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## Entrepreneurial Strategies to Mitigate the High Failure Rates of Small Retail Businesses

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

James A. Latour

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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2021

Abstract

Entrepreneurial Strategies to Mitigate the High Failure Rates of Small Retail Businesses

by

James A Latour

MS, Liberty University, 2007

MA, University of Illinois, 2010

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

October 2021

## Abstract

The high rate of business failures within the first 5 years negatively affects half of startup business owners. Small retail business owners who fail to develop innovative entrepreneurial strategies experience high failure rates within the first 5 years of operation. Grounded in self-determination theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore entrepreneurial strategies small retail business owners use to support long-term sustainability. Participants were five small retail business owners from Southern Illinois who successfully used entrepreneurial strategies to reduce high failure rates. Data were collected from semistructured interviews and internal documents relevant to reducing high failure rates and analyzed using Yin's 5-step process. Three themes emerged: (a) entrepreneurial mindset, (b) social media strategy, and (c) innovation. A key recommendation is that small retail business owners have a positive mental attitude and take calculated risks. The implications for positive social change include the potential to increase employment opportunities and to improve the quality of life for residents in local communities.

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## Dedication

I want to dedicate this doctoral study to my family who supported me throughout the process, especially my wife Candice – and kids (Jameson, Chloe, Isaac, Layla, and Mathias). I would not have started this journey without your motivation and advice. I want to thank you all for encouraging me to continue the journey, even when I wanted to quit. I want thank the Lord for giving me guidance and support when I felt like giving up.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The contributions of small retail businesses include the employment of over 100 million people aiding both the local Illinois economy and the U.S. economy (U.S. Small Business Administration [SBA], 2016). However, more than 80% of small businesses fail within the first 5 years of operation (SBA, 2018). Small business leaders need entrepreneurial strategies to retain customers, overcome barriers, and succeed as small retail businesses (Browne et al., 2018).

### **Background of the Problem**

In 2016, the Small Business Administration (SBA) reported that small businesses account for over 55% of all jobs in the United States (SBA, 2016). However, many small businesses fail within the first 5 years of operation for various reasons. Small business failure because of the increased cost of doing business, country taxes, regulations, and unfair competition (Spinelli et al., 2017). Moreover, some small businesses could fail from economic recessions and financial hardship (Scott & Pressman, 2017). According to Paterson (2018), small businesses fail because of bankruptcies, liquidity, or solvency issues. Therefore, small retail business leaders need to understand the factors hindering business success and develop innovative strategies to deter business failures.

### **Problem Statement**

Small business leaders' inability to develop innovative strategies could result in business failure (Johnson, 2015). According to the SBA (2018), more than 80% of startup businesses fail within 5 years of beginning operations. The general business problem is that some small retail businesses do not have innovative strategies for long term business

survival. The specific business problem is that some small retail business leaders lack innovative entrepreneurial strategies to sustain business beyond the first 5 years of operation.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore innovative entrepreneurial strategies small retail business leaders use to sustain business beyond the first 5 years of operation. The target population consists of five small retail business leaders in the Belleville, Illinois area who succeeded in using innovative strategies to maintain operations beyond the first 5 years in business. The research question for this multiple case study was: What innovative entrepreneurial strategies do small retail business leaders use to sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operation? The implications for positive social change rest in employment opportunities resulting from business sustainability leading to poverty elimination in the local community.

### **Nature of the Study**

The three conventional research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. A qualitative method is suitable in a study in which a researcher plans to understand the study phenomenon by asking and how and what questions (Colorafi & Evans, 2016; Isaacs, 2014). Huang et al. (2015) described quantitative research to test hypotheses and examine relationships among variables. The quantitative method is not suitable as I do not plan to test hypotheses. Turner et al., (2017) posited that the mixed method is the appropriate methodology when both qualitative and quantitative approach is necessary to understand the study phenomenon. A mixed method is not appropriate in

the merit that a quantitative approach does not apply to the study. The qualitative approach is appropriate as I plan to explore the study phenomenon by examining participants' perspectives through semistructured how and what interview questions.

The qualitative designs include phenomenological, ethnography, narrative, and case study designs. Phenomenology researchers seek to describe the meanings of the participants' lived experiences about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers use the ethnography design to describe facets of culture grounded on observed phenomena (Jamali, 2018). In a narrative design, a researcher explores participants' personal experiences in a storytelling format (Nigar, 2020). Scholars use qualitative case study designs for exploring specific phenomena bounded by time and space (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2018). The case study design is descriptive and exploratory, and commonly used in entrepreneurship research (Pathiranage et al., 2020; Tomski, 2017).

The phenomenological design does not apply to this study as I am not seeking participants' lived experiences. Ethnography design and narrative design are not suitable because the purpose is not to conduct an investigation in a cultural setting or to collect data in a narrative format. The multiple case study design aligns because the research goal is to collect in-depth information in a specific setting using semistructured interviews from multiple small retail business leaders in Belleville, Illinois. Multiple case study designs could produce more theoretical replication, strengthening the studies over a single case study design (Yin, 2018).

### **Research Question**

What innovative entrepreneurial strategies do small retail business leaders use to sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operation?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What innovative entrepreneurial strategies did you use to stay in business beyond 5 years?
2. What kind of barriers did you encounter while implementing innovative entrepreneurial strategies?
3. How did you overcome the key barriers to implementing these innovative entrepreneurial strategies?
4. How did you measure the success of these innovative entrepreneurial strategies?
5. Based upon your experience, what leadership approaches do you think are essential to succeed as an entrepreneurial small retail business?
6. What lessons have you learned from developing and using entrepreneurial strategies to sustain your business beyond 5 years?
7. What other information could you provide that adds value to this study?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The self-determination theory (SDT), as developed by Deci and Ryan in 1985, is the conceptual framework for this study. The main construct of the theory is to explain the human desire for self-sufficiency, capability, and understanding (Sipe, 2018). The self-determination theory helps business leaders find answers to what and why goal

attainment and the human need to succeed (Thibault-Landry et al., 2018). The self-determination theory is an appropriate conceptual lens for this study because, according to Sipe, the tenet of the theory supports the notion of motivating people by addressing their psychological needs, which are competency, connections, and autonomy.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Advanced persistent threat (APT):* APT is a stealth computer network threat act from either nation-state, state-sponsored group, or criminal group that gains access to BCI over a sustained period (Kaukola et al., 2017).

*Business critical information (BCI):* Information vital to the operation of the business and loss would result in catastrophic financial losses (Kaukola et al., 2017).

*Business model innovation (BMI):* Examining the status quo and expanding the boundaries of how the small business owner views the customer, the product, and the business (Yi et al., 2020).

*Coronavirus (COVID-19):* This is a new and more deadly virus not previously known to humans and causes upper-respiratory-tract issues and possible death (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2020).

*Human capital theory (HCT):* The investment in education and training that an individual contributes to the labor force through productivity in the workforce or job market (Holden, 2016).

*Pestal:* Concept involving the political, economic, socioculture, technology, environment, and legal aspects of analyzing entry of a business into the market (Espinoza et al., 2019).



*Resilience*: The ability to discover, defeat, and adjust to multiple threats from insiders, natural disasters, cyber-attacks, and epidemics, while maintaining business sustainability (Kativhu et al., 2018)

*Small business*: Small business refers to a firm with fewer than 500 employees (SBA, 2016).

*Sustainability*: Refers to small business owners' options to increase social change in many communities (Johnson, 2015).

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

#### **Assumptions**

Researchers use assumptions to study relevant facts and when adopting a more objective and utilitarian emphasis in the study (Strijker et al., 2020). Assumptions in the qualitative method are philosophical in nature and style oriented rather than an analysis of data points (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). This study has two assumptions. The first assumption is that participants have at least 5 years of leadership in small business retail in the desired location. The second assumption is that all participants will answer the questions honestly and to the best of their ability. The qualitative method is essential for researchers to study and achieve the required minimum sample size in relation to the size of the population, and depth of understanding of small business firms' strategy beyond 5 years (Boddy, 2016).

#### **Limitations**

Researchers understand limitations as weaknesses, not in their control, and can affect results (Nelson, 2016). The first limitation depends on the small business leader to

answer the questions using their experiences, successes, and failures. The second limitation is a misinterpretation of findings and potential researcher bias. In this study, there is a potential for small business owners to hide real operational strategies of success and willingness to disclose trade secrets with a researcher. The researcher can mitigate these items by reviewing available public information on the company. Last, focusing on business leaders in one Illinois city may limit the generalizability of the study's conclusions in relation to rural and big city areas.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations define restrictions and the bounds of the study during the research and analysis development (Yin, 2018). The study involved small retail business owner strategies to stay in business past the five-year mark. Another delimitation of the study included five small retail business owners who made between \$100,000 and \$500,000 gross revenues. The interviews will consist of retail business owners' expertise and strategies explored concerning this phenomenon.

### **Significance of the Study**

The contributions of small retail businesses include the employment of over 115.1 million employees and are significant in aiding the local Illinois economy but the U.S. economy as well (SBA, 2016). In this study, small retail business leaders may learn of other strategies to succeed past the 5-year mark in business and incorporate other retail businesses' tactics. The goal was to identify and explore the strategies that contributed to the successes of the participating businesses and the associated implications for effecting general beneficial social change.

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Small retail businesses provide a base for catalyzing and sustaining economies by promoting economic development in many communities in the United States (SBA, 2018). The results of this study might create awareness of strategies that other small retail businesses could potentially use to improve and sustain performance and profitability. Furthermore, by understanding innovative entrepreneurial strategies, some small business leaders may mitigate business failure within 5 years of operation.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Small retail businesses contribute to improving the human condition by providing economic stability at the local level (SBA, 2018). Successful small retail businesses catalyze positive social change and may promote societal development when they stay in business past the 5-year mark. A study of this nature could be useful in providing awareness of strategies to reduce business failures which could affect general beneficial social change by ensuring economic prosperity through increasing employment in local communities.

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

This review of professional and academic literature focused on writings related to small retail businesses that survive beyond 5 years of operation and explore the entrepreneurial strategies of these businesses. The central research question is: What entrepreneurial strategies do small retail business leaders use to sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operation? The databases used for the search included: Walden University library, Thoreau, EBSCO Discovery Service, ABI / Inform, Business Source

Complete, Emerald Insight, SAGE journals, Science Direct, and peer-reviewed journals between 2015 and 2020. I used the following search terms: *self-sufficiency, business strategies, entrepreneurship, successful business strategies, autonomy, competence, relatedness, optimization, and small business failures*. The literature review involved reviewing 198 sources, out of which 86% were peer-reviewed and 85% published within the last 5 years (2016 or later) of approval of the Chief Academic Officer.

### **Self-Determination Theory**

Deci and Ryan (1985) developed the self-determination theory (SDT) to answer the what and why of goal attainment and the human need to succeed (Thibault-Landry et al., 2018). Other researchers contributed to the body of entrepreneurial strategies knowledge by explaining the human desire for self-sufficiency, capability, and understanding (Sipe, 2018). Entrepreneurial strategies apply to multiple business fields and relate to self-sufficiency, capability, and empirical nature (Jacobi, 2018; Rayburn et al., 2018; Wisniewski et al., 2018).

Deci and Ryan found that lack of self-determination leads to bad decision-making in their seminal research into self-determination, which is essential for entrepreneurial strategy development (Barrable & Arvanitis, 2018). Today's global business environment requires entrepreneurial strategies like self-determination because this theory supports development, inspiration and shows how people relate to one another (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). The SDT provides a framework that includes multiple ingredients: autonomy, competence, relatedness, and optimization, leading to the ideal function and growth for a small business owner (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

To understand how self-determination works, researchers should look through the lens of autonomy. Munro and O’Kane (2017) explained how artisan business owners use the autonomy lens to break free from corporate ideas, enjoy freedom, and control from having a boss. Still, other researchers looked at the autonomy lens to achieve self-control of the environment by having an entrepreneurial orientation that incorporates leadership, originality, and opportunities (Gamst et al., 2018). Gardner (2017) addressed how autonomy uses a push/pull method in different eras of workers who want more freedom, decision-making, and satisfaction (pull). The bureaucratic government agencies want to retain control (pull). This dichotomy shows how SDT uses autonomy in businesses and organizations, which leads to the next point in self-determination – competence.

Researchers investigated SDT by highlighting competence as a key criterion in running a business. Prasastyoga et al. (2018) studied 114 small business growth beliefs (SBGBs) to understand the importance of a leader with a promotion-focused outcome. Prasastyoga et al. found that professed competence is necessary for running a small business successfully. Managerial competency leads to correct decisions, and an entrepreneurial outlook help business owner to explore future opportunities and maintain sustainable growth (Zacca & Dayun, 2018). Competence results in the trust of clients and relationship building (Tan et al., 2016). Competence could increase business networks and attract the interest of investors (Hain & Jurowetzki, 2018; Torkkeli et al., 2019). Business competence could enable business lenders to obtain external funding for business sustainability.

Relatedness in the SDT lens is about connectivity to stakeholders. Schummer et al. (2019) used the European Workers Condition Survey (EWCS 2010) to analyze how German entrepreneurs used relatedness to improve business success. Schummer et al. found that entrepreneurs were persistent, commitment-driven, and exhibited job satisfaction, which is a cornerstone of the SDT model. Several factors that could lead to a lack of relatedness in small to medium enterprises (SME) are poor business decisions, strategic plans, focus, culture, growth strategies, and entrepreneurial orientation (Torres et al., 2019). Relatedness is about attitudes and behaviors (*Seven Pillars*) and the cognitive abilities of the workers (*Five Minds*), whose presence could lead to improved business productivity (Lockerbie & Williams, 2019). These connected issues lead to optimization, performance, and efficiency standards in SMEs and may provide entrepreneurial strategies to mitigate the high failure rates of small retail businesses.

The tenets of self-determination theory could help business leaders improve optimization, essential to SME operations. Business leaders could improve optimization through information technology, resource efficiency practices, and innovations. Bodas-Freitas and Corrocher (2019) examined 2056 European manufacturing SMEs using the 2013 Flash Eurobarometer survey and found that knowledge management resulted in process improvements and reduced production costs. Tran and Nguyen (2019) investigated over 400 Vietnamese SMEs and identified SME knowledge management practices that resulted in cost reduction, products, and service efficiencies. The production optimization depends on proficiencies in information technology, human

resource development, and knowledge retention (Bucsa, 2019; Lee et al., 2019; Twyford et al., 2016). Knowledge retention is another aspect of SDT, essential in keeping the knowledgeable and experienced employees in business for long-term sustainability (Ramona & Alexandra, 2019). Optimization effort strategies may assist small retail business leaders by providing additional entrepreneurial methods to sustain operations in difficult times.

Small retail business leaders can gain an understanding of business dynamics by knowing the potential benefits of self-determination. Self-determination involves both internal (intrinsic) and external (extrinsic) motivation activities, preparedness, and setting goals (Goldman et al., 2018). The SDT is suitable to explore motivational factors that some small retail stores could use to enhance psychological well-being and success in the workplace (Manganelli et al., 2018). Ncube and Zondo (2018) found that intrinsic motivation resulted in small to medium enterprises growth in South Africa. However, Geri et al. (2017) noted that extrinsic motivation is essential to some business models. Small retail business leaders who believe in intrinsic and extrinsic self-determination may experience increased psychological wellbeing and motivation to succeed in business.

### ***Human Capital Theory as Contrasting Theory***

The human capital theory (HCT) was a phrase that developed in early economics in the late 1950s. Still, the empirical and theoretical research did not begin until Schultz used the term in the 1960s and by Becker and Mincer in the early 1960s and 1970s (Holden, 2016). The HCT is both the education and skills needed to contribute to entrepreneurs' capability to open new ventures and sustain them (Aboobaker & Renjini,

2020). The skills notion of HCT includes the different educational phases of the process, practical experiences of the entrepreneurial venture, and the skills required in innovative and idea generation for small to medium firms (Mamabolo & Myres, 2020). The HCT adds two distinct strategies not covered in SDT: having the right business education and the skills needed to succeed for small retail business leaders. Routinely, business researchers associate HCT with having the right strategy skills such as competence and entrepreneurship education to mitigate small business failure rates and lead to growth in small to medium enterprises (Ezuma & Ismail, 2017; Westhead & Solesvik, 2016). Small retail business leaders who use HCT as a strategy and implement the ideas may sustain the business longer than 5 years.

### **Business Strategies**

Another theme for SDT revolves around the multiple business strategies available to retail business owners. Blackburn et al. (2018) cited an effective strategy using accountants when seeking business advice. Other scholars, including Snider and Davies (2018), posit the education angle as a key business strategy in many small retail businesses. Many businesses, including small retail businesses, lack the necessary business strategies in marketing, which can hurt operations and business performance (Mehra & Coleman, 2016). Balzer et al. (2015) highlighted the need for *Lean higher education (LHE) to eliminate wasteful spending and create value*. Small retail businesses can copy this successful practice by implementing LHE in training new managers and employees. Additionally, learning how to build effective relationships as a business strategy is critical too.



The need for relationships is a key driver in many small retail business strategies. Blackburn et al. (2018) highlight trust as a critical factor in accepting business advice from client-customer relationships. Warren and Szostek (2017) suggested four strategies that involved (a) building better relationships, (b) having more passion for the business, and (c) increase both business and financial knowledge to sustain the small business beyond 10 years. Some cause-and-effect relationships do not necessarily affect small business growth or strategies (Eijdenberg et al., 2017). Business strategies suggested by Warren and Szostek might be useful for retail businesses that engage customers daily. Some business strategies work better than others, as is the case with entrepreneurs that understand new opportunities, innovations, and taking risks (Joshi et al., 2017).

Other business strategies include having the right marketing concept and social entrepreneurship strategies. In some countries, having an entrepreneur marketing (EM) concept can lead to better firm performance in inhibited markets (Eggers et al., 2018). EM can lead small firms to have an opportunistic outlook with customers and resort to innovative resource leveraging (Sadiku-Dushi et al., 2019). Taking the appropriate EM risks is essential as the market constantly changes and reevaluates international markets may not be the best choice for some small retail businesses. The need for effective EM as online marketing and social media can lead a small firm into a damaged brand reputation without the right strategies (Crick et al., 2018; Renton & Richard, 2019). These social media entrepreneurship strategies for small firms may also create sustainable competitive advantages in underprivileged communities and self-sufficiency (Palacios-Marqués et al.,

2019). The use of entrepreneur marketing provides small retail business leaders who lack social media strategies enough information to expand business reach in the local area through the web.

### ***Self-Sufficiency***

Researchers from Korea utilized surveys and interviews of small retailers and cited how correct policy and promotion strategies enable self-sufficiency for retail-led rejuvenation projects (Kim & Jang, 2017). Although Korean society is different from American society, the tactics used in this research may assist small retail business owners in Illinois by utilizing surveys and interviews to better understand the customer base. Self-sufficiency plays a role in small retail businesses to build a business that relies on its product, humility, and without the need for government subsidies (Basit et al., 2018).

The success of microfinance institutions is directly related to self-sufficiency and provide business owners with more tools to succeed in industry (Remer & Kattilakoski, 2021). Others, like Sharafizad and Coetzer (2016) mentioned the need for financial independence and networking with other small businesses as a reason to pursue entrepreneurship. Psychological happiness and personal satisfaction were also example of why people are interested in entrepreneurship, and the reasons behind it which are (a) affiliation, (b) opportunity, and (c) independence of action (Shir et al., 2019; Wiklund et al., 2019). Self-sufficiency strategies may provide hope to some small retail business leaders and drive them to sustain the business longer, and not become another statistic in the business failure realm. Sutter et al. (2019) suggested entrepreneurship as a possible solution to poverty but recommend further literature to support this claim. Others like

Milanesi (2018) add to the research on self-sufficiency by citing the difference between having passion for a hobby and entrepreneurial passion that leads to a business profession.

### ***Entrepreneurship***

Small retail businesses improve business survival when these businesses engage in community economic development using the entrepreneurial skills taught by Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) mentors (Dahlstrom & Talmage, 2018). If small retail businesses use entrepreneurial business models that challenge the norms, promote creativity, respond to change, and encourage honesty, these businesses have a better chance to succeed in business (Browne et al., 2018). SCORE counselors provide the information to assist small businesses through mentorship and provide small retail business leaders with additional success strategies.

Acosta et al. (2018) cited the need for small firms to have an entrepreneurial orientation in domestic and international markets. Milanesi (2018) studied why some go into entrepreneurship in rural areas of the world, and the reasons included the freedom to being, economic means, and community development. Entrepreneurs achieve successful business strategies when they promote acceptance and participate in multifaceted support groups (Chatterjee et al., 2018). An entrepreneur orientation is cited in multiple studies and seminal author books and is another strategy that may assist small retail business leader's success.

Traphagan (2017) showed that entrepreneurs in rural Japan might face constraints due to the region or family relationships and not necessarily based on the gender of the entrepreneur. Aldrich and Ruef (2018) cited examples of where entrepreneurs could utilize the *Silicon Valley* model of entrepreneurship and concentrate on the threats that exist: high growth, innovative activity, and opportunity recognition firms. Some business leaders have experience in multiple business areas, which is beneficial to entrepreneurial pursuits (Kacperczyk & Younkin, 2017). Small retail business leaders face family, regional, and business model issues, but the leaders who learn from these constraints avoid common failures among other retail businesses.

Other areas business leaders can focus on are personality traits that drive people to pursue an entrepreneurship passion, even multiple personality traits (Obschonka et al., 2019). Numerous scholars cited the role cognition plays in entrepreneurship, successful business ventures, and creative resourcefulness (Garbuio et al., 2018; Kier & McMullen, 2017; Johnson et al., 2018). Business leaders should examine strategic entrepreneurship as it fits the role of opportunity seeking, risk-taking, and wealth creation entrepreneurs (Withers et al., 2018). Another strategy for small retail business leaders is understanding entrepreneur personality traits, which may help sustain the business past the 5-year mark.

### **Small Business Failures**

The first approach any small retail business should look at is small business failures and how other small retail enterprises succeed. Small business failures are not just a U.S. business issue but a worldwide phenomenon as many companies in Africa fail too (Mendy & Hack-Polay, 2018). Many retail businesses suffer decline because of

online competition, including Korean businesses (Kim & Jang, 2017). Hyder and Lussier (2016) suggested using the *Lussier Model* that businesses succeed or fail because of the following themes: business planning, staffing, cash flow, and partnerships. Other small business failures are caused by out-of-control costs, country taxes, regulations, and unfair competition (Spinelli et al., 2017). Some small businesses fail because of economic recessions or financial crises rotated around housing crashes, tourism economics, and failure in national economies (Scott & Pressman, 2017; Vivel-Búa et al., 2016). Other small businesses fail because of bankruptcies, liquidity, or solvency issues (Paterson, 2018; Ringe, 2018). Small retail business leaders must understand why some small businesses succeed and others fail. More importantly, understand the strategies behind the success and failure rates of small retail businesses in the United States.

### **Successful Business Strategies**

Many international businesses employ multiple successful strategies for competitiveness and resourcefulness that drive organizational proficiencies (Thomé & Medeiros, 2016). Multifaceted business strategies succeed more often than not when installing in the business lexicon (Galbreath et al., 2020). There is also a need for a health and safety-conscious work environment and practices for small-to-medium sized businesses, which often lack the right successful business strategies in this area (Vinberg, 2020). Another strategy that may prolong the small retail business is to maintain the business focus on the customer and the health and safety of employees.

Carter et al. (2020) cited how online learning as a strategy using the self-regulated framework may assist in on-the-job management training. Small firms can embrace the latest technology trends, such as artificial intelligence, which can assist businesses with labor expansion, innovation acceleration, and cross-industry strategies (Plastino & Purdy, 2018). Some other successful business strategies involve giving away products or services called freemium to win new business (Holm & Günzel-Jensen, 2017). Small retail business leaders could create better on-the-job training, utilize artificial intelligence, and innovate by offering freemium to new customers.

Other successful business strategies include choosing the right organizational structure when transitioning leadership among family members in family-owned retail businesses (Zaki et al., 2018). The importance of an integrated marketing strategy is another good business practice (Parnell, 2018). Täuscher and Kietzmann (2017) cite the need for a sharing economy that uses a hybrid business model and mitigates risks. This sharing economy includes small businesses transitioning from product selling to solution-selling strategies that increase competitiveness (Levihn & Levihn, 2016). Further, some scholars show that business reorganization using multifaceted portfolio strategies can lead to more successful business strategies (Hildebrandt et al., 2018; Moon & Lee, 2017). The right organizational structure may provide small retail business leaders with a more efficient business model and may help them save costs on overhead.

### ***SWOT Analysis***

The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis is a strategic tool developed by Harvard Business School and Stanford University (Al-Araki,

2013; Siciliano, 2016). According to some scholars, SWOT analysis is a marketing framework for analyzing a business's internal and external dependencies using strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (Granulo & Tanovic, 2020; Siciliano, 2016). The advantage of SWOT analysis is that it provides the framework for analyzing a firm's operational environment using quality, price, branding, and reputation (Kowalik, 2020). SWOT analysis involves combining environmental opportunities and threats and reviewing a company's organizational shortcomings, problems, and limitations (Verboncu & Condurache, 2016). The simplicity of SWOT provides a strategic roadmap for small retail business leaders struggling with competition in the local environment.

Opportunities require the small business owner to forecast changes in a particular trade and to market those trends to gain a competitive advantage. Pandya (2017) posits that when small businesses use the mitigation of the LISA method as an additional add-on tool for SWOT analysis, they can improve the strengths and weaknesses of leveraging, improving, seizing, and awareness in a business. SWOT also mitigates risks when the firm's financial, human, market, and physical location is in the risk prevention strategy (Ade et al., 2020). SWOT is adaptable when customers' perceptions include Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA), a technique for measuring customer satisfaction through surveys (Phadermrod et al., 2016). The small retail business leader who utilizes tools such as the LISA method and SWOT analysis may strengthen the business survival rate cited in multiple SBA studies.

SWOT analysis strengths include building the capacity to have a resilient business that can survive all kinds of disasters, including cyber-attacks, climate change, natural disasters, and closures due to epidemics like the Corona (COVID-19) virus. Kativhu et al. (2018) call this resilience measuring in the small retail sector. Some weaknesses of not having a resilient business are that business owners are susceptible to cyber-attacks, including loss of data from cybercriminals extorting the small retail business until the owner pays a ransom to get the data back (Kaukola et al., 2017; Rea-Guaman et al., 2018). Weaknesses include not having the ability or knowledge to protect the small retail businesses BCI against APT's or criminals that exist to steal this information and paralyze the business (Rea-Guaman et al., 2018). Some opportunities are available through learning lessons from the past in disaster response (Gregory, 2020). Small retail business leaders that prepare using SWOT resiliency strategies may prolong the business in any disaster condition.

More recently, the threat of economic disruption from viruses such as Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a global threat to small-to-medium enterprises that had to close doors unexpectedly due to this global health issue (Fauci et al., 2020, SBA, 2020). The lack of knowledge, actionable plans, and lessons learned from previous disasters in business is an issue of concern for many small businesses (Singleton, 2020). There was hope for some small businesses through the passage of the CARE Act in 2020, which contained over \$370 billion for American small businesses to battle the Coronavirus (SBA, 2020). Small business leaders need to have a game plan for natural disasters and everything to include these areas (Gregory, 2020). These types of threats to small retail



businesses drive the need for more strategic thinking and threat analysis using SWOT, PESTAL, and Five Forces Analysis. Small retail business leaders that employ these strategies during economic disruptions may survive past the 5-year mark in business.

**PESTEL Analysis.** PESTEL analysis is a tool that consists of an analysis of political, economic, technical, social, environmental, and legal areas that is strategic and provides a company a competitive advantage (Tsangas et al., 2019). PESTEL analysis is what multiple businesses, including the construction industry, use for analyzing both positive and negative internal/external effects in a company (Turkyilmaz et al., 2019). A small retail business leader may learn strategies using the PESTAL scale, which may provide additional techniques for small business survival.

Small businesses may face taxes, political interference, and a surge of other state requirements in the political realm. Alvord (2020) argued that involving tax cuts in Kansas did not have the desired effect that many politicians believed they would as many small businesses suffered from a lack of state services after the tax cuts. The small business owner needs to stay active in the political arena to understand how political decisions can affect the businesses bottom line. Schaffer and Sokhey (2019) said many small business owners are more politically active than ever because these small retail owners understand the political landscape. Public policy is something every small business owner must realize as many policies affect the operation of each enterprise in each state- Still, partisan politics usually leave the small business owner to their survival (Dennis, 2016). Knowing the political landscape is essential for small business owners, but understanding the economics of the business may even be more important.

Small businesses are essential for the United States (SBA, 2019). Bonsu and Kuofie (2019) argued that small businesses make up 50% of the gross domestic product (GDP) of the United States, and understanding the economics behind it is essential for small business survival. Small and medium enterprises contribute to tourism and economic development in many small towns, including Malaysia (Mohd Shariff & Zainol Abidin, 2020). Understanding economics is essential for survival, but understanding the social responsibilities that small businesses provide to customers is another key area for small retail businesses. Small retail business leaders are learning why economic strategies may help them succeed past the 5-year mark in business.

Social responsibility is a new research area for scholars, and many small businesses understand the implications of the response to the community they serve (Soundararajan et al., 2017). According to Tomasella and Ali (2019), small businesses that engage in social acts of generosity usually have a competitive advantage over other small businesses that do not. Social responsibility includes understanding the stakeholders in your business environment. Lahdesmaki et al. (2017) posited using the *Stakeholder Salience Theory* that stakeholders can influence business decisions that may not be the best for the small business, but rather for the stakeholder. Understanding social responsibilities are essential for small businesses but may not be business smart. Candi et al. (2018) cited the need for social interaction among customers by adopting social media strategies that are cost-effective and innovative but engaging to the customer audience. The need for social responsibility for SMEs is beneficial to firm performance, competitive advantage, and long-term strategy (Nejati et al., 2017). A small retail

business leader may learn that employing social technology strategies may assist in innovation and economic growth.

Small retail businesses that include technology are more likely to innovate and have a competitive edge on competitors in the same sector. Soriano et al. (2018) studied Australian small businesses and the use of technology, and results showed increased innovation, teamwork, and improved processes that affected positive growth in small to medium enterprises. Other innovations such as Industry 4.0 include cyber, cloud computing, and a litany of other technologies that assist small businesses in gathering data, improving performance, and enabling better business control (Moeufa et al., 2018). Ramona and Alexandra (2019) cited the need to use knowledge management techniques, which provide a competitive and collaborative environment for employees and may lead to better employee retention. Small retail business leaders may learn from further research that technology is essential for survival strategies.

Environmental sustainability and environment are areas where small retail business owners can assess as a mitigation factor in staying operational. Roxas et al. (2016) examined three businesses in the Philippines. They determined that small businesses that employ an entrepreneurial stance towards environmental issues can better implement them and enjoy an increased firm performance. Like Mupani and Chipunza (2019), others posited that small businesses that understand the internal and external environmental influences and adopt strategic philosophies might improve business survival and achieve better results. There is a knowledge gap in environmental management practices to include firm focus and attitudes in retail businesses in New

Zealand (Cassells & Lewis, 2019). Large corporations adopt environmental policies, and this is no different in SMEs. Small retail businesses face internal and external pressures to embrace proactive environmental strategies that may help the business through social concerns (Testa et al., 2016). When small retail business owners embrace favorable environmental policies using the Schwartz Value System as a framework, these policies may achieve monetary and even beneficial social change (Schaefer et al., 2018). Small retail business leaders may learn that environmental issues and strategies are just as necessary as legal issues.

Legal issues can destroy a small retail business, and having the proper mitigations strategies is essential to a business surviving past the 5-year mark. Having adequate knowledge of small business taxes is one area small retail business owners must understand and the implications for lack of knowledge, which can cause significant issues with the Internal Revenue Service in the United States. Mol-Gómez-Vázquez et al. (2016) examined 25 European countries' policies regarding SME financing and the problem with weak laws that can affect small retail businesses' ability to expand and improve operations. There are also multiple tax issues regarding employees under regular payroll and 1099 employees, which can cause problems with small retail businesses. Murray and Turkington (2019) researched the tax implications of 1099 nursing consultants, and they recommended hiring a tax advisor that understands small businesses and the tax plan. Other researchers cautioned about using quick legal registration and studying the implications before jumping into a venture, especially a new small business (Tian et al., 2018). When small retail business owners look through the lens of PESTAL

analysis, they may learn new skills to use that may assist in mitigating some small business failures. Another tool that small retail business leaders may use is Porter's (1980) Five Forces Matrix, an analysis framework.

**Porter's Five Forces Matrix.** Porter's (1980) five forces matrix is an analysis framework that researchers use to examine competition within an industry and small business adaptable if used as an interconnected marketing strategy (as cited in Sutherland, 2014). The strengths of the five forces as these shape industry competition and examines threats to new entrants, substitutes, the bargaining power of suppliers, the bargaining power of buyers, and the rivalry among existing competitors. Every organization faces barriers to entry (Couto & Barbosa, 2020). The Five Forces consist of barriers to entry, substitutes, bargaining power of suppliers, bargaining power of buyers, and competitive rivalry.

The small business industry is very competitive, and many companies try to exploit their rivals by beating them out on price. Porter (2008) stated that new entrants bring with them a *capacity*, and they want to gain a market share from their competitors. Firms do this by establishing a competitive advantage in their industry (Porter, 2008). Bacanu (2016) addressed the overuse of competitive advantage as a strategic management theory and tool. Small retail business leaders may learn that establishing a competitive advantage is another survival strategy that may mitigate small business failure.

The next thing in the five forces is substitutes. Threats to a business model can come from anywhere and in many different directions (Porter, 2008). The five forces framework adds value to small business leaders' knowledge base but may not have the effect it once had because of innovations, policies, and international competitiveness (Isabelle et al., 2020). The bargaining power of vendors is an advantage that many small businesses have. There are threats from substitute products and services, new startups, existing rivalries into non-traditional markets, and niche providers (Espinoza et al., 2019).

The bargaining power of customers is intense. The future indicates that digital is the way to go, and many people, including researchers, love reading on Kindle devices or the phone and computer app. Amazon makes reading easy by allowing customers to buy online and carry thousands of books on one device, while syncing what you read on all devices. Negative public perceptions of the industry are something small business owners must be aware of in the market (Lawton & Weaver, 2009). Small retail business leaders who understand consumers' bargaining power and future trends may learn that implementing futuristic strategies is another method for mitigating business failure.

The last two items in five forces are competitive rivalry and implications, threats, and opportunities. Competitive rivalry is a technique to assist the business owner in making strategic decisions and combating outside threats. Hartwell (2016) highlighted how competitiveness works even in post-Communist economies, where this method would not work in a previous administration. Radilova and Ziomek (2020) described how

Porter's (1980) five forces are adaptable in non-governmental organizations and can assist with competitive donation collections for nonprofits.

The implications, threats, and opportunities of Porter's (1980) Five Force Analysis underline the importance of having a strategic plan ready to counter the many threats businesses face. The analysis helps look at the industry as a whole. The essential part for businesses is understanding what their rivalries are doing and countering those threats at any given a chance, but identifying these risks is probably the most challenging part of a strategist's job.

### **Transition**

Section 1 involved the essence of the study and included (a) the problem and purpose statements, (b) nature of the study, (c) research question, (d) the conceptual framework, (e) definition of terms, (f) significance of the study, and (g) academic literature review. The literature review also explored how small retail business owners can use entrepreneurial strategies to stay in business longer than expected. Section 1 included the literature review based on the self-determination theory and highlighted key themes such as business strategies, self-determination, entrepreneurship, successful business strategies, and small business failures. Section 1 included complementary and alternative analysis of the human capital theory, SWOT, PESTAL analysis, and Porter's (1980) five forces.

Section 2 will include a restatement of the purpose and description of my role as the researcher and data collector, the participant's role, and ethical guidelines. The project will explain the multiple case study design was the best design to research. Additionally,

Section 2 will include the population and sampling, data analysis method, reliability, and validity of my study. Section 2 will include a description or research method, design, data collection instruments, organization, and techniques.



## Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I explored entrepreneurial strategies that small retail leaders use to stay in business. Section 2 includes explaining the purpose and description of the role as a researcher and data collector, the participant's role, and ethical guidelines. Additionally, Section 2 provides the data analysis method, reliability, and validity of the study, description of research method, design, data collection instruments, organization, and techniques. Last, the author will assure dependability, credibility, and confirmability of the findings and reliability and validity of the study.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore innovative entrepreneurial strategies small retail business leaders use to sustain business beyond the first 5 years of operation. The target population consisted of five small retail business leaders in the Belleville, Illinois area who succeeded in using innovative strategies to maintain operations beyond the first 5 years in business. The research question for this multiple case study was: What innovative entrepreneurial strategies do small retail business leaders use to sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operation? The implications for positive social change rest in employment opportunities resulting from business sustainability leading to poverty elimination in the local community.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of any research in a qualitative study involves (a) open-ended interviews, (b) social and behavioral exploration, (c) shows linkages to theory, (d) provides context originality and relationships, and (e) literature fusion (Colorafi & Evans, 2016; Orr et al.,

2020). In a qualitative case study, my role as a researcher involves making choices regarding research questions, participant selections, data collection, informed consent, and themes.

The face-to-face interview works best for researchers when collecting data in a research study (Orr et al., 2020). To collect reliable and valid data from small business owners, a researcher must use a collection instrument to record accurate data (Isaacs, 2014). Solid researchers utilize various tools to include: a recording device, journal notes, interview notes. I will develop conclusions after analyzing the data and themes. The researcher must understand the *Belmont Report* and the principles of ethical research involving human subjects, which include respect for persons, justice, and magnanimity (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [DHSS], 1970). A researcher must adhere to informed consent rules as it applies to the treatment of the subject, and understand the risks, demands, and benefits of face-to-face or during COVID-19 – the use of virtual interviews (DHSS, 1970; Jones & Abdelfattah, 2020)

Researchers need to establish participant-inclusion criteria as a standard practice in qualitative studies and include demographic and geographic participants that have the requisite knowledge and insight of the research question (Patino & Ferreira, 2018; Yin, 2018). The study sample included five small retail business leaders who used entrepreneurial strategies to survive past the 5-year mark in business. Researchers must obtain IRB approval from the attended university (Wilson et al., 2017). I obtained IRB approval from Walden University for this study and my approval number is 09-30-20-0566418. I sought participants using social media to include Facebook, LinkedIn,

Instagram, Twitter, and e-mail. Using social media to reach potential participants is a good communication action to reach participants (Gelinias et al., 2017).

### **Participants**

Researchers need to establish participant-inclusion criteria as a standard practice in qualitative studies and include demographic and geographic participants that have the requisite knowledge and insight of the research question (Patino & Ferreira, 2018; Yin, 2018). The study sample included five small retail business leaders who used entrepreneurial strategies to survive past the 5-year mark in business. Researchers must obtain IRB approval from the attended university (Source, 2020). I obtained IRB approval from Walden University before leveraging participants for this study. I sought participants through social media via Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, and e-mail. Using social media to reach potential participants is recommended (Gelinias et al., 2017).

### **Research Method and Design**

#### **Research Method**

I selected a qualitative research method for this study because of the need to get expressive results (Yin, 2018). The three conventional research methods to use in a doctoral business study are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Stake, 2010). Kennedy (2019) noted that the qualitative approach fits the practices in management, is demanding, and is helpful in the development of research. A case study uses exploratory research in everyday life settings and provides a framework compatible with the qualitative method (Yin, 2018).

Other researchers view the case study as more reporting of finding and less of a method approach (Boblin et al., 2013). The case study is useful for analysis, consistency, and qualitative research (Cronin, 2014). Harland (2014) posits that the case study contributes to seminal data and philosophy. The other qualitative designs include narrative methodology, which tells a story about an experience (Strijker et al., 2020). The grounded theory involves the researcher building a theory from collected data (Kahlke, 2014). Researchers use the ethnography method to describe facets of a culture and how it influences behaviors, and the phenomenology method describes lived experiences not limited by time or location (Moustakas, 1994). I chose a case study and ruled out the other research methods because the case study aligns with this research goal.

### **Research Design**

Researchers choose the design after inquiring about the topic of interest (Kennedy, 2019). I decided on qualitative research from multiple research designs, including narrative, ethnography, phenomenological, and case study. According to Strijker et al.(2020), the narrative design allows the researcher to understand from a participants' perspective and gain conceptual knowledge of the problem under the study. In this study, the goal is not to look at participants' shared experiences, and therefore the narrative design is not appropriate for the study. The ethnography design includes examining facets of a culture and how it influences behaviors by observing histories, beliefs, ideas, and more (Stake, 2010). I do not plan to use ethnography because the goal is not to explore beliefs, ideas, and influencing behaviors to warrant further research. In

the phenomenology design, the researcher describes lived experiences not limited by time or location but unique (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016).

The plan does not include using a phenomenological design because I do not plan on questioning small business owners' personal, political or social beliefs. A case study uses exploratory research in everyday life settings, provides a framework compatible with the qualitative method, and gets expressive results (Yin, 2018). Other researchers view the case study as more as a reporting of findings and less of a method approach, but the case study adds to the theory and practice of research (Boblin et al., 2013; Harland, 2014). The case study is useful for analysis, consistency, and qualitative research (Cronin, 2014). I chose a case study and ruled out the other research methods because the case study aligns with my research goal and provides flexibility to interview multiple participants in the same industry. Data saturation occurs when there is no new information available during the data collection phase.

### **Population and Sampling**

This qualitative multiple case study population and sampling include five small retail business leaders in Belleville, Illinois. These business leaders must have been in business for at least 5 years and generated at least net profit over those years. Illinois has over 1.2 million small businesses that employ over 2.4 million people, has the 5th highest GDP in the United States, and is the headquarters to more than 36 Fortune 500 companies (Illinois DCEO, 2017; SBA, 2016).

Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to collect data that is rigorous in nature, interactive, redundant and captures in-depth understanding and experiences of

participants (Cleary et al., 2014; Yin, 2018). Sample sizes are relevant when they include 2 to 400 participants and similar themes in literature (Fugard & Potts, 2015). Researchers can use their judgment when using the purposeful method and select participants based on the following criteria: (a) own a retail business in the Belleville, Illinois area for at least 5 years; and (b) earned net profit over those years. The sample size will include 5 participants, data source triangulation, and member checking to ensure data saturation. Sampling is a key component of the qualitative method, and the doctoral student must safeguard consistency, transparency, and reliability when conducting research (Robinson, 2014).

### **Ethical Research**

Participants could sign the consent form during the pre-interview stage, agreeing to provide honest, forthright information to interview questions (Ngozwana, 2018). I will ensure participants know that the interview for this study is voluntary and that participants can withdraw for any reason. There is no monetary reward for participating in this research study. Researchers must let participants know that taking part in a research study has many benefits. The benefits include access to research findings and the use of study information to mitigate business failures.

Academics use ethical methods in research when using human participants and ensure each participant's health, safety, and confidentiality (Makhoul et al., 2018). Researchers may experience ethical quandaries but must ensure participants know and understand informed consent (Ayre et al., 2018). I will ensure ethical research in protecting human participants by completing the National Institute of Health (NIH)

course and seeking approval from the Walden University IRB. *The Belmont Report* outlines ethical treatment guidelines for researchers and lists how to respect human participants in research (Office for Human Research Protections, 2015). I will (a) avoid psychological, physical, and economic harm to participants, (b) maintain participant privacy and confidentiality, and (c) ensure informed consent before the interview of all participants. Wilson et al. (2017) addressed the ethical concerns when ensuring privacy, confidentiality, and consent procedures when interviewing participants. The study plan uses P1-P5 for coding purposes and storing data on an external hard drive, thus ensuring participants' security and auditing purposes for at least 5 years.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The primary data used in this study came from the semistructured interview. Yin (2018) recommended both primary and secondary instruments to collect data in qualitative research. The primary data collector for this study is the researcher. I conducted a semistructured interview with five retail business leaders in the Belleville area and used the information from these interviews to understand the participant's viewpoints and build an important relationship in an interview. Feuerstein et al. (2018) argued that semistructured interviews were essential for the collaborative type of research and for showing proficiency of both researcher and practitioner, which improves the validity of the interview. In the semistructured interview, the idea is to ask seven open-ended questions (see Appendix A), focused on the central research question.

According to Zhou et al. (2017), a semistructured interview allows the researcher to ask open-ended questions in a casual environment and understand the participants'

views. Researchers use methodological triangulation to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research outcome and enhance the study's reliability and validity (Joslin & Müller, 2016). I collected data from semistructured interviews with participants, multiple journals, and internal company documents.

The interview protocol is what researchers use during the face-to-face semistructured interviews (see Appendix B). The interview protocol's purpose will ensure the reliability and validity of the open-ended questioning. The purpose of the interview protocol is to ensure openness, validity, reliability, and data saturation (Mitchell et al., 2018). The researcher ensures participants' responses by using the data from the semistructured interviews, member checking to ensure accurate transcriptions, research findings, and accurate data interpretation (Birt et al., 2016). I will meet with participants after data collection to ensure data interpretation reflects their views of the research.

### **Data Collection Technique**

When conducting a qualitative case study, a researcher collects data using semistructured interviews, questionnaires, observations, or focus groups (Yin, 2018). The study included the use of in-person semistructured interviews to collect data from small retail business leaders who have used entrepreneurial strategies to stay in business longer than 5 years. The use of the interview protocol is what scholars use as a procedural guide by conducting individual, face-to-face interviews (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Yin, 2018). When conducting the interviews, I ensured the interview questions aligned with the overarching research question. I obtained IRB approval from Walden University before I collected data. IRB approval is essential for any researcher seeking data from



participants, gathering informed consent, and explaining the research processes and purpose.

### **Data Organization Technique**

Researchers need techniques to organize the information and ensuring proper grouping of data. Case study researchers rely on the ability to find data, but each person has a unique way of gathering the data and how the data influences their research (Bernadyn & Feigenson, 2018). Researchers rely on years of learning in academic programs, and the techniques in research circles involve inductive and deductive reasoning, and the use of evidence (Hayes et al., 2018).

The use of folders will ensure the data is aligned into groups of related topics and keep all participant data in separate folders with dates, times, and transcribed narratives. This will assist in retrieval of data quickly as all the folders in file explorer are searchable. Additionally, the use of query logs reduces burdens in online searches or databases (Wang et al., 2016). The researcher who uses the folder options will have information ready for defense of doctoral study.

Storage of data and all information concerning notes from research participants for at least 5 years in a secure locker only accessible by myself. When the 5 years are up, the researcher will destroy all the data via shredder and the information will remain confidential at all times. Researchers use shredders to destroy the data, which is used by government agencies as the premier method to destroying records (Lei Kristoffer & Jaderick, 2015). A chain of evidence is essential for case studies (Yin, 2018).

## Data Analysis

The study included the use methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation incorporates two or more data collection methods during the analysis phase (Yin, 2018). Triangulation is a strategic option for the researcher to ensure all data interpretations are valid and understand the phenomenon by capturing multiple viewpoints (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Yin (2018) outlined the process using five steps; (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding. Compiling involves organizing the data, and disassembling consists of breaking down the collected data into sections and tags. In the reassembling phase, I grouped data and categorized it into groups from the sectional data. The interpreting phase involves creating narratives from the classifications and groups for a conclusion.

The goal is to label and compile data into specific groups, which will allow me to gather the foundational data and use the information from the semistructured interviews of the small retail business owners to show how these owners were able to stay in business. I was the primary data collector for this study. The study includes conducting a semistructured interview with five retail business owners in the Belleville area. It uses these interviews to understand the participant's viewpoints and build an important relationship in an interview. Feuerstein et al. (2018) argued that semistructured interviews were essential for the collaborative type of research and for showing proficiency of both researcher and practitioner, which improves the validity of the interview. In the semistructured interview, I will ask seven open-ended questions (see Appendix A), focused on the central research question. According to Zhou et al. (2017), a

semistructured interview allows the researcher to ask open-ended questions in a casual environment and understand the participants' views.

Researchers use methodological triangulation to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research outcome and enhance the study's reliability and validity (Joslin & Müller, 2016). I will collect data from semistructured interviews with participants, multiple journals, and internal company documents (see Appendix A). I used an interview protocol (see Appendix B) during the face-to-face semistructured interview. The interview protocol's (see Appendix C) purpose ensured reliability and validity of the open-ended questions. The purpose of the interview protocol was to ensure openness, validity, reliability, and data saturation (Mitchell et al., 2018). The researcher ensured participants' responses by using the data from the semistructured interviews, member checking to ensure research findings, and accurate data interpretation (Birt et al., 2016). I met with participants after data collection to ensure data interpretation reflects their views of the research.

## **Reliability and Validity**

### **Reliability**

Researchers ensure the quality of the study by demonstrating dependability of the process and research that shows trustworthiness (Jordan, 2018). The method includes research that shows integrity, accuracy, and consistency with academic standards (Smith & McGannon, 2017). Yin (2018) said that the researcher needs to ensure quality by managing bias and repetition. Dependability is when researchers provide qualitative research by using member checking (Birt et al., 2016). I used methodological

triangulation to demonstrate dependability by using NVivo software and member checking to ensure precise interviews and data collection with all participants. The study included follow-up with member checking and the use of the interview protocol in the study.

### **Validity**

Qualitative researchers use tools to measure the validity and accuracy of recorded data for potential readers, and three tests ensure the validity of the process (Zheng & Yu, 2020). The researcher uses credibility, transferability, and confirmability to ensure fidelity. Below are the discussions on approaches taken to ensure study validity.

**Credibility.** Credibility is about maintaining an objective stand during the research. A qualitative researcher must include all-encompassing data offered by participants, a complicated procedure, and consistency for achieving credibility (Raskind et al., 2019). I addressed credibility by methodological triangulation using semistructured interviews, notes, audio of interviews, and member checking.

**Transferability.** The transferability of a qualitative study is complete when a researcher can provide a detailed description of the research and enable others to build upon the literature review, data, and analysis sections of the study (Smith, 2018). When using dependability, a researcher ensures the data process is comprehensive and confirms whether the interpretations are accurate (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019). I ensured transferability of the study by providing detailed information, observations, assumptions and limitations, and showing the relevance of the research.

**Confirmability.** A researcher needs to address the conformability to ensure study validity. Confirmability ensures the trustworthiness of the study and where other researchers can corroborate the results of the research (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). I established confirmability by ensuring that bias is mitigated and providing an audit trail that will link this research to accurate methodological triangulation.

**Data saturation.** Qualitative researchers provide data saturation by collecting information that becomes a repetitive theme and when no new information is available or associated with the research question (Lowe et al., 2018). Thomas (2016) cites the need for member checking in case study qualitative research. I interviewed participants multiple times and conduct member checking to ensure data collected are accurate.

### **Transition and Summary**

In Section 2, I provided a restatement of the qualitative multiple case study, which explores the entrepreneurial strategies that some small retail business owners in Belleville, Illinois, use to sustain business beyond 5 years. The findings of this research might create entrepreneurial strategies that other small retail businesses could use to promote economic development in the communities they serve and reduce gaps in knowledge in the academic literature.

The data collected for this research started after Walden University IRB approval. Upon approval, the researcher conducted in-person interviews with 5 small retail business leaders and transcribed the data from a recorded device. After reviewing the audio and transcriptions, I identified the themes from the data collected. In Section 3, the information collected from semistructured in-person interviews and open-ended questions

will provide the information for this study, which explores the entrepreneurial strategies, difficulties in business, and the competitive nature of entrepreneurs running a successful business.

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

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore innovative entrepreneurial strategies small retail business leaders use to sustain business beyond the first 5 years of operation. I conducted five semistructured interviews with five small retail business owners who successfully sustained business beyond the first 5 years of operations in Belleville, Illinois. The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, and were tape-recorded. I maintained confidentiality by identifying participants as P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5. The participants shared information about innovative entrepreneurial strategies that was consistent with the strategies small retail business leaders use. I reviewed collected data from participants from semistructured interviews, notes, and recorded conversations. I identified the following themes and presented them to participants for member checking. Three major themes emerged from the study: (a) entrepreneurial mindset, (b) innovation, and (c) social media strategies. In section 3, I present an analysis of findings from this study that aligns with the conceptual framework and alternative theories from the literature review, and the applications to professional practice, and implications for social change.

#### **Presentation of findings**

The research question for this study was the following: What innovative entrepreneurial strategies do small retail business leaders use to sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operation? The conceptual framework for this study was Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2017). The study included the use of

Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory to analyze what innovative entrepreneurial strategies small retail businesses used. To answer the research question, I interviewed five retail business owners who used successful approaches to sustain business beyond five years. The participants' privacy and confidentiality were ensured by assigning codes (P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5). All five participants understood that the business name or formal name is not in the final study.

The study included the examination of all business websites to see what other documents were relevant to the study. P1, P2, and P4 showed fliers, business cards, stickers in windows, and other forms to increase business and word of mouth strategies. All participants used online tools to increase business and brand awareness. P1, P2, P4, and P5 were members of non-profit organization that assists small retail businesses with promoting business in the area. P3 did not find benefit in the ability to join the organization. I transcribed the audio and showed each participant the notes of each interview to ensure member checking and validate and confirm the interview responses' accuracy. Member checking ensures participants confirm interview transcripts and enhances validation and answers to interview questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The emerging themes resulted from this analysis.

After collecting the data and completed the coding from semistructured interviews, notes, and internal documents, three themes emerged from the study: (a) entrepreneurial mindset, (b) Innovation, and (c) social media strategies. In the next section, evaluation includes the themes and connection to the conceptual framework and the literature review. Ryan and Deci's SDT provided a framework that includes the



themes presented in this study. The SDT construct includes innovative entrepreneurial strategy development (Barrable & Arvanitis, 2018).

### **Theme 1: Entrepreneurial Mindset**

The first theme that emerged from the methodological triangulation of the study was an entrepreneurial mindset. In this case study, small retail business owners embraced an entrepreneurial mindset and had to adjust the business models to succeed, resulting in auspices of business model innovation. Having a positive mental attitude was noteworthy, and each participant said taking calculated risk is equally important. All five participants identified an entrepreneurial mindset as an essential aspect of staying positive during any crisis, including the mandatory closing of businesses during COVID-19. P1-P5 all stated that discipline is a critical component of maintaining current business operations. P2, who owns a clothing boutique and gift shop, said, “I was very disciplined in my operations and my mindset to survive this closure.”

P5, who owns a do-it-yourself store, said, “You have to have a positive mindset and be able to take risks when warranted, and I did that.” P1, a custom gift shop for local vendors, stated, “I understood the crisis and learned how to change by taking risks and collaborating more with other businesses.” A sports store owner – P4, stated, “We collaborated with other sports stores to fill products that were otherwise untrainable due to supply chain issues.”

P1, P2, and P4 all received some mentoring and coaching from business partners or family members. P3 and P5 did not. P3 stated they watched motivation videos on

YouTube and even took courses related to having a positive mindset. All participants had a varying degree of this mindset, as highlighted in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Entrepreneurial Mindset*

Participant	Disciplined	Positivity	Risk-taker	Collaboration
P1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P3	Yes	Yes	No	No
P4	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

*Note.* Entrepreneurial mindsets that ensure change

***Connecting Theme 1 to the Literature***

Building an entrepreneurial mindset requires having a positive mental attitude, creative perspective, persuasion, persistence, and self-motivation (Lindblom et al., 2020). An entrepreneurial mindset involves discipline, positivity, risk-taker, and collaboration (Lanivich et al., 2020). The need to succeed was apparent for all participants who displayed through the rigors of discipline, positivity, risk-taking, and collaboration. Participants noted entrepreneurial mindset involves taking a calculated risk. Bosman (2019) cited online training as beneficial to the student because the environment increases interest, networks and producing value in the student.

***Connecting Theme 1 to the Conceptual Framework***

The entrepreneurial mindset is congruent with the SDT theory as proposed by Thibault et al. (2018). Having discipline and working for self is a significant component

of the SDT and was cited by most leaders in this study. Ryan and Deci (2017) suggested similar attributes to the entrepreneurial mindset as the main themes for the SDT.

### **Theme 2: Innovation**

Another theme that developed as a result of this research is innovation. When COVID-19 hit and forced businesses to close shop for multiple months, small retail businesses had to adjust by pivoting business models to adjust to the times. Four of five small retail companies interviewed for this research highlighted the need to adapt to the new business model to survive. P1, P2, P4, and P5 adjusted the business model to remain in business as lockdowns occurred and prepared for additional lockdowns. P1 stated, “I changed my whole business model due to the closing of my business for three months.” P1 did implement new selling strategies online, renting out floor space to others to assist in paying bills and promoting the business using a non-profit organization titled ‘Belleville First.’ All participants were active members of Belleville First except P4, who stated, “It’s not worth paying for something I can’t see direct results for.” The other participants (P1, P2, P4, and P5) said that Belleville First has helped them increase customers by promoting businesses online. P2 shifted 80% of operations online and stated, “You must be open to adaptation and understand the times to survive.”

Other participants struggled with adjusting to the business model. P3, who created curbside delivery, stated, “I have seen a significant drop in business since COVID-19 hit.” The biggest shift of business occurred with P4, as most of the company was selling sports gear. P4 stated, “I sell more guns and ammo than sports gear, but this is not sustainable because the supply chain is running low on both of these items.” Lastly,

P5 shifted all operations to work out of home for the closure and stated, “I was able to shift all my operations to my house and worked from home where I held home and Tumblr parties to maintain business.”

Table 3 shows the business model changes.

**Table 3**

*Business Model Innovation*

Participant	Temp Closures	Model Pivot	Online	Other
P1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P3	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P4	Yes	No	No	Yes
P5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

*Note.* Participant’s strategy changes due to COVID-19 (PESTEL effects)

***Connecting Theme 2 to the Literature.***

In theme 2, participants noted business innovation for business sustainability and growth. Business model innovation is a strategy to maintain a competitive advantage that creates value for customers and stakeholders (Su, et al., 2020). All participants cited the need for resilience and the ability to use innovation to discover defeat and adjust to disasters while maintaining business sustainability. Innovation plays a vital role in small business sustainability, and firms that utilize it to succeed more often than not (Hyder & Lussier, 2016).

***Connecting Theme 2 to the Conceptual Framework***

The tenets of SDT supports business innovation. Participants stated innovative approaches in knowledge management and production optimization. Following the

critical constructs of self-determination theory could help business leaders improve optimization, essential to SME operations. Business leaders could improve optimization through information technology, resource efficiency practices, and innovations (Schummer et al., 2019). The production optimization depends on innovation in information technology, human resource development, and knowledge retention (Bucsa, 2019; Lee et al., 2019; Twyford et al., 2016).

### **Theme 3: Social Media Strategies**

The third theme that emerged is social media strategies. These strategies also assisted all participants in overcoming COVID-19 challenges by posting updates through social media to keep customers informed of changes to business practices. All five participants utilize social media to some degree and P1, P2, and P5 more often. Some disagreed with the competitive advantage that social media strategies provide. P3 stated, "I use social media strategies strictly, but I am afraid that complaints may hurt my business versus help it." Some of the participants, including P4, have not updated the business social media sites since 2018. P4 stated, "I update it when I can, and our website is the main source of revenue for our store."

The majority of the participants utilized social media strategies to sustain operations and keep customers aware of changes. P1, P2, and P5 all concurred that social media provide a competitive advantage for the business. P1 stated, "I use social media strategies daily and use Facebook, Instagram, and other tools to stay competitive." Other participants, including P2, said, "Social media provided me a competitive advantage as well as relationships with my customers." And lastly, P5 stated, "Social media provided

me with another tool to broadcast my message as well as engage customers, which makes me profitable and competitive." Table 4 shows the social media strategies of P1-P5.

**Table 4**

*Social Media Strategies*

Participant	Facebook	Instagram	Webpage	Other
P1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P3	Yes	Yes	No	No
P4	Yes	No	Yes	No
P5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

*Note.* Social media use fluctuated among participants

***Connecting Theme 3 to the Literature***

All participants answered the what and why of goal attainment by utilizing social media strategies. Small retail businesses use social media to reach audiences, create buzz, promote business, engage customers, and create customers (de Vries et al., 2018; Zang et al., 2020). Lupo and Stroman (2020) posited those social media strategies provide small businesses with little investment and may provide a competitive advantage over more prominent companies.

***Connecting Theme 3 to the Conceptual Framework***

In theme 3, participants discussed the use of social media for business sustainability. Small retail businesses use social media to reach audiences, create buzz, promote business, engage customers, and create customers (de Vries et al., 2018; Zang et al., 2020). The STD lens could enable business leaders to capitalize on information

technology, including social media strategies driving competitive advantage over competitors (Busca, 2019).

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

Small retail businesses provide a base for catalyzing and sustaining economies by promoting economic development in many communities in the United States (SBA, 2018). The findings of this might create awareness of strategies that other small retail businesses could potentially use to improve and sustain performance and profitability. Small retail businesses that understand the multi-tier threats from the advanced persistent threats in cyberspace to economic, political, and environmental hazards that can cause catastrophic financial loss to operations, might implement strategies of this nature to sustain business past the 5-year mark (Kaukola et al., 2017).

The entrepreneurial mindset is identified in research as a critical component of succeeding while maintaining discipline, positivity, risk-taking, and collaboration (Lanivich et al., 2020). Small retail business owners who maintain discipline under any condition are more prone to work through complex issues such as the COVID pandemic. Risks are what every entrepreneur takes, and having the mindset to go along is essential to sustainability.

Small retail business owners need to have an innovative business model that can twist and turn with PESTEL type events (Tsangas et al., 2019). Business model innovation is a strategy to maintain a competitive advantage that creates value for the customer and stakeholders (Su, Zhang, & Ma, 2020). Small retail business owners have to think about the business model and have to be innovative daily in operations Yi et al.,

2020). Businesses need to have a pivot strategy to adjust to any political, economic, or even pandemic, like a COVID event. Business model innovation assists small retail businesses with being flexible to constantly changing conditions in the industry. This type of application corresponds with the conceptual framework's SDT human need to succeed and the human capital theory (HCT) of understanding the need to sustain an entrepreneurs' business. Business model innovation, if applied daily, is essential to survival. Understanding online tools to increase brand awareness assists small businesses in the local area.

Small retail businesses use social media to reach audiences, create buzz, promote business, engage customers, and create customers (de Vries et al., 2018; Zang et al., 2020). Social media helps small retail business owners keep the customer updated on business model changes or business practices. Businesses had to pivot during COVID to stay open and social media and other online tools helped small retail companies do that. Social media strategies provide small businesses with little investment and may provide a competitive advantage over more prominent companies (Lupo & Stroman, 2020). Using the SDT lens, small retail businesses that engage with information technology, social media strategies drive competitive advantage over non-technical businesses (Busca, 2019). When small businesses understand innovative entrepreneurial strategies as noted in both the SDT and HCT, they may mitigate business failure within 5 years of operation.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Small retail businesses contribute to improving the human condition by providing economic stability at the local level (SBA, 2018). Successful small retail businesses



catalyze positive social change and may promote societal development when they stay in business past the 5-year mark. The challenge of COVID-19 pushed many small retail businesses out of operation, and when the local level consumer understands that, they may empathize and support small retail businesses to avoid closure. The findings in this study could be useful in providing awareness of strategies to reduce business failures which could affect general beneficial social change by ensuring economic prosperity through increasing employment in local communities. These findings may even educate customers as to the challenges of operating a small retail business during extraordinary times of COVID-19 and the threat posed to not only businesses, but to the community at large.

### **Recommendation for Action**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is that some small retail business leaders lack entrepreneurial strategies to sustain business beyond 5 years. Small retail business is a catalyst for communities throughout the United States. Lack of strategies affect businesses worldwide but are a problem in the United States in the first five years of business. Recommendations include the following strategies after interviewing multiple businesses for this study.

#### **Recommendation 1: The Entrepreneurial Mindset**

Innovative entrepreneurial strategies are directly related to having an entrepreneurial mindset, and this is what some participants used as a strategy to deal with the COVID restrictions. An entrepreneurial mindset is associated with those in entrepreneurship including students who learned the subject in school (Rodriguez &

Lieber, 2020). Some of the participants in this study said that a positive mindset is what helped them adapt to changing conditions. One participant had a sign that said “Think – Believe – Create.” Leaders need to have an entrepreneurial mindset to get past obstacles, overcome challenges to business operations, and to rid the negativity of a bad situation.

### **Recommendation 2: Build Adaptable Business Model**

Adaptable business models are not something every small retail business owner is able to do, but the leaders that emerge with this innovative entrepreneurial strategy are more likely to survive past 5 years in business. P1, P2, and P5 all built or adapted the business model to meet the challenges of COVID, and lack of open stores to succeed. Su, et al. (2020) cited the need for business model innovation to maintain competitiveness and create value for customers and stakeholders. Multiple participants in this study built an adaptable business model and will likely survive post COVID shutdowns in the long-term.

### **Recommendation 3: Business Contingency Strategy**

Many businesses lack innovative entrepreneurial strategies and this includes having a viable business contingency strategy. Kemp (2016) highlighted the need for all small businesses to have natural disaster plan, insurance, and have plenty of cash reserves to maintain operations post disaster. Small retail business leaders who understand the PESTEL model, SWOT analysis, and having a business contingency strategy that is realistic will likely survive any type of disaster to include another type COVID event. The small retail businesses that do not have this in mind when planning business strategies may have to find an exit strategy instead.

### **Disseminating the Results**

The findings of this study will be made available through the ProQuest/UMI dissertation database. I may pursue other avenues to publish in scholarly and business journals. The study will be published and available on the Walden dissertation search and other databases for future scholars and academics to read.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Further exploration of the SDT may result in additional information learned for small businesses other than retail businesses. The SDT strategies do appear to work with the companies I interviewed. Future researchers may find the information useful to expand on and write more information of value to small retail businesses. The limitations in this study are that only 5 small retail businesses were interviewed. A bigger sample may assist providing further validating data.

### **Reflections**

The doctoral journey is not an easy one and I recommend if you plan on doing something like this, be prepared to devote 3-5 years of your life to get it. The journey was both rewarding and challenging. My goal was to become a doctor and to gain a better understanding of small retail businesses. I accomplished both. I spent the majority of my life in the military and I am thankful for the discipline I learned in the military, because without it, I would have quit this doctoral journey years ago. Going through something like this requires grit, perseverance, patience, and time. I have a newfound respect for scholars of all types, and the doctoral journey challenged me like no other venture in life.

## **Conclusion**

In this qualitative multiple case study, the study included the exploration of innovative entrepreneurial strategies small retail business leaders use to sustain business beyond the first 5 years of operation. The participants comprised 5 small retail businesses in Illinois who used innovative entrepreneurial strategies to survive past the 5-year mark in business. Data were collected using face-to-face semistructured interviews. Data analysis was guided using Yin's (2018) 5-step analysis process, and through analysis of participants' interview responses, by examining participants websites and social media platforms, and through triangulated data, and data saturation. The three emergent strategy themes include social media, entrepreneurial mindset, and business model innovation. A key recommendation is for small retail business owners is to have an entrepreneurial mindset to survive business disruptions, while utilizing social media to increase business reach, and having strategies to pivot using business model innovation. Implications for social change could be useful in providing awareness of strategies to reduce business failures, which could affect general beneficial social change by ensuring economic prosperity through increasing employment in local communities. Furthermore, by understanding innovative entrepreneurial strategies, some small business leaders may mitigate business failure within 5 years of operation.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview: Explored the entrepreneurial strategies small retail business leaders use to sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operation?

1. Here I will talk about how I scheduled the interviews.
2. I will ask the participants for invitation and an overview of study.
3. I will ensure participants read and understand the informed consent form.
4. I will explain to them before they sign anything and that I expect interview to last less than 30 minutes.
5. I will ask if the participants have a problem with recording interview.
6. I will answer any questions participants have.
7. I will summarize to include giving their answers to questions and ask if what I have is correct, ensuring member checking.
8. I will provide the participants a written account of the study's conclusion and findings to ensure validation.
9. I will thank each participant for taking part in interview.

### Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What innovative entrepreneurial strategies did you use to stay in business beyond 5 years?
2. What kind of barriers did you encounter while implementing innovative entrepreneurial strategies?
3. How did you overcome the key barriers to implementing these innovative entrepreneurial strategies?
4. How did you measure the success of these innovative entrepreneurial strategies?
5. Based upon your experience, what leadership approaches do you think are essential to succeed as an entrepreneurial small retail business?
6. What lessons have you learned from developing and using entrepreneurial strategies to sustain your business beyond 5 years?
7. What other information could you provide that adds value to this study?