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Marketing Strategies for Profitability in Small Independent Restaurants

Wanda Y. Jenkins
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Wanda Jenkins

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Walden University
2015

Abstract

Marketing Strategies for Profitability in Small Independent Restaurants

by

Wanda Y. Jenkins

M.Ed., Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, 2000

BA, Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, 1993

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

August 2015

Abstract

The restaurant industry is the second largest employer in the United States; however, only 33% of restaurants are successful during the first 3 years of operation. The purpose of this exploratory multiple case study was to determine what marketing strategies small independent restaurant owners need for profitability. Aaker's brand equity model was the conceptual framework used to ground this study. Using a purposeful criterion sampling technique and semistructured interviews, 12 individuals (2 managers and 2 employees from 3 restaurants in Philadelphia) participated in the study. Data collected from interviews and archival business records were analyzed to generate themes, also allowing for triangulation. Five marketing strategy themes emerged from this study: word of mouth and social media marketing, limited financial resources, product differentiation and atmosphere, blogging and using the point of sale (POS) system, and employee engagement and upselling. Participants stated that word of mouth and social media marketing were powerful strategies that small independent restaurant owners should use to retain customers and gain new customers. Participants noted that product differentiation and atmosphere are unique characteristics that guide marketing strategies, brand positioning, and influence competitive advantage and profitability. Implications for positive social change include business development opportunities, opening resource centers for training programs, and free webinars associated with marketing and brand equity strategies. Communities, organizations, and new entrepreneurs will benefit from positive social change from the increase of social resources, community economic growth, employment opportunities, and sustainability.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my beloved mother Barbara Jean Pierce. My mother encouraged me to further my education; she was one of my biggest supporters. Though she passed away toward the end of my educational journey, I know in my heart she is smiling down from heaven and is so very proud. Thank you mother for your blessings, inspiration and advocacy; my success is because of you.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Owners of independent restaurants are affected considerably and face many challenges, such as decreased consumer demand, decreased sales, and reduced disposable income, when the economy is unstable, which may threaten their level of profitability and competitive advantage (Lee & Ha, 2012). The restaurant business is the second largest employer in the United States, yet 67% of restaurants fail within the first 3 years of operation (Frazer, 2012). Business leaders of small, independent restaurants may need to use new marketing tools to attract and retain customers, increase revenue, optimize products, and develop a comprehensive understanding of customer needs in order to grow and sustain their business. Small, independent restaurant owners should strengthen their competitive position to seek effective marketing strategies to improve profitability and exceed competitors' strategies and performance (Desai, 2013).

Background of the Problem

Creating marketing plans that contribute to effective expenditure of resources and promote profitability is a task for small business leaders such as small, independent restaurant owners. The challenge for small business executives is relationship building with customers via marketing, especially because of resource constraints (Fiore, Niehm, Hurst, Jihyeong, & Sadachar, 2013). Marketing strategies for small-medium enterprises are different from large enterprises because of these limited resources (Harrigan, Ramsey, & Ibbotson, 2011). Strategic execution of market and competitor analysis, and how to adjust marketing strategies to meet target revenue and profitability goals are tasks for executives of small businesses (Desai, 2013). The ability to react to changes in market

conditions is an internal factor that influences business performance (Ciemleja & Lace, 2011).

Small, independent restaurant owners cannot afford to become content with the current customer base, but should continue to be innovative in establishing and building relationships with customers (Fiore et al., 2013). Small business leaders should use social networks such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter to filter marketing strategies and retain customers (Koutroumanis, 2011). To remain competitive, small, independent restaurant owners should explore new strategies to survive and remain profitable.

Problem Statement

More than 99% of the businesses in the United States are small businesses (Fox, 2013). Parrott, Muhammad, and Holliman (2010) stated that the sustainability for small and medium-sized enterprises relies on the understanding of competitive pressures and volatile market conditions. According to the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), 50% of all small businesses close within the first 5 years because of insufficient and poorly executed marketing plans (Cronin-Gilmore, 2012). The general business problem is that small business executives face profitability challenges based on execution of marketing strategies. The specific business problem is some small, independent restaurant owners lack marketing strategies to generate profit.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study was to determine what marketing strategies small, independent restaurant owners need for profitability. Market requirements and conditions are pertinent to establishing future sales, market

share, and profitability (Ngo & O’Cass, 2012). The population was managers and employees from three small, independent restaurants in Philadelphia, PA. Twelve managers and employees participated in an interview.

This study may contribute to positive social change by enhancing marketing intelligence and providing innovative strategies for domestic deployment to small businesses in the United States. The results from this study may influence small, independent restaurant owners by showcasing to business leaders the importance of strategic marketing for sustainability, long-term profitable growth, brand equity, and competitive advantage. Small business restaurant owners should apply innovative market strategies for growth and profitability (Smith, 2013).

Nature of the Study

This study was a qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study. Qualitative, exploratory research allows a researcher to explore and use personal stories to understand lived phenomena (Barratt, Choi, & Mel, 2011). In contrast, quantitative research methods help researchers to explain relationships with the goal of confirming associations or correlations between variables (Horsewood, 2011). Comparatively, qualitative research involves the collection of data that may be easier to interpret versus numbers and statistics presented in quantitative data (Sallee & Flood, 2012). Mixed methods research encompasses the use of qualitative methods for interpretation, description, and validation of quantitative findings (Harrigan et al., 2012).

Qualitative ethnography research design is associated with anthropology with a study focus on an entire culture group (Cibangu, 2013; Hays & Wood, 2011). In

qualitative discourse analysis research design, textual units are examined, analyzed, and used to scope linguistic expressions (Khoo & Jaidka, 2011). Qualitative grounded theory research design involves saturated data, while phenomenological studies are focused on the lived experiences of participants (Hays & Wood). Researchers use the qualitative case study research design to explore and interpret multiple facets of the phenomenon through an array of data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003). The qualitative case study design aligned with this study because other qualitative designs such as ethnography, discourse analysis, grounded theory, and phenomenology were unsuitable for this study. The qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study research design was selected over quantitative and mixed methods research designs because the qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study research design involves analyses of systems and strategies (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003). Implementing the qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study research design was the best research method and appropriate in exploring marketing strategy practices for three small, independent restaurants.

Research Question

The objective of this study was to explore profitability based on the marketing strategies used by three small, independent restaurants. The central research question was: What marketing strategies does the executive of three small, independent restaurants need to generate profit?

Interview Questions

Participants answered the following questions:

1. What are the marketing strategies used to retain current customers and gain new customers?
2. As a small business, what are the barriers to your business and marketing strategies?
3. What are the unique characteristics of your company's brand that guide marketing strategies?
4. How does your company position its brand for competitive advantage and profitability?
5. How do you measure the success or failure of your marketing strategies?
6. How do you conduct your marketing profitability analysis?
7. What marketing performance tools have you implemented to track trends and calibrate profitability?
8. What are your strategies to help maximize profitability?

Conceptual Framework

The fundamental concept of marketing strategies was the basis of this study. Theories of marketing include brand equity theory, relationship-marketing theory, and resource-advantage theory. The brand equity model, developed by Aaker (1991), was the conceptual framework that I used to complement this doctoral study. Brand loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary brand assets are dimensions of the brand equity model that provide value to the customer and the business (Aaker, 1991).

Aaker (1991) theorized that effective marketing strategies and high business performance are attributes of high brand equity. According to Stahl, Heitmann, Lehmann, and Neslin, (2012), brand equity theory includes knowledge, relevance, esteem, and differentiation as four pillars of value that connect customers to the brand because of its quality, reliability, and uniqueness. The likelihood of customers switching to a brand they are familiar with is favorable because the risk of the product not suiting their needs is less, rendering positive outcomes on acquisition and profit margin (Stahl et al., 2012). In relationship marketing theory, organizational goals involve creating a consumer champion or advocate that will recommend the company (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Hunt (2011) identified resource-advantage theory as a constant investment of resources through an evolutionary process for competitive advantages.

Highlighted in this review are various marketing theories. The marketing theories included brand equity theory, relationship-marketing theory, and resource-advantage theory. The brand equity theory of marketing was adopted for this doctoral study as the conceptual framework because brand equity was appropriate and relevant to exploring the profitability of the marketing strategies used by three small, independent restaurants.

Operational Definitions

Branding. Branding is the selection and blending of attributes specifically and uniquely used attractive to consumers (Cheng, 2014).

Competition-based pricing. Competition-based pricing is when a company sets and bases prices in accordance with the competition (Khan, 2014b).

Customer relationship management (CRM). Customer relationship management is a strategic approach that is concerned with creating improved shareholder value through the development of appropriate relationships with primary customers and customer segments (Chiang, 2013).

Market analysis. Market analysis means to analyze the market profitability and attractiveness (Cheng, 2014).

Marketing mix. A fundamental concept of marketing, which is a set of controllable marketing tools executives use to create a desired response in the targeted market, is a marketing mix (Khan, 2014b).

Marketing-mix adaptation. The process executives use to implement its export strategy in response to internal and external forces is marketing-mix adaptation (Magnusson, Westjohn, Semenov, Randrianasolo, & Zdravkovic, 2013).

Market segment. Market segment is a group of consumers who respond similarly to a given set of marketing stimuli (Cheng, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions, in qualitative research, are a supposition about what is analyzed, what counts as evidence, and what counts as knowledge (Chandler, 2013). Assumptions carry risks because prejudgments and conjectures may taint knowledge obtained from the qualitative study data results. In this qualitative study, I made assumptions regarding the application of marketing strategies for small, independent restaurants. One assumption that I made was that a lack of efficient implementation of tools and systems for marketing

strategies contributes to a deficiency in business practices. The executive for the restaurants applied tools and systems for marketing strategies efficiently and did not have a deficiency in business practices. Another assumption that I made was that a flaw in the execution of marketing strategies negatively influences profitability, as evidenced by revenue targets and organizational growth. The executive implemented sufficient marketing tools and systems for efficient business practices, growth, and profitability (Andrew, 2011; Shin, 2013).

An additional assumption that I made was that participants would understand the interview questions and would provide truthful and unbiased responses. Participants understood the interview questions with clarification, at times, for nonmanagerial employees. Participants' responses seemed truthful and unbiased.

Limitations

Limitations are constraints that challenge researchers conducting qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods research (Lakshman, 2012). The first limitation was that, according to Goffin, Raja, Claes, Szwejcjewski, and Martinez (2012), an exploratory multiple case study of three small, independent restaurants may be insufficient to provide adequate data to answer the central research question, and may limit the ability to make transferable business recommendations. Another limitation of this qualitative study was the challenge of obtaining approval from the executive to allow the inclusion of proprietary information, prior to submitting to the IRB application to Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). I obtained approval from the executive to include proprietary information. I made presentations about the purpose of the doctoral

study prospectus to the executive, to address feedback and concerns before initiating the study. I took feedback in the form of one-on-one consulting with the executive for three small, independent restaurants, which made the approval process easier to include proprietary information.

Delimitations

Delimitations are controlled boundary conditions for theory (Ody-Brasier & Vermeulen, 2014). The delimitation was the focus on marketing strategies for three small, independent restaurants in Philadelphia, PA. The participants of the qualitative study were 12 managers and employees. The delimitation of the area and population were characteristics that did not make the transferability of results from this qualitative study difficult to apply other small businesses (Gau & James, 2013; Ody-Brasier & Vermeulen, 2014).

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

This qualitative study may contribute to information on how executives can implement effective practice of business by exploring marketing strategies for profitability for small businesses. The knowledge obtained from study results may help small business leaders improve business practices, as well as identify and determine factors that support innovative approaches to improve revenue, profitability, and market share. The implementation and effective execution of marketing strategies for profitability are significant from a business perspective because they may help small business executives accelerate growth, expand current market position, solidify brand

position, and achieve marketing targets. The responses obtained from the data instrument may allow executives to use the data to identify customer needs, analyze market trends, and forecast marketing and brand strategies for business.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for positive social change include business development for small businesses, such as small, independent restaurants, to help elevate economic growth. A direct contribution to positive social change may be to open up resource centers in the community that offer information on marketing techniques, factor analysis, advertising effectiveness, and marketing research for entrepreneurs and those seeking business investments. Resource centers are institutions with a source of new external knowledge for the community (Shaijumon, 2014). Business development and implementing resource centers are implications for positive social change because they help drive business success through financial resources, technological resources, marketing strategies, and create employment opportunities (Jasra, Khan, Hunjra, Redman, & Azam, 2011).

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study was to determine what marketing strategies small, independent restaurant owners need for profitability. In this literature review, I examined the various strategies of marketing for profitability in small, independent restaurants through marketing concepts and theories. Ninety-eight percent of the 105 sources in this literature review were peer reviewed, and 92% were published within 5 years of expected Chief Academic Officer (CAO) final approval.

The organization of this literature review starts with the fundamental issues of marketing strategies, followed by theories of marketing: branding, relationship marketing, resource advantage, and last a review on profitability. I used the following EBSCO databases in my search for professional and academic literature: Business Source Complete, ABI/INFORM Complete, SAGE Premier, Science Direct, Health Science and Information and Technology databases. Books and journal articles were the main publications used in the review. I retrieved these with the following keywords:

advertising, branding, competition-based pricing, competitive advantage, customer engagement, customer relationship marketing, customer relationship management, customer segmentation, marketing–mix adaptation, market analysis, marketing mix, market orientation, market segmentation, marketing strategies, marketing theories, product development, profitability, pricing strategies, relationship marketing, resource advantage, small business, small restaurants, social marketing, and viral marketing.

Fundamental Issues of Marketing Strategies

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

Marketing new products keeps customers aware of new offerings; for long-term growth organizations must involve innovation and insights from customers (Barwise & Meehan, 2011). Executives use promotion, advertising, fundraising, and public relations as principles of marketing operations and strategy (Tabaku & Mersini, 2014). Small, independent restaurant owners can attract new customers to apply marketing strategies such as viral marketing, advertising, flyers, brochures, and outreach (Tawanda, Future, & Angela, 2013). Creating and executing a coordinated marketing plan for new and existing products and services may also help small, independent restaurant owners make enhancements or modifications based on adjustments in the competitive landscape. Small and medium sized businesses with high levels of performance are descriptive when documenting strategic marketing planning activities such as business mission, marketing objectives in the area of market share, products and services, and distribution (Ogunmokun & Tang, 2012). Using the concept of marketing as an adaptive strategy is necessary to ensure resources are available when implementing marketing activities (Tabaku & Mersini, 2014).

Leaders of small and medium sized firms should use more cross-functional involvement with focus on inter-organizational partnerships, intraorganizational partnerships, and training as a marketing strategy (Gillian, Weerawardena, & Liesch, 2012). Training all staff on marketing principles and the importance of market research is fundamental (Tabaku & Mersini, 2014). Training executives from stakeholder organizations in areas such as sales, services, and leadership are critical when implementing a marketing plan (Janicic & Jankovic, 2014). Integrated marketing

strategy, external integration of resources, market research, steady marketing management activity, and market orientation are basic principles of an innovation-marketing model (Li & Ju, 2014). Organization commitment, market orientation, business performance, and data sources (top management, employees, annual reports) are the main factors in the theoretical model when implementing internal marketing programs in organizations (Zaman, Javaid, Arshad, & Bibi, 2012). Employees who are loyalty and committed to an organization provide excellent service to their customers and are concerned with organization growth when business executives provide strategic rewards, effective training, and internal marketing programs (Zaman et al., 2012). Market orientation and internal marketing programs correlate with high business performance and profitability (Zaman et al., 2012). An organization's degree of market orientation can be positive for business performance and profitability (Jakada & Gambo, 2014).

A strategic marketing system entails a needs analysis, research and analysis, creative infusion, strategic positioning, marketing plan development and training, implementation, evaluation, and adjustment (Janicic & Jankovic, 2014). A strategic marketing system is comprised of approaches that can help leaders cultivate and enhance marketing plans and marketing efforts. Marketing contributes to customer and shareholder value through the development of customer-oriented solutions (Abernathy, Kubick, & Masli, 2013). The analysis of customer data is extracted through marketing strategies (Chiang, 2013). With the use of marketing strategies, business owners are able

to share concepts with consumers and stakeholders to precipitate profit (Bettiol, Di Maria, & Finotto, 2012).

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

Marketing managers should implement offensive and defensive strategies to adopt a relationship marketing orientation approach centered on three concepts: attracting, retaining, and regaining lost customers (Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012). Offensive marketing strategies are marketing planning goals of acquiring more customers, suggesting brand modifications, and increasing purchase frequency (Vivek et al., 2012). Small business executives should use offensive marketing strategies to assess the value of engaging prospective customers and the value of evaluating brand potential (Vivek et al.,

2012). Executives should monitor the activities and interactions of customers to determine what drives customers to the product or brand (Vivek et al., 2012).

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

Strategy formulation and technology development can help aid the decision-making capabilities and build a competitive advantage for small restaurants (Koutroumanis, 2011). According to Sanchez, Popescy, Chivu, Ciocârlan-Chitucea, and Popescu (2011), small and medium sized enterprises contribute to 55%-95% of U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and generate technical innovation for the economy. Small business executives should use the Internet as a marketing tool to avoid competitive disadvantages (Omar, Ramayah, Lim, Mohamad, & Marimuthu, 2011). Using the latest technology to engage and communicate with customers is important, because implementing technology as a marketing strategy may help small business leaders forecast customer expectations and values (Rowley, 2012). Measuring the outcomes from web-based marketing may determine if it helps increase profit, increase

return on investment (ROI), enhance company brand, increase customer loyalty, and improve business processes (Omar et al., 2011).

Word of mouth communication is a powerful marketing tool (Vázquez-Casielles, Suárez-Álvarez, & del Río-Lanza, 2013). Viral marketing, through word of mouth communication, is fundamental to innovative marketing strategies; and is a good way for executives to promote and strengthen brand, and to encourage loyal customers to spread the word to other people (Lekhanya, 2014; Nejad, Sherrell, & Babakus, 2014). Word of mouth consumer conversations about brand occurs 75% face-to-face, 15% via phone and 10% online with an estimate of 15 billion brand impressions every week in the United States (Keller & Fay, 2012). Small, independent restaurant executives can implement online marketing as a communication platform to build relationships and customer loyalty (Tabaku & Mersini, 2014). Small business executives need customers to spread the message about the company and products because the ultimate credibility source is customer to customer or customer to a new prospect (Swenson et al., 2012). Marketing campaigns that incorporate incentives to encourage viral diffusion may allow dissemination of the message to spread beyond the anticipated pool of customers, and continue after the incentive has completed (Ewing, Stewart, Mather, & Newton, 2014). Social marketing is a way to add an implicit consumer endorsement of a brand (Keller & Fay, 2012). Applying social media for brand equity as a marketing focal point increases revenue and profits (Zailskaite-Jakste & Kuvykaite, 2013).

Thirty-four percent of small business executives do not examine the effects of marketing activity (Katona, 2014). Following up with existing customers to confirm their

satisfaction may help marketing managers who work in small businesses establish, maximize, and maintain positive relationships with existing and potential customers. Small business executives should realize the importance of efficient marketing, because the elements of marketing help operate and manage a small business (Katona, 2014). Marketing strategies and activities for small businesses are distinctively different from those observed in large organizations (Bettioli et al., 2012).

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

Marketing activities such as marketing communications, personal selling, competition-based pricing, product development, and distribution may help small, independent restaurant owners emphasize differentiation-based product market strategies to meet market goals (Khan, 2014b; Mohammed, Rashid, & Tahir, 2014). Executives can use marketing communications to obtain information and advice, offer information about products, and persuade target customers on the merits of a particular product (Khan, 2014b). Information used to determine consumer preferences and to segment consumers, benefit effective promotional programs and marketing expenditures (Barber,

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

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

According to Li and Ju (2014) small businesses executives can use a corporate marketing model structure as a tool to help improve customer value, communicate

efficiently and interactively, and reduce customer total cost. Khan (2014b) advanced small business executives should use pricing to reinforce other marketing activities because although higher prices will lead to higher profitability initially, higher prices may result in lower sales and profits in the long term. Creating short-term and long-term marketing and advertising strategies that align to strategic plans may help small business executives achieve profitability.

Branding

Strategically building a valuable brand increases customer value perception, gives the product a higher quality level, and increases profitability (Dogramatzis, 2012). Proactively innovating a business model, product differentiation, and trend creation increases brand image (Yang & Chiu, 2014). Small, independent restaurant owners should continue to generate innovative product concepts to elevate brand growth.

Brand image can be an influential factor that causes customer complaints in a restaurant (Kim & Boo, 2011). Brand strategists are tasked with using various communication levels to determine which consumer populations are most likely to talk about a company brand to help influence quantifiable ways to sales and profitability (Keller & Fay, 2012). Companies that have a strong brand name achieve better performance and marketing capabilities (Jannesari, Ghorbani, & Haery, 2014). Hsu, Hung, and Tang (2012) conducted in-depth interviews with restaurant managers to identify marketing strategies and activities for building brand equity about managerial strategies such as: production development, customer service, restaurant ambience, and integrated marketing communication. Hsu et al. (2012) analyzed data from the

interviews and found customers age 21-30 years old place value on perceptions of looking, hearing, smelling, and testing, and physical evidences such as meals, uniform design of staffs, tableware design, and decorations of a restaurant. Customers age 31-40 value symbolic benefits and service attitudes because they want to feel relaxed while dining and want to experience a friendly, enthusiastic, and cheerful attitude from restaurant staff (Hsu et al., 2012).

The results of the study may help marketing executives develop, evaluate, and enhance hospitality brand equity. Small business restaurant owners can use the results to create marketing strategies and improve customer value of brand equity. Brand creation, marketing internationally, and searching for new marketing opportunities are ways small, independent restaurant owners should strategize for profitability (Yang & Chiu, 2014). Brand equity building is an important component for the competitive advantage formation of a business (Zailskaite-Jaste & Kuvykaite, 2013). When brand extensions are successful, companies gain additional customers and organizational performance is superb (Singh, Scriven, Clemente, Lomax, & Wright, 2012).

Brand and target identities should be transparent because the most effective approach is to connect brand to consumer identity (Bhattacharjee, Berger, & Menon, 2014). Enhancing brand image along with implementing effective and interactive communication improves customer value (Li & Ju, 2014). According to Zailskaite-Jaste and Kuvykaite (2013), business leaders should use social media as a marketing focus to allow consumers to contribute to brand equity building and brand representation. Zailskaite-Jaste and Kuvykaite advanced that through social media, consumers can

decide how to interpret a brand and business executives can expand brand awareness. Using social media will guarantee high consumer involvement in communications that may increase brand equity, determine brand loyalty, and increase revenue and profits (Zailskaite-Jaste & Kuvykaite, 2013).

Small, independent restaurant owners must be abreast of the trademark distribution of competitors before promoting their own brand and design a patent map to create an enterprise brand (Chen & Liang, 2013). Building a patent map helps restaurant owners create a trademark map from the company brand and find its position in the market (Chen & Liang, 2013). Brand extension and brand equity is a way small, independent restaurant owners can fill market gaps and hinder the expansion of its competitors' market shares (Cheng, 2014). Brand equity and marketing activities are pertinent to customer relationship retention and components of business success (Hajipour, Bavarsad, & Zarei, 2013). Brand elements selection and marketing strategies affect brand equity building (Hsu et al., 2012).

Business managers should design viral marketing and email message execution regarding brand promotion, in an attractive manner in which the recipients relate and contextualize the marketing strategies (San José-Cabezudo & Camarero-Izquierdo, 2012). Implementing viral marketing in collaboration with internal and external counterparts may drive brand initiatives. The likelihood of customers purchasing products and services is better when brand value and brand equity are superior (Chun-Chen, Szu-Wei, Cheng-Yi, & Chang, 2014). A brand name is just as important as product quality and product profitability (Hinterhuber & Hinterhuber, 2012). Companies such as Coca-Cola

and Sony have established reputations globally through branding (Kay, 2011). Small, independent restaurant owners should involve customers in brand development because branding is a blending of attributes used attractive to consumers (Cheng, 2014). Companies with a brand image that include distinctive characteristics from its competitors and attributes that are better than normal transparency of product marketing, sustain long-term competitive advantage (Metaxas, 2010). Developing a valuable brand increases the product's profitability and sustainability levels and boost customer value, perception, and loyalty (Dogramatzis, 2012). Business executives should review metrics regarding profitability and market awareness when seeking cobranding strategies (Kalafatis, Remizova, Riley, & Singh, 2012). Small, independent restaurant owners can examine economic attractiveness, competitive intensity, and differential product advantages through market characteristics, product characteristics related to branding and pricing components, and business portfolio priorities (Dogramatzis, 2012).

Budget comparisons, marketing objectives and goals, marketing activities, sales channels, and positioning are areas within marketing dynamics that small business executives can use as they conduct a marketing audit (Janicic & Jankovic, 2014). Marketing strategies and marketing capabilities that include an in-depth market and brand analysis may help to support brand growth. Sixty percent of product decisions and 32% of distribution decisions influence long-term brand sales (Ataman, Berk, Van Heerde, & Mela, 2010).

Small business managers can promote brand and products to identify market trends, propose customized marketing strategies, and execute market campaigns through

online interaction successfully (Pantano & Corvello, 2013). Small, independent restaurant owners can track and optimize brand performance by using data analytics to help identify opportunities for business growth and innovate brand initiatives. Using a virtual environment for marketing may allow consumers to influence brand expression and contribute the building, dissemination, and promotion of the brand (Zailskaite-Jakste & Kuvykaite, 2013). Small, independent restaurant executives should collaborate with consumers about website updates and various multimedia sources to increase brand awareness and recognition.

Small, independent restaurant owners should use a logo, a website, and a brand development model as elements of a marketing plan to execute the brand (Holland & Weather, 2013). Holland and Weather (2013) opined brand strategy coupled with an organization's business strategy is a marketing plan that promotes growth and strategic brand development initiatives. The development and execution of marketing brand strategies are key initiatives that drive brand awareness. Comprehending customers' value and using marketing activities for positive investment may improve brand performance (Herrmann, Henneberg, & Landwehr, 2010). Human resources managers should create brand ambassadors because employees should play an integral part in an organization's brand strategy to deliver brand messages properly (Holland & Weather, 2013).

Product development, promotion, advertising, and innovation are marketing activities that help promote brands. Filtering on the knowledge that consumers prefer brands positioned on their identity, Jif peanut butter targets mothers with marketing

messages by noting, *Choosy moms choose Jif* (Bhattacharjee et al., 2014). A marketing strategy should include image development and brand characteristics that allow organizations to have an efficient marketing mix that reflects a trustworthy image (Torre, Fenger, VanTwist, & Bressers, 2014).

Relationship Marketing

Relationship marketing, which encompasses relationship building and market analysis of competitors and consumers, emerged as a marketing theory in the early 1990s (Khan, 2014a). Relationships with customers and competitors are forefront for a company when issues are addressed regarding business strategy (Kay, 2011). The purpose of employing relationship marketing is to allow small, independent restaurant owners to use a strategic process to develop and maintain a profitable relationship portfolio (Catoiu & Tichindelean, 2012). The application of relationship marketing is significant to the profitability of a business (Borisavljevic, 2013). Small, independent restaurant executives should implement effective marketing strategies that align with the business strategy, which includes defining successful engagement of customers, prospects, and competitors in the market arena (Jemaiyo, 2013).

Micro marketing, database marketing, one-to-one marketing, loyalty marketing, wraparound marketing, customer partnering, and interactive marketing are customer relationship concepts under the pillar of relationship marketing (Khan, 2014a). Small, independent restaurant owners should implement micro marketing as a proponent of the relationship marketing process and strategic approach to customer engagement (Khan, 2014a). Small business executives apply relationship marketing to different marketing

activities ranging from consumer frequency marketing programs, customer partnering, and interactive marketing, directed toward building partnerships with important business customers (Khan, 2014a). Executives implement loyalty marketing to show commitment and maintain a relationship with the buyer; leaders use commitment as a variable to measure the strength of a marketing relationship and predict future purchase frequency (Khan, 2014a). Relationship marketing helps to foster the competitive advantage through networks communications and interactions during implementation marketing strategies (Gharehbashlani & Seify, 2014). Small business leaders should identify, develop, and execute new business opportunities to build relationships with primary customers within targeted market segments.

Customer relationship marketing (CRM) is a new paradigm and is important to the service industry for leverage of customer and business value (Chiang, 2013). The CRM strategy is an integration of marketing, sales, and customer service with the objective of delivering customer value to enhance marketing productivity (Soliman, 2011). Soliman (2011) advanced the aspects of CRM, which include a primary focus on customers, organizational efficiency, and customer knowledge management, help businesses achieve a high marketing performance. Small, independent restaurant owners should execute a CRM strategy to evolve marketing communications, drive brand engagement, and generate profit. Small, independent restaurant owners should invest in CRM technology and systems, to improve electronic and direct marketing programs, enhance prediction models, upgrade planning systems, improve organizational structures, and increase profitability margins (Soliman, 2011). Small, independent restaurant

owners should implement CRM and lead maturation to attain new customers for targeted growth. Small business executives should apply relationship marketing to maintain and improve competitive position in the market (Borisavljevic, 2013). Soliman (2011) conducted a study of sales administration and reported 50% of companies, which had a profit of more than one million dollars in sales, had executives who practiced CRM.

Product, price, promotion, and place are the traditional 4P concepts in relationship marketing for small business owners to improve its competitive position in the market (Borisavljevic, 2013). Driven marketing approaches involve the initiation of product strategies that foster the development of product positioning, formulation, advertising, and pricing. Changing the product might be necessary to maintain or grow market share because product characteristics are also factors of brand loyalty (Schmidt & Ralph, 2014; Zailskaite-Jaste & Kuvykaite, 2013). Customers' positive perception of a brand cultivates relationship-marketing strategies (Radu, 2013). As small, independent restaurant executives work to maintain current client base, they should aggressively grow sales through prospecting and relationship development with external stakeholders within designated market territories. Managers can use brands and products to revitalize and innovate customer relationships (Bettiol et al., 2012).

Effective marketing strategies should include leveraging products and services to meet customer needs. Consumer identification, customer acquisition, customer retention, customer development, and tracking consumer information are steps in the process of relationship marketing small business leaders implement to maintain lifelong relationships (Khan, 2014a). Marketing executives who implement relationship

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

The close relationship small and medium-sized enterprise leaders have with customers along with market orientation affords them the competitive advantage over larger businesses (Reijonen, Laukkanen, Komppula, & Tuominen, 2012). The process of relationship marketing requires the knowledge base of customers' economic, emotional, and moral needs, and mechanisms to serve and satisfy customers efficiently (Radu, 2013). Small, independent restaurant executives should use relationship marketing to identify existing and potential customer segments and to invest in new market segments (Micheaux, 2013). Employing relationship-marketing strategies that encompass long-term communication processes to capture customers' point of view makes customers loyal to the organization (Omidinia, Matin, Jandaghi, & Sepahyar, 2014). From a broader perspective, positive relationships and customer satisfaction helps attract new customers generate referrals, expedite the roll out of new products and services, and improves brand equity (Agarwal, Chaurasia, & Negi, 2012). Positive customer relationships are formed from the process of CRM, because CRM creates customer awareness and customer engagement and allow business owners to establish long-term, resource-manageable, and profitable customer relationships (Chiang, 2013).

Proper implementation of relationship marketing helps business managers successfully attract and maintain profitable clients, and establish relationships with manufacturers and distributors for an optimization of organizational, financial performances (Radu, 2013). Relationship marketing is a way to establish a unique long-term relationship with customers to drive business equities (Abeysekera, & Jayakody, 2011). Small business executives should pay attention to customer needs as they design, implement, and coordinate product strategies and other marketing initiatives; the maintenance of customer interaction is important (Bouguerra & Mzoughi, 2011; & Sanzo & Vazquez, 2011). Small, independent restaurant owners should align the philosophy of relationship marketing with a business and marketing plan to cut costs, increase incomes, and generate intangible benefits (Radu, 2013).

Small, independent restaurant owners should develop relationship marketing based on market situation and organizational characteristics (Juscus & Grigaite, 2011). Intellectual assets regarding environment cultivation such as customer, channel, and partner relationships are all fundamental aspects of marketing strategies (Sarathy & Banalieva, 2014). Marketing strategies are executed based on customer segmentation. Small, independent restaurant owners need to establish a process to help determine customer segmentation strategies based on analysis of existing customer database and competitive and market intelligence.

Retaining current partners and customers poses high economic options (Kang, & Sivadas, 2013). Specializing in the acquisition of new customers and retention of existing customers can help small business executives leverage relationships to maximize

revenue opportunities. Customer loyalty is linked to financial success and profitability (Bowden & Dagger, 2011). Fundamental components of strategic relationship marketing are an increase in profitability and sustainable competitive advantage for service organizations (Hashem, 2012). Relationship marketing involves market success and profitability; small, independent restaurant owners must be positioned to influence existing customer relationships and adjust services, products or strategies as needed (Essawy, 2012). Creating a systematic follow-up process for all networking activities, maximizing referrals, and focusing on a target market are strategies small, independent restaurant owners should implement to improve marketing activities. Evaluating existing products, services, market segments and customer targets, as well as profitability can ascertain the need for new products and services.

Relationship marketing presents a strategic response to businesses in attaining competitive advantages and commitment with customers (Pereira, Ferreira, & Alves, 2012). Understanding and responding to consumer needs, operating in a competitive environment, and consumers' preferences are centralities of marketing (Sarathy & Banalieva, 2014). Small, independent restaurant owners should make efforts to measure the value of each customer (Radu, 2013). Business managers should take advantage of complaints from customers and use it as a marketing tool to build long-term customer relationships (Kim & Boo, 2011).

In relationship marketing, strategic competitive advantage involves satisfying existing customers through buyer-seller relationships and increasing corporate profitability (Khan, 2014a). Bilateral relationships, seller-maintained relationships, and

buyer-maintained relationships are categories of buyer-seller relationships business executives can use to incorporate relationship-marketing tool and build partnerships with important business-to-business customers (Khan, 2014a). From a sales management perspective, managers apply relationship marketing to various marketing activities directed toward developing long-term relationships, trust, and communication with customers (Khan, 2014a). Client orientation, trust, commitment, teamwork, innovation, flexibility, and results orientation, which are shared values related to the development of relationship marketing orientation, should align with marketing strategies (Iglesias, Sauquet & Montaña, 2011). Developing relationship-marketing programs and valuing customers across cultures are important (Hui, Ho, & Wan, 2011). Relationship marketing will help businesses thrive in the market and guard competition (Alvarez, Casielles, & Martin, 2011).

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

customers with a focus on building positive relationships (Agariya & Singh, 2011; Choo & Petrick, 2012).

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

Resource Advantage

The aspect of resource-advantage theory supports the notion that valuable resources influence marketing strategy and export performance (Magnusson et al., 2013). The objective of resource-advantage theory is superior financial performance (Foss, 2012). Sustainable marketing and economic growth are cross-functional disciplines in resource advantage theory (Hunt, 2011). Operational practices of an organization around the actions of competitors and suppliers and consumers' behavior are concepts of resource advantage theory (Griffith & Yalcinkaya, 2010).

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

planning for small businesses (Bettiol et al., 2012). Marketing strategies that encompass sustainability align with resource-advantage theory (Crittenden et al., 2011).

Resources and high financial performance are concepts of resource-advantage theory (Arnett & Madhavaram, 2012). Resource-advantage theory is a theory centered on competition, theoretical practices of business, and marketing strategy (Hunt & Madhavaram, 2012). Resource diversity and market segments for competitive advantage and disadvantage are important in resource-advantage marketing strategy (Hunt, 2012).

Profitability

To accelerate profitability levels and be successful, executives have to engage customers in product deployment, which will help drive the market (Swenson, Rhoads, & Whitlark, 2012). Examination and analysis of best market opportunities and creation of profitable strategies are elements of strategic marketing planning (Ogunmokun & Tang, 2012). Small, independent restaurant owners should create marketing strategies from the analysis of customer segmentation to augment sales and profits (Hwang, Lee, & Park, 2012).

Marketing strategies have an effect on financial outcomes for small businesses (Solomon & Perry, 2011). An effective marketing strategy can lead to increased sales and dominance in a targeted market (Jemaiyo, 2013). Small business leaders can gauge market attractiveness based on growth rate and profitability (Dogramatzis, 2012). Creating opportunity, multiplying the effect, leveraging relationships, and making profits are elements of a systematic framework used to measure and execute entrepreneurial marketing (Swenson et al., 2012). Evaluating a business idea and the dimensions of a

product are ways leaders create growth opportunities and develop responsive marketing strategies (Swenson et al., 2012). According to Swenson et al. (2012) entrepreneurs implement the multiplying effect to identify and partner with business stakeholders who have a significant influence over the target market. Leveraging relationships with advisors, suppliers, and customers may increase business success (Swenson et al., 2012). Small, independent restaurant owners should use marketing strategies to help identify specific buying and use trends of customers and modify product specifications for profitability (Swenson et al., 2012). Understanding use patterns may allow executives to understand customers' needs and how to deliver value and recognize marketing opportunities (Swenson et al., 2012). Small, independent restaurant owners should apply market information management to grow market value and enhance organizational performance (Shin, 2013).

Marketing activities should involve the analysis of data for efficiency, marketing program pricing, and cost savings recommendations. Implementing an analytical system that includes a reporting mechanism for ROI, revenue projections, and industry and market developments is important. Using marketing metrics to forecast profitability and evaluate organizational performance are important for marketing managers, because forecasting allows managers to analyze marketing effectiveness and return on investment outcomes (Mitchell & Olsen, 2013).

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

analyses to determine if marketing strategies permit allocation of resources and innovative ways to foster and retain customer relationships (Kumar & Rajan, 2012). Allocating higher expenditures for an effective marketing innovation strategy and technology development is recommended for small businesses, based on study results (Çetinkaya & Kalkan, 2014).

Small, independent restaurant owners' innovative-oriented strategies and marketing activities help increase organizational sustainability (Çetinkaya & Kalkan, 2014). Marketing strategies should include quick product launches, and the identification of new market dimensions needed to pursue and drive customers, and successfully drive profits (Swenson et al., 2012). Small, independent restaurant owners should design marketing practices on cross-functional and cross-buy opportunities to develop strong customer relationships and drive sales (Shah, Kumar, Qu, & Chen, 2012). Development and execution of marketing strategies and promotional activity through the marketing mix may help achieve revenue targets for small businesses.

For profit and growth, business executives must implement a marketing strategy such as designing and redesigning companies' products and services to sustain competitive advantage (Civic, 2013). Small business leaders should create information gatekeepers for product marketing to drive profits (Chen & Liu, 2013). Andrew (2011) opined significant gaps between marketing expectations and performance satisfaction are barriers called tactical soup and failure to launch. *Tactical soup* is when business leaders do not adequately prioritize strategies on how to generate revenue and profitability through marketing activities, whereas *failure to launch* is when business executives do

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

Small, independent restaurant owners should use marketing resources and convert business ideas into revenue to avoid failure to launch (Andrew, 2011). Facilitating an engagement with prospective clients and maintaining brand awareness are marketing tools business executives can implement for growth and profitability (Andrew, 2011). The marketing channels small business executives use should incorporate customer feedback, as a way to increase customer profitability and influence corporate profitability (Karamehmedovic & Bredmar, 2013). Marketing executives should use customer base and relationship with customers to create marketing programs and initiate profitability (Pepe, 2012).

The effectiveness of marketing strategies is measured by analysis of profits and sales (Jemaiyo, 2013). Eighty percent of the senior managers ranked branding, marketing, and sales as important success factors for business (Andrew, 2011). Sales promotions foster short run or long run profitability (Zebra, Syeda, Malik, Batul, & Syeda, 2012). Profitability levels relating to advertising are measured by past sales

figures with past advertising expenditures (Cheng, 2014). Developing a marketing plan that creates new product concepts based on customer insights and customer innovative recommendations may help small business owners improve the performance of products and become more profitable (Markides, 2012). Brand execution is essential to long-term growth, whereas customer insights are valuable in guiding innovation and resource allocation (Barwise & Meehan, 2011).

Profitable customer loyalty, business performance metrics, and marketing-mix adaptation correlate to the following marketing-mix variables: product, promotion and advertising, price, distribution, sales, and sales force (Kumar, Sharma, Shah, & Rajan, 2013; Magnusson et al., 2013). Profitable customer loyalty is fundamental to business success and involves customers who exhibit attitudinal loyalty and provide profits for a firm (Kumar et al., 2013; Magnusson et al., 2013). Increased customer loyalty contributes to business profitability (Agarwal et al., 2012). Marketers should implement a combination of promotional and advertising strategies to reach profitability goals (Kumar et al., 2013; Magnusson et al., 2013). Small, independent restaurant owners should develop pricing strategies around business objectives, market conditions, and customer portfolios, as they align marketing strategies (Kumar et al., 2013; Magnusson et al., 2013). Effective marketing strategies can help small business owners enhance the understanding of its position in the marketplace (Tawanda et al., 2013). Effective sales promotions implemented by executives will optimize pricing strategies; sales performance is an important indicator of customer loyalty (Kumar et al., 2013; Magnusson et al., 2013).

Small, independent restaurant executives should develop marketing plans around customer loyalty programs across multiple platforms. Examining various distribution networks will help leaders build a loyal customer base and more customer segments, which are primary marketing strategies (Kumar et al., 2013; Magnusson et al., 2013). As small, independent restaurant owners assess market needs, marketing specifications and measure organizational growth, product innovation should represent the voice of the customer through a strategic and operational marketing process (Cherchem, 2012). For small businesses, major components of marketing innovation are increased profits and market shares, and sustainable competitive advantage (Çetinkaya & Kalkan, 2014).

Small business owners use corporate profitability and product characteristics as a dimension of relationship marketing to connect to existing satisfied customers (Khan, 2014a). Customer insights can help foster the process of building a valuable long-term asset, brand equity, and a platform for business growth (Barwise & Meehan, 2011). Financial and operational accountability should align with marketing initiatives and strategies. Small, independent restaurant owners must measure the effectiveness of marketing program and strategies quantitatively and qualitatively. Small, independent restaurant owners can use business and marketing strategies to shape, achieve, and sustain the competitive advantage of their portfolio (Jemaiyo, 2013). Zaman et al. (2012) proposed business executives who apply internal marketing programs have an influence on market orientation, business performance, and profitability. High brand image, high company image, and a well-maintained profit margin are success factors that may help small, independent restaurant owners maintain its market shares and profit (Cheng,

2014). Small, independent restaurant owners may have a competitive advantage on sales and marketing opportunities when brand image is high because of customers' brand loyalty and awareness (Cheng, 2014). Customers' positive perception of products and services attributes to high company image and the quality of products and services delivery (Cheng, 2014). Executives should continue to analyze and evaluate brand equity strategies and marketing approaches for profit margin (Cheng, 2014).

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

Strategic marketing, marketing communication, and sales process are integral parts of effective operational execution and profitability (Bierbooms, Van Oers, & Bongers, 2014). Bierboom et al. (2014) advanced executives should target markets, position products, and develop a marketing communications plan for strategic marketing. Successful marketing strategies may help leaders strengthen the market orientation and increase profitability (Bierboom et al., 2014). Small, independent restaurant managers must drive a customer retention strategy along with a marketing strategy to help achieve brand goals and focus on growing revenue and profits. Small business leaders should seek opportunities and threats through the examination of how economic development of emerging markets over time affects marketing strategies (Sarathy & Banalieva, 2014). The chief marketing officer's role is important to evaluate business performances such as a low asset turnover and high profitability (Abernathy et al., 2013).

Transition and Summary

In the beginning of Section 1 of this study, I provided the problem statement and purpose statement. I aligned and justified both the problem statement and purpose statement with peer-reviewed sources. The method and design I chose were the qualitative research method and exploratory multiple case study research design. I used the central research question to determine the content for the interview questions.

After the discussion of the conceptual framework, I presented a review of the academic and professional literature about various marketing theories and strategies, and profitability for small businesses, to articulate past research and contribute resourceful information to the study. In Section 2, a synopsis of the study is discussed, followed by

the segments: purpose statement, role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection, data analysis technique, reliability and validity, and transition and summary. In Section 3, an introduction to the study, presentation of the findings related to the conceptual framework, literature review, and data analysis of the results with the themes identified are discussed. The segments application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendation for action and further research, reflections, and study conclusions are presented.

Section 2: The Project

The objective of the doctoral study was to explore how executives can implement marketing strategies for profitability in three small, independent restaurants in Philadelphia, PA. I begin Section 2 with the purpose statement, role of the researcher, and participants, followed by the presentation of research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection, and data analysis technique. The section also includes the reliability and validity segments through a plan designed to address the credibility, transferability, and dependability of research data and results.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study was to determine what marketing strategies small, independent restaurant owners needed for profitability. Innovative approaches to marketing such as sales promotions, product strategies, and advertising are marketing activities that may bolster market share growth and profitability (Shin, 2012). This study may contribute to positive social change by enhancing market intelligence and providing innovative strategies for domestic deployment of marketing. Business executives may use the results of this study to develop strategic marketing strategies and initiatives for growth, business sustainability, brand equity success, and competitive intelligence. For growth and profitability, small, independent restaurant owners should implement innovative marketing strategies (Smith, 2013).

Role of the Researcher

The role of a researcher in the data collection process is to use reliable and valid data collection instruments for accurate representation (Parker, 2012). In the data

collection process, I collected and analyzed qualitative data to evaluate outcomes that support marketing strategies for profitability in small businesses. I interpreted the data and minimized personal bias to avoid ethical issues that may relate to validity, reliability, and authenticity (Street & Ward, 2012). The process included providing a clear and concise explanation of the goals and objectives of the research to each participant, and furnishing clarity of language and content to eliminate incorrect analysis. According to Wikman (2006), problems associated with word ambiguity, and the limitations of everyday language are from lack of clarity. I reviewed the Belmont Protocol Report (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979), and completed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) web-based training course (see Appendix A), to ensure compliance with ethical standards and the protection of human research participants.

As a native and resident of Philadelphia, this study focus related to my professional and academic interests. The study involved data collection that may provide performance trends and marketing strategies regarding the success or failure of small businesses in Philadelphia. A qualitative approach to the study helped me explore the interdependence between marketing strategies and profitability for small, independent restaurants in Philadelphia (e.g., Starke, 2013).

Participants

The owner of three small, independent restaurants in Philadelphia, PA, participated in this study. To gain access to participants, I used personal and business networking strategies with the owner. I conducted a purposeful criterion sampling

process of 12 managers and employees who met specific criterion for the study (Patton, 1990).

The small sample size of 12 is appropriate for an exploratory case study (Guo, Porschitz, & Alves, 2013). I selected two managers and two employees from each of three small, independent restaurants, for a total of 12 individuals. When using qualitative research, small samples and validity are incorporated (Bleijenbergh, Korzilius, & Vershuren, 2011). The number of participants chosen, as well as the target population of managers and employees, was sufficient because the participants had a general knowledge base of marketing and experience in the restaurant industry, which was the eligibility criteria for study participants.

Purposive sampling involves participants who can provide data sources and insights into the research questions because of their knowledge of marketing (Wan & Ng, 2013). I implemented criterion sampling for this research, which is a type of purposeful sampling that entails inclusion criteria (Patton, 1990). The goal of a researcher, when implementing a case study research method, is to report data from participants in a truthful and unbiased manner rather than manipulate conclusions (Amerson, 2011).

Research Method and Design

When conducting research, the researcher has three types of research methods to consider; quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Ostlund, Kidd, Wengstrom, & Rowa-Dewar, 2011). Researchers implement the quantitative method for deductive research when testing relationships between variables and hypotheses (Klassen, Creswell, Clark, Smith, & Meissner, 2012). The qualitative research method entails inductive and

deductive research with a focus on contexts and human experiences (Klassen et al., 2012). Qualitative research involves credibility, transferability, and dependability, while quantitative studies depend on quality criteria such as external validity, generalizability, and reliability (Wisdom, Cavaleri, Onwuegbuzie, & Green, 2012).

The mixed methods research encompasses three basic types of designs; convergent (or parallel or concurrent), sequential (or explanatory sequential or exploratory sequential) and embedded (or nested; Klassen et al., 2012). Researchers employ the mixed methods research to make philosophical positions through collection of quantitative and qualitative data (Klassen et al., 2012). Quantitative and mixed methods research was considered; the qualitative research method was chosen for this study. The qualitative research method was appropriate because I sought answers on *why* and *how* with the goal of getting an in-depth analysis of marketing methods for small businesses through semistructured interviews (Uluyol & Akci, 2014).

Prowse and Camfield (2013) explained that life history interviews and semistructured interviews are suitable and focused qualitative research methods. Qualitative research is important to help discover, comprehend, and interpret processes and experiences in individuals, teams, and organizations (Bluhm, Harman, Lee, & Mitchell, 2011). Data obtained from applying the qualitative research method may clarify strategies and techniques needed to improve profitability through the execution of marketing strategies for small, independent restaurants.

Research Method

I used the qualitative research method to analyze marketing strategies for profitability in small, independent restaurants. Qualitative research methods help build theory and support conceptualization (Doz, 2011). Qualitative approaches help researchers to understand possible changes needed in processes around organizational culture (Garcia & Gluesing, 2013). Qualitative data are beneficial to understand the nuances of customer behavior (Zenobia & Weber, 2012).

I used semistructured interviews and archival records from three small, independent restaurants as sources of information for the qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study (Yin, 2009). Using additional sources to collect information added rigor and guided me throughout the study (e.g., Yin, 2009). I used archival records to obtain information about previous data in areas such as business strategies, marketing trends, and profitability for three small, independent restaurants (Liu et al., 2012).

This study had a consumer focus and qualitative research strategy (e.g., Chikweche & Fletcher, 2012). Personal categorizations and perceived association with qualitative methods involve responses from participants (Cieza, 2012). Small, independent restaurants may use data acquisition from participant interviews and data results as an apparatus to measure marketing strategies, perform periodic market analysis, and assess market share for profitability.

Research Design

A researcher can implement case study research, when examining organizational phenomena (Hoon, 2013). Case studies involve an analysis of projects, policies, and

systems, and capture characteristics of real life events (Lalor et al., 2013; Thomas, 2011). Case studies consist of descriptive, explanatory, exploratory, intrinsic, instrumental, multiple case, holistic single case, and single case with embedded units, which are the preferred options for qualitative research (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003, 2009). According to Yin (2003), a researcher should use an exploratory case study research design to analyze situations, when the interventions evaluated have no clear set of outcomes. Bengtsson and Johansson (2012) applied the exploratory case study design to examine sustainability opportunities for small-medium enterprises through cross-functional business relationships with large firms. Heijes (2011) used the exploratory case study design to gain knowledge and obtain an in-depth analysis of diversity policy development through organizational context. Researchers can apply the exploratory case study research design to analyze data from interview questions and obtain information from multifaceted context (Conboy, Fitzgerald, & Mathiassen, 2012).

A multiple case study design enables the researcher to explore differences between cases and conduct a cross-analysis of cases with the goal to replicate findings across cases (Yin, 2003). Terziovski and Hermel (2011) used a multiple case study approach to explore the role of quality management practice in the performance of integrated supply chains (ISCs) and examine major implementation decisions of strategic quality in the supply chain. Booth (2012) used a multiple case study approach to examine three online learning communities for K-12 educators and explore how to support users through trust and knowledge sharing practices. Researchers can implement

cross-analysis and replication of findings to explore multiple facets and variations of cases through the multiple case study research sign (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003).

Other types of case studies reviewed and considered were descriptive, explanatory, intrinsic, instrumental, holistic single case, and single case with embedded units (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Researchers use the descriptive case study design to describe an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context (Yin, 2003). A researcher uses the explanatory case study design when attempting to answer a question regarding real-life interventions too complicated for survey or experimental strategies (Yin, 2003). When a researcher has an interest in the case but does not have a purpose to understand abstract, construct, or generic phenomenon, the intrinsic case study design is used (Stake, 1995). Researchers apply the instrumental case study design when seeking to pursue an external interest, gain an in-depth insight into an issue, or help refine a theory (Stake, 1995). A holistic single case study design requires a unique single group in one environment (Yin, 2003). Single case study design with embedded units involves the analysis of sub-units for a unique single group within a larger case (Yin, 2003). Case studies with descriptive, explanatory, intrinsic, instrumental, holistic single case, and single case with embedded units did not align with the purpose of this study.

I reviewed and considered other qualitative research designs such as ethnography, discourse analysis, grounded theory, and phenomenology (Cibangu, 2013; Hays & Wood, 2011). In ethnography, the researcher seeks to understand the cultural practices of participants and is not appropriate for this study (Herrmann, Barnhill, & Poole, 2013). A researcher using discourse analysis explores the understanding of textual units and

discourse relations; discourse analysis was not a suitable research design for exploring marketing strategies (Khoo & Jaidka, 2011). Grounded theory research involves developing a theory to generate data grounded in participant experiences and perspectives; in contrast, the goal of phenomenology research is to obtain participants' lived experiences (Hays & Wood, 2011). Neither research design aligned with the purpose of this study.

I selected the exploratory multiple case study design for this study. Implementing the exploratory multiple case study design enabled me to use data outcomes as a provision for strategic and business analytics on marketing strategies for tangible growth and profit in three small, independent restaurants. Applying the exploratory multiple case study approach enabled multifaceted explorations of marketing strategy practices for three small, independent restaurants (Crowe et al., 2011). I chose the qualitative, exploratory, research design over ethnography, discourse analysis, grounded theory, and phenomenology because the other designs did not align with process to explore and conduct an in-depth analysis of marketing strategies (Amerson, 2011; Heijes, 2011).

I used methodical triangulation in this study to enhance the trustworthiness of the research (Denzin, 2012; Yu, Abdullah, & Saat, 2014). Methodical triangulation and multiple data gathering techniques are pertinent strengths of case study research (Denzin, 2012; Yu, et al., 2014). Data saturation is when data obtained from continuous interviewing have been examined and indicate no new themes or information (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson 2006; Poghosyan, et al. 2013).

Population and Sampling

The population for the study consisted of 12 managers and employees from three small, independent restaurants in Philadelphia, PA. Two restaurants were full-service and one was a café, specializing in soul food and southern cuisine. I embedded the qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study in the business setting for each restaurant through the purposeful sampling technique (Lasch et al., 2010). I had a 6-year business relationship with the restaurant owner, which helped with the consent process to interview employees. Using my business relationship with the restaurant owner, I obtained a list of all managers and employees of the independent restaurants from the human resources department, which included contact information.

Guest et al. (2006) deduced that a sufficient sample size for a case study is around 12. Criterion sampling is a type of purposeful sampling, which involves selecting cases that meet a predetermined criterion (Patton, 1990). Using a purposeful criterion sampling technique, I interviewed 12 managers and employees from three small, independent restaurants in Philadelphia, PA. Guo et al. (2013) used a small sample size when they conducted an exploratory, qualitative, case study on the career experiences of Chinese self-initiated repatriates after their return to China. Using a sample size that is larger than needed poses the ethical issue of uselessly employing research funds and wasting participant time (Francis et al., 2010).

Data saturation was ensured when no new information or themes presented after continuous interviewing (Guest et al., 2006). The eligibility criterion for participant selection was that study participants were employed at the restaurant for a minimum of 6

months and had 1-year prior experience in the restaurant industry. Managers had a minimum of 1-year of experience providing direct supervision. All participants were at least 18 years of age. The race and gender of managers and employees were not a part of the criteria in the selection process. These eligibility criteria that I applied in this study provided the chance of obtaining a sample of study participants who have a solid knowledge base of marketing (Wan & Ng, 2013).

Ethical Research

Approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) via the IRB application process is important before data are collected to address compliance. I received approval from Walden University's IRB, IRB approval # 05-22-15-0169162, before collecting and analyzing data. The areas of compliance included: proposed research, community research stakeholders and partners potential risks and benefits, data integrity and confidentiality, potential conflicts of interest, data collection tools, description of the research participants, and informed consent (Walden University, 2015). The goal of the IRB process is to invigorate research ethics and avoid exploitation of study participants to access three ethical principles: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Shore, 2009). I followed the consenting process once IRB approval was given, by inviting 12 managers and employees from three small, independent restaurants to participate in the study and presented the design and purpose of the study.

Appendix B is an email invitation, sent before submitting the IRB application, containing a synopsis of the study and requesting the executive to participate in the study. Appendix D is the Letter of Cooperation the executive signed and submitted to me when

agreement was made to participate in the study. Participants had the right to refuse to answer particular questions or withdraw from the study at any time by verbal notification or submitting me a signed letter. All participants decided to participate in the study. Participants did not receive incentives to participate in the study. I protected the names of each participant and restaurant by implementing an alphabet and numeric coding system to maintain confidentiality. I will secure and store the data for 5 years under a file requiring a password to meet the requirements of the IRB, before deleting electronic files.

Data Collection Instruments

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study was to determine what marketing strategies small, independent restaurant owners needed for profitability. In qualitative research, the researcher commonly uses interviews as a data collection instrument (Tessier, 2012). Sánchez-Rodríguez and Spraakman (2012) used semistructured interviews with open-ended questions to interview controllers from 13 Canadian firms, to explore modifications that enterprise resource planning (ERP) implementations have had on performance measures and management accounting techniques. Sakulkijkarn (2012) applied semistructured interviews as a data collection instrument, to conduct a case study on the effectiveness of team building techniques with small and medium business executives. I used open-ended interview questions (see Appendix C) and archival records as instruments for data collection.

With the goal to determine what marketing strategies the management of three small, independent restaurants needs to remain profitable, data collected from in-depth interviews were explored. I used the data to help small, independent restaurant owners

ascertain how to execute marketing strategies to develop and deliver innovative products, and support the strategic direction of the restaurant and the brand. In addition, to explore what additional barriers of marketing strategies impede profitability, I used the data collected to determine how to measure outcomes and change marketing strategies, according to market and competitive environments for small, independent restaurants. The interview questions involved themes about marketing and profitability in a consistent and systematic manner to elicit more elaborate responses from participants (Qu & Dumay, 2011). I relied on qualitative methods to supply rich context, in lieu of calculating and analyzing the meaning of scores (Maltseva, 2014). Assessment of reliability and validity of the data collection instrument is pertinent because measurement helps to establish credibility, trustworthiness, and transferability of the study (Klassen et al., 2012).

I contacted the executive of three small, independent restaurants via telephone to explain the purpose of the study, request permission to use the restaurants in the study, and request a list by email of employee names, job position, and contact information: email addresses and phone numbers for all managers and employees. I sent the executive via email, a formal introductory letter (see Appendix B) indicating the scope and synopsis of the doctoral study and a Letter of Cooperation (see Appendix D). The requested timeframe for the executive to electronically sign and return documents was one to two days. After I received both signed documents from the executive and employee information, I sent an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix E) to managers and

employees. The requested timeframe for managers and employees to electronically sign and return documents was two days.

All documents were in Microsoft Word. Managers and employees replying via email with the words, “I consent, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above” was the way I obtained signatures electronically. The Introductory Letter, Letter of Cooperation, and Informed Consent Form served as documents to consent and secure the confidentiality and ethical rights of all participants.

I contacted each participant via telephone and scheduled an interview date and time after I received the signed consent form. I documented the interview schedule on a research log and tracked interview appointments in Zimbra Collaboration software. Through Zimbra Collaboration software, participants received the interview start time and finish time, conference line information, and reminder notification. Once the participant accepted the interview appointment, the acceptance was tracked via Zimbra Collaboration software; participants could propose a new time if the original time was not convenient.

Participants received an email confirmation with the interview logistics. Two days before the interview I called the participant as a reminder; from Zimbra Collaboration software the participant and I received a reminder three hours before the interview. The telephone interviews occurred for employees and managers of three small, independent restaurants outside of work hours.

All telephone interviews were audio-recorded through FreeConferenceCall.com, a conference call service. Participants needed a phone to participate in the interview via

FreeConferenceCall.com; participants did not need access to a computer. I downloaded and saved all interviews as a file requiring a password, on my computer. Access to all files is exclusive to me. Only the identifier code assigned to each participant was included in the study to maintain confidentiality. I audiotaped interviews through FreeConferenceCall.com, downloaded interviews, and transcribed interviews verbatim. I applied the member checking process and engaged participants for accuracy the day after transcription (Parker, 2012). Member checking allowed participants to review content to ensure data was precise and afforded me the opportunity to make modifications to language if necessary, to increase data credibility, and support data confirmability (Faseleh-Jahromi et al. 2013). I deleted interviews from the conference account after data were transcribed and verified by participants.

I loaded the transcripts into NVivo 10. NVivo 10 is computer assisted qualitative data analysis software to organize responses, identify themes, and advance the robustness of the qualitative research (Bergin, 2011). HyperRESEARCH and PASW 18 (SPSS) were other qualitative data analysis software reviewed and considered. Researchers use HyperRESEARCH software to analyze qualitative data from formats such as audio, video, graphs, or text. PASW 18 (SPSS) is software used by researchers to describe quantitative data, test hypotheses, and analyze qualitative survey results. NVivo 10 was the best choice for this study because I was able to enter each interview via transcript into the software and categorized themes about marketing and profitability (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

Other types of recording devices reviewed and considered were the Verba Recording System and Uptivity Call Recording. A researcher can use the Verba Recording System to record phone interviews from any device. Uptivity Call Recording is a device researchers can use to record and analyze calls such as phone interviews. FreeConferenceCall.com is a free conferencing service and was the best choice for this study because I used the device to interview participants and record responses at no charge. Through FreeConferenceCall.com, I received a reference number and a call detail report (CDR) for all calls to help me identify each recorded call. The file on the researcher's computer will be stored for five years and deleted thereafter.

Data Collection Technique

Semistructured interviews were the primary data collection technique through telephonic conversations (Sakulkijkarn, 2012). Employing semistructured interviews allowed the collection of rich data and a precise way of retrieving insights from participants. With approval from the restaurant owner, I obtained a list of all managers and employees of the independent restaurants, who met the criteria for the study, from the human resources department. The list included employee names, job position, and contact information such as email addresses and phone numbers.

First, I sent out via email 50 invitations to participate in the study. Second, I selected managers and employees from the first 18 signed consent forms received. My plan was to select managers and employees from the first 20 signed consent forms received, but only 18 participants responded. Last, I chose 12 out of 18 participants; the remaining six were placed on an alternate list. Initially, there were six participants

designated as a backup if a participant from the first selection withdrew from the study, but one participant decided not to participate in the study and notified me via email.

I deleted the participant information from my electronic files and my computer. The alternate list was changed to reflect five backup participants. On the list, I included names of every person who decided to participate and complete interviews and those who chose not to participate, as a way for me to keep thorough statistics. There were no demographic factors considered when selecting participants. The race and gender of managers and employees were not a part of the criteria in the selection process. I selected participants who were eligible and willing to participate in the study.

Twelve individuals, two managers, and two employees, each from three restaurants participated in semistructured interviews, through a purposeful criterion sampling technique. I confirmed eligibility with the participant before conducting the interview. Interviews lasted for the duration of 30-45 minutes. Participants did not receive incentives to participate in the study.

I assigned each participant a code as a form of measurement to assure ethical protection is adequate, for example, GSEP1, GSMP2, REP1, RMP2, and WEP1, WMP2. I coded participant number one, employee of GS restaurant, as GSEP1 and participant number one, manager of GS restaurant, as GSMP1. The code identifier is the initial of each restaurant, position level, and participant number. I electronically tracked and documented responses from the interview on a data sheet with the use of a research log through categorization of participant code and each independent restaurant. I did not use a pilot study; coding of data and engaging participants through member checking was the

way I enhanced the reliability and validity of the data collection instrument and data collection process (Goffin, et al., 2012; Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013; Parker, 2012). Member checking afforded participants the opportunity to review content to ensure data was accurate, allowed me to make corrections if needed, and strengthened data credibility (Faseleh-Jahromi et al., 2013).

The Letter of Cooperation is included in Appendix D for the executive as a consent form to participate in the study. The Informed Consent Form is included in Appendix E for managers and employees to agree to participate in the study and secure the confidentiality and ethical rights of all participants. I will secure and store data for 5 years on a desktop under a file requiring a password.

Data Organization Technique

The data organization techniques I used were NVivo 10, Microsoft Excel, and research logs. I organized and stored data from this qualitative research by each interview question, the assigned participant code, and responses by columns in a Microsoft Excel workbook file (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The Microsoft Excel workbook file includes a separate spreadsheet for each question.

Implementing NVivo 10 helped me organize responses and identify themes (Bergin, 2011). I used research logs to track and categorize data (Goffin et al., 2012). I scanned and saved each signed consent form in an electronic folder (Sin, 2010). I am the only one with access to the Microsoft Excel workbook file and the password. All data collected and organized in the file will be stored in a safe cabinet for five years and destroyed after the study has concluded (Sin, 2010).

Data Analysis Technique

The purpose of the qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study was to address the main research question: what marketing strategies does the executive of three small, independent restaurants need to generate profit?

The interview questions for participants were:

1. What are the marketing strategies used to retain current customers and gain new customers?
2. As a small business, what are the barriers to your business and marketing strategies?
3. What are the unique characteristics of your company's brand that guide marketing strategies?
4. How does your company position its brand for competitive advantage and profitability?
5. How do you measure the success or failure of your marketing strategies?
6. How do you conduct your marketing profitability analysis?
7. What marketing performance tools have you implemented to track trends and calibrate profitability?
8. What are your strategies to help maximize profitability?

First in the data analysis process, I used a coding system for all participants (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013). Data analysis involves an inductive process such as codes and patterns to theory (Castellan, 2010). The codes for managers ranged from GSMP1-WEP2 and codes for employees ranged from GSEP1-WEP2. The code

identifier for each participant is the initial of the restaurant where he or she works, position level, and participant number. Second, I analyzed data collected through application of interview transcripts, NVivo 10, and Microsoft Excel software tool to code and identify themes (Qu & Dumay, 2011). I compared and contrasted Atlas.ti to NVivo 10 and Microsoft Excel. Atlas.ti is a qualitative analysis tool, which researchers implement to import tables and code and organize data. NVivo 10 is computer assisted qualitative data analysis software researchers use to load transcripts, organize data, and identify themes. Microsoft Excel is an electronic tool researchers apply to store and organize data through spreadsheets. Implementing Microsoft Excel and NVivo10 as tools for this study was the best choice for coding and identifying themes.

Third, I focused on the fundamental themes of marketing and profitability to document themes from data collected during interviews and used archival records to demonstrate methodical triangulation (Denzin 2012; Guest et al., 2006; Poghosyan et al., 2013). Last, I correlated the themes about the fundamental issues of marketing strategies, branding, relationship marketing, resource advantage, and profitability to the central research question, to literature (including new studies published since writing the proposal) and the conceptual framework. Data analysis helped address logically and sequentially the brand equity theory of marketing for profitability, which is the conceptual framework of this study. The data helped explore if marketing a high brand image will give small, independent restaurant owners the competitive advantage, elevate customers' brand loyalty and awareness, and foster a sound financial position (Cheng, 2014).

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Reliability and validity constitute evaluative measures that enhance research rigor and add to the credibility of statistical data (Rao, 2013; Sin, 2010; Srivastava & Misra, 2014). Reliability and validity include quality case analysis and procedures to guarantee research findings reflect the purpose of the study (Rao 2013; Sin 2010; Srivastava & Misra, 2014). Measurements established to assure conclusions are valid science and not biased observations are results of reliability in research (Street & Ward, 2012). In qualitative research, reliability comprises data collection and data analysis techniques, starting with the coding of data (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013). A qualitative coding (categorization) process ensures reliability and increases validity in case study research (Goffin, et al., 2012). Implementing the same techniques for data collection and data analysis will lead to equivalent methodological results by other researchers (Ali & Yusof, 2011).

Providing a full description of the study was a necessity for data quality and reliability. I applied strategies to ensure rigor and reliability of this qualitative study and provided a thorough and detailed description of data collection/instruments, data collection/technique, data organization techniques (coding, reflective journals, data analysis), to guarantee credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the findings and conclusions (Klassen et al., 2012; Wisdom et al., 2012).

Validity

Validity refers to the accuracy and legitimacy of research findings (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). Validity is critical in qualitative research based on the logic that data is plausible, credible, and trustworthy, and can be defended when challenged (Venkatesh et al., 2013). Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are important principles for validity in qualitative research (Marais, 2012).

Prolonged engagement, member checks, quality record, and triangulation are elements of validity (Marais, 2012). Methodical triangulation involves the use of multiple methods as way to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question (Denzin, 2012). The validity and credibility of a study is threatened if participants withhold relevant information during the interview process (Zhou & Miguel, 2013). Rao (2013) tape-recorded interviews and transcribed them to understand the interview material clearly and as a mechanism to increase validity for a qualitative multiple-case design study. I audio-recorded each participant during the interview and transcribed responses to provide reliability and validity.

Data saturation was concluded when no new information or themes emerged (Guest et al., 2006). Data saturation occurred after the analysis of 12 interviews (Guest et al., 2006). I collected data using in-depth interviews from 12 managers and employees and continued interviewing until data saturation; data examination occurred by documenting themes and analyzing repetition to confirm and validate data saturation (Guest et al., 2006; Poghosyan et al., 2013). Member checking is an important quality control process in which participants have the opportunity to review statements for

accuracy (Harper & Cole, 2012). I confirmed data saturation through member checking when all participants reviewed the findings and had no additional contributions (Merwe, 2014). Results developed from data saturation presented strong credibility (Ashworth, 2012). I implemented the member checking process and methodical triangulation at the end of the data collection and data analysis process to track emerging themes, ensure validity, ensure creditability, and engage participants from the study (Denzin, 2012; Parker, 2012).

Transferability refers to extrapolation and relies on the reasoning that findings can be transferred to other environments or groups (Elo et al., 2014). In the viewpoint of trustworthiness and credibility, the main question is; “How can the reader evaluate the transferability of the results?” (Elo et al., 2014). I incorporated transferability in my study to provide a precise and detailed description of the research context on marketing strategies for profitability for small, independent restaurants and clarification of any assumptions (Watkins, 2012). Transferability added an element of rigor to this qualitative study and helped assess how the conclusions apply to other small businesses seeking revenue growth through marketing strategies (Gau & James, 2013). I used Walden University’s doctoral study committee to examine and critically assess the qualitative research findings, which helped ensure the credibility/believability of content analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I presented an analysis of the participant selection process, the process for population and sampling, data collection methods and techniques, data

instruments, reliability and validity of the study and a review of the interview questions. The study involved interviews of 12 participants, two managers and two employees, each from three small, independent restaurants in Philadelphia, PA. The decision to use the qualitative research method over quantitative and mixed method was justified through peer-reviewed sources.

I discussed and justified through peer-reviewed sources the choice to use the qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study research design over ethnography, discourse analysis, grounded theory, and phenomenology. I presented the advantages of implementing an exploratory multiple case study research design to analyze marketing strategies and profitability in small, independent restaurants. In Section 3, I discuss the introduction to the study, presentation of the findings and how to apply the results of the study in professional practices, and implications for social change. I present recommendations for action and further research, along with reflections and study conclusions.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Section 3 includes an introduction to the study, presentation of the findings related to the conceptual framework and literature review. I also present the data analysis of the results with the themes identified. Application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendation for action and further research, along with reflections and study conclusions are presented.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study was to determine what marketing strategies small, independent restaurant owners needed for profitability. The findings of the study revealed five themes regarding marketing strategies for profitability: (a) word of mouth and social media marketing, (b) limited financial resources, (c) product differentiation and atmosphere, (d) blogging and using the point of sale point of sale (POS) system, and (e) employee engagement and upselling. Participants identified cost-effective marketing strategies for small, independent restaurant owners to implement for profitability through word of mouth and social media marketing and blogging and using the (POS) system. Collectively, 100% of participants acknowledged unique brand characteristics guide marketing strategies, brand equity, and profitability.

Presentation of the Findings

The central research question was: What marketing strategies does the executive of three small, independent restaurants need to generate profit? Using a purposive

sample, the participants for this study were 12 individuals: two managers and two employees, each from three restaurants, in Philadelphia, PA. I assigned each participant an alphabet and numerical code, which is the initial of each restaurant, position level, and participant number. I replaced the names of participants with codes GSEP1, GSEP2, GSMP1, GSMP2, REP1, REP2, RMP1, RMP2, WEP1, WEP2, WMP1, and WMP2. Participants' interview responses provided insight on the marketing strategies small, independent restaurant owners use for profitability. Five themes that emerged from the study included:

1. Word of Mouth and Social Media Marketing (IQ1)
2. Limited Financial Resources (IQ2)
3. Product Differentiation and Atmosphere (IQ3 and IQ4)
4. Blogging and Using the Point of Sale (POS) System (IQ5, IQ6, and IQ7)
5. Employee Engagement and Upselling (IQ8)

Interview Question 1

The interview question was: What are the marketing strategies used to retain current customers and gain new customers? My intent with this question was to explore the marketing strategies used for customer retention and customer acquisition. Theme 1, word of mouth and social media marketing, emerged from Interview Question 1. Small business leaders should implement social media marketing to develop and maintain customer relationships (Khan, 2014a; Omar et al., 2011). Applying customized marketing strategies may help small, independent restaurant owners attract new customers (Agarwal et al., 2012; Pantano & Corvello, 2013). Using the Internet and

relationship marketing are attributes of marketing for competitive advantage (Agarwal et al., 2012; Khan, 2014a; Omar et al., 2011).

Theme 1: Word of Mouth and Social Media Marketing

The first theme that emerged from participants' responses was word of mouth and social media marketing. Results revealed that 11 participants (92%) linked the importance of using word of mouth and social media marketing as tools to retain current customers and gain new customers. Participants were of the opinion that executives should use word of mouth and social media marketing campaigns to obtain new customers and promote brand awareness (Ewing et al., 2014; Keller & Fay, 2012). I found that implementing social networks such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter as a platform for marketing strategies may help small restaurant owners retain customers (Koutroumanis, 2011). Participant RMP2 stated:

We focus on the customer because great customer service leads to word of mouth. Other marketing strategies are weekly emails and sharing email lists with our other restaurants with the same demographic base. We tie marketing into our weekly events such as Wednesday happy hours, Election Day, Thursday comedy night, and Friday Karaoke. We work with radio personalities and use our strong social media. We have a loyal following and our food is top notch.

Participant GSMP1 posited that social media, word of mouth, positive customer experiences, and ensuring each guest has an excellent experience are marketing strategies used to retain current customers and gain new customers. Participant GSMP1 was in the opinion that "word of mouth is so powerful." Participant WEP1 shared a similar view;

“Providing good service is key to retaining customers and that can turn into word of mouth and help us get new customers.”

Business executives should implement social media as a marketing tool to expand brand equity, foster customer loyalty, and increase profits (Zailskaite-Jaste & Kuvykaite, 2013). Engaging customers and prospects successfully through social media is an effective marketing strategy small, independent restaurant owners should explore (Jemaiyo, 2013; Zailskaite-Jaste & Kuvykaite, 2013). Participant WMP2 expressed the following opinion: “word of mouth and information blast on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are strategies. We have a social media person who is primarily in charge of marketing.” In addition, Participant REP2 stated:

Weekly email blasts inform them of current events, specials events, special offers, and social media to keep them interactive. Radio advertisement, word of mouth, having happy loyal guests who introduce others to the restaurant helps gain new customers. Group affiliations and large parties also help to introduce the restaurant to new customers. Both participants RMP1 and REP2 believed promoting business through word of mouth at birthday parties, wedding rehearsal dinners, and other large events create the opportunity to gain new customers.

Word of mouth communication is a good way for small, independent restaurant owners to strengthen brand image, increase customers’ loyalty, and acquire new customers (Lekhanya, 2014; Nejad et al., 2014).

Interview Question 2

As a small business, what are the barriers to your business and marketing strategies? The goal of this question was to examine the obstacles to business and marketing planning. Theme 2, limited financial resources, emerged from Interview Question 2. Executing brand strategies could help small, independent restaurant owners allocate and integrate resources to optimize business initiatives (Cheng, 2014). Profitability, financial performance, and business performance are elements of resource-advantage theory that support brand awareness and strategic business development efforts (Arnett & Madhavaram, 2012; Foss, 2012; Magnusson et al., 2013).

Theme 2: Limited Financial Resources

The second theme that emerged from participants' responses was limited financial resources. Findings showed that 42% of participants perceived limited financial resources as challenges to business and marketing strategies. Applying various resources is a pertinent resource-advantage marketing strategy for competitive advantage (Hunt, 2012). Participants were of the opinion that small, independent restaurant owners should allocate more funds for marketing innovation strategies as advanced by Cetinkaya and Kalkan (2014). Participant RMP2 indicated:

A barrier to our business and marketing strategies is the cost of mainstream advertising. We would like to implement mainstream advertising but it is expensive. You could blow your whole month budget on advertising in Philadelphia magazine. Traditional media outlets are expensive and it is unrealistic to spend \$6,000 a month on advertising, so email is 100% the way to go.

Participant WEP2 expressed, “A barrier for business is that we are not able to offer the higher wages as corporate and restaurant chains. The good thing is that we do not struggle with staff retention.” Participant GSMP2 asserted, “It is difficult to market because of the limited money we have to use toward marketing.” Participant WMP1 stated, “Two challenges are trying to make marketing work within the revenue you are able to generate and reviewing the price points for demographics. Customers look for a deal and value.”

Participants suggested that having access to valuable resources would help small, independent restaurant owners implement mainstream advertising and enhance the visibility and awareness of the brand (Bettiol et al., 2012; Magnusson et al., 2013). Participant REP2 added that as a small, independent restaurant, the concepts of business and marketing strategies are different from those of a chain restaurant. The budget does not permit constant recognition, large capital to do more radio spots, print media, and television advertisement. Participant WMP2 expressed:

A barrier is that we don't have the corporate backing because we are not a large business. Money can get tight, and we don't have millions of dollars to use on marketing. We can't do big commercials like Olive Garden or Red Lobster.”

The opinion of Participant WMP2 directly aligned with the theory that small business owners have to develop new approaches to marketing, different from big business owners, for effective customer engagement and sales (Harrigan et al., 2011).

Interview Question 3

What are the unique characteristics of your company's brand that guide marketing strategies?

Interview Question 4

How does your company position its brand for competitive advantage and profitability?

Through Interview Questions 3 and 4, I attempted to examine unique characteristics of the restaurant's brand that guide marketing strategies and how brand positioning influences competitive advantage and profitability. The third theme emerged from Interview Questions 3 and 4, product differentiation and atmosphere. Business executives can use brand attributes and CRM to enhance marketing productivity and maximize customer retention (Hajipour et al., 2013; Soliman, 2011). Small, independent restaurant owners can implement competitive intelligence, forecasting, and customers' perspective to develop product plans and product launch strategies (Barwise & Meehan, 2011).

Theme 3: Product Differentiation and Atmosphere

The third theme that emerged from participants' responses was product differentiation and atmosphere. Participants (100%) indicated excellent cuisine and the design and mood of the restaurant atmosphere are attributes, which guide marketing strategies, brand equity, and profitability. Hsu et al., (2012) identified customer service and restaurant ambience as marketing tools to build brand equity.

Cuisine and live entertainment. Operating in a competitive environment and meeting customer needs are pertinent aspects of competitive advantage and marketing (Sarathy & Banalieva, 2014). Participant WEP2 stated:

Our restaurant is one of the fewest places in Philly and the country that offers great entertainment and great cuisine. Now days its one or the other. We offer the best of both. It is not a lot of competition in that niche.

Participant REP1 posited:

We are a Soul Food Restaurant and one of a very few fine dining restaurants that showcases a soul food cuisine, on-site and off-site catering, private parties, and wedding rehearsal dinners; anything a guess wants, we cater to that. Additionally, we offer a fantastic buffet Brunch on Saturdays and Sundays and that sets us apart as one of the best in the city with the options we provide. We provide excellent service and a quality buffet brunch with an entire dining experience as a whole.

Participant GSMP2 expressed, “We have good healthy fast food; everything is made fresh, nothing frozen is made.”

Participant GSMP1 added:

We are very progressive. We offer fast-casual dining experiences. We bridge healthy eating and encourage better eating habits. Our food tastes great. We cater to each customer and because we are not a chain restaurant, we personalize our menu and services; this is what sets us apart from Qdoba and Chipotle.

Business executives should include marketing initiatives on lead generation, brand awareness, and brand consistency, to enhance sales and revenue growth (Ogunmokun & Tang, 2012; Torre et al., 2014).

Participant WMP2 stated, “The ambience, the live entertainment, and our food are unique characteristics. We are the only restaurant that has live entertainment in

Philadelphia, 7 days a week. You can't get that combination anywhere else." Participant REP2 posited, "Our brand position itself by staying on the cutting edge. It is important to continually keep looking for the next best thing. There are always new ideas to borrow, add, or use for quarterly marketing mix." The response from participant REP2 validated, marketing strategies should include unique brand image characteristics and product differentiation as the center of the marketing mix, to enhance profitability (Torre et al., 2014). Participant WMP2 expressed:

Not a lot of people have live music and entertainment 7 days and week. We are unique because we have headliners coming in nationally and locally. We have people who come from South Carolina and Georgia to see musicians and eat our great food. Our corn bread is well known; people come from all over for our corn bread. We don't serve crappy food; we serve great southern cuisines with 3 courses for a great price and a reasonable cover charge.

Participant WEP1 indicated, "We are unique because we have live music and entertainment 7 days a week. We have fun working here and even interact with musicians some times during performances. Managers talk to employees as human beings."

Participant RMP1 expressed the following opinion:

The unique characteristics of our company's brand that guide marketing strategies are (1) our atmosphere, (2) live music, (3) great food, (4) great service, and (5) our décor. We are located in the West Oak Lane section of Philadelphia, which is a small neighborhood but when you come inside our restaurant it has the feel of a

jazz club in center city Philadelphia. We give our guest a different experience with its own unique experience.

Atmosphere. Small restaurant owners should use brand equity building as a component for the competitive advantage and to increase brand awareness (Zailskaite-Jaste & Kuvykaite, 2013). Participant WMP2 stated:

We try to create a southern home-style hospitality atmosphere. We take a personal approach and are very hands on. Our performance stage is a foot away from the dining room. People are often smiling, having fun, and enjoying themselves. Guests are allowed to interact with artists and feel included in the music experience.

Participant RMP2 stated:

The things that make our brand better than our competitors is our hands on approach. The owners come to our place everyday. There is a family feel from the servers, managers, and hostess. Knowing that the owners are here makes us want to take care of our customers and offer a warm hospitality experience; there is no red tape.

Small, independent restaurant owners should use relationship marketing to retain customers and solicit ideas for new products (Catoiu & Tichindelean, 2012).

Participant RMP2 posited:

The owners offer an atmosphere and environment, which is warm and inviting; this environment lends to a family base of customers. We offer an upscale modern

environment and the finest in southern cuisine; the soul food and services we offer are the best in city.

Participant GSEP2 asserted, “We are encouraged to provide exceptional service to our guest. If I provide the customer with a great experience this will make him or her want to return to our restaurant.” Participant GSEP1 added, “Making sure each guest feels warm and welcomed is important. Giving the customer a good experience impacts my own profit. The goal is to increase guest retention.”

Participant GSMP1 stated:

We position our brand for competitive advantage and profitability by working toward being better and gauging perceived guest frustrations. We are so guest-oriented. We want people to have an experience that is positive and resonates with them. A guest is going to enjoy everything when he or she has a positive experience. Word-of-mouth communication is so powerful. We come from a company of successful restaurants. Two keys to profitability are (1) ensuring food is high quality and cost-effective and (2) consistency. Consistency is important with positioning our product for profit.

Participants indicated product differentiation increases brand image and brand awareness (Yang & Chiu, 2014). Participant WMP1 stated, “The ambience, the live entertainment, and our food are unique characteristics. We are the only restaurant that has live entertainment in Philadelphia, 7 days a week. You can’t get that combination anywhere else.”

Participant WMP2 added:

We take the time to make sure everything comes out consistently good and that the experience as a whole is not just about eating food, but it is about the exterior, interior, how we serve, and how we create that atmosphere.

Participant GSMP2 noted a differential advantage is that the food they serve is organic, hormone free, and chicken is farm raised. We have a clean atmosphere and it feels clean when you walk in our restaurant. Participant WEP1 added, “We create a comfortable and warm atmosphere for guest. We develop relationships with guests and this is why they come back to our restaurant over and over again.” All participants affirmed the need to integrate relationship marketing and brand positioning for business success and profitability (Borisavljevic, 2013; Hajipour et al., 2013).

Interview Question 5

How do you measure the success or failure of your marketing strategies?

Interview Question 6

How do you conduct your marketing profitability analysis?

Interview Question 7

What marketing performance tools have you implemented to track trends and calibrate profitability?

My intent of interview questions 5-7 was to explore performance tools used to measure marketing strategies, marketing profitability techniques, and tools to track trends. Theme 4 emerged, blogging and using the point of sale (POS) system. Using data analytics will help business executives measure the effectiveness marketing initiatives, social media engagement, and sales activities (Mitchell & Olsen, 2013).

Theme 4: Blogging and Using the Point of Sale (POS) System

The fourth theme that emerged from participants' responses was blogging and using the point of sale (POS) system. From the results, I found 42% of participants connected blogging and using the POS system as methods to measure marketing outcomes, profitability analysis, and trends. Responses from participants confirmed executives should use statistical information to track marketing development strategies, market strategy insights, and profit levels from sales trends (Janicic & Jankovic, 2014). Small business executives should compile data and prepare reports of marketing material expenditures and POS promotional expenses to identify product and market trends for profitability (Kalafatis et al., 2012). Participant WEP2 asserted, "We position our brand through careful analysis of each promotion through the POS system. Every manager is required to blog every night via Google. Staff are encouraged to use social media."

Participant REP2 stated, "Our POS system helps us to see increase and decrease of business. There are also consistent business cycles and trends we can manipulate to increase profitability". Participant RMP2 asserted, "We use spreadsheets, weekly Google blogs, look at seasonality and holidays, and review blogs from previous years to analyze and track trends." Small, independent restaurants owners can use sales history to execute sales strategies and target prospective customers (Cheng, 2014).

Participant REP1 advanced:

Guest turn out is a way we measure the success or failure of our marketing strategies. An example would be if guest turnout is lower than projected. If we receive a lot of reservations but not the guest turnout to match those reservation

numbers, this is not considered a failure but rather us not hitting our target. When guests don't show up we have to evaluate why.

Participant WMP1 had a similar perspective:

We use blogs, and track the number of covers, and our owner track trends on a macro level to calibrate profitability. We have had one of our best years ever this past year. If our guests are happy, the buzz out there is good.

Participant REP1, however, was not aware of how to conduct marketing profitability analysis for the restaurant. Participant GSMP2 stated:

We retrieve information from our employees and blogs to track trends. If we change the recipe for turkey chili and customers don't like the change, it will show on our sales report; that prompts us to go back to our original recipe.

The response from participant GSMP2 coincides with the opinion that modifying product characteristics when necessary is an important element of brand loyalty (Schmidt & Ralph, 2014; Zailskaite-Jaste & Kuvykaite, 2013).

Participant WEP2 advanced, "We measure through blog recording; an example would be if 65 out of 100 people go for a promotion, the marketing strategy was obviously successful." Participant WEP2 added, "We use blogging and POS as tools. We can look to see how many people actually went to a promotion. We track trends and even go back 10 years to review feedback and trends." Five participants (GSMP1, REP1, RMP1, RMP2, and WEP2), 67% of managers and 17% of employees, discussed other marketing methods, such as bounce back cards, open table, Yelp, comment card, feedback box, and the restaurant website for measuring marketing strategies for

profitability. Small, independent restaurant owners can implement forecasting tools to monitor sales volume and buying trends of customers for profitability (Swenson et al., 2012).

Bounce back cards. Participant WEP2, asserted:

The biggest is the bounce back cards we give out to our staff to create a personal relationship with guests. Staff put their own name on the card so guests come back and ask for them. We give out complimentary desserts, drinks, and for loyal customers we take care of their bill from time to time. Promotions and outside promoters help us gain new customers. We wow new customers when they are here to keep them.

Open table. Participant RMP2 posited, “We also use open table and grubhub to retain current customers and gain new customers. Participant RMP1 stated, “We use open table services, which allow us to see and gain access on how to expand our reservation count and is another avenue to bring in new guests.”

Yelp. Participant GSMP1 expressed, “Reviews on yelp are very helpful. We read the reviews on yelp and take in consideration what customers say and respond when necessary. I would like to implement a system to respond directly to positive and negative reviews.”

Comment card, feedback box, and restaurant website. Participant REP1 stated:

We use a comment card, a feedback box, our website, and open table services as marketing performance tools to track and calibrate profitability. The comment

card has options to rate areas such as: atmosphere, price value, service, and food with a rating scale of 1-5, 5 being the highest rating. There is a box in our restaurant where guest can write how they feel; there is also promotional material on our website and social media information.

Interview Question 8

What are your strategies to help maximize profitability? My intent of this question was to examine strategies used to maximize profitability. Theme 5 emerged, employee engagement and upselling. Promoting innovative initiatives with customers and staff may improve profitability (Markides, 2012). Small, independent restaurant owners should apply employee engagement as a strategic approach to understand customers' preferences and exceed sales quotas (Barwise & Meehan, 2011).

Theme 5: Employee Engagement and Upselling

The fifth theme that emerged from participants' responses was employee engagement and upselling. Findings indicated 33% of participants thought employee engagement and upselling were strategies used in the restaurant, which help maximize profitability. I found, increasing sales through new product launches and positioning strategies may help managers meet sales target (Cetinkaya & Kalkan, 2014). Managers and employees validated small, independent restaurant owners should implement offensive marketing strategies to raise purchase frequency (Vivek et al., 2012).

Participant WEP2 indicated that:

Staff are empowered through the bounce back card. Employees are provided with their own personal business cards. Managers promote staff initiatives such as mini contest and prizes, i.e.. whoever sells the most gets a free meal or wine.

Participant WEP1 stated:

When we come up with new event ideas we are able to work those events. Once I did a West African Extravaganza; the bosses and managers are always open to hear new ideas. We are looked at as more than servers or bussers.

Participant WMP2 expressed the following opinion:

I am a coach for my staff. Staff can kill business or they may help business thrive. When thinking about strategies to help maximize profitability, you can't forget the importance of having motivated staff. Our young staff between the ages of 18-25 have a lot of insight of what's new, help bring in more clients, upsell guests, and build relationships with guests; this makes guests want to come back. An example is when guests come in and say I want to be seated in Mark's section or a bartender lets me know about an innovative idea. The owner has a good relationship with managers and managers have a good relationship with staff. It starts from the top. The owners are always here.

Participant RMP2 asserted, "We try to upsell our customers, give a bounce back card for free dessert, and suggest customers tell a friend. We also try to promote our business and improve our marketing strategies."

Connecting Findings to Conceptual Framework

The brand equity model, developed by Aaker (1991), was the conceptual framework used to complement this doctoral study. The five brand equity components of the model include:

1. Brand loyalty:
 - a. Retaining and attracting new customers
 - b. Decreased marketing costs
2. Brand awareness:
 - a. Associations
 - b. Familiarity
 - c. Customer purchasing process
3. Perceived quality:
 - a. Product differentiation
 - b. Various sales channels
4. Brand associations:
 - a. Retrieve associations via a form of advertising
 - b. Contribute to brand differentiation
5. Other proprietary brand assets:
 - a. Patents
 - b. Proprietary rights

Analysis of participants' data confirmed the brand equity theory of marketing developed by Aaker (1991) was appropriate and relevant to exploring the profitability of the

marketing strategies used by three small, independent restaurants. Participant responses and themes aligned with the five components outlined in Aaker's brand equity model.

Components 1-3: Brand loyalty, brand awareness, and perceived quality.

Responses from managers and employees linked to brand loyalty, brand awareness, and perceived quality, which coincide with the components of Aaker's brand equity model. Participants (96%) acknowledged Theme 1 and Theme 3, restaurant environment and product differentiation as unique brand characteristics of marketing strategies that foster profitability. Participants stated that customers are loyal and continue to come to the restaurant because of brand loyalty, which helps with marketing via word of mouth (Aaker, 1991). Study findings confirmed marketing strategies, which include designing and redesigning products, as necessary, and could help small business executives sustain competitive advantage and increase profits (Civic, 2013). Positive customer relationships promote successful product launches and improve brand equity (Agarwal et al., 2012).

Components 1 and 2: Brand loyalty and brand associations. Derived from Theme 1 and Theme 2, an average of 67% of participants for both themes, advanced the importance of using innovative ways to advertise a business and expand a customer base. Small business executives should distribute resources proportionately because of limited financial resources (Baker, 2013). The study results confirmed small business executives should implement different marketing strategies because they do not have the resources of large business executives (Harrigan et al., 2011). Findings of the study validated the need for small business executives, such a small, independent restaurant owners with

limited financial resources, to decrease marketing costs through word of mouth and social media marketing (Aaker 1991; Harrigan et al., 2011). Perspectives from participants linked to brand loyalty and brand associations, which are elements of Aaker's brand equity model.

Component 3: Perceived quality. Developed from Theme 5, participants (33%) believed offering additional products to customers and promoting employee involvement are different sales channels small, independent restaurant owners can use as marketing profitability strategies. Implementing various sales channels are elements of perceived quality (Aaker, 1991). Results from the study confirmed managers should involve employees in strategic brand development initiatives to maximize profitability (Holland & Weather, 2013). Small, independent restaurant owners should apply personal selling to convince customers to purchase additional products and meet revenue goals (Mohammed, Rashid, & Tahir, 2014; Khan, 2014b).

Relating Findings to Literature on Effective Business Practice

I used the results from the study to validate word of mouth as a powerful marketing strategy small business executives should use because positive word of mouth marketing has a stronger influence on brand purchase probability (Aaker, 1991; Vázquez-Casielles et al., 2013). Executives can use valuable resources and customer relationship marketing to influence marketing planning and develop marketing programs (Magnusson et al., 2013; Pepe, 2012). The findings of the study confirmed limited financial resources could constitute barriers when developing and executing marketing plans to meet profit targets (Bettiol et al., 2012). Results confirmed executives should create a portfolio

strategy that includes product development and brand equity to improve profitability levels (Khan, 2014b; Mohammed et al., 2014; Stahl et al., 2012).

Theme 3 on product differentiation and atmosphere aligned with literature on effective brand strategies. Small business managers can drive brand development and create new platforms for market campaigns (Pantano & Corvello, 2013). Small, independent restaurant owners should incorporate marketing practices to promote the brand image, drive sales, and interface with customers for a high level of level of customer satisfaction (Shah et al., 2012).

Applications to Professional Practice

The findings of this study apply to small business executives such as small, independent restaurant owners. Most participants advanced the importance of implementing brand equity as a fundamental marketing strategy for profitability. Small, independent restaurant owners should ensure that brand initiatives are consistent with priorities, strategies, and brand equities, and should align with business processes and initiatives across brands (Zailskaite-Jaste & Kuvykaite, 2013). As opined by Dogramatzis (2012), to maximize profitability, small business executives should deliver a financial strategy for brands including:

- Identify financial and performance gaps
- Review forecasting tools
- Differentiate product advantages
- Provide pricing strategy recommendations
- Examine marketing and trade plans

Small, independent restaurant executives can improve business practice through marketing profitability analysis (Sarathy & Banalieva, 2014). Executives should evaluate the research market environment, competitive environment, and competitive pricing in the market to focus on brand valuation (Sarathy & Banalieva). Aligning brand equity strategies with product-market goals and profit goals can help business executives assess competitive initiatives (Mohammed et al., 2014; Swenson et al., 2012). Small business executives should provide appropriate competitive responses including POS reports, advertising, marketing programs, and adjust brand equity strategies accordingly (Janicic & Jankovic, 2014).

Executives, managers, and employees can use the applicability of the findings with respect to the professional practice of business to gain competitive advantage, through a SWOT analysis of competitor's strengths and weaknesses and marketing a high brand image for profitability (Cheng, 2014; Janicic & Jankovic, 2014). Managers can examine marketing strategies and provide feedback to executives on effective collateral materials to ensure promotional materials costs align with the revenue allotted and decrease marketing costs (Aaker, 1991). Small business executives can establish and implement strategic and tactical communications plans to capitalize on market opportunities, generate demand, and create brand awareness (Andrew, 2011). Small, independent restaurant owners can use blogging and POS as tools to measure the return on marketing program investments (Shin, 2013).

Executives should use word of mouth and social media marketing as cost-effective marketing strategies to foster brand loyalty, organizational growth, and

profitability (Aaker, 1991; Koutroumanis, 2011; Vázquez-Casielles et al., 2013). Small business owners can implement customer loyalty and relationship marketing to sustain competitive advantage for profitability (Alvarez et al., 2011; Hashem, 2012). Business executives should use brands to cultivate customer relationships (Bettiol et al., 2012).

When exploring marketing strategies for profitability, small, independent restaurant owners should manage brand equity activities to increase customer base and revenues, optimize the marketing mix, and analyze the effectiveness of sales channels to improve business practice. Using brand equity can help managers quantify marketing strategies for sales and profitability (Keller & Fay, 2012). Small, independent restaurant owners should focus on unique brand characteristics, quality, and reliability of their brand to build and maintain relationships customers (Stahl et al., 2012).

Implications for Social Change

The implications for positive social change of this study include the following integrated approaches to business sustainability: (a) business development for small businesses and strategies for financial resources, (b) training programs to support new entrepreneurs and the public and, (c) free webinars on marketing strategies for communities and organizations. Small business owners should develop and foster relationships with communities and other organizations to help grow business development opportunities and identify marketplace opportunities (Tawanda et al., 2013). Small business executives can act as a liaison to gain an understanding of important trends and issues affecting the community (Fiore et al., 2013). Analysts for small businesses can use marketing strategies to manage business sustainability, increase

opportunities for community growth, create jobs, and develop social resources through the investment of capital (Jasra et al., 2011).

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

Recommendations for Action

Based on the five themes identified from semistructured interviews, analyzing participants' responses, and methodical triangulation of archival business records, I have made three recommendations for small business executives, such as small, independent restaurant owners.

I recommend small, independent restaurant owners develop marketing strategies that include employee engagement. Managers should promote learning resources for employees on effective marketing strategies (Ogunmokun & Tang, 2012). Owners should ensure employees are engaged and made fully aware of tracking mechanisms such

as blogging, comment cards, and the POS to enhance business performance (Shin, 2013). Creating a scorecard of metrics and using archival employee engagement data may help executives identify areas of success and failure of marketing strategies. Executives should offer incentives to motivate employees to develop and share best practices for efficient marketing from indirect and direct interactions with customers (Vivek et al., 2012). Implementing important metrics to determine overall effectiveness based on employee engagement activities can help increase profitability levels (Swenson et al., 2012).

I recommend small, independent restaurant owners create a cross-functional team of managers and employees to act as brand liaisons. The cross-functional team can manage new product launches and promotional programs. Owners should align the brand portfolio with product roadmaps, sales and marketing strategies, and industry trends (Markides, 2012). Managers can use brand associations and customer relationship marketing as performance tools to track trends, calibrate profitability, and retain and gain new customers (Aaker 1991; Abernathy et al., 2013; Chiang, 2013; Mitchell & Olsen, 2013). Executives should collaborate with managers to explore innovative ways to maximize profits through relationship marketing, customer acquisition, and customer retention (Khan, 2014a; Vivek et al., 2012).

I recommend small, independent restaurant executives allocate more resources toward social media marketing to increase brand loyalty, profits, and ROI (Aaker 1991; Omar et al., 2011). Executives should ensure social media marketing activities align with business goals and profit strategies (Radu, 2013). Small, independent restaurant owners

need to create ways to implement marketing strategies that promote business across social media channels such as Blogs, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, and local radio and television stations (Koutroumanis, 2011; Zailskaite-Jaste & Kuvykaite, 2013). Managers should use social media to engage current and new customers, which may lead to word of mouth referrals and communications. I recommend executives apply customers' reviews to improve brand strategies and monitor social media networks for brand consistency (Keller & Fay, 2012). Administrators should encourage managers and employees to collaborate to support social media daily interaction, such as blogging and tweeting.

The knowledge base and feedback from nonmanagerial employees can help small, independent restaurant owners explore effective marketing strategies. Responses to the interview questions may help managers tailor their overarching marketing strategies to deliver brand equity and marketing initiatives from management to nonmanagerial employees, from employees directly to customers in a way that promotes profitability. Executives can see if equitable knowledge of marketing strategies between nonmanagerial employees and managers and conduct professional development as needed.

Small business owners, marketing managers, brand managers, and entrepreneurs need to pay attention to the findings from this study. I will send an email to the restaurant owner to inform the study results are completed. The email will request the owner to contact me via phone if he would like a summary of the research findings. I will provide a debriefing session of the study results via phone after completion of the

research. Research results will not be disseminated via email or in person. Also, I will disseminate the results of this study at small business expos, business-networking events, call for paper conferences, the Philadelphia Small Business Association, and through the ProQuest/UMI dissertation database.

Recommendations for Further Research

The study was designed to explore marketing strategies management can implement for profitability in small, independent restaurants. Limitations of this study were a multiple case study of three small, independent restaurants, a sample size of 12 participants, and a target group of managers and employees. I included and interviewed nonmanagerial employees, as participants because I believed data are pertinent to employees just as much as managers. Often employees are the primary implementers of marketing strategies and have substantial input about marketing strategies in the restaurants where they work. Employees directly and indirectly apply marketing strategies when they serve customers and provide anecdotal insight into areas such as marketing strategies for competitive advantage and profitability. I obtained sufficient data to answer the central research question and identified pertinent themes from managers and employees. I recommend further studies to expand the multiple case study to six small, independent restaurants and include more employee related interview questions, to provide additional approaches to effective marketing and improve business practice.

Another limitation of this qualitative study was obtaining approval from the executive to use the restaurants and review archival business records, prior to submitting

the IRB application to Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The limitation was because of time constraints; the executive is the owner of the three independent restaurants used in the study. Independent restaurants can have the same owner because they are not a chain or part of a national chain. I presented the purpose of the doctoral study and potential benefits to the executive and addressed concerns before initiating the study. A quantitative correlation study to examine the relationship between resource allocation and the two variables, marketing strategies and profitability levels may provide additional information on effective marketing techniques and innovative practices to improve business performance (Sallee & Flood, 2012).

Reflections

My passion for developing and implementing business processes and creating new approaches for business sustainability was the reason I chose to explore marketing strategies for profitability. In my community, four small, independent restaurants closed within a year of operation, which prompted me to use three small, independent restaurants in my study. I had a preconceived idea that once receiving approval from the IRB, collecting and analyzing data would be easy. I underestimated the amount of time and level of tediousness it took to transcribe the data personally. Interviews with each participant were rewarding. The business culture of all three restaurants was exceptional; Participant responses showed how the culture replicated in each restaurant. I was amazed at the level of buy-in staff showed. Policies and customer retention strategies were similar at the restaurants. The results of this study confirmed my proposition that innovative business approaches to services and brands should include input from

nonmanagerial employees. I believe that employees can support managers and executives with business development efforts and marketing initiatives to maintain best practices for profitability.

Summary and Study Conclusions

In this qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study, I explored what marketing strategies the executive of three small, independent restaurants needed to generate profit. Five themes emerged from the study: (a) word of mouth and social media marketing, (b) limited financial resources, (c) product differentiation and atmosphere, (d) blogging and using the point of sale (POS) system, and (e) employee engagement and upselling. Ninety-two percent of participants indicated the importance of using word of mouth and social media as marketing strategies for customer retention and customer acquisition. One hundred percent of participants believed the southern cuisine, custom menus, design, and the ambiance of the restaurants are elements, which guide marketing strategies, brand equity, competitive advantage, and profitability. Participants noted limited financial resources are barriers to business and marketing strategies, but expressed using cost-effective strategies such as word of mouth and social media marketing may increase profits while operating within budgetary constraints.

The study population of managers and employees from three small, independent restaurants helped me explore diverse business practices and innovative marketing strategies for profitability. I found small business owners, such as small, independent restaurant owners, can implement effective marketing strategies and align profit and business development objectives to their brand with limited financial resources. I

concluded from the findings that brand awareness, brand equity, product characteristics and positioning, and marketing communications activities could help executives maximize profitability and create a competitive advantage.

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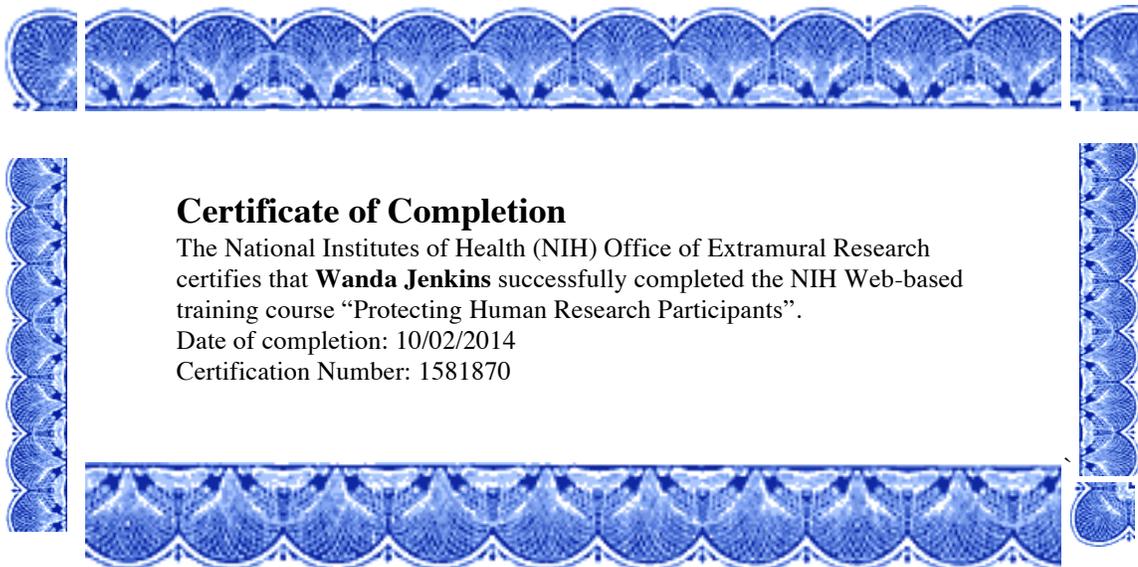
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Appendix A: National Institutes of Health (NIH) Certificate



Appendix B: Introductory Letter for Executives

Dear Executive,

My name is Wanda Y. Jenkins and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am pursuing a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) degree with a specialization in Leadership. I am conducting a qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study titled: *Marketing Strategies for Profitability in Small Independent Restaurants*. The purpose of this study is to determine what marketing strategies small, independent restaurants need for profitability. This study may affect business practices for small, independent restaurants, such as yours, by showcasing to business leaders the importance of strategic marketing to level sustainability, long-term profitable growth, brand equity, and competitive advantage.

As part of this study, I am requesting authorization from you to conduct semistructured interviews with open-ended questions with your managers and employees from three small, independent restaurants, for the purpose of data collection. Interviews will be conducted outside of work hours via telephone. I understand that employees' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

Here are some sample questions:

- What are the marketing strategies used to retain current customers and gain new customers?
- As a small business, what are the barriers to your business and marketing strategies?
- What are the unique characteristics of your company's brand that guide marketing strategies?

If you grant me permission to conduct the study using your restaurant and employees, please review, sign and email or scan the Letter of Cooperation to me at xxxx.xxxx@xxxx.xxxx. Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at [REDACTED]xxxx.

Sincerely,
Wanda Y. Jenkins

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Participants will answer the following questions:

1. What are the marketing strategies used to retain current customers and gain new customers?
2. As a small business, what are the barriers to your business and marketing strategies?
3. What are the unique characteristics of your company's brand that guide marketing strategies?
4. How does your company position its brand for competitive advantage and profitability?
5. How do you measure the success or failure of your marketing strategies?
6. How do you conduct your marketing profitability analysis?
7. What marketing performance tools have you implemented to track trends and calibrate profitability?
8. What are your strategies to help maximize profitability?

Appendix D: Letter of Cooperation

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

April 24, 2015

Dear Wanda Y. Jenkins,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Marketing Strategies for Profitability in Small Independent Restaurants. As part of this study, I authorize you to conduct semistructured interviews with open-ended questions for the purpose of data collection. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: A list from the human resources department of employees who have been employed with the restaurant for a minimum of six months and have one-year prior experience in the restaurant industry; and a list of managers who have a minimum of one year of experience providing direct supervision. Lists will include employee names, job position, and contact information: email addresses and telephone numbers.

I authorize approval for you to conduct research. I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential, and no one outside of the research team will receive data without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Authorization Official:

[REDACTED]

Contact Information:

[REDACTED]

Appendix E: Informed Consent Form for Participants

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Wanda Y. Jenkins and I am a student at Walden University pursuing a doctoral degree in business administration. You are invited to take part in a research study I am conducting titled: *Marketing Strategies for Profitability in Small Independent Restaurants*. You were chosen for this study because you are an employee or manager of a small, independent restaurant. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to determine what marketing strategies small, independent restaurants need for profitability. This study may contribute to business practices by helping small businesses identify and determine factors that combat innovative approaches to improving revenue, profitability, and market share.

Participation in the study requires the following criteria:

- All employees must be 18 years of age or older
- All employees must be employed at the restaurant for a minimum of six months and have one-year prior experience in the restaurant industry.
- Managers specifically must have a minimum of one year of experience providing direct supervision
- Employees and managers must have a general knowledge base of marketing

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in an interview via telephone for the duration of 30-45 minutes.
- Be interviewed on a day and time agreed upon with the researcher.
- Agree to allow the researcher to audio-record the interview through FreeConferenceCall.com
- Engage in participant feedback, by reviewing the data from your interview to determine if your statements are accurate and propose corrections if necessary.

Here are some sample questions:

- What are the marketing strategies used to retain current customers and gain new customers?
- As a small business, what are the barriers to your business and marketing strategies?
- What are the unique characteristics of your company’s brand that guide marketing strategies?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. Your decision will be respected whether or not you choose to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. Participation in this study poses no risks. The benefit of being in the study allows your knowledge base and feedback to be used to help small businesses explore effective marketing strategies.

Payment:

You will not receive any payment, thank you gifts, or reimbursements to participate in this study.

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. Your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports will not be included. You will be assigned an identifier code, which will be included in the study to maintain confidentiality. Your interview will be deleted from FreeConferenceCall.com (Conference account) after all data has been transcribed by me and verified by you. Data will be kept secure in an electronic file requiring a password. I will be the only one to have the password and access to the data. All data collected and organized in the file will be stored in a safe cabinet with a lock for 5 years and destroyed after the study has concluded, as required by Walden University.

Contacts and Questions:

Should you have any questions now or later, you may contact me at [REDACTED] xxxx and/or at xxxx.xxxx@xxxx.xxx. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is xxx-xxx-xxxx. Walden University's approval number for this study is **05-22-15-0169162** and it expires on **May 21, 2016**.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. **By replying via email with the words, "I consent, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above"**.

Please keep this consent form for your records.