experience and opinions of leaders in the five small retail businesses. Because of the limited scope of this study, the findings might have limited transferability by future researchers to other cases or settings. The final limitation was I relied on the honesty of participants and the supporting documentation of the business owners who have successfully implemented strategies to increase sales is the means to identify participants.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are boundaries set for the research study (Yin, 2018). Setting boundaries is important when there are time constraints or other limiting factors. The geographic region of North Carolina was a delimitation. Another delimitation of this study was the small sample size of five owners of small retail businesses. The participant eligibility criteria of small business owners who use social media marketing strategies to increase sales was a delimitation. I focused solely on exploring the social media marketing strategies small business owners use to increase sales as the final delimitation; therefore, I did not address other issues that small business owners experience in attempting to increase sales.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study may be significant in filling in the gaps concerning how small business owners use social media marketing strategies and channels to increase sales. In examining how some small business owners have used social media marketing strategies to increase their sales, both researchers and other business owners can learn from the effective strategies some business owners employ. Business owners use social media marketing to expand their brand (Stavrianea & Kavoura, 2015). With increased competition, evolving technological advancements, and improved customer engagement, small business owners need to know how to leverage marketing to increase sales. Through this study, I explored how small business retailers use social media marketing strategies to increase sales.

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Small business owner might use the finding of this study to implement effective social media marketing strategies to increase sales. The use of effective social media marketing strategies is a means for small business owners to gain insight into targeted market segments, competitive trends, and sales (Borgman, Jones, & Ulusoy, 2015). This insight into effective marketing might lead to successful social media marketing strategies, such as content marketing and behavioral targeting strategies. Small business owner might improve their understanding of the benefits of social media marketing through the findings of this study.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The implications for positive social change include the potential to offer insights into increased sales for the small business owner, thereby increasing job opportunities of individuals and improving economic conditions. Small businesses have added approximately 8 million jobs to the economy since 1993, with large businesses eliminating about 4 million jobs during this same time (U.S. Small Business Administration [SBA], 2016). However, approximately 50% of small businesses close within 5 years because of inadequate marketing strategies (Atanassova & Clark, 2015). Small business owners might use the findings of this study to contribute to positive social change through increased local employment opportunities, lower local unemployment rates, and improved local economic growth. Small business owners who improve sales and profitability growth create additional local employment opportunities, reduce unemployment rates, and strengthen local economic stability (Popescu & Crenicean, 2013).

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

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies that some small retail business owners use to increase sales. The literature enhanced my understanding of how small retail business owners can use social media marketing strategies to increase sales. During my research and evaluation of peer-reviewed articles and seminal books, I evaluated the different

viewpoints surrounding the central research question: What social media marketing strategies do some small retail business owners use to increase sales?

I synthesized the literature drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles, seminal books, and dissertations relative to my conceptual framework of social media marketing strategy theory and the topic of social media marketing. This search process included the following key words and phrases: *social media marketing, small retail businesses and social media marketing, social media theories, social media marketing strategies, business-to-consumer (B2C), web shop windows, online shops, and business-to-business (B2B) engagement.*

In this literature review, I provide a synthesis of the subject matter experts' views social media marketing strategies for small retail businesses, and the associated processes. The initial search started with researching scholarly journal articles, seminal books, and dissertations using the Walden University Library databases. The primary search from Business Source Complete, ABI/INFORM Complete, SAGE Premier, and Emerald Management Journals resulted in articles that encompassed social media marketing theories, as well as past and present practices. Additional search databases included Academic Search Complete, ProQuest Central, and Google Scholar for more comprehensive and informative review of current literature. Included in the references are peer-reviewed articles that represent of the references needed according to Walden's guidelines.



The literature review organization is as follows. First, I review and synthesize the literature regarding the social media marketing strategy theory, discuss complementary and alternative theories, and provide the history of social media marketing. I will then synthesize the literature regarding the importance of small business owners using social media marketing strategies to increase sales; the role of social media marketing; and the significance of social media marketing, B2C, Web Shop windows, B2B, customer engagement, and social media marketing. The sources used in this study are as follows: (a) 158 peer-reviewed scholarly journal articles, (b) eight seminal books, (c) five dissertations, and (d) two government sources. Of the 173 sources used, 91% were peer-reviewed scholarly journal articles, and 153 of the sources have publication dates from 2014-2018, equating to 88%. Eighty sources are unique to the review of academic and professional literature.

### **Social Media Marketing Strategy Theory**

The social media marketing strategy theory, originated by Richardson et al. (2016), was the conceptual framework for this study. Dahnil, Marzuki, Langgat, and Fabeil (2014) posited that leaders of small-to-medium size enterprises (SMEs) are the primary contributors to economic development and growth in employment. SMEs have limitations and acceptance barriers when applying new technology with the revolution of the Internet and communication channels to adopt to the way people conduct business (Dahnil et al., 2014). The use of social media changed the marketplace, leading to an increase in the sophistication of consumers (Constantinides, 2014). Constantinides (2014) and Lou and Koh (2017) noted that customers

are difficult to influence, persuade, and retain. Consumers use social media in a variety of ways, such as sharing purchasing experiences, complaining about a brand, or offering a recommendation (Lou & Koh, 2017). Social media-based businesses incorporate information sharing. The information shared by consumers complicates marketing managers' work when dealing with issues of their business (Hofacker & Belanche, 2016). The key propositions of the social media marketing strategy theory are successful marketing, sharing company media files, the use of social media blogs and discussion boards, marketers and optimal social mix, and marketers appeal to consumers.

**Successful marketing.** Successful marketing is a component of organizational success. Using social media remains dependent on the creation of many-to-many networks and integrated ties between the social media platform and the advertising company. Lou and Koh (2017) suggested that brands, relationships, and quality (BRQ) maintains the relationship between consumers and brands. Business leader should develop and promote brands to fulfill the needs of consumers; relationship development occurs in many ways through the concept of relationship quality (Constantinides, 2014). BRQ is an instrument that marketers use to evaluate the strength of relationships. The strength of the relationship increases by the person-brand relationship, not necessarily through the social media platform and advertising (Lou & Koh, 2017). Constantinides (2014) and Chen and Lien (2017) noted that marketing effectiveness improves through stronger consumer-company relationships and when the consumer perceives the brand is

of high quality. Effective social media marketers seek strong consumer-brand relationships.

**Sharing company media files.** Sharing of company media files occurs to improve marketing communications with prospective buyers. Kilgour, Sasser, and Larke (2015) and Richardson et al. (2016) noted that sharing company files improves marketing communication. Kilgour et al. maintained that matching the target audience to their message and customer engagement achievement is the key to a successful communication strategy by the level of brand relationship and product category involvement. Abashidze (2017) and Kilgour et al. commented that social media marketers should integrate media files to improve the flow of communication about the product to the consumer. Kilgour et al. suggested that company marketers should analyze consumer information by listening to consumers' conversations to determine their wants, needs, and desires. Social media marketing is a means for marketers and business owners to go beyond textual advertising to promote their good and services through photos and videos.

**Using social media blogs and discussion boards.** Marketers use blogs and discussion boards to increase awareness of products and services as well as obtain feedback from prospective buyers. Killian and McManus (2015) and Richardson et al. (2016) claimed that social network marketers often manage relationships with customers who use blogs to facilitate relationships. Wang, Lee, and Hua (2015) commented that some social media users appear to be addicted to using social media as a means to obtain

information, news, and review products and services. Consumers use blogs to learn, share, and express thoughts; blogs are an information source for businesses to receive feedback (Wang et al., 2015). Astute social media marketers recognize the benefits of engaging consumers in blogs and discussion boards.

**Marketers and optimal social mix.** To implement a social media marketing strategy, marketers must determine the optimal mix of social media platforms to maximize exposure of the company's products and services. Ramanathan, Subramanian, and Parrott (2017) and Richardson et al. (2016) stated that the mix of price, product, promotion, and place are significant in determining the optimal marketing mix. Tafesse and Wien (2018) posited that determining the most optimal use of social media platforms or groups is a strategic decision based on the product or service offered. Ramanathan et al. and Tafesse and Wien commented that successful social media marketers recognize who their target group of consumers are, and strategically placed advertisements result in the most efficient use of marketing dollars. Social media marketers' recognition and implementation of the best mix of social media advertisements is an efficient use of marketing resources.

**Marketers appeal to consumers.** A key aspect of the social media marketing strategy theory is the consumer appeal that marketers create through social media advertisements. Marketers should appeal to the normal buying motives and habits of consumers through conspicuous product and service displays (Richardson et al., 2016). Hudson, Huang, Roth, and Madden (2015) posited that social media is so widespread that

companies are integrating social media marketing strategies into their communications. Öztamur and Karakadılar (2014) noted the need for further research on how social media affects consumer attitudes, behaviors, and processes because of a deficient in existing information. Marketers must go beyond implementing traditional marketing strategies to reach social media users and to create increased consumer appeal for the products and services (Öztamur & Karakadilar, 2014). Astute social media marketers recognize the wants and needs of their consumers, and they strategically place appealing advertisements to improve sales growth.

**The selection of social media marketing strategy theory.** To explore the social media marketing strategies small retail business owners use to increase sales, I considered two theories for this study: social media marketing strategy theory developed by Richardson et al. (2016) and the social exchange theory developed by McFarland and Ployhart (2015). The framework theory for this study was the social media marketing strategy. Effing and Spil (2016) posited that social media is a group of Internet applications built on the foundation of Web 2.0 that people use for the exchange of user content and to create a valuable, unique situation involving different activities.

The use of social media marketing has become a component of businesses in the 21st century. Strategic social media marketing remains somewhat untested, and company leaders have not successfully implemented strategies to adjust to the increasing numbers of consumer-oriented communication via social media (Effing &

Spil, 2016; Felix, Rauschnabel, & Hinsch, 2017). Galati et al. (2017) postulated that difficulties exist in determining the effectiveness of social media regarding the return on investment and return on sales because of the difficulty of differentiating customers from online community members. Hudson et al. (2015) and Galati et al. posited that social media is widespread, and companies are beginning to integrate social media in their communication strategies. However, scholars have not examined significant social media interaction on attitudes and behaviors (Hudson et al., 2015). I selected the social media marketing strategy theory as the lens for this study because social media marketing is an element of small business owners' strategies to increase sales.

### **Complementary and Alternative Theories**

**Social feedback-loop-framework theory.** The social feedback-loop-framework theory is a complementary theory to the social media marketing strategy theory. The social feedback-loop-framework theory is the connection between social media and consumer purchases (Pan & Crotts, 2014). Unlike the social feedback-loop, social media marketing theorists claim that successful marketing using social media remains dependent on the creation of many-to-many networks and strong integration ties between the social media platform and the advertising company. In using the social feedback-loop framework theory, Pan and Crotts (2014) postulated that consumer purchasing has three distinct levels: awareness, consideration, and purchasing. I considered using the social feedback-loop-framework theory to explore the social media marketing strategies small

retail business owners use to increase sales; however, I determined that the social media marketing strategy theory was in more alignment with the purpose of this study.

Social media marketing theorists seek to advertise products and services while social feedback loop theorists denote the need for consumer feedback. Marketers share company media files and post to discussion forums to improve marketing communications with prospective buyers and implement a social media marketing strategy (Richardson et al., 2016). In comparison, marketers seek to implement the social feedback loop theory to obtain feedback from consumers using online forums or blogs (Pan & Crotts, 2014). Social media marketing theorists determine the optimal mix of social media platforms to maximize exposure of companies' products and services, appealing to the normal buying motives and habits of consumers through product and service displays (Richardson et al., 2016). However, the use of the social feedback loop theory remains dependent on consumers to spread the social feedback loop by word-of-mouth and product usage (Pan & Crotts, 2014). The social media marketing strategy theory was my chosen conceptual framework for my study. I sought to explore the social media marketing strategies business owners use to increase sales, not explore the effectiveness of obtain feedback from consumers.

**Social exchange theory.** The social exchange theory, an alternative to the social media marketing strategy theory, is of benefit to business owners. Business leaders use the social exchange theory to engage individuals with social media by rewarding the individual through communication, cost avoidance, and maximization of benefits (Malik

et al., 2016). McFarland and Ployhart (2015) noted that leaders use social exchange theory to ensure individuals stay connected to colleagues who live thousands of miles away without any cost associated with the relationship. Pan and Crotts (2014) and McFarland and Ployhart claimed that social exchange theorists compare alternatives to explain how human beings communicate, form relationships, and form communication through communities. Cropanzano, Anthony, Daniels, and Hall (2017) and McFarland and Ployhart noted that the social exchange theory encompasses a series of transactions between more than one parties. The exchange occurs when one party repays the good or bad deeds of another party. The exchange is quantifiable by the relationship between the target and actor, whereas the exchange of economics tends to involve more monitoring and less trust. However, Leung, Bai, and Erdem (2017) posited that social media marketers contend with *how* and *what* to say in advertising. The *what* to say is the message content regarding price, availability, special offers, and new ideas in the advertisement. The *how* to say it is the format of the message, such as text, photos, and videos, timing of the advertisement, and the choice of media used.

### **History of Social Media Marketing**

The advent of the Internet resulted in additional mediums for business owners to market their good and services. The evolution of marketing resulted in opportunities for organizational leaders to not only market their products and services, but also have a direct conversation with current and prospective customers (Melero, Sese, & Verhoef, 2016). The introduction of the Internet occurred in 1969 with the Advanced Research



Projects Agency Network (ARPANET) network (Campbell-Kelly & Garcia-Swartz, 2013). Several researchers and scholars advised that numerous aspects of the Internet's formation are understood; they, therefore, provide the metaphor of a tree to assist in its illustration (Campbell-Kelly & Garcia-Swartz, 2013), describing that the roots stem from an acorn (the ARPANET) branching out and growing since 1969. By the mid-1980s, the evolving Internet was a substantial network with about 2,000 host computers. Since 1993, network specialists connected computers around the world and joined to form the World Wide Web (Campbell-Kelly & Garcia-Swartz, 2013). Since the World Wide Web's formation in 1993, web traffic increased 20% each month providing the staggering numbers of Internet users in the 21st century (Buccoliero, Bellio, Mazzola, & Solinas, 2016). Opportunities for social media marketing would not exist without the Internet.

Business owners and marketers use the Internet for a variety of ways to reach new customers. The Internet had a revolutionary impact on communication, culture, and commerce that provides communications through instant messaging, email, video chatting, and other Internet-based applications (Srivastava, Nakazawa, & Chen, 2016). Business leaders use the platform of the World Wide Web to market their products and services in new ways that includes hosting their businesses in a virtual world (Xun, 2014). This evolution of commerce resulted in new marketing opportunities. Word-of-mouth marketing, one of the oldest, most powerful forms of promotion, has taken a new voice with the rise of the Internet (Gombeski, Martin, & Britt, 2015). Word-of-mouth occurs through the flow of shared interest groups, friendships, or family members in a

multistage filtering and interpretation process (Liu, Chou, & Liao, 2015). Businesses need to have a presence on the World Wide Web and market the business products and services to facilitate virtual word-of-mouth advertising (Maisam & Mahsa, 2016). Virtual word-of-mouth marketing is easily noticeable in consumer-generated media, taking the prior face-to-face communication norm to a completely new level.

Company leaders use the Internet to deliver promotional marketing messages to existing and prospective customers. Internet marketing began after the Internet launched publicly in 1993 and the use of the Internet influenced the automation and integration of marketing functions (Kucuk, 2016). Company leaders actively embraced the trend of Internet marketing when they not only hosted a website to conduct business, but also to provide information on their products and services, and bring their print advertisements to life, digitally (Atwong, 2015). Initially, marketers began with e-mail marketing and display advertising and banners, and then moved to search engine-marketing sites, such as Google and Bing, and social media marketing sites including Facebook and Twitter (Kurtin, 2016). The utilization of the Internet was and continues to be unprecedented, and the use of Internet marketing has and continues to increase exponentially. Edmiston (2014), in agreement with Kucuk (2016), noted that a strong Internet presence has become increasingly significant for businesses as a powerful tool to heighten awareness among consumers, attract potential customers, and facilitate communication among a company's customer base. The Internet was the gateway to social media marketing, and

without its creation, social media, the platform in which this marketing medium deploys, would not exist.

Effective marketers and business owners use social media to extend their advertising reach beyond traditional methods. Business leaders incorporate social media into their marketing strategies to gain access to customers who are likely unreachable through print or radio marketing methods (Coleman, Chandler, & Gu, 2013). Social media differs distinctly from traditional media because of increased frequency of use by consumers and sustained usability through countless forms beyond the traditional website, such as blogs, social networking sites and applications, and media photos and video clips (Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson, & Seymour, 2011). Consumers previously used traditional forms of purchasing, such as going to department stores or face-to-face transactions. However, consumers explore social media platforms to share their content through sharing sites, blogs, and social networking (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). Social media has become not only a place for business leaders to market their products and services, but also an arena to interact directly with customers (Edosomwan et al., 2011). In concert with Kietzmann et al. (2011), Coleman et al. (2013) commented that astute business owners realize the potential value of using social media to increase sales, improve their reputation, and extend their ability to survive in a competitive environment. Social media marketing is an effective means for business owners to reach new customers and improve their brand awareness in the marketplace.

## **Role of Social Media Marketing**

Marketers use social media to link consumers and business together in collective conversational networks. Consumer-business connections are a means for business leaders to develop relationships to maintain their current customer bases while attracting new customers (Schultz & Peltier, 2013). In an era in which business owners design marketing strategies to increase profits and market share, social media marketing is a means for marketers to improve customer satisfaction and retention resulting in increased sales (Ismail, 2016). Unlike traditional marketing methods, social media marketing results in improved collaboration, rather than exposure and impressions. Therefore, engagement from the business is critical to the effective use of social media marketing for increasing sales (Kurtin, 2016; Markova & Petkovska-Mircevska, 2013). Social media marketers seek increased engagement with the consumer as opposed to the buying traditional advertisement space to display products.

Small business marketing strategies differ from large corporate marketing strategies. Large corporations invested substantial resources in customer engagement strategies based on the argument that improving customer engagement rates leads to significant increases in sales (Milan, Eberle, & Bebbler, 2015). Small business owners who use social media customer engagement have an advantage over larger corporations because the larger corporations have to account for the financial overhead of IT and administrative and social media departments (Milan et al., 2015). In contrast, small business owners are solely responsible for how they delegate those tasks to one or fewer

employees (Hassan & Casaló Ariño, 2016). However, small business owners struggle with how to implement a marketing strategy; more precisely, small business owners may lack marketing knowledge intended for understanding specific marketing problems to increase sales (Bhatnagar & Papatla, 2016). In mild rebuttal to Bhatnagar and Papatla (2016), Hassan and Casaló Ariño (2016) noted that small business owners have a variety of inexpensive technological resources to engage in effective social media marketing campaigns. Small business owners can make effective use of social media marketing by using online resources to learn the process of purchasing and posting social media advertisements.

The use of social media marketing evolved from posting consumer enticements to seeking long-term customer engagement. The initial objective of an online marketing campaign was to entice the consumer to click-through to a company's website; however, astute social media marketers learned the value of creating sustained engagement with the consumer (Fisher, 2015). Social networks are a means for business leaders to increase their scope of their marketing campaigns (Kim & Drumwright, 2016). In concert with Kim and Drumwright (2016), Colapinto and Benecchi (2014) commented that social media marketing tools affect business innovation, resulting in an expansion of a small business owner's customer reach, targeting demographic groups for increasing customer engagement, streamlining advertising, and minimizing customer service efforts.

Conversely, Harmeling, Moffett, Arnold, and Carlson (2017) suggested that customer engagement is no longer by word of mouth, product or brand, or providing customer

ratings, but governed by customer's behaviors whereby customers go beyond fundamental transactions by making voluntary contributions and comments regarding a brand or a company. Marketers recognized that online commerce consisted of a lack of human contact, yet the use of social media is a means to increase the personalized contract with consumers (Markova & Petkovska-Mircevska, 2013). From a small business owner's perspective, the information posted on relevant sites can result in valuable research data about issues, such as product or service quality, usefulness and navigation of their site, and customer censors or recommendations (Kim & Drumwright, 2016). Social media marketers seek for online consumers to spread the company's message virally as opposed to the passive consumption of traditional marketing advertisements (Lee, Wang, Trappey, & Yang, 2014). Virtual word-of-mouth conversations regarding a product or service are a means for potential customers to learn about a product or service from other consumers rather than relying on a company's advertisement.

In using social media, business leaders and owners further developed networking by cultivating personal and professional relationships, allowing for the exchange of knowledge. Social media marketers create and monitor consumer forums to allow for interactions and provide the propagation of information to vast audiences (Suby, 2013). With an increasingly number of businesses integrating social media into their marketing, the simplistic fear of being left behind in this innovative marketing race has led to most businesses venturing into the social media world (Kim & Drumwright, 2016). After

experiencing a decay in traditional marketing effectiveness, business leaders searched for new marketing mediums, resulting in the exponential growth in social media marketing, yet many small business owners lack the knowledge and experience to mount effective social media marketing campaigns (Naylor, Lamberton, & West, 2012). In agreement with Naylor et al. (2012), Rambe (2017) postulated that some small business owners lack the confidence and technological *know-how* to implement a successful social media marketing strategy. To harness the effectiveness of increasing networking with consumers and improving customer engagement, small business owners need the ability to implement social media marketing strategies.

Social media is more than just an additional advertising vehicle or the new wave of advertising. Small business owners use social media to post paid advertisements and to generate *buzz* through posting media to free platforms (Mills & McCarthy, 2014). In rebuttal to Mills and McCarthy (2014), Charoensukmongkol and Sasatanun (2017) noted that small business owners should engage in a strategic and extensive process to make effective use of social media. The strategic process to make effective use of social media marketing is as follows: (a) collect customer information for identification, such as customers' demographic characteristics, purchasing history, and personal preferences; (b) differentiate consumers into groups based on similar needs and values; (c) interacting and communicating with customers to create long-term relationships based on their expectations; and (d) tailoring and customizing marketing offers based on the consumer preferences and specific needs (Charoensukmongkol & Sasatanun, 2017). Kasemsap

(2017), in agreement with Charoensukmongkol and Sasatanun, noted that the identity of individuals and association-based information is the data marketers use to contact users of the businesses site. Small business owners must understand the wants and needs of their customers to make effective use of social media marketing.

Business leaders use social media to improve customer relationships. Customer relations are critical to organizational success; business owners using the most effective medium to promote their organization's products and services are the determinants to success (Sherbaniuk, 2014). Social media is a means for small business owners to respond to customer's comments, show a genuine interest in the customer, improve the customer's perception of the company, and build lasting relationships (Liu et al., 2015). Effective social media marketers recognize the value of customer loyalty, brand awareness, and building a long-term relationship with the customer to gain repeat business (Kasemsap, 2017). In agreement with Sherbaniuk (2014), Liu et al. (2015) noted that strategic value of long-term customer relationships is organizational success. The preponderance of the literature reviewed indicated that small business owners need lasting customer relationships to remain viable in a competitive marketplace.

### **Business-to-Consumer (B2C)**

The business-to-consumer (B2C) category of small retail sales of goods and services to private individuals via the Internet is a prominent area of e-commerce. Business owners who implement an effective B2C strategy target customers to improve traffic on their e-commerce sites (Keikha & Sargolzaei, 2017). In agreement with Keikha



and Sargolzaei (2017), Clark (2017) posited that organizational leaders could improve e-commerce traffic placing targeted advertisements on social media sites. Monitoring the social media sites for consumer feedback is another method business owners use to improve their B2C effectiveness (Keikha & Sargolzaei, 2017). Business owners should follow their targeted consumer groups, consistently reply to consumer comments, and seek to engage the consumer in positive dialog to increase brand awareness as well as sales (Swani, Milne, Brown, Assaf, & Donthu, 2017). Dissatisfied customers are far more likely to post a negative review of a product or service than a satisfied customer will post a positive review (Sparks & Bradley, 2017). Business owners who consistently fail to address negative reviews risk their survivability.

Conducting B2C e-commerce is a personalized business transaction with a customer. Business owners engaging in B2C transactions must recognize that a customer purchasing a product engages in a personal decision (Swani et al., 2017). Business owners can use social media to increase the personalization of their marketing campaigns to improve customer satisfaction, influence consumer behavior, and increase sales (Tussyadiah, Kausar, & Soesilo, 2018). In agreement with Tussyadiah et al. (2018), Swani et al. (2017) commented that business leaders could use social networking and marketing to shape the buying decisions of consumers. Tussyadiah et al. posited that the referrals facilitated via the Internet, such as virtual word-of-mouth, viral marketing, and relationship marketing are vital and desired activities of small business owners. The

literature indicates that business leaders can improve their B2C performance by personalizing the transaction using social media.

### **Web-Shop Windows**

Small business owners can use low-cost Web-Shop windows to display products or an online catalog. A Web-Shop window is not an online store, but rather a sales manager tool to draw customers into the online retail website (Kotler, Keller, Manceau, & Hémonnet-Goujot, 2015). Business owners can enhance the customer's shopping experience by using Web-Shop windows (Fiore, Vrontis, Silvestri, & Contò, 2016). The Web-Shop window is a user interface for cataloging data, sharing pricing, registering customer comments, and facilitating moving customers from browsing to purchasing a product or service (Kotler et al., 2015). Business leaders using Web-Shop windows need to provide prominent links to their online retail store as well as link their social media marketing to Web-Shop links (Blackburn, Hart, & Wainwright, 2013). Web-Shop windows are useful mediums marketers and business owners can use to enhance their social media marketing strategy.

Business owners who use Web-Shop windows create an additional method to connect with potential customers. Small business owners often use a Web-Shop window as the traditional store banner or billboard to entice customers to enter the retail store (Rezaei, Chandran, & Oh, 2018). As noted by Siddiqui and Fitzgerald (2015), small business owners need to possess some technological knowledge or invest in a third party provider to create an effective Web-Shop window. Agnihotri, Trainor, Itani, and

Rodriguez (2017), in agreement with Siddiqui and Fitzgerald (2015), suggested that small business owners have access to technology knowledge, tools, and experts to develop attractive Web-Shop windows to complement their social media marketing strategy. Small business owners might make effective use of their social media marketing resources by creating Web-Shop windows to attract customers to their retail stores.

### **Business-to-Business (B2B)**

Business-to-business (B2B) involves all levels of electronic interaction between companies with the use of special technology and electronic data interchanges. Some business leaders use their social media marketing strategy to develop and improve their B2B e-commerce opportunities (Guillet, Kucukusta, & Liu, 2016; Kotler et al., 2015). Using a virtual platform, leaders of B2B enterprises and companies can exchange information, find new partners and suppliers, and conduct trading operations (Blackburn et al., 2013; Schaupp & Bélanger, 2013). Traditional electronic systems of data exchange, such as Electronic Data Interchange (EDI), designed to operate within an intranet might not be as profitable as using B2B platforms, especially for company leaders who wish to establish a connection with the small customers and suppliers who are unable to maintain complex and expensive EDI-technology (Kotler et al., 2015). There are almost 7 million small companies in the United States, representing about 50% of the country's gross domestic product. Small businesses can still compete with larger firms even without the means to use EDI and other expensive extranet systems via B2B (Blackburn et al., 2013; Kotler et al., 2015). However, when business leaders create and maintain commercial

B2B sites, they give consumers the opportunity to use comparisons to make the best decision when purchasing a service or product.

The first step toward the creation of a B2B trading platform is to develop a business strategy. Ahmed, Bwisa, Otieno, and Karanja (2014) noted the importance of business leaders developing a specific strategy to create an effective B2B platform, implement the plan, and integrating the B2B strategy into the company's overall strategy plan. Business leaders engaging in B2B online commerce seek to combine solutions for vendors and customers, integrating them into a single system based on the central portal (Tuten, 2014). In concert with Tuten (2014), Blackburn et al. (2013) commented creators of a B2B platform should implement the features and components needed by buyers and sellers to improve operational performance. Scalability is important for B2B success, as the expansion of activity and an increase in the number of participants is directly proportional to the growth of company earnings from B2B e-commerce (Hatten, 2015). B2B success directly links to the quality of directory management organization and on the speed of adding new and changing old information, contributing to the convenience of searching the directory (Rezaei et al., 2018; Hatten, 2015). As leaders use social media marketing to increase B2B e-commerce, consistently updating the information on the B2B platform is an essential activity.

Business leaders need a virtual trading platform to support all types of e-commerce transactions, integrate business processes, and foster cooperation between companies. The integration of business processes is a means to document and record

management, and increase the profit of the participating businesses (Hatten, 2015; Kotler et al., 2015). An important aspect of the integration is to ensure the incorporation of business processes on an electronic exchange with business systems participants. Many business leaders use ERP software to accomplish the integration of business processes (Akca & Ozer, 2014). In agreement with Akca and Ozer (2014), Hatten (2015) noted the business leaders use ERP process integration to optimize the planning and management of internal resources and facilitate the receipt of data from external applications to enhance the B2B platform. Effective integration of participating businesses' process in B2B platforms is a strategy leaders use to participate in several online trading platforms (Hatten, 2015; Mills & McCarthy, 2014). Effective business leaders engaging in B2B e-commerce implement process integration to improve performance, yet difficulties exist in executing a B2B strategy.

The creators of B2B e-commerce platforms must ensure the safety of payment and the transfer of valuable information. A company transitioning from traditional product sales to B2B e-commerce may experience difficulty maintaining profitable relationships with intermediaries and distributors who remain somewhat resistant to conducting business through a B2B e-commerce site (Hatten, 2015; Mills & McCarthy, 2014). Business leaders who develop a strategy to transition supply chain partners from traditional commerce methods to e-commerce complete a vital component of a successful B2B operation (Hatten, 2015; Schaupp & Bélanger, 2013). Small business owners could

improve their sales by using their social media marketing strategy to complement a B2B e-commerce operation.

### **Customer Engagement**

Engaging customers using a social media marketing strategy is an effective means for business owners to increase sales. Braojos, Benitez, and Llorens-Montes (2017) noted that a business leader needs a high level of proficiency in social media to engage online customers. Business owners seeking to engage in online commerce must cultivate trust with the customers, recognizing the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive concepts of consumers making a purchasing decision (Harrigan, Evers, Miles, & Daly, 2017). In accord with Harrigan et al. (2017), Islam and Rahman (2016) commented that business owners engage online customers by increasing the level of trust the consumer experiences when making an online purchase. Harrigan et al. (2017) noted that in order to boost loyalty of customers through social media avenues, marketers should seek to improve the consumer's trust in the brand and in the security features regarding making an online purchase.

Customer retention is an essential element of a marketing strategy. Retaining customers is dependent on marketers developing a strategy that cultivates a consumer's emotional attachment with the product or company (Venkatesan, 2017). Moreover, if a customer enjoys the environment of the social media platform, the customer is more likely to interact with other people by word-of-mouth, which increases the potential for repeat business and new customers (Braojos et al., 2017). Evidence in the reviewed

literature indicates that improving online customer engagement is a function of ensuring the consumer trusts the company, the brand, and the process of buying a product online.

### **Benefits of Social Media Marketing**

Social media marketing is a strategy business owners use to increase the exposure of their products and services. Social media has an abundance of marketing avenues and opportunities for marketers to focus their product campaigns through interactive dialog platforms (Barrutia & Echebarria, 2013). In contrast to traditional marketing mediums, marketers recognize that the use of social media marketing is a means to appeal to younger generations of consumers. Consumers seldom interact or offer shared experiences in response to a traditional newspaper or radio advertisement, yet will often engage interactively to social media advertisements (Markova & Petkovska-Mircevska, 2013). In agreement with Markova and Petkovska-Mircevska (2013), Braojos et al. (2017) noted the consumers who respond to social media advertisements provide business leaders with real-time marketing research data to better position advertisements or adjust the content to improve sales. Astute marketers use social media to detect consumer reactions, obtain feedback, and adjust their marketing strategy accordingly (Rolland & Parmentier, 2013).

Business leaders use a variety of social media platforms to interact with consumers. Popular social networking sites consist of Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, and Twitter (Surma, 2016). Marketers also use the media sites of YouTube, Flickr, and Pinterest to reach customers (Surma, 2016). Marketers use Facebook to provide

information about their business, posts relevant pictures and videos, and promote events. YouTube is means for business owners to share videos and link advertisements to videos with content related to their product and business. Marketers use Twitter for a quick source of information and consumer feedback (Witkemper, Lim, & Waldburger, 2012). Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter are the most common types of social media used by marketers to interact with consumers and increase sales (Witkemper et al., 2012). Wang and Kim (2017) agreed with Witkemper et al. (2012) in that marketers use social media to transform how online users into active participants rather than passive consumers of traditional advertisements. Consumers communicating with each other and interacting with the business is a means for business leaders to increase the efficiency of their marketing resources.

The growth in the use of social media is an opportunity for business owners to capture more customers, obtain real-time feedback, and improve their marketing in a competitive environment. Consumers use social media to make over 500 billion impressions and comments annually regarding product offerings since 2008 (Allan & Ali, 2017). Consumers and business leaders use social media because of ease-of-use and to post and digest information virtually (Vinerean, Cetina, Dumitrescu, & Tichindelean, 2013). Astute marketers recognize the growth in the use of social media as an opportunity to engage in low-cost advertising to reach millions of potential new customers (Allan & Ali, 2017). The phenomenon of social media is a means for business owners to link marketing communication and branding to customer relationship marketing (Witkemper



et al., 2012). Social media marketing strategists recognize the beneficial effects of consumer socialization on consumer purchasing decisions and the concept of placing advertisements in the most conspicuous places for the masses of consumers to view.

Astute marketers recognize that the use of social media is an effective medium to expand their customer base. Markova and Petkovska-Mircevska (2013) noted that business performance improves when business leaders update their technological systems to take advantage of social media marketing opportunities. Wang and Kim (2017) disagreed with Markova and Petkovska-Mircevska, arguing that investment in technology hardware and software will not necessarily improve business performance; improved business performance is a result of engaging customers, meeting their needs, building customer loyalty, and ensuring their satisfaction. Social media is a means for consumers to promote or demote a business based on their experiences with the company's products and services. Business leaders who recognize the value of satisfied customers tend to obtain favorable customer reviews, resulting in improved sales (Markova & Petkovska-Mircevska, 2013). Responding to customers' comments and posts, and providing a genuine interest in the customer and being receptive to feedback are effective activities for small business owners to improve customer satisfaction and improve sales (Ismail, 2017). Using social media, the consumer can influence the manner a business owner operates.

Effective marketers incorporate social media into their marketing plan. Social media is an important part of a marketing plan because business owners can include the

consumer in business conversations, provide consumers with the ability to share testimonials, and collect valuable information from the consumer (Ismail, 2017).

Consumers are brand and value conscious, typically view brands as status symbols, and seek the best brand within their budget (Schultz & Peltier, 2013). By taking advantage of social media, a business owner improve brand awareness and keep consumers connected to their brand (Witkemper et al., 2012). A robust B2C connection is vital to the success of a company; social media is a means for business owners to implement a marketing plan to build consumer relationships at a low cost and in a timely manner.

Social media is a resource for business owners to advertise, generate new leads, and improve sales. Business leaders want consumers to believe in, purchase, support the brand, and to promote their products and services; social media is a means for consumers to convey their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a company (Schultz & Peltier, 2013). In agreement with Schultz and Peltier (2013), Ismail (2017) suggested that social media is a hub for promoting goods and services that business leaders use to communicate actively with consumers. Unlike traditional print, radio, television, or billboard advertisements, social media marketing is a means for two-way communication between the consumer and the business.

The preponderance of the literature reviewed indicated that social media marketing is an effective strategy for small business owners to increase sales. Astute business owners take advantage of social media marketing because of the increased efficiency regarding marketing resources and the exponential growth in the number of

people using social media (Vinerean et al., 2013). In agreement with Vinerean et al. (2013), Wang and Kim (2017) postulated that implementing an effective social media marketing strategy is a means for small business owners to improve customer relationships, loyalty, brand awareness, and value. Amankwah-Amoah (2017) posited that business failure is often a result of business owners failing to implement effective marketing strategies. In this study, I seek to explore the social media marketing strategies some small retail business owners use to increase sales.

### **Transition**

In Section 1 of this study, I introduced the foundation and background for the study related to (a) the problem and purpose statements, (b) nature of the study, (c) research question, (d) the conceptual framework, (e) definition of terms, (f) significance of the study, and (g) academic literature review. In Section 1, I also focused on exploring how small retail business owners can use social media marketing to increase sales.

In Section 2, I will explain my role as the researcher and the importance of collecting all the data relevant to this case study. I explain why the multiple case study design is the best design for this study. I will discuss population and sampling, ethical research, data collection and organization techniques, data analysis, and reliability and validity. Section 3 will include a detailed explanation of the data collection process, my findings for the research, application to the professional practice of social media marketing, the implications for social change, and finally recommendations for further actions of the research study.

## Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I include a detailed plan for exploring the social media marketing strategies that small retail business owners use to increase sales. I will explain the role of the researcher, discuss the eligibility criteria for participants, justify the chosen research method and design, and explain the procedures undertaken to ensure adherence to ethical research standards. Section 2 contains an explanation of the data collection instruments, data organization techniques, and data analysis procedures. I closed Section 2 with a discussion of ensuring dependability, credibility, and confirmability of the findings.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies that some small retail business owners use to increase sales. The target population consisted of owners of five small retail businesses in North Carolina who successfully implemented social media marketing strategies to increase sales. The findings of this study may contribute to positive social change through increased local employment opportunities, lower local unemployment rates, and improved local economic growth. Small business owners who improve sales and profitability growth create additional local employment opportunities, reduce unemployment rates, and strengthen local economic stability (Popescu & Crenicean, 2013).

### **Role of the Researcher**

In a qualitative case study, researchers are vital in capturing the experience and knowledge of the participants. Collins and Cooper (2014) noted that the researcher's role is data collection, data organization, and data analysis. As the researcher, I identified common patterns in the data and categorize accordingly. My role was to identify and address all forms of bias that could influence the outcome of the study. As the primary instrument for data collection, I recruited participants, conducted the interviews, reviewed company documents, analyzed the data collected, interpreted the findings of the study, and reported the results. As noted in *The Belmont Report*, a researcher should use basic ethical principles when interviewing human subjects (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research [NCPHSBBR], 1979). The basic ethical principles are: (a) respect, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (NCPHSBBR, 1979). Respect involves honoring the participant's demands when the participant voluntarily agrees to the interview. Beneficence involves respecting participants' decisions and ensuring that participants are not exposed undue risks. Justice involves fairness and equal ethical treatment of all participants. I showed respect to all participants to ensure that they experienced no exposure to unnecessary risk and treated them ethically throughout the study.

My role relating to ethics in accordance to *The Belmont Report* was to ensure compliance with respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. De Mooy and Yuen (2017) posited that ethics must be part of any research discussion. Since the 1970s, regulation of

human subject research occurs through detailed guidelines in *The Belmont Report* and administered by the institutional review boards (IRBs). I did not compromise the principles of *The Belmont Report*; participants received informed consent forms, understood their rights, and knew that their participation was voluntary. I informed the participants of their rights, the purpose of the study, and the potential risks and benefits for participating in the study.

Marshall and Rossman (2016) maintained that although researchers have a personal interest in their topic, researchers should not exhibit any bias in the study. Fusch and Ness (2015) postulated that researchers' and participants' bias or worldview, whether intentionally or unintentionally, are present in all social research. To mitigate bias and address personal lens, researchers should adhere to the interpretation of the phenomena from the participants' perspective. I have 15 years of experience working in small businesses focusing on social media marketing in the Charlotte, North Carolina area. I avoided using my subjective opinions and put aside preconceived ideas regarding the outcomes of the study during data collection and analysis. Marshall and Rossman (2016) posited that researchers should avoid selecting participants with whom a personal or work relationship exists to mitigate biases and improve the trustworthiness of the findings. I did not select participants with whom a personal or working relationship exists to mitigate biases and improve the credibility of the results.

Because I was part of the research process, avoiding bias was of utmost importance. I used member checking to mitigate bias. Member checking is a process that

researchers use to provide the participants the opportunity to validate the researcher's interpretation of their responses to the open-ended, interview questions, and any follow-up or probing questions (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2018). I audio recorded the interviews, transcribed the audio recordings, created a summary of the transcripts using my objective interpretation, and returned the summaries to the participants for their validation in a follow-up, 30-minute, member-checking session. I revised the summaries if any participant required a change or added additional information.

Adhering to an interview protocol is a means for the researcher to maintain consistency among all of the interviews (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). I used an interview protocol to maintain consistency during the interviews and as a procedural guide before, during, and after the interviews (see Appendix A). I asked participants open-ended questions that aligned with the research question (see Appendix B). Yin (2018) noted that an interview protocol is a useful tool that researchers use to help with replication of the study and improve the credibility of the data. Adhering to the interview protocol was a process I used to remove my personal opinions and worldviews from the data collection process.

### **Participants**

Researchers should develop participant-inclusion criteria and identify potential participants who possess the knowledge and insight needed to answer the overarching research question of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2018). Researcher

participants must possess a deep understanding of phenomenon (Hem, Pedersen, Norvoll, & Molewijk, 2015). I selected participants who possessed the knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study to answer the research question. The eligibility criteria for the targeted population for this qualitative, multiple case study consisted of small retail business owners in North Carolina who use social media marketing strategies to increase sales. The sample for this study consisted of five small business owners who successfully used social media marketing to increase business sales. Academic researcher must obtain IRB approval of the university of record (Grady, 2015). I obtained IRB approval from Walden University prior to seeking out potential participants for this study.

Reviewing LinkedIn business-networking site is a means for researchers to locate potential participants for a study (Bunn et al., 2014). To gain access to participants, I solicited small business owners from the social media-marketing group on the LinkedIn business-networking site. I used the LinkedIn social network because of its professional reputation and the potential to network with small business owners. Peticca-Harris, de Gama, and Elias (2016) commented that researchers improve their recruiting efforts by conveying to the potential participants some common professional interests. I conveyed to the potential participants my 15 years of experience working with small business owners and leaders in the area of social media marketing to begin to build a rapport.

McDermid, Peters, Jackson, and Daly (2014) noted that researchers should communicate the purpose of the study, the potential benefit and risks of participation, and



the need to conduct the research to participants to build a working relationship. After identifying potential participants, I e-mailed the small business owners to gauge their interest in participating in this study. The e-mail contained the purpose of this study, the potential benefit of the research, the potential risks of participation, and reassurances of confidentiality and ethical measures to the LinkedIn Group of small retail business owners. After receipt of a favorable response from the small business owners, I e-mailed each owner and informed consent form. Miller (2017) noted that the effective recruiting of participants seldom occurs with a single contact. I followed up with each owner through telephone calls or in-person visits to answer any questions, further explain the research and interview process, and continue to build a working relationship.

## **Research Method and Design**

### **Research Method**

The three research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers use the qualitative method to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon through open discourse with participants, discovery, and investigation (Patton, 2014). The methodology approach for this study was qualitative as the objective was to explore social media marketing strategies used by small retail businesses in ways that lead to increased sales. Yin (2018) noted that a qualitative researcher explores a phenomenon or reality through the knowledge, experience, and expertise of participants who provide the researcher with value and insight into a phenomenon not fully understood. The purpose of the qualitative researcher is to discover phenomenon by

conducting interviews, data analysis, ensuring the quality of the data analyzed, and synthesizing the literature (Holt & Goulding, 2014). A qualitative study is not a method of answering but rather a method of questioning, with the realization that reflective questioning is a means of gaining insight from the participants (Van Manen, 2014). With the qualitative method, researchers focus on discovering and understanding a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives of individuals involved. The primary focus and goal of a qualitative researcher is to acquire accurate data to generate a configuration that mirrors the quintessence of the experience (Van Manen, 2014). I selected the qualitative method to discover the in-depth meaning of a phenomenon through open dialog with participants, gain insight from the knowledge and experience of the participants, and gather rich data for analysis.

Quantitative researchers use statistical data to test hypotheses via the use of dependent and independent variables (Patton, 2014). Quantitative researchers aim to answer the *if* of a phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Bryman (2015) posited that a researcher uses the quantitative method to measure, generalize, replicate, and connect the data. The quantitative researcher uses numeric data to prove or disprove a hypothesis (Yin, 2018). I did not collect numeric data for statistical testing of hypotheses; therefore, I rejected the quantitative method.

Mixed-method researchers use both qualitative and quantitative elements (Yin, 2018). Researchers use the mixed-method approach to combine qualitative and quantitative methods and collect data using open dialog with participants and numeric

data for statistical testing of hypotheses (Bryman, 2015). Bryman (2015) posited that quantitative researchers use generalizations and measurements. The mixed-method researcher uses one method to strengthen the findings from another method (Hesse-Biber, 2015). The mixed-method approach is a means for researchers to analyze quantitative and qualitative data to understand an issue (Van Manen, 2014). I did not use a combination of the qualitative and quantitative methods to answer the research question for this study; therefore, I rejected the mixed-method approach.

### **Research Design**

I considered three research designs for this study: (a) phenomenology, (b) ethnography, and (c) case study. Case studies are useful in the exploratory realm of research (Yin, 2018). Researchers conducting a case study explore, investigate, and describe a phenomenon within a bounded setting (Baškarada, 2014). The case study researcher seeks to explore a real-world problem that exists within a contextual setting (Van de Glind et al., 2012). I selected the case study design because I seek to explore a real-world phenomenon within a bounded, contextual setting. Researchers using a case study design collect data from multiple sources of evidence to engage in methodological triangulation (Raab, 2013). I collected data using semistructured interviews and document review to engage in methodological triangulation. Case study researchers increase the credibility and dependability of the data and the findings by collecting diverse data from multiple sources (Yin, 2018). I conducted a multiple case study to collect diverse data and to increase the credibility and dependability of the findings. I

used semistructured interviews, asking participants open-ended questions to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon.

Phenomenological researchers focus on the lived experiences of participants to explore a phenomenon (Bristowe et al., 2015). Researchers use the phenomenological design to understand a phenomenon through collecting data from people who lived the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Dante (2015) suggested that using the lived experiences of participants is an inappropriate means to explore the participants' knowledge of a business issue. The phenomenological design was not appropriate for this study because I did not collect data on the lived experiences of small business owners.

The ethnographic researcher observes the culture of groups of people for an extended period (Raab, 2013). The use of ethnographic design involves direct social contact with participants to encounter the human experience (Marion, Eddleston, Friar, & Deeds, 2015). Researchers use ethnography to study the culture of a group of people or an organization (Yin, 2018). I did not explore the culture of a group of small business owners; therefore, the ethnographic design was not appropriate for this study.

O'Reilly and Parker (2013) noted that data saturation occurs when additional data collection efforts by the researcher do not result in new data, information, themes, or patterns. A researcher improves the credibility of the data through reaching data saturation (Anney, 2014). Baškarada (2014) maintained that researchers conducting a case study must collect rich, in-depth data from multiple sources to reach data saturation. Researchers achieve data saturation through asking participants probing questions,

engaging the participants in member checking, collecting data from multiple sources, and engaging in methodological triangulation (Anney, 2014). Researchers use member checking to allow the participants to validate an interpreted summary of their responses to the interview questions (Yin, 2018). Methodological triangulation is a process that researchers use to cross check interview data with data collected from supporting documents (Anney, 2014). I reached data saturation through conducting semistructured interviews, asking probing questions during the interviews for additional clarity, and engaging the participants in member checking. I collected data from multiple sources of evidence to use methodological triangulation. I continued data collection until no new themes or patterns emerged.

### **Population and Sampling**

The population for this study was small retail business owners in North Carolina who successfully used a social media marketing strategy to increase sales. I used purposeful sampling to select the five participants. Purposeful sampling is a means for researchers to contribute to the credibility of the research (Valerio et al., 2016). Researchers identify participants using purposeful sampling to improve the trustworthiness of data collected through interviews (Duan, Bhaumik, Palinkas, & Hoagwood, 2015). Researchers use purposeful sampling to add value to case study research: (a) in selecting members of a specialized population that is difficult to reach, (b) when dealing with a unique case, and (c) for the identification of cases for investigation (Ishak & Bakar, 2014).

The participants had to be a majority owner of a small business in North Carolina. Each participant possessed a record of using social media marketing strategies to improve sales. I reviewed company documents regarding social media marketing strategies and year-over-year sales reports to validate the record of the participants. I conducted semistructured interviews to gain rich data from participants. Researchers should select an appropriate interview setting to ensure the comfort and confidentiality of the participants (Ecker, 2017). Interviews were conducted in an agreed upon location that was convenient for the participant; yet, I suggested a neutral, private setting, such as the conference room of a local public library. Scheibe, Reichelt, Bellmann, and Kirch (2015) noted that interviews should be in a place that is free of distractions and is conducive for uninterrupted dialog between the interviewer and the interviewee.

Gordon (2017) conducted a qualitative case study using five participants to explore the social media marketing strategies that organizational leaders use to improve sustainability. Ezeife (2017) purposefully selected five participants and used a qualitative case study design to research the social media strategies business leaders use to increase sales. Lupo (2018) explored the social media strategies that small business owner use to improve business survivability using four participants. I justified the use of five participants in this study from the prior research studies conducted by Gordon, Ezeife, and Lupo because of the similarities in method, design, scope, and topic.

Researchers who conduct a case study must collect rich, in-depth data from multiple sources to reach data saturation (Baškarada, 2014). Researchers achieve data

saturation through asking participants probing questions, engaging the participants in member checking, collecting data from multiple sources, and engaging in methodological triangulation (Anney, 2014). Data saturation occurs when additional data collection efforts by the researcher do not result in new data, information, themes, or patterns (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Researchers use member checking to allow the participants to validate an interpreted summary of their responses to the interview questions (Yin, 2018). Methodological triangulation is a process researcher's use to cross check interview data with data collected from supporting documents (Anney, 2014). I reached data saturation through conducting semistructured interviews, asking probing questions during the interviews for additional clarity, and engaging the participants in member checking. I collected data from multiple sources of evidence to use methodological triangulation. I continued data collection until no new themes or patterns emerge.

### **Ethical Research**

Ethical researchers obtain informed consent from participants prior to collecting data through interviews, experiments, or observation (Eisnecker & Kroh, 2017). To abide by research ethical standards set forth in *The Belmont Report* and adhere to IRB protocol, researchers must obtain informed consent from participants (Grady, 2015). Prior to conducting semistructured interviews with participants, I obtained their informed consent. The informed consent form contained an introduction to this study, the risks and benefits of participating in this research, and notations regarding participation in this study is voluntary and without any form of compensation. I emailed the informed consent

form to participants who then replied *I consent* to the email to provide their informed consent.

Academic researchers must obtain IRB approval prior to contacting participants and collecting any data (Blackwood et al., 2015). Walden University's IRB establishes ethical considerations to ensure researchers do not expose participants to unnecessary risk or harm. I obtained IRB approval from Walden University prior to contacting potential participants or collecting any data for this study. The Walden University IRB approval number was 03-07-19-0085206.

Participation in this study was voluntary and without any incentives or compensation. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time by contacting me via e-mail, telephone, or in person. Researchers should use code names for participants within the published study to maintain the confidentiality of participants' identity (Spillane, Larkin, Corcoran, Matvienko-Sikar, & Arensman, 2017). To ensure the confidentiality of participants, I used the codes P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 for participants within the published study. All research data and information will be securely stored in a fireproof, locked drawer in my home office of which I will only have access. Storage for the secured data will last for 5 years. After 5 years, I will mechanically shred all print copies of data and research records, and electronically delete all electronic files.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Researchers who use the qualitative method to conduct their research are the primary instruments of data collection (Cypress, 2017). For this qualitative study, I was



the primary data collection instrument, collecting data through semistructured interviews and a review of relevant company documents. De Massis and Kotlar (2014) explained that interviews are a key source of data for qualitative researchers. Researchers who conduct a qualitative research study often use semistructured interviews to capture the insight, knowledge, and expertise of participants regarding a phenomenon (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). To conduct the semistructured interviews, I followed a strict interview protocol to ensure a credible and consistent interview process (see Appendix A). Amankwaa (2016) noted that researchers use an interview protocol to improve the consistency of the interview process as well as improve the credibility of the collected data.

Researchers should maintain a reflective journal while collecting data to maintain a record of all the process used during data collection (Cope, 2014). I maintained a reflective journal to record notes and nonverbal communications from the participants during the interviews. With the permission of the participants, I audio recorded the semistructured interviews for transcription purposes. I asked the participants open-ended questions to elicit thorough responses and collect information-rich data (see Appendix B). Yin (2018) identified the following steps of how a researcher should conduct an ethical interview: (a) obtain IRB approval, (b) obtain informed consent from each participant, (c) record the interview, (d) stay focused, (e) listen during the interview for opportunities to ask follow-up questions. I obtained approval from Walden University's IRB before

contacting participants, obtained informed consent from each participant, and asked probing follow-up questions to gain additional clarity during the interviews.

Researchers who conduct a qualitative case study must collect data from multiple sources to engage in methodological triangulation, the process of crosschecking one source of data with a second source of data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2018). I reviewed company documents regarding social media marketing strategies and year-over-year sales reports to validate the interview data collected during the semistructured interviews. I obtained permission to review company documents through the informed consent process with the small business owners.

Member checking is a process researchers use to provide the participants the opportunity to validate the researcher's interpretation of their responses to the open-ended, interview questions and any follow up or probing questions (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Researchers use member checking to improve the credibility and dependability of the data as well as to reach data saturation (Anney, 2014; Yin, 2018). I transcribed the audio recordings of the interviews, analyzed the transcripts, developed a 1-2 page summary that consisted of my interpretation of the participants' interview responses, and met in a follow-up 30-minute session with each participant to ask them to review and validate my interpretation. If needed, I revised my interpretation based on the participants' review of the interpreted summary of the transcripts. I used member checking to ensure I accurately captured each participant's intent and to improve the dependability of the interview data.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

In conducting a qualitative case study, a researcher might collect data using semistructured interviews, focus groups, pertinent documents, or validated questionnaires (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2018). Researchers who conduct a qualitative study seek rich, insightful data from the viewpoint of participants; therefore, a primary data collection technique for qualitative researchers is the semistructured interview (Vass, Rigby, & Payne, 2017). I used face-to-face, semistructured interviews to collect information-rich data from small business owners who implemented successful social media marketing strategies to improve sales. An interview protocol is a resource researchers use to maintain a consistent and trustworthy interview process (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Yin, 2018). I used an interview protocol to maintain consistency during the interviews and as a procedural guide before, during, and after the interviews (see Appendix A). During the interviews, I asked open-ended interview questions that align with the overarching research question for this study (see Appendix B).

I obtained IRB approval from Walden University prior to contacting potential participants. De Massis and Kotlar (2014) noted the importance of researchers building a working relationship with participants, explaining the research purpose and procedures, and obtaining their informed consent. After IRB approval, I purposefully selected five small business owners who implemented social media strategies to improve sales, obtained their informed consent, and scheduled the face-to-face, semistructured interviews. I explained to the small business owners the purpose the study, the potential

risks and benefits, and the time commitment regarding participation. Researchers should avoid engaging in coercive actions to entice participation in a research study (Vass et al., 2017; Yin, 2018). I reminded the participants that their participation is voluntary and without any form of compensation. I obtained the participants' permission to audio record the interviews. The audio recordings occurred using Windows Media Player on my laptop computer as well as a backup recording on a smartphone with voice recorder application for Android.

Following the interview protocol (see Appendix A), I opened the interviews by introducing the purpose of the research study, thanking the business owners, asking them if they have any questions, and verified that they understand the interview format. I asked each participant the same interview questions (see Appendix B) and asked probing follow-up questions as needed for additional clarity. I took reflective notes during the interview to record my observations of verbal and nonverbal communications from the participants. Spillane et al. (2017) noted that researchers should maintain the confidentiality of participants by using code names within the published study. I reiterated to the participants that their personal and business names would not appear in the published study and that I would use the code names of P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 to maintain their confidentiality. At the end of the interview, I reminded each participant of the need for a 30-minute follow-up meeting for them to review my interpretation of their interview responses.

Advantages and disadvantages exist regarding the use of semistructured interviews. Baškarada (2014) posited that using a semistructured interview technique is an effective means for a qualitative researcher to collect rich data from the participants' point-of-view. Researchers use the semistructured interview technique to engage in open dialog with participants, capture the participants' knowledge, expertise, and insight, and collect quality data (Alshenqeeti, 2014). In using the semistructured interview technique, the interviewer can ask probing, follow-up questions to gain additional insight and clarity from the participants (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The potential for researcher bias, steering participants, and the researcher overly controlling the interview are disadvantages of the semistructured interview technique (Vass et al., 2017). As noted by Alshenqeeti (2014), conducting semistructured interviews, transcribing the audio recordings, and interpreting the meaning of the participants' responses is time consuming, potentially laden with researcher bias, and results in large volumes of data in need of coding and labeling in preparation for data analysis.

Case study researchers should collect data from multiple sources to engage in methodological triangulation and improve the credibility of the findings (Yin, 2018). Collecting data from organizational documents is a means for researchers to validate the data collected through semistructured interviews (Anderson, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I used document review as a data collection technique. I reviewed company documents regarding social media marketing strategies and year-over-year sales reports to validate the data collected from participants during the interviews and member-

checking sessions. I obtained permission from the small business owners to review the proprietary documents through their agreement with the informed consent form.

An advantage of collecting data from organizational documents is the researcher could have the opportunity to verify the accuracy of the participants' responses during the semistructured interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Case study researchers must use multiple sources of data to triangulate the data and to reach data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Using document review as a data collection technique is a viable means for researchers to collect data from a second source to engage in methodological triangulation (Yin, 2018). Disadvantages of using document review as a data collection technique are as follows: (a) gaining access to pertinent documents might prove difficult or impossible, (b) organizational leaders might hesitate to provide complete and up-to-date documents, (c) the researcher lacks the means to validate the accuracy of the documents, and (d) the documents might not align with the existing practices used within the organization (Anderson, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2018).

Researchers engage in member checking to allow the participants an opportunity to validate the researcher's interpretation and analysis of their interview responses (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). Member checking is a process researchers use to improve the credibility of the interview data and to help reach data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). In using member checking, the researcher might obtain additional clarity from the participants as well as new information (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Within the informed consent form and during my closing statements of the interview, I conveyed

to the participants my desire to meet with them in a follow-up 30-minute meeting for member checking. I transcribed the audio recordings of the interviews, analyzed the transcripts, developed a 1-2 page summary that consisted of my interpretation of the participants' interview responses, and met again with each participant to ask them to review and validate my interpretation. If needed, I revised my interpretation based on the participants' review of the interpreted summary of the transcripts. I used member checking to ensure I accurately captured each participant's intent and to improve the trustworthiness of the interview data.

Some researchers conduct a small pilot study to test the instruments and procedures planned for a future larger study (Lancaster, 2015). The use of a pilot study is a means for researchers to test research protocols, validate self-designed questionnaires, and measure the reliability of data collection instruments, all in preparation to conduct a larger study in the future (Drummond, 2017). I was conducting a qualitative case study of limited scope and scale and was not preparing to conduct a larger subsequent study; therefore, I did not conduct a small pilot study to test the research protocol, procedures, and data collection instruments of this study.

### **Data Organization Technique**

Researchers organize data to begin to prepare for data analysis (Yin, 2018). De Massis and Kotlar (2014) stated that researchers create a database to organize data for easy retrieval. Qualitative researchers collect volumes of data (Baškarada, 2014). To organize the large volume of data, researchers should use computer software programs to

organize data (Chowdhury, 2015). I used Microsoft Word to organize the interview transcripts and create a data-tracking database using Microsoft Excel. I used computer-based NVivo 12.0 software to further organize the interview and data collected from company documents to begin coding and categorizing the information in preparation for data analysis. Researchers use NVivo software to organize, code, and label data (Houghton, Murphy, Shaw, & Casey, 2015). I coded and labeled the data using NVivo 12.0 software. Ethical researchers maintain the confidentiality of participants by avoiding placing any personal identifiers of participants in the published study (Rowlands, Waddell, & Mckenna, 2015). To ensure the confidentiality of participants, I used the codes of P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 for participants within the published study.

Researchers maintain a reflective journal before, during, and after data collection to facilitate organizing the data in a logical sequence (Cope, 2014). I maintained a reflective journal to document the research and data collection process, maintain an audit trail, and facilitate data organization. Researchers should have a secure method to maintain all research records to ensure the credibility of the research process (Leung, 2015). Maintain a secure chain of custody for research records is an essential activity of ethical researchers (Rowlands et al., 2015). I used a password-protected flash drive to store all electronic records stored or developed in Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, and NVivo 12.0 to maintain secure custody. I securely stored all research files, notes, data, and the password-protected flash drive in a fireproof, locked drawer in my home office



for 5 years. After 5 years, I will mechanically shred all print copies of data and research records, and electronically delete all electronic files.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis in a qualitative study is a set of processes researchers undertake to understand the deeper meaning of raw data (Flick, 2014; Yazan, 2015). Researchers conducting qualitative, case study data analysis must embark on a rigorous and thorough process to ensure the dependability and credibility of the findings (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Yin, 2018). Methodological triangulation is a process researcher use to allow one set of data to confirm the dependability and validity of a second set of data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I used methodological triangulation during the data analysis process, using documentation data to confirm the dependability and validity of the interview data. Yin (2018) recommended the five-phase data analysis process of compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding the data. I used Yin's five-phase process to analyze data collected from semistructured interviews and documentation review.

### **Compiling Data**

Researchers begin the compiling process by gathering and sorting the data (Yin, 2018). The purpose of the compiling phase is for the researcher to place the raw data into an organized database (Rowlands et al., 2015). Raw data needs transforming into written text form during the compiling phase of data analysis (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). After transcribing the recordings of the interviews, engaging the participants in member checking, and reviewing organizational documents, I began the data compilation phase.

Qualitative researchers use an interpretive, content analysis process to proceed with data analysis (Tuapawa, 2017). I used qualitative content analysis to analyze the transcripts from the interviews to reveal the participants' information and thoughts. I analyzed the results of member checking to ensure the compiled data aligns with the participants' intent, not my interpretive viewpoint. I compiled the data using Microsoft Word and Excel prior to beginning the disassemble phase using NVivo 12.0 software.

### **Disassembling Data**

Disassembling is the phase in which researchers break down the compiled data into smaller fragments or nodes to assign labels or codes (Yin, 2018). I used NVivo 12.0 software to organize the data into a logical order. I then disassembled the data into small fragments and nodes to begin coding and labeling. Researchers should disassemble data into manageable and logical groups (Tuapawa, 2017; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). The development of core themes occurs during the grouping of data fragments and nodes (Rowlands et al., 2015). I organized the disassembled data fragments and nodes into thematic groupings as I began the data reassemble phase.

### **Reassembling Data**

Reassembling is the process of thematically organizing, clustering, and categorizing the data fragments into logical groups, which may include creating graphs, lists, and tables (Kornbluh, 2015). I reassembled the fragments of data into thematic clusters to begin categorizing the emergent themes and patterns. Researchers group data based on patterns and themes to begin developing the deeper understanding of the

phenomenon under study (Tuapawa, 2017). During the reassemble phase, researchers should use a logical and consistent coding process to maintain data order and not comingle themes and patterns (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). I used a consistent coding process, rechecked the codes, and ensured proper grouping of themes and patterns to prepare for data interpretation.

### **Interpreting Data**

The researcher begins creating a narrative from the reassembled data during interpreting phase of data analysis (McDermid et al., 2014). During the interpreting phase, researchers must remain objective, avoid inserting personal biases, and shun the desire to include preconceived notions regarding the outcomes (Tuapawa, 2017). I created narratives from the reassembled data while avoiding subjective interpretation to allow the emergent themes to emanate from the data. Interpreting the data is a process researchers undertake to explore the groupings and patterns to discern the emergent key themes and subthemes (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). I explored the data grouping and patterns to discover the key emergent themes in order to answer the overarching research question of this study.

### **Concluding Data**

During the data-concluding phase, researchers draw strong conclusions from the interpreted data (Yin, 2018). The deeper meaning of the data emerges during the conclusion phase (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). I concluded data analysis by drawing conclusions from the created narratives to finalize the emergent themes and subthemes. I

monitored and documented the processes and procedures and arrived at the conclusions accurately and truthfully to ensure the dependability and credibility of the findings. Although, qualitative data analysis is an interpretative process undertaken by researchers, the conclusions must emanate from the collected data, not the researcher's subjective viewpoint (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). As I concluded data analysis, I remained an objective interpreter of the participants' interview responses and the data collected during documentation review.

Yin (2018) noted that the possibility of going back between any two of the phases is sometimes necessary, as the entire process is nonlinear. In the event that a data grouping needs additional disassembling or reassembling, I returned to the previous phases to ensure an accurate and complete conclusion of data analysis. During the use of Yin's five-phase data analysis process, I used methodological triangulation, using documentation data to validate the interview data. Researchers improve the credibility of the data using methodological triangulation (Van Dijk, Vervoort, van Wijk, Kalkman, & Schuurmans, 2015).

### **Software Plan**

I used Microsoft Word and Excel to create a database to organize participants' responses from the interviews, the results from member checking, and the data collected from document reviews. NVivo, a computer-assisted, qualitative, data analysis software is a trusted tool used by researchers during data analysis (Anney, 2014). NVivo is an excellent software for researchers to code data and identify themes and patterns

(Houghton et al., 2015). I used NVivo 12.0 software during data analysis to fragment and cluster data, insert codes and labels, and parse out emergent themes and subthemes. After collecting data from semistructured interviews and document reviews, I imported the textual information into NVivo 12.0 to analyze data.

### **Key Themes**

As I concluded data analysis, I focused on the emergent key themes and the social media marketing strategies that some small retail business owners use to increase sales to answer the research question. I mitigated my potential biases during the research process by using an interview protocol (see Appendix A) engaging the participants in member checking, and employing methodological triangulation to ensure the key themes emerged from the data. Researchers should compare their key themes that emerged during data analysis to similar studies (Yazan, 2015). Within the presentation of the findings in Section 3, I used the findings of this study to confirm or refute the findings of researchers who conducted and published studies after the commencement of this study. I linked the key themes to the conceptual framework of this study, the social media marketing strategy theory, originated by Richardson et al. (2016).

### **Reliability and Validity**

Qualitative, case study researchers seek dependable data as well as credible, confirmable findings in their research (Yin, 2018). Trustworthiness, consistency, dependability, credibility, and confirmability of the findings are key aspects sought after by the qualitative researcher (Anney, 2014; Yazan, 2015). In the sections below, I

explained the procedures to ensure dependability, credibility, and confirmability of the findings of this study.

### **Dependability**

Hess, McNab, and Basoglu (2014) noted that consistency as well as dependability is important in qualitative research and readers should be able to follow the results. Researchers help ensure dependability by mitigating their biases, remaining objective, and avoiding the inclusion of their worldview during data collection and analysis (Birt et al., 2016). I remained objective and mitigated any biases during data collection and data interpretation. Member checking is means for researchers to mitigate personal biases and allow the participants an opportunity to validate an interpreted summary of their interview responses (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I engaged the participants in member checking to ensure an accurate interpretation of their interview responses. Researchers use member checking and methodological triangulation to improve the dependability of the data (Hess et al., 2014). I employed methodological triangulation to improve dependability by comparing interview data with data collected from a review of relevant company documents.

### **Credibility**

The confidence that the truth placed on the findings in qualitative research is credible (Anney, 2014). Baškarada (2014) maintained that research is credible when rich in-depth information sought and obtained. To ensure credibility of the findings, researchers should use peers to obtain their comments on the study. Anney (2014)

suggested that member checking is useful in establishing adequacy such as interpreting the documents used during the data collection before producing the final document.

Member checking is a crucial process that a qualitative researcher should undertake to improve the credibility of the data (Anney, 2014). I used methodological triangulation to investigate sources and theories to obtain corroborating evidence. The use of triangulation reduces bias and cross-examines integrity of the participants' responses. To ensure credibility in my study, I compared data that I eventually collected from participants via the use of semistructured questions, member checking, and documents.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability occurs during the process of record keeping of sources of data, decisions, sampling, and data collection, and data analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Researchers should maintain a clear, logical, and organized audit trail during each phase of the research to ensure confirmability of the findings (Yin, 2018). I maintained an organized audit trail during the research process to help ensure confirmability. Asking participants probing questions, ensuring the participants remain focused on the interview questions, and using member checking are processes researchers use to ensure confirmability (Anney, 2014). Researchers should attain data saturation to ensure the confirmability of the findings (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I obtained rich data from participants by asking probing questions and using member checking. I continued data collection until no new themes or patterns emerge to help ensure confirmability of the findings.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is the degree to which future researchers corroborate the finding of a previous study or the agreement of a reader of the study (Anney, 2014). Transferability may occur when the findings have meanings to individuals in similar situations as the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Researchers improve the opportunity for transferability by using an interview protocol, maintaining an audit trail, mitigating personal biases, and collecting dependable, credible data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). To improve the prospects of future researchers to transfer the findings of this study, I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) to document each phase of the research process, remained objective during data collection and analysis, and strived for dependability and credibility of the findings.

### **Data Saturation**

Başkarada (2014) maintained that researchers conducting a case study must collect rich, in-depth data from multiple sources to reach data saturation. Researchers achieve data saturation through asking participants probing questions, engaging the participants in member checking, collecting data from multiple sources, and engaging in methodological triangulation (Anney, 2014). O'Reilly and Parker (2013) noted that data saturation occurs when additional data collection efforts by the researcher do not result in new data, information, themes, or patterns. A researcher improves the credibility of the data through reaching data saturation (Anney, 2014). Researchers use member checking to allow the participants to validate an interpreted summary of their responses to the



interview questions (Yin, 2018). Methodological triangulation is a process researcher's use to cross check interview data with data collected from supporting documents (Anney, 2014). I reached data saturation through conducting semistructured interviews, asking probing questions during the interviews for additional clarity, and engaged the participants in member checking. I collected data from multiple sources of evidence to use methodological triangulation. I continued data collection until no new themes or patterns emerged.

### **Transition and Summary**

In Section 2, I included information on my role in the research, participant selection, and the selected research method and design. I explained the data collection instruments and techniques, the means to organize and analyze the data, and the processes planned to reach data saturation. I closed Section 2 with an explanation of the processes to ensure dependability, credibility, and confirmability. In Section 3, I included the findings of my research, application to professional practice, and recommendations for small business owners might use the findings to increase sales using social media marketing strategies. I closed Section 3 with the implications for social change, my reflections, and a concluding statement.

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

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies that some small retail business owners use to increase sales. I explored the study topic by interviewing five small retail business owners who successfully implemented social media marketing strategies to increase sales. I obtained and reviewed supporting documents, including sales receipts, appointment records, purchasing receipts for products, and inventory records.

I linked my findings to Richardson et al.'s (2016) social media marketing strategy theory. The three themes were a social media engagement strategy, an outsourcing strategy, and a target market strategy. In this study, I found that the small retail business owners achieved success by using the social media marketing strategy by networking with potential clients with advertising through Facebook, LinkedIn, company exposure, using third party social media markets, and brand awareness.

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

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to answer the overarching research question: What social media marketing strategies do some small retail business owners use to increase sales? I conducted semistructured interviews with five small retail business owners who have successfully implemented strategies to increase sales. All five of the participants approved of the audio recording of the conversations, and they agreed to participate in member checking for the validation of my interpretation of their

interview responses. I used the code names of P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 to ensure the participants' confidentiality and privacy.

I transcribed each audio recording upon completion of each interview and prepared an executive summary of the interpreted data from which I used to conduct member checking with each participant. I used member checking to validate and confirm the accuracy of my interpretation of the recorded responses of the participants. I used member checking for clarity of the additional questions that I noted during my transcription of each participant's information. In addition, I used member checking to ensure that I gathered the information that I needed from the participants to answer my research question.

After the completion of the member checking process, I uploaded the research data for each participant into the NVivo 12 software program. I used NVivo 12 software to identify and extract themes and patterns from the responses of the participants and the organizational documents. The interview process repeated with each research participant until unloading of data into NVivo 12 completed. The reassembling of the coded data continued to produce other themes, patterns, and groups that emerged from new interview data. I noted no new emergent themes after the fourth interview. The data from the fifth interview was a means to confirm that I had reached data saturation for my research.

After the validation of my interpreted responses from the participants, I compared the participants' responses to their business records. I then triangulated the interview data to the business documents to crosscheck the validity of the interview data. After

attainment of data saturation, I performed data confirmation to identify additional themes that emerged from the triangulated data. The three themes that emerged were (a) social media engagement strategy, (b) outsourcing strategy, and (c) target market strategy.

Table 1 displays the emergent themes and the percentage of use by participants' businesses.

Table 1

*Social Media Marketing Strategies*

Strategy	Percentage of Use by Owners
Social Media Engagement Strategy	100%
Outsourcing Strategy	60%
Target Market Strategy	100%

**Theme 1: Social Media Engagement Strategy**

The small retail business owners who participated in this study used a social media engagement strategy to attract customers. All five participants used social media marketing strategies, such as Facebook and Instagram advertising, to inform customers about their business and to attract new customers. These findings confirm the findings of Constantinides (2014) and Lou and Koh (2017) in that customers are difficult to influence, persuade and retain; consumers use social media in a variety of ways, such as sharing experiences, complaining about a brand, or offering a recommendation to target

perspective clients. The participants also used the word-of-mouth approach as part of their social media engagement strategy.

I used data analysis to identify themes that the participants used for social media engagement strategy. The five participants expressed the importance of using networking to create a conversation with consumers. Consumers use social media in a variety of ways, such as purchasing experiences and recommendations. Social media-based businesses incorporate information sharing. The key proponents of the social media marketing strategy were to share company media file through the use of social media blogs and discussion boards for optimal social media mix. All participants agreed that using social media was essential to their organizational success. As indicated in Table 2, the participants used a variety of tactics to implement their social media engagement strategy.

Table 2

*Social Media Engagement Strategy*

Tactics Used to Implement Strategy	Percentage of use by Owners
Networking: Create a conversation	100%
Facebook advertising	100%
Instagram advertising	40%
LinkedIn advertising	20%
Link website to social media platform	40%
Employee engagement; blogging; update content	100%

Social media depends on many-to-many networks and strong ties to social media ties and advertising. Kilgour et al. (2015) and Richardson et al. (2016) noted that the sharing of company files improves marketing communication. P4 explained that using social media marketing through Facebook business page for businesses increased his sales, stating, "I track each website visit and purchase. I can see how many click the link in a social media post that brought them into the sales process and my sales increased by 5% because of this strategy." P4 noted that since implementing this strategy when starting their business, sales due to engagement increased by 80%, and sales increased to 20%. I used the participants' business records, viewed their websites, and observed their social media advertisements to validate the interview data. This finding confirmed the research of Richardson et al. (2016) in that business leaders who engage in effective social media marketing strategies create multiple linking one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many networks, resulting in increased sales. I confirmed that small business owners could create an inexpensive marketing campaign using social media, resulting in viral marketing, virtual word-of-mouth advertising, and increased sales. Dahnil et al. (2014) noted that leaders of SMEs are primary contributors to economic development and growth in employment. Wang et al. (2015) suggested that effective marketers take advantage of social media users' addiction to using social media as a means to obtain information, news, and review products and services. In addition, Kaun and Stiernstedt (2014) found that business leaders consider using social media when deciding the best customer engagement method. Ashley and Tuten (2015) suggested that social media has

an interactive and an interpersonal aspect and that information can work or again the brand, depending on the engagement of consumers.

**Networking to create a conversation.** All five participants discussed how they network by creating a conversation with customers. I observed the participants' online accounts used for their online platforms to document usage from consumers. All of the five participants noted the importance of using the many-to-many networks to communicate with customers. P2, P3, and P5 noted the importance of networking through different channels to attract customers via the use of blogs, LinkedIn, and the Google website to reach a broad base of consumers. P2 stated, "Our usage of the Google website strategy has been a valuable tool in reaching their customer base." P2 commented that the website has an infomercial to show customers their employees working and that the website attracts attention using this avenue to advertise their services to potential clients.

Hudson et al. (2015) suggested that social media is so widespread that companies are integrating social media marketing strategies into their communications. Marketers must go beyond using traditional marketing strategies to reach social media users and create increased consumer appeal for products and services (Öztamur & Karakadilar, 2014). P3 discussed the use of multiple networking sites to inform customers about the business products and services. P3 stated, "LinkedIn is a more professional site. I did not have much success on this site because people do not know you on LinkedIn; I can reach a larger customer base utilizing Facebook." P5 discussed the use of a podcast platform to

reach potential customers.” P5 stated, “We utilize a podcast platform where business owners discuss their businesses. We record the podcast recorded for viewing by anyone in the United States to ask questions and receive responses.” P5 noted the benefits of using podcast to discuss issues, such as how to get started in business, how to use social media marketing, and how to acquire financing for a business start-up. This finding confirmed the research of Wang et al. (2015) who noted that podcasts and blogs are effective methods for business owners to connect with consumers and receive customer feedback.

The findings confirmed the research of Edosomwan et al. (2011), in that social media has become not only a place for business leaders to market their products and services, but also an arena to interact directly with customers. The finding confirmed the research of Schultz and Peltier (2013) who noted that consumer-business connections are a means for business leaders to develop relationships to maintain their current customer base while attracting new customers.

**Facebook advertising.** All five participants used Facebook for advertising their products and services, noting the importance of using the social media platform to increase sales. Bhatnagar and Papatla (2016) and Hassan and Casaló Ariño (2016) suggested that small business owners have a variety of inexpensive technological resources to engage in effective social media marketing campaigns, such as Facebook advertising. P5 noted that Facebook is a means to appeal to the senior population because of their increased use of social media. P1, P3, and P4 suggested that using Facebook is a



means for their business to use their personal pages, which makes contacting their customers easier. P4 noted that their business used Facebook to target customers who align with their products and services, use hashtags on post, and follow relevant pages to meet new potential clients.

Andreou et al. (2019) suggested that Facebook has been the source of controversies regarding privacy and the lack of transparency in providing information to its users about the ads that users see. Although Facebook has had some issues, business owners with a Facebook account become an advertiser with a few clicks on Facebook's website. Anyone can have an account on Facebook by verifying themselves, yet with no identification or proof of a legitimate business (Andreou et al., 2019). The Facebook platform is a means for advertisers to have a range of ways to target customers (Andreou et al., 2019). Facebook has attributes based on a list of individuals living in a zip code that advertisers can target. All of the study participants mentioned that their primary mode for social media advertising was Facebook.

**Instagram advertising.** Instagram is social media site where individuals can share photos, videos, stories, and messages with family and friends. P1, P3, and P4 noted that they used Instagram to target their social media audience. The three participants stated that their businesses used Instagram to target new clients and keep in contact with existing clients. Richardson et al. (2016), the originators of the social media marketing theory, suggested that small business owners could create an inexpensive marketing

campaign using social media, resulting in viral marketing, virtual word-of-mouth advertising, and increased sales.

**LinkedIn advertising.** LinkedIn is a social media site that professional business people use to link up with companies, business associates, or to recruit individuals seeking employment or a service. P3 suggested that their business use LinkedIn as a social media-marketing tool to increase sales. P3 noted that LinkedIn is a little more sophisticated than Facebook and that a majority of the individuals on LinkedIn do not know the individual or individuals on this site. Tafesse and Wien (2018) posited that determining the optimal social media marketing mix on social media platforms or groups is a strategic decision based on the product or service offered.

**Link company website to social media.** Some of the participants increased sales by linking their website page to a social media platform. Keikha and Sargolzaei (2017) and Clark (2017) suggested that business leaders could improve traffic to their sites by placing targeted advertisements on social media sites and then linking the social media advertising to their company website. Monitoring the social media sites for customer feedback is an alternative method that business owners use to improve their B2C website traffic (Keikha & Sargolzaei, 2017). P2 stated that an infomercial placed on social media with a link to the company's website increased traffic and sales. I reviewed P2's social media site to validate the linkage with the website.

**Employee engagement, blogging and updating content.** All five participants noted the value of engaging and encouraging employees to update content and post

within blogs on their social media sites. P1 commented that keeping the site “refreshed with updated content” was an element of attracting new customers. P3 stated, “We use a variety of social media platforms to interact with consumers and depend on the employees to engage with customers through social media.” The most popular sites consist of Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, and Twitter (Surma, 2016). Marketers also use the media sites of YouTube, Flickr, and Pinterest to reach customers (Surma, 2016). P5 stated, “Facebook is a way for use to provide information about the business, post pictures and videos, and promote events. I rely on my employees to keep the content up-to-date.” All of the participants agreed that their employees were vital to their ability to keep social media content up-to-date and correct. Social media is a part of a marketing plan because business owners can include the employees in business conversations with customers, provide consumers with the ability to share testimonials, and collect valuable information from the consumer (Ismail, 2017).

**Alignment with the conceptual framework.** The findings regarding a social media engagement strategy aligned with Richardson et al.’s (2016) social media marketing strategy theory. Social media marketing theorists noted that successful marketing using social media remains dependent on the creation of many-to-many networks and strong integration ties between the social media platform and the advertising company (Richardson et al., 2016). Small business owners can improve the effectiveness of their advertising resources by using social media marketing on platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn (Richardson et al., 2016).

## Theme 2: Outsourcing Strategy

Three of the five participants used an outsourcing strategy within their overall social media marketing strategy. Kranzbühler, Kleijnen, and Verlegh (2019) suggested that 72% of businesses use some form of outsourcing to improve their marketing campaigns as well as the customers' experience. The three participants who used a third-party social media-marketing expert noted they did so because of lacking the expertise needed to target customers and publish professionally appearing advertisements. I reviewed the participants' business records, websites, and social media advertisements to validate the interview data. Business owners seeking an effective method to improve the customers' experience with a company website or social media site should consider using the services of a professional online marketer (Kranzbühler et al., 2019). Small business owners lacking marketing expertise have a variety of resources available from social media sites to use to improve their marketing campaigns and increase their brand recognition (Kranzbühler et al., 2019). Table 3 displays the tactics used by three participants to implement their outsourcing strategy.

Table 3

### *Outsourcing Strategy*

Tactics Used to Implement Strategy	Percentage of use by Owners
Outsource social media marketing	60%
Increase professionalism of advertisements	60%
Use of professional social media marketers	60%

**Outsource social media marketing to improve professionalism.** P1, P2, and P4

noted the value of outsourcing social media marketing to target customers, increase website traffic, improve the professionalism of advertisements, and increase sales. P2 commented that Web-Shop windows are a low-cost service in which small business owners can display products or an online catalog, yet noted the need to engage a third-party expert to develop the Web-Shop windows along with the associated advertisements. Web-shop window is not an online store, but rather a sales management tool to attract customers into the online retail website (Kotler et al., 2015). P2 suggested that handling social media marketing was somewhat challenging, finding the process was more effective by engaging an external marketing expert. P1 noted that social media marketing “is big business and letting a professional social media marketing firm handle the advertising is a means for us to grow our business.” P4 stated, “Customer trust and brand recognition improve when social media advertisement have a professional look.” Agnihotri et al. (2017) and Siddiqui and Fitzgerald (2015) suggested that small business owners have access to technology knowledge, tools, and experts to develop attractive, professional advertisements to implement and improve their social media marketing strategy.

**Use of professional social media marketers.** P1, P2, and P4 agreed that engaging customers using social media marketing developed by a professional marketer was an effective means to increase sales. Braojos et al. (2017) determined that a business leader needs a high level of proficiency in social media to engage online customers, yet

many small business owners lack the ability to use social media marketing practically or effectively. P1 commented, “My skills lie in running my business, not in marketing. I can improve the use of my marketing dollars by engaging a professional who knows how to target customers.” P4 agreed with P1, noting that the lack of expertise in marketing was the primary reason for engaging a third-party expert to conduct and manage social media marketing. Business owners must cultivate trust with the customers, recognizing the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive concepts of consumers making a purchase decision (Harrigan et al., 2017). Using a professional marketing firm is a means for small business owners to improve customers’ perception of the company and the products and services offered (Harrigan et al., 2017).

**Alignment with the conceptual framework.** The findings regarding the use of an outsourcing strategy align with the social media marketing strategy theory. Business owners lacking expertise in social media marketing should take advantage of expert marketers to determine the optimal mix of social media platforms and maximize exposure of the company’s products and services (Richardson et al., 2016). Marketers should appeal to the normal buying motives and habits of consumers through product and service displays (Richardson et al., 2016). Harrigan et al. (2017) and Islam and Rahman (2016) commented that business owners who use the services of an expert, third-party marketer improve their online presence, increase the professionalism of their marketing efforts, and increase the level of trust the consumer experiences when making an online purchase.

### Theme 3: Target Market Strategy

All participants used a target market strategy as a social media marketing strategy to increase sales. Camilleri (2018) suggested that one of the four major elements of the marketing mix is promotion and an essential element of businesses' marketing strategy consist of a combination of promotional tools to target specific customers or groups of customers. Effective marketers implement customer-targeting strategies to engage existing consumers, reach out to potential customers, and solidify their customer base (Camilleri, 2018). The study participants all agreed that their social media strategies and platforms, and customer identification, engagement, and retention are critical elements in their target marketing strategies. Table 4 displays the subthemes of the target market strategy.

Table 4

#### *Target Market Strategy*

Tactics Used to Implement Strategy	Percentage of use by Owners
Target new residents	100%
Target demographic groups	100%
Improve customer loyalty	100%
Increase brand awareness	100%

**Target new residents.** All five participants discussed how they target new residents or customers using social media marketing strategies. I used the participants'

business records, viewed their websites, and observed their social media advertisements to validate the interview data. All of the participants primarily use Facebook to target new customers. P3 commented that using Facebook is more advantageous and expedient when targeting new clients. P1 noted that targeting new residents was a means to outmaneuver the competition. P4 acknowledged that connecting with new residents was a critical method of improving sales. By taking advantage of social media, a business owner can improve brand awareness, keep existing consumers connected to their brand, and connect with new residents within the targeted region to improve sales (Witkemper et al., 2012). A robust B2C connection is vital to the success of a company. Social media is a means for business owners to implement a marketing plan to build relationships with new customers at a low cost and in a timely manner.

**Target demographic groups.** The type of service that the business owners have to offer determines the groups targeted. Lou and Koh (2017) noted that customers are difficult to influence, persuade, and retain. Social media based businesses incorporate information sharing. The information shared by consumers complicates a marketing manager's work when dealing with issues of their business (Hofacker & Belanche, 2016). P2 and P4 noted that their business target groups that align with their products and services. P2 and P4 used different methods to target demographic groups. P2 used infomercials attached to their website to target groups, and P4 used hashtags on their post for groups to follow relevant pages to meet new customers. P5 commented that targeting people in the younger generations was an effective means to connect with people most



interesting in the services offered by the business. Kilgour et al. (2015) suggested that matching the target audience to the business' mission and vision is the key to a successful communication strategy to connect with customers, improve the customer-brand relationship, and increase product sales.

**Improve customer loyalty.** All participants in this study use a target market strategy to improve customer loyalty. Harrigan et al. (2017) commented that in order to boost loyalty of customers through social media, marketers should seek to improve the customer's trust in the brand and in the security features regarding making online purchases. P1 noted that providing clients with a means to book appointments through the links on the social media site to the company's website dramatically improved customer loyalty. P4 stated, "Anything I can do to make the customers' experience in engaging with my business easier is a way I improve customer loyalty. Social media plays a vital role in improving the customers' experience." Wang and Kim (2017) postulated that implementing an effective social media marketing strategy is a means for small business owners to improve customer relationships, loyalty, brand awareness, and value. This finding confirms the research of Kim and Drumwright (2016) who noted that business leaders use social media to facilitate positive engagement and to gain the customers' interest. Business owners improve customer loyalty by providing a means for customers to provide feedback on the social media platform (Kim & Drumwright, 2016). P1 and P4 noted that Instagram was an effective platform for them to improve customer engagement

and loyalty. All participants agreed that improving customer loyalty through social media marketing was a vital aspect of increasing sales.

**Increase brand awareness.** All participants used a target market strategy within their overall social media marketing strategy to increase brand awareness. This finding is consistent with the research of Misirlis and Vlachopoulou (2018) who suggested that the social media marketing is an effective strategy to increase brand awareness, expose the target audience to content and messages, and improve customer engagement. Lim (2018) noted that people like to share experiences with a product or service on social media sites. P5 noted the need to maintain the highest quality services or risk damage to the company's brand because customers have the means to share their experiences on social media. Misirlis and Vlachopoulou noted that customer engagement, relationship marketing, and a recognition of consumer behavior are dominant factor business owners must consider regarding improving brand awareness. Brand awareness is an essential component of organizational success (Lim, 2018). This finding aligns with the research of Lou and Koh (2017) who suggested that business owners use brand awareness, customer relationships, and quality products and services to maintain and grow their customer base. All participants in this study agreed that brand awareness is an essential element for increasing sales. P3 and P4 use hashtags and infomercials, respectively, to target customers and improve brand awareness. P5 uses podcasts as a means to increase awareness of their business' products and services. Kilgour et al. (2015) suggested that marketers improve brand awareness by listening and reacting to consumers'

conversations regarding their wants, needs, and desires. Social media is a means for marketers and business owners to go well beyond textual advertising to promote their goods and services through photos and videos to increase brand awareness.

Ashley and Tuten (2015) suggested the social media is a means for business owners to market their products and services, offer improved customer service, create more customer relationships, and increase the recognition of the company's brand. P2 stated, "Branding must be relevant to the consumer if you want the customer to take the time to read the advertisement and make a purchase." Social media is a means for business owners to encourage customers to become informed buyers (Lim, 2018). This finding confirms the research of Misirlis and Vlachopoulou (2018) who commented that business owners should consider the benefits of improving brand awareness, exposing their messages to the appropriate target market, and providing appealing content that results in increased sales.

**Alignment with the conceptual framework.** The findings regarding a target market strategy aligns with the social media marketing strategy theory because business leaders who engage in effective social media marketing strategies create multiple linking one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-one, and many-to-many networks, resulting in increased sales (Richardson et al., 2016). Marketers must go beyond implementing traditional marketing strategies to reach social media users and create increased consumer appeal for the products and services (Öztamur & Karakadilar, 2014). Abashidze (2017)

commented that social media marketers must integrate media files to improve the flow of communication about the product to the consumer and to target specific customers.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The small retail business owners who participated in this study used social media marketing to increase their sales. Business owners use social media to improve customer relationships (Kasemsap, 2017). The relationship with customers is critical to organizational success to promote their organization's products and services (Sherbaniuk, 2014). Social media is the means for small business owners to respond to customer's comments, show a genuine interest in the customer, improve the customer's perception of the company, and build lasting relationships (Liu et al., 2015). Kasemsap (2017) suggested that effective social media marketers recognize the value of customer loyalty, brand awareness, and building a long-term relationship with the customer to gain repeat business.

Small business owners could apply the findings of this study to become more knowledgeable about the different social media platforms to increase their sales. Business leaders who implement an effective B2C strategy target customers to improve traffic on their websites (Keikha & Sargolzaei, 2017). Sparks and Bradley (2017) found that businesses who consistently fail to address negative messages risk their survivability. The literature reviewed indicated that small business owners need lasting customer relationships to sustain viability in a competitive marketplace.

Business owners might apply an outsourcing strategy to engage an external organization that focuses on social media marketing advertising. The use of a social media expert could result in businesses advertisements appearing more professional, appealing, and attractive to existing and new consumers. Business owners could also take advantage of the functions that Facebook offers to advertisers to target customers, such as targeting customers based on their zip codes and demographic groups. Reaching out to existing and new customers via Facebook and Instagram with links to the business owner's website might be a means for owners to improve customer targeting and create a loyal customer base.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The implications for positive change includes the potential for small business owners to increase sales, resulting in increased job opportunities for local residents and improved local economic conditions. Small businesses added approximately 8 million jobs to the economy since 1993 and large businesses eliminating about 4 million jobs during this same time (SBA, 2016). Small business owners who increase sales and profitability growth can create additional local employment opportunities, reduce unemployment rates, and strengthen local economic stability (Popescu & Crenicean, 2013). Small business owners might use the findings of this study to implement a social media engagement strategy, an outsourcing strategy, and a target market strategy to improve sales, strengthen the long-term sustainability of their business, and have a positive effect on the communities they serve. Approximately 50% of small businesses

close within 5 years because of inadequate marketing strategies, resulting in a loss of local jobs and reduced local economic growth (Atanassova & Clark, 2015). By implementing proven strategies to increase sales, business owners could survive and thrive in a competitive market, grow their businesses, hire more employees, offer better wages and benefits, and improve their local communities.

Small business owners should consider the potential for increased retail sales and sustainability in a competitive market using successful social media marketing (Zwick & Bradshaw, 2016). The participants in this study used social media marketing strategies to extend their advertising reach beyond traditional methods, resulting in increased sales. Business leaders incorporate social media into their marketing strategies to gain access to customers who are likely unreachable through print or radio advertising methods (Coleman et al., 2013). Social media differs from traditional media because of increased frequency of use by consumers and sustained usability through mediums beyond the traditional website, such as blogs, social networking sites and applications, media photos, and video clips (Edosomwan et al., 2011). Small business owners who apply the findings of this study might create increased business longevity, which will result in a more prosperous local community.

### **Recommendations for Action**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore how small retail business owners use social media marketing strategies to increase sales. My recommendation to small retail business owners is to utilize different social media

platforms to engage customers via the use of more effective advertising to achieve a loyal customer base. I recommend that the business owners continue to expand their social media engagement strategy by using different promotional tools to increase awareness of their services. Business owners should also consider outsourcing their social media marketing to professional marketers to improve the professionalism of their advertisements. I recommend that business owners devise an effective communication vehicle that would target new customers to their brand. Business owners achieve a loyal customer base through enhancing the media platform that they use with more appealing information, responding to positive and negative responses to show that they are listening to the customers' wants and needs (Zwick & Bradshaw, 2016).

I recommend that small retail business owners use new, rich content to market their products and services to existing and potential customers. The business owner's task is meeting the demands of customers while development of their business to be sustainable in a competitive market (Jara et al., 2014). Many businesses use social media marketing to increase sales; however, some business owners lack the knowledge and technical expertise to implement social media marketing strategies (Jara et al., 2014). Small business owners who implement the recommendations arising from this study might improve their social media marketing efforts to increase sales.

A researcher's goal is to have the findings of the study published in quality academic journals to contribute to the existing body of literature (Hangell & Schmidt-Pfister, 2017). My intention is to contribute to the body of knowledge through scholarly

literature in the area of business management using social media marketing strategies. I plan to develop articles to submit for publication in the following peer-reviewed business journals: (a) *American Journal of Industrial and Business Management*, (b) *Open Journal of Business and Management*, (c) *Journal of Marketing*, and (d) *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Organization Management*.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

I make several recommendations for further research based on the limitations of this study. A limitation of this study was the sample population of five small retail business owners who implemented strategies to increase sales utilizing social media marketing platforms. Future researchers could conduct multiple case studies to explore the phenomenon using a larger sample of different size businesses to compare and contrast how small, medium, and large business utilize social media to attract and retain consumers. A research limitation of this study was the geographical location of North Carolina. I recommend that future researchers use different geographic locations to test the transferability of the findings of this study. I recommend a future researcher to conduct a quantitative correlational study to test the significance of the relationship of variables, such as social media mix, customer traffic, dollars spent on social media marketing, and sales. A future researcher might consider conducting a mixed-method study to capture information-rich data through interviews while testing the significance of variables through quantitative analysis. A limitation of this study was that the findings are not generalizable to a larger population. A researcher using the quantitative or mixed



method to explore or examine social media marketing strategies would overcome this limitation.

### **Reflections**

When I reflect on my journey and experience in this doctoral program, I can truly say I have gained a wealth of knowledge as related to my study. However, I did not anticipate the rigorous research, proposal title changes, reference changes, and the many re-writes. However, in the process of the many changes required, I have a better understanding of the doctoral study process through the trials and errors I experienced. I gained a wealth of information from the participants, gained insight into how to conduct an effective interview, and enjoyed analyzing and interpreting the data. I have a deeper appreciation of the doctoral research process because of completing this study. This journey has truly been a testament that challenged me holistically through my mind, body, and soul. I learned that earning a doctoral degree is a challenging, yet rewarding experience that requires ones' undivided attention to complete the journey.

### **Conclusion**

In this qualitative multiple case study, I explored the strategies that small retail business owners use to increase sales via the use of social media marketing. I collected data using face-to-face, semistructured interviews of five small retail business owners who use social media to increase sales along with reviewing company documents. Through the analysis of the participants' interview responses and a review of their business records, websites, and social media pages, I identified patterns, triangulated

data, and reach data saturation. The three emergent themes were a social media engagement strategy, an outsourcing strategy, and a target market strategy. Small business owners might apply the findings of this study to implement or improve their social media marketing strategies, such as engagement, outsourcing, and customer targeting to increase sales, improve their profitability, and increase the long-term sustainability of their businesses. Small business owners might use the findings of this study for positive social change through increased employment opportunities, lower local unemployment rates, and greater local economic stability and growth.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

**Interview preparation.** To prepare for the interview, I will research LinkedIn, the Small Business Administration (SBA), and the Chamber of Commerce for small businesses in the state of North Carolina.

**Opening the interview.** Face-to-face interviews will be conducted. Once the participants agree to participate free of charge as an unpaid and uncompensated volunteer in this study, I will call each participant, discuss the study briefly, and get agreement to record, and set-up a time to meet for the interview at the participant's place of business. During the call, I will ask the participant if they are still willing to participate then I will explain the purpose of the study and interview procedure: *"The purpose of this study is to explore how small business owners use social media marketing strategies to increase sales"*.

**Informed consent.** Upon arrival at the venue, the first few minutes will be spent socializing to create a warm and friendly atmosphere. I will inquire to see if the participant has read the consent and agreed to participate in the study with the assurance of complete confidentiality. Once the participant is ready to proceed with the study, I will let the participant know that I will be recording the interview for transcription purposes and that at any time the participant does not want to continue, they can stop the interview without any consequences or repercussions, and that their professional image will not be tarnished.

**Conducting the interview.** I will start the interview process as follows: *My name is Curtis Dean and I am a Doctoral study at Walden University. Thank you for agreeing to*

*meet and participate in this study. The consent form reiterates that this interview is completely confidential, and you have agreed to participate, share your experiences, offer your opinions, and that I have your permission to record or conversation by audio and written transcription. If at any point you feel uncomfortable, we will stop. I will be conducting a phenomenological multiple case study interview for approximately 1 hour asking semistructured interview questions and asking follow-up probing questions.*

**Follow up with probing questions.** After asking the participant the semistructured open-ended interview questions, I will allow the participant to continue the conversation without interruption or leading comments. I will then follow-up with probing questions to the participant's responses for additional information and clarity.

**Theme verification.** I will explain to the participant that I will ask them about major themes discussed during the interview. This step will ensure that I, the researcher understands that the participant's intent of the study is completely understood.

**Coding.** I will explain that to ensure the participant's confidentiality, I will use a coding procedure that will not include the name of the business nor the participant's name. The coding process is as follows: P1, P2, P3, etc.

**Recording reflexive notes.** *Mr. or Ms. Participant( name), thank you for allowing me to record the interview and taking notes to document your thoughts during the interview process. Again, this process is necessary for capturing your responses as accurately as possible.*

**Ending the interview.** *“Thank you (Mr. or Ms. Participant’s name) for being very accommodating to my request for participating in my doctoral study.*

I will inform the participant that I will contact them at a later date, and that they will receive a copy of the transcribed interpretation of the audio recording. I will also send a copy of the transcribed hand written notes from the recording to review for corrections and to verify that I captured your thoughts appropriately.



### Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What social media marketing strategies do you use to increase sales?
2. What social media marketing strategies did you find as most effective in increasing sales?
3. How did you measure the effectiveness of your social media marketing strategies used to increase sales?
4. What key challenges did you experience in implementing social media marketing strategies used to increase sales?
5. How did you overcome the key challenges in implementing social media marketing strategies to increase sales?
6. What other information can you provide about the social media marketing strategies you use to increase sales?