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Social Media Marketing Strategies Used by Small Retail Businesses

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

Social Media Marketing Strategies Used by Small Retail Businesses

by

Rochelle S. Jordan

MA, Webster University, 2013

BS, Northwestern State University, 2005

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

October 2018

Abstract

Developing effective social media marketing (SMM) strategies to engage customers is a challenge for business leaders. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the SMM strategies used by small business retailers to engage customers. The conceptual framework for this study was Rogers's diffusion of innovations theory. Participants included 5 small business retailers who had been in business for at least 5 years, used effective SMM strategies to engage customers, and were located in the southwest region of the United States. Data were collected through semistructured, face-to-face interviews. Data analysis resulted in 3 emergent themes: (a) marketing strategies and platforms, (b) social media content, and (c) customer engagement and retention. Small business retailers might benefit from the findings of this study by understanding what other small business retailers consider the most beneficial social media platforms and strategies, what customers desire in social media content, and effective customer engagement and retention processes to create SMM strategies. The implications for positive social change could include providing small business retailers with SMM best practices and strategies to improve company sustainability and growth, generate employment, reduce local poverty, and enhance employees' standards of living.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my family, who through their many sacrifices, have made obtaining my Doctorate possible and worthwhile. To my wonderful, smart, and talented daughters, Hope, Faith, and Kenyetta, this accomplishment is a testament that you can achieve anything you strive for. To my peers at Walden University, especially Ranelli Williams, I cannot thank you all enough for encouraging me throughout this journey.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

In 2015, the number of small businesses totaled 28.4 million in the United States of America, but 50% of small businesses are likely to fail within the first five years of operation (Small Business Administration [SBA], 2015). Small businesses play a vital role in creating new jobs, innovations, and economic growth (Karadag, 2015). Social media marketing (SMM) is one strategy that may lead to improved survival of small businesses (Wamba & Carter, 2014). Many small business owners fail to consider digital media when developing marketing strategies (Hassan, Nadzim, & Shiratuddin, 2015). However, there is a paucity of literature related to how social media enhanced business performance (Paniagua & Sapena, 2014).

The lack of literature on the benefits of SMM and knowledge of organizational impacts indicates the need for further research (Charlesworth, 2014). Future researchers could uncover best practices and effective SMM strategies to help business leaders exploit potential benefits and assess which social media tools and strategies are most beneficial to achieve competitive advantage (Boling, Burns, & Dick, 2014; Brooks, Heffner, & Henderson, 2014). Practitioners might benefit from this study by gaining more insights about the associated risks and benefits of social media and to make informed decisions to adopt SMM strategies (Paniagua & Sapena, 2014).

Background of the Problem

Small businesses play a vital role in the global economy. The classification of a small business in the retail trade industry is a business with a gross of less than $7.5 million in average annual receipts that employs 1 to 500 people (SBA, 2016a). Small

business owners faced marketing challenges to gain a competitive market position (Hutchinson, Donnell, Gilmore, & Reid, 2015). One of the most impactful challenges for business leaders is developing an effective SMM strategy to engage customers (Oyza & Agwu, 2016). Jones et al. (2015) posited that an effective marketing strategy is invaluable to business success. Effective marketing strategies have a positive impact on a business's financial performance and survival rate (Fillis, 2015).

Small businesses must employ certain customer engagement practices to compete against larger firms (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). Social media were the most cost-effective medium for marketing and suitable for small businesses that may not have a large marketing budget (Hassan et al., 2015). Some small business leaders lack effective SMM strategies required to successfully engage consumers. Herman (2015) posited that small business leaders have been unsuccessful in implementing SMM strategies that promote the longevity of their businesses. The high failure rate of small business in the United States was a major concern (Anderson & Ullah, 2014; Karadag, 2015). While many factors contribute to business failure, customer engagement is a key component for business success (Hibbler-Britt & Sussan, 2015) as well as setting goals and developing strategies (Chatterjee & Das, 2015).

Problem Statement

There are some organizations struggling to find ways to effectively connect with customers (Oyza & Agwu, 2016). Oyza and Agwu (2016) discovered that 62% of marketers identified developing an effective social media marketing strategy as one of the most impactful challenges for business leaders. The general business problem is that

some business leaders do not fully understand how to leverage social media marketing to engage customers. The specific business problem is that some business leaders struggle to effectively implement social media marketing strategies to engage customers.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the SMM strategies small business retailers used to engage customers. The target population was five successful small business retailers in the San Antonio, Texas (SATX) region. The sample was five small business retailers who developed and employed successful SMM strategies to engage customers. Small business retailers may use the results of this study to gain insights into using social media and creating successful SMM strategies to effectively engage customers. The implication for social change is the possible increase in the success rate of existing and future small retail businesses in SATX. Successful small businesses might employ more people, who in turn, could financially stimulate the local economy. The money generated by small businesses might increase taxation to help fund social services.

Nature of the Study

This study is a qualitative, multiple case study. The purpose of a qualitative study is to explain how and why a phenomenon exists when not enough information on a subject exists (Yin, 2018). Participant observation and in-depth interviews are ways researchers use qualitative methods to explore a phenomenon (Morse, 2015). Qualitative research involves assembling, organizing, and explaining material derived from dialog or conversation (Grossoehme, 2014). The need to discover what SMM strategies small

business retailers use to engage customers will drive the methodology of this study. Bryman (2015) posited that quantitative research focused on measurement, generalization, replication, and causality. A quantitative researcher examines the relationships between variables, seeks to answer hypotheses through surveys and experiments, and tests theories by analyzing statistical data (Yin, 2018). A quantitative method does not provide the opportunity to develop a deep understanding of a phenomenon (Spillman, 2014). Researchers prefer qualitative instead of quantitative research to gain a contextual understanding of a phenomenon (Allen, Hancock, & Vardaman, 2014). I examined how perceptions affect individuals' thoughts and actions within a situational context. The mixed methodology was also not suitable for this study. Mixed methods research design combines qualitative and quantitative methods in a single research project where one method strengthens the other to be more effective (Hesse-Biber, 2015). Two factors for the mixed methods design are the amount of time required to complete the study and numerical data (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2014). The mixed-methods approach is a way to take advantage of the benefits both methods offer (Bryman, 2015; Morse & Cheek, 2014); however, due to time constraints and a lack of hypotheses to test (see Yin, 2018), a mixed methods approach was not beneficial for this study. Of the identified research methods, the qualitative research was the best method for my study because I explored the strategies and motivations of small business retailers who successfully used SMM.

Grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenology, and case study designs are all qualitative research designs (Ingham-Broomfield, 2015). Phenomenological,

ethnographic, and grounded theory designs are not suitable for this study because of the

characteristics and goals associated with each. Grounded theory is a general research

method consisting of various research procedures for the development of conceptual

categories (Tossy, 2015). Grounded theory suits qualitative or quantitative research and

works best when exploring the context of a phenomenon (Corley, 2015). The

phenomenological design reflects a participant's perspective of an event or situation

while the researcher tries to answer the question of the experience (Gill, 2014).

Phenomenological design studies are ideal for exploring intense social, affective human

behavior and shared experiences of a social phenomenon (Merriam, 2009), which was not

the goal of my research.

In ethnographic research, often referred to as the *fly on the wall technique*, people

are observed closely in their natural environments (Cayla, Beers, & Arnould, 2014).

Ethnographic researchers observe cultures, organizations, and groups closely (Brown,

2014). The ethnographic design was not suitable for this study because I did not focus on

a specific culture. Researchers used case studies to explore a contemporary phenomenon

(Yin, 2018), with the intent to understand the setting or context of an occurrence in real-

time (Singh, 2014). Case study designs required face-to-face interviews and allowed the

researcher to receive extensive feedback (Yin, 2018). Case studies also offered

opportunities to answer how and why a phenomenon exists and possibly obtain solutions

to the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). The case study was used to analyze details of real-life

situations (Ardhendu, 2014) and helped to establish a comprehensive and complete

understanding of the business problem.

Research Question

What SMM strategies do small business retailers use to engage customers?

Interview Questions

1. What social media platforms do you currently use to support your retail operations?

2. What SMM strategies do you use to engage customers?

3. What are your most effective SMM strategies to engage customers?

4. How has social media improved customer engagement?

5. What SMM strategies are important to retail operations?

6. What SMM strategies have been beneficial to your business?

7. What SMM strategies are unique to retail operations?

8. What positive effects on your business have using SMM strategies had on engaging customers?

9. How have you adjusted your SMM strategies based on customer feedback?

10. What additional information would you like to share concerning your SMM strategies?

Conceptual Framework

Rogers's diffusion of innovations (DOI) theory was the conceptual framework of this study I used to explore how small business retailers developed and incorporated SMM strategies to engage customers. Rogers popularized the DOI theory in 1962. Rogers' DOI theory, established as a communications theory, is the foundation for behavior change models within the social science discipline (Valente & Rogers, 1995). Rogers sought to explain how, why, and the rate at which ideas and technology spread

through cultures. The use of technology increased customer reach and business growth

(Nawafleh, 2015). The four categories of the DOI theory are innovation, communication

channels, time, and social system (Rogers, 2003). Adopting an innovation was key to

achieving a competitive advantage over competitors and remaining profitable

(Achadinha, Jama, & Nel, 2014). Communication channels such as social media, apps,

and websites are innovations used for marketing (Andrews, Goehring, Hui, Pancras, &

Thornswood, 2016). Grewal, Roggeveen, and Nordfält (2017) used the DOI theory to

explore the length of time it takes for individuals to adopt a technology. Social circles

could affect user adoption, resulting in organizations leveraging social systems to

influence adoption rates (Risselada, Verhoef, & Bijmolt, 2014).

Rogers' DOI adoption factors: (a) relative advantage, (b) compatibility, (c)

complexibility, (d) trialability, and (e) observability influenced adopters of social media

(Zolkepli & Kamarulzaman, 2015). Yahaya, Hamid, Fauzi, Idris, and Haji-Othman

(2016) used the DOI to explore the influence of relative advantage, compatibility, and

complexity had on mobile banking services and was able to use the results to predict

users' likelihood of using mobile banking services. Dutta (2016) used trialability to

explore the differences in how men and women accepted technology. Razaghpanah et al.

(2015) suggested that marketers observe and analyze mobile traffic and network data,

which could be used to create effective SMM and customer engagement strategies. I

applied the DOI theory as the conceptual framework of this study to explore how small

business retailers developed and incorporated SMM strategies to engage customers,

which afforded multiple areas of exploration. Using the DOI theory along with

semistructured interviews, observations, and a thorough review of existing literature facilitated the understanding of how small businesses implemented SMM strategies to engage customers.

Operational Definitions

Branding: Branding is a marketing strategy designed to promote a product to attract and retain consumers (Rosendale, 2015).

Customer engagement: Customer engagement is a strategy that encourages the consumer to interact and share experiences with a company or brand (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, & Ilic, 2011).

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM): Electronic word-of-mouth is person-to-person communication spread over social media or the Internet (Leung, Bai, & Stahura, 2015).

Innovation: An innovation is the first endeavor to put an idea or invention into practice (Fagerberg, 2006).

Social media: Social media are online platforms that host opportunities for web users to interact by creating, exchanging, and sharing information. Social media can encourage participation as well as interactions between potential clients and companies (Ho, 2014).

Social media marketing (SMM): Social media marketing is the practice of using Internet-based social media platforms to promote goods, services, information, and ideas (Dahnil, Marzuki, Langgat, & Fabeil, 2014).

Social networking sites: Social networking sites are web-based services such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Skype, and Instagram that allow individuals to build an online public profile, create a list of other users they wish to stay in contact with, and post information for their friends and others to see (Hibbler-Britt & Sussan, 2015).

Traditional marketing: Traditional marketing comprises of marketing tools such as television, print, and radio advertisements (Hassan, et al., 2015).

User-generated content: User-generated content is massive quantities of information produced by and about people, things, and their interactions (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015).

Word-of-mouth: Word-of-mouth content is an unpaid form of promotion in which satisfied customers tell other people how much they like a business, product, or service (Kawakami, Kishiya, & Parry, 2013).

<div align="center">**Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**</div>

Assumptions

Assumptions are considered unverifiable truths, carry risks and can cause inaccuracies in the findings (Lips-Wiersma & Mills, 2014). Leedy and Ormrod (2016) reported that researchers must disclose all assumptions or risk invalidated findings. Researchers might investigate a phenomenon from a particular viewpoint based on their beliefs and assumptions, which could influence the approach to their research (Chandler, 2014). Using the qualitative multiple case study design, I assumed small business retailers used SMM strategies to successfully engage customers. Researchers conducted

face-to-face interviews that address entrepreneurship experiences to gather a rich understanding and to connect with participants (Galloway, Kapasi, & Whittam, 2015). Thus, I assumed participants would answer the interview questions honestly and provide accurate feedback on their personal experiences using SMM strategies.

Limitations

Limitations are shortcomings, conditions, or influences the researcher cannot control and can affect the final review of the research (Utian & Maamari, 2014). There were several limitations in this study specific to the retail industry. One limitation of the study was that the target population was small business retailers. The results of this study were unique to the small business leaders in the retail industry and might not be transferable across other industries. Another limitation was that the geographical location was specific to the Southwestern United States; the results might not be indicative of issues experienced in other regions in the United States and the rest of the world. A third limitation was the small population size of five small business retailers, which might not be representative of all retail businesses in SATX, nor detail every small business retailer's experiences.

Delimitations

Delimitations are set boundaries that will narrow the scope of the study (Ody-Brasier & Vermeulen, 2014). Setting boundaries can help answer specific questions, which is important when there are time constraints or other limiting factors. Delimitations might include methodological procedures that do not fit the scope of the study, the chosen population, and the chosen conceptual framework (Ody-Brasier &

Vermeulen, 2014). Boundaries specific to this study included small business leaders in the retail industry: (a) with businesses in the SATX region, (b) who employed successful SMM strategies to engage customers, and (c) who had been operational for at least five years.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study includes information on the contribution to business practice and implications for social change, which are the reduction of gaps in SMM strategies and information on how the study may positively affect social conditions. The focus of this study was to explore the SMM strategies small business retailers used for customer engagement. The ability of small business retailers to develop strategies to compete with large competitors may generate best practices in the retail industry. Small business retailers could use this study to develop and implement successful SMM strategies and practices. Furthermore, the development of such strategies could become a guide for new retailers entering the market to improve the sustainability and survival of small retail businesses. Business survival could result in increased profits and additional job opportunities, thus promoting positive social change for the community.

Contribution to Business Practice

My focus in this study was to explore the SMM strategies small business retailers use to engage customers. Small business leaders could use the findings of this study to improve retail SMM strategies. Small business leaders must employ practical and effective strategies to remain competitive (Boling et al., 2014). One of the goals of conducting this study was to discover possible ways to enhance business practice.

Companies that engage in social media activities, generally begin by communicating with customers for marketing purposes (Kane, 2015). Maintaining an online presence was beneficial to small businesses promotion and reaching large numbers of people in different geographical locations for a fraction of the cost of traditional marketing (Herman, 2015). An effective SMM strategy can lead to brand recognition, increased profits, and customer retention (Lee, Hosanagar, & Nair, 2014). Therefore, small business leaders in the retail industry could benefit from the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this study to create effective SMM strategies. Furthermore, the information contained within this study may help to reduce gaps in research by providing insights into how on small business retailers use successful SMM strategies to engage customers.

Implications for Social Change

Small businesses with less than 500 employees make up 99.7% of 5.68 million firms in the United States (SBA, 2015) and contribute to the creation of jobs and economic growth. Probable contributions leading to positive social change include the possibility to increase awareness of the benefits of SMM strategies. Small business retailers could use the results of the study to develop long-term survival strategies, which could improve local employment opportunities. Contributions to positive social change could include SMM best practices and strategies to improve company sustainability and growth, generation of employment, reduction in local poverty, and an enhancement of employee's standards of living. Additionally, small business leaders in other industries might benefit from the study and could develop strategies to support the sustainment and

growth of economies through employment and financial contributions within the community.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the SMM strategies used by small business retailers to engage consumers. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn have billions of users (Kane, 2015) and 54% of customers in the United States spend over two hours per day on social media (Noguti, Lee, & Dwivedi, 2016). Social media played an important role in how firms engaged customers (Cabiddu, De Carla, & Piccoli, 2014). Firms relied more on social media than on traditional marketing strategies to engage customers (Kumar, Bezawada, Rishika, Janakiraman, & Kannan, 2016). The review of professional and academic literature within this study entailed an in-depth look at information regarding the research question guiding this study, which was: What SMM strategies do small business retailers use to engage consumers? To answer the research question, I examined SMM and customer engagement strategies, explored small business contributions to society, and discussed the findings from previous studies about the usefulness and value of SMM on customer engagement. Major points covered in this study were: (a) the concept used to frame this study, (b) Rogers' DOI theory, (c) the historical context of the conceptual framework, (d) a summary and the importance of the phenomena, (e) gaps and limitations found in current literature, and lastly, (f) how this study contributes to the current body of knowledge.

The supporting references in this study originated from two government websites, 10 books, and 225 or 87% scholarly peer reviewed articles dated from 2014 to 2018 to ensure the supporting information is current. The literature review contains 95 peer-reviewed articles that have a publication date of fewer than five years from when I expect to receive Walden University chief academic officer's (CAO) approval for my study. I used multiple search engines to retrieve peer-reviewed literature for the study such as Google Scholar, Researchgate, Science Direct, and ProQuest, Ulrich's Periodical Directory, EBSCOhost, and Emerald Management Journals, but my primary source was Walden University's Library, which had an extensive collection of databases and research articles. I used a combination of keywords to conduct my searches which included *customer engagement, diffusion of innovations theory, innovation, retail marketing, small business, small business retailers, small business success rates,* s*ocial media, social media marketing, and social networking sites.*

Diffusion of Innovations Theory

Diffusion of innovations is a popular theory that explains the processes adopters use when deciding to adopt new technologies, ideas, or innovations (Shelomi, 2015). Organizations used the DOI theory to understand what influenced adoption, which led to achieving competitive performance (Wu & Chiu, 2015). Using the DOI theory helped me understand why retailers used SMM strategies to engage customers. Rogers explained the DOI theory as how and at what rate people adopt innovations, how social systems share innovations over time, and the understanding potential adopters have of innovations. Innovations are new ideas or practices, communication is the sharing and

receiving of information, and the social system is a formation of interlaced units that achieve a common goal (Rogers, 2003). Rogers posited that the measurement of time in diffusion research which includes: innovation decision, innovativeness of an individual or unit, and rate of adoption, was a strength in the DOI theory.

Diffusion of innovations theory has beginnings in sociology and agriculture and has since been applied to other disciplines such as medical sociology, marketing, health promotion, development studies, and communications (Valente & Rogers, 1995). Early diffusion research appeared in studies of rural sociology, communications, marketing, and medical sociology; however, researchers of each discipline applied DOI differently (Greenhalgh, Robert, Macfarlane, Bate, & Kyriakidou, 2004). Katz, Levine, and Hamilton (1963) compared the similarities of diffusion between medical sociology, rural sociology, and anthropology. The concept of innovation in rural sociology seen in Ryan and Gross's 1943 hybrid seed corn experiment formed the foundation of DOI research and detailed how farmers accepted an innovation after influence from earlier adopters (Greenhalgh et al., 2004; Valente & Rogers, 1995). Rogers and Kincaid (1981) conceptualized DOI in communications studies as new information transmitted by mass media or through personal relationships. Coleman, Katz, and Menzel (1966) applied DOI to doctor's acceptance and prescription of antibiotics; the study was the catalyst for network analysis (Burt, 1973). In marketing, innovations were either products or services and researchers used perceived benefits or costs to measure success and adoption behavior (Greenhalgh et al., 2004).

Diffusion of innovations was one of the most commonly examined theories to explain a specific population's adoption of an innovation and the acceptance of new technologies within society (Rogers, 2003). Some businesses strived to gain competitive advantage through innovations and by being unique (Brem, Maier, & Wimschneider, 2016). Zolkepli and Kamarulzaman (2015) referred to characteristics of the DOI theory on social media adoption and discovered information that could help marketers understand factors that inspire social media usage. I applied the DOI theory to understand the innovative practice of SMM strategies small business retailers used to engage customers.

I considered using Porter's competitive strategy theory as the conceptual framework. Porter discovered strategy theory in 1980 (Porter, 1980). Competitive strategy is the most researched theory in business strategy literature (Block, Kohn, Miller, & Ullrich, 2015). Porter's framework includes three competitive strategies: (a) cost leadership, (b) differentiation, and (c) cost focus (Farrell, 2015). The difference between the DOI theory and Porter's competitive strategy is that the DOI theory explains a population's adoption of an innovation and the acceptance of new technologies within society (Rogers, 2003), whereas the main premise of Porter's competitive strategy theory is that business leaders can create more value and sales than competitors (Menon & Yao, 2017). I could use Porter's competitive strategy theory to explore business sustainability practices and competitive advantage; however, Porter's theory would not fully explain the innovation adoption process.

Innovation

Company business models changed with the increase in customer acceptance of new technologies (Moreno-Munoz, Bellido-Outeirino, Siano, & Gomez-Nieto, 2016). A major component of innovation is identifying opportunities to develop new products or services (Andries & Czarnitzki, 2014). Small businesses can be more flexible than larger firms and flexibility leads to generating innovative products and services (Mastur & Soriano, 2014). Innovation stimulated economic growth, sustains business growth, and offers new potential, such as increased profits (Galindo & Mendez, 2014).

Companies invested in technology with the intent to increase revenue, decrease costs, or improve efficiencies (Turner & Shah, 2014). For instance, smartphone technologies are innovations that allow customers to leisurely interact with brands by using mobile applications or apps, which are another way brands are engaging consumers (Kim, Wang, & Malthouse, 2015). The internet has become one of the most powerful engines to foster retail sales (Leeflang, Verhoef, Dahlstrom, & Freundt, 2014). Mobile internet technology usage grew 18.9% since 2010 and use mobile internet more than stationary internet service (Moreno-Munoz et al., 2016). People spent an average of 17% on Facebook's mobile app (Moreno-Munoz et al., 2016). Kim et al. (2015) posited that using a brand's mobile application increased consumer-buying behavior because mobile technologies are readily available, portable, and convenient.

Limited resources, including the lack of funds dedicated to marketing, contributed to the high failure rates of small businesses (Anderson & Ullah, 2014; Karadag, 2015). Innovations such as SMM might be a way to help small firms survive beyond the first

five years. Characteristics such as the size and age of a business contributed to innovativeness. Autio, Kenney, Mustar, Siegel, and Wright (2014) found that small businesses were less likely to be innovative.

Globalization of goods and services are forcing small businesses to be more innovative to remain competitive and improve advantageous market positioning (Leung, Cheung, & Chu, 2014; Story, Boso, & Cadogan, 2015). Hassan et al. (2015) posited that social media and the Internet are critical for small business for competitiveness and innovation. Innovation drove the demand for a product or service or influenced the anticipation for next-generation products (Taalbi, 2017). Love and Roper (2015) discovered the existence of positive relationships between innovation, exportation, cash flow, and liquidity. Applying the DOI theory might assist small business leaders understand how innovations are adopted and the benefits of new technologies to create successful SMM strategies to improve competitiveness.

Small Business Contributions to the U.S. Economy

Small businesses are vital to the U.S. economy; have a significant impact in creating new jobs, economic growth, and innovation; and are major contributors to socioeconomic development throughout the world (Karadag, 2015). In March 2014, a representative of the SBA reported small businesses in the United States made up 99.7% of employer firms, 63% of net new private-sector jobs, 48.5% of private-sector employ-ment, 42% of private-sector payroll, 46% of private-sector output, 37% of high-tech employment, 98% of firms exporting goods, and 33% of exporting value (SBA, 2015). Small businesses account for approximately 39% of the U.S. gross national product

(GNP) and employ about 40 million people in the United States, yet 50% fail within the

first five years of operation (Boling et al., 2014; SBA, 2016a; Wamba & Carter, 2014).

Social Media

Social media are Internet-based technologies designed for multiple people to

interact simultaneously and share information (Bingham & Conner, 2015). Hibbler-Britt

and Sussan (2015) stated that social media played a key role in the survival of small

businesses. Business use of social media platforms had significant impacts in managerial

and marketing arenas (Georgescu & Popescul, 2015). Leonardi (2014) found that

workplace communication via social networks decreased work duplication and enhanced

the development of innovative ideas for products and services. Business leaders used

social media to engage customers, remain competitive, and gain visibility in their

respective markets (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). Company leaders used popular social

networking sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Skype, and

Instagram to engage consumers, which enabled small businesses to compete with larger

businesses (Hibbler-Britt & Sussan, 2015).

Company leaders used social media platforms to engage directly with existing and

potential customers, which fostered building relationships (Goi, 2014). Business leaders

used social media to engage consumers directly (Sajid, 2016). Consumers and business

leaders used social media to share and receive information about each other, brands,

products, and services via web-based and mobile technologies (Dahnil et al., 2014).

Business leaders used data received from their consumers to predict or influence

consumer-buying behavior, generate sales, increase brand popularity, and attract new

consumers (Dahnil et al., 2014). Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are the most popular

social media platforms (Patil & Puri, 2015). Customers are spending more time on social

media interacting with people who have similar interests (Kumar et al., 2016). Facebook

has over 1 billion users, while Twitter and LinkedIn users are in the hundreds of millions

(Kane, 2015). Pinterest and Snapchat are new popular social media platforms which

seemed to appear overnight and are growing rapidly (Kane, 2015). Consumers used

social media to share positive or negative service experiences conspicuously or

anonymously on a business page (Valos, Habibi, Casidy, Driesener, & Maplestone,

2016). Schulze, Scholer, and Skiera (2014) argued that customers who use social media

regularly will have more influence on other customers in social media communities who

possess the same views about a product or service.

Social Media Marketing (SMM)

SMM is the practice of using Internet-based social media platforms to promote

goods and services and to share information and ideas (Dahnil et al., 2014). Marketing

was more sophisticated with the emergence of social media (Constantinides, 2014).

Hounhouigan, Ingenbleek, Van der Lans, Van Trijp, and Linnemann (2014) found that

effective marketing practices benefited customers and increased business profits.

Gajendra and Wang (2014) found that marketers gained a better understanding of

consumers' purchase intentions when consumers shared feedback and experiences online.

Umrez (2014) found that customers preferred personalized marketing experiences. Many

organizations included social media in their marketing strategies (Ananda, Hernandez-

Garcia, & Lamberti, 2016). The increased usage of social media for marketing purposes

allows small business retailers to reach audiences outside of the retailer's immediate location (Sajid, 2016). Consumers controlled if and how they engaged with businesses (Tiago & Verrissimo, 2014). Retailers were able to quickly get information to consumers by using various social media platforms (Nobre & Silva, 2014). One marketing strategy was to leverage digital technology to facilitate online reviews and inform customers of a product or service (Keng, Tran, Liao, Yao, & Hsu, 2014) with the intent to influence consumer-buying behavior. Retailers posted product or service descriptions, customer experience reviews, coupons, deals, and sales on social media websites to increase web traffic and influence consumer-buying behavior (Nobre & Silva, 2014). To optimize the quality of customers' shopping experiences, one of the key factors is to increase consumers' product knowledge level (Keng et al., 2014). SMM is not a new concept; however, the adoption of this technology has been slow (Boling et al., 2014). Business leaders might consider using SMM strategies to improve customer relations, increase sales, and improve their reputation (Schaupp & Belanger, 2014). The functionality and versatility of social media was an important reason why businesses must consider creating SMM strategies (Tiago & Verrissimo, 2014). SMM strategies can have a positive effect on revenues and profits (Kumar et al., 2016). Managers should understand online consumer behavior (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016) to leverage those interests and to create marketing strategies that will increase the survivability of the business. Successful SMM strategies include wider viewership and brand exposure (Yadav & Tripathi, 2016).

Social media were a low-cost, high-efficient alternative to traditional marketing, which might allow business leaders to concentrate funds on other activities used to engage consumers and increase profits (Hassan et al., 2015; Karadag, 2015). Social media were easy to use; nondiscriminatory; inclusive of all people regardless of age, income, language, and location; directly responsible for the significant growth in communication and collaborations among people and businesses; and connect like-minded people with similar interests (Georgescu & Popescul, 2015). In Parveen, Jaarfar, & Ainin's (2015) study of Malaysian social media managers, business leaders reported their organizations were more competitive after implementing SMM strategies to attract new consumers, promote goods and services, build relationships with online communities, and to conduct market research to determine the customers' wants and needs. Social media were often less expensive marketing platforms than print and television marketing and had the potential to reach wider audiences (Boling et al., 2014; Hassan et al., 2015). Broekemier, Chau, and Seshadri (2015) reported that companies spent less than $10,000 annually on SMM, which is important to entrepreneurs who may not have the budget for traditional marketing methods to remain competitive (Toombs & Harlow, 2014). However, Chatzithomas, Boutsouki, Leonidas, and Zotos (2014) posited that consumers preferred SMM to traditional means and suggested that businesses consider using a mix of traditional and SMM to engage customers, vendors, and suppliers.

Business leaders used social media in a variety of ways (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). Zuniga, Copeland, and Bimber (2014) discovered that social media usage

enhances political consumerism, which is a form of boycotting goods or services offered by brands who consumers think have unsatisfactory business practices. Wazed and Ng (2015) discovered that employment recruiters used social media to engage college students globally through Facebook, increase employer brand awareness, and reduced overall recruiting costs. Patil and Puri (2015) found that 87.5% of Indian companies used social media as the primary marketing platform.

Herman (2015) found that SMM was effective for reaching global audiences for a fraction of the cost of traditional marketing tools. Business leaders could use SMM strategies rather than printed media or television ads, to engage consumers and increase their chances of survival. Exposure to SMM influences consumer purchase decisions (Xie & Lee, 2015). A void exists in the literature regarding how some small business leaders might incorporate the latest communications technologies into their business strategies to engage consumers and other stakeholders.

Customer Engagement

SMM is a strategy that might improve products and services, therefore business leaders must effectively use social media to engage customers (Constantinides, 2014). Customer engagement strategies included making the customer feel like an important part of the company (Moreno-Munoz et al., 2016). Effective customer engagement increased brand loyalty and was critical for business survival (Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015; Hibbler-Britt & Sussan, 2015). Cole (2015) posited that acknowledging customer feedback created customer satisfaction and might lead to developing new products. Chakravarty, Kumar, and Grewal (2014) found that 80% of small businesses

relied on the customer satisfaction and purchasing experience. Satisfied customers were more likely to view a company positively, spread word-of-mouth content, and repeat business transactions with the company (Chen & Chen, 2014). Lee et al. (2014) and Dijkmans, Kerkhof, and Beukeboom (2015) discovered a positive relationship between social media customer engagement, increased sales, return-on-investment, profitability, perceived reputation, and customer retention. Active customer engagement decreases the impact negative events could have on an organization's reputation (McCann & Barlow, 2015). Kajalo and Lindblom (2015) discovered that direct, close contact with customers enabled small businesses to be more flexible in improving market position.

Customer engagement strategies are a major concern for marketers. Customer's perspectives and the value of communication is a focal point for marketers (Rad, Ghorabi, Rafiee, & Rad, 2015). Fang, Xiaoling, Minue, and Palmatier (2015) found that interested customers were more likely to click advertising links, which increased traffic and other business-related activities. An increase of interest in consumer communities occurred when consumers actively exchanged product and service information (Dessart et al., 2015). Word-of-mouth, electronic word-of-mouth activities, blogging, and writing product or service reviews are examples of customer engagement behaviors.

Word-of-mouth communication. Word-of-mouth communication impacted consumer behavior (Berger, 2014). Word-of-mouth advertising was effective in getting messages to target audiences (Levy & Gvili, 2015). Facebook word-of-mouth communication enhanced brand equity, brand image, and consumer-buying behavior (Dehghani & Tumer, 2015). Pauwels, Aksehirli, and Lackman (2016) posited that word-

of-mouth advertising was more effective than paid marketing. Satisfied customers were likely to share positive word-of-mouth content with other customers (Barreto, 2014). Consumers discussed products, spread word-of-mouth content, made recommendations, and mentioned products, services, and brands (Berger, 2014). Men and Tsai (2015) discovered that communicating and engaging on social media sites led to beneficial relationships between businesses and other interested parties. Customers relied on word-of-mouth communication because customer reviews were independent of manufacturer or marketer influence, which was significant because there was no control of the shared content (Sloan, Bodey, & Gyrd-Jones, 2015).

Electronic word-of-mouth communication. Electronic word-of-mouth communication (eWOM) is the person-to-person communication spread over social media or the Internet (Leung et al., 2015). Social media platforms allowed consumers to interact with one another, which generated eWOM and promoted awareness for businesses, products, or services (Kwok & Yu, 2013). Consumers shared positive experiences with new products or services with family and friends, which might lead to the adoption of innovations and increased sales (Kawakami et al., 2013). Business leaders might be able to leverage eWOM by communicating effectively with their target audience and guiding consumer discussions according to the company's mission and marketing goals. Zhou and Wang (2014) posited that eWOM communication via social media, such as in online tourism communities and tourism review websites, promoted cities as tourism destinations. Consumers who had positive social media experiences

influenced the opinions of the social media page, the hotel brand, booking intention, and intention to share experiences via eWOM (Leung et al., 2015).

User-generated content. Consumers create user-generated content by writing online reviews of products or services that are visible to anyone who visits the website (Zhou & Wang, 2014). User-generated content was the main source of information passed to businesses and consumers (Yu, Duan, & Cao, 2013). User-generated content influenced consumer-purchase behavior (Weathers, Swain, & Grover, 2015). Consumers created user-generated content by writing online reviews of products or services that were visible to anyone who visited the website (Zhou & Wang, 2014). Sales of products and services increased by 58% and 41%, respectively when consumers wrote reviews or made recommendations to friends using social media (Forbes & Vespoli, 2013). SMM and the understanding of user-generated content are still in the early stages, and managers do not know how to exploit the benefits of each (Paniagua & Sapena, 2014).

Branding. Brands have increased their presence on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which enabled consumers to drive the conversation and communicate with brands in real-time (De Vries & Carlson, 2014). Brand marketing can be expensive; however, social media offered a low-cost solution for small businesses with limited marketing budgets (Herman, 2015). Social media platforms facilitated communication between consumers and businesses; increased company and brand recognition, customer engagement, event promotion; and allowed brands to share product information (Nobre & Silva, 2014; Patil & Puri, 2015). Firms that engaged customers through social media pages may be more likely to influence customers' purchase

behavior (Kumar et al., 2016). Habibi, Laroche, and Richard (2014) discovered that

positive relationships between consumers and brands, products, companies, and among

other consumers increased brand trust and loyalty. Interacting with brand pages

encouraged employees and consumers to share interesting information and positive

experiences about products (Patil & Puri, 2015). Consumer interaction influenced brand

loyalty by the cocreation value, social value, and frequency of use with brand pages (De

Vries & Carlson, 2014; Zheng, Cheung, Lee, & Liang, 2015). Business practices of

addressing consumers' concerns helped to build brand or company equity, brand

recognition, and brand loyalty, which might lead to increased business value and

survivability (Fan & Gordon, 2014).

Adopting Social Media Marketing Strategies

Jones, Simmons, Packham, Byonon-Davies, and Pickernell (2014) suggested that

business leaders who adopted information technology communication skills promoted

sustainability and growth. The adoption of innovations occurred at different rates

between early and late adopters and was dependent upon how and in what context the

adopter interacted with the innovation (Greenhalgh et al., 2004; Rogers, 2003). The

differences in the perception of innovation attributes: *relative advantage*, *compatibility*,

complexity, *trialability*, and *observability,* contributed to the rates of which adoption

occurred, therefore understanding the effects of attributes on any innovations was

important as they influenced the adoption decisions of the potential adopters (Rogers,

2003). Relative advantage referred to an adopter's belief of how well an innovation was

improved upon over prior versions (Rogers, 2003). Innovations that are either cost-

effective or effective are usually adopted and implemented at higher rates (Greenhalgh et al., 2004). The greater the perceived advantage, the faster users will adopt the innovation (Rodrigues et al., 2014).

Compatibility is the degree an innovation aligns with the existing values, needs, and experiences of potential adopters (Rogers, 2003). Complexity referred to the difficulty of which an individual felt an innovation was to use (Rogers, 2003). Adoption rates were higher for simple to use innovations with few barriers (Greenhalgh et al., 2004). Users expected innovations to be easy to use (Leeflang et al., 2014). Observability represented how others viewed the benefits of an innovation (Rogers, 2003). Lastly, trialability referred to if and how one might experiment with an innovation before adoption (Rogers, 2003).

It was critical to fully understand the innovation attributes when considering adopting a new technology (Rogers, 2003). Fillis (2015) found that adopting technology for marketing helped business leaders create opportunities to build stronger customer relationships. Early adopters will try innovations before fully accepting an innovation, whereas late adopters will try an innovation only after learning of the early adopters' experiences (Frattini, Bianchi, Massis, & Sikimic, 2014; Rogers, 2003). Early adopters influenced the time it took late adopters to fully accept and adopt innovations (Van Der Boor, Oliveira, & Veloso, 2014). Ryan and Gross (1943) revealed that it took 14 years, from 1927 until 1941, before the majority of Iowa farmers began planting hybrid seed corn and only then after hearing of the success from early adopters (Valente & Rogers, 1995).

Adopting SMM strategies was slow across some industries because SMM was unfamiliar, disruptive, and the benefits associated with costs were unknown (Boling et al., 2014). Some business leaders experienced difficulty implementing and deploying social media strategies because of the many differences between SMM and traditional marketing strategies (Valos, Polonsky, Mavondo, & Lipscomb, 2015). External competitiveness drove the adoption of digital media, which increased brand recognition, product knowledge, and improved 2-way communication between consumers and businesses (Dahnil et al., 2014). Smaller businesses were slower than larger corporations to accept and implement new technologies and often did not possess effective means of measuring return on investment (Tiago & Verrissimo, 2014). Herrmann and Nadkarni (2014) found that small business leaders were less likely to employ innovation strategies because of costs associated with new changes. Brooks et al. (2014) found that in addition to marketing, business leaders used social media to conduct risk management and customer relations, which further lends to the importance of incorporating SMM into marketing strategies.

Adoption of social media varied by industry and depended on the industry sector, firm size, and the innovativeness and technological advancement of the company (Wamba & Carter, 2014). Understanding and comfortability with social media contributed to the effectiveness of social media technologies (Eagleman, 2013). Perceptions and attitudes varied among industries because there was a lack of knowledge of the perceived benefits and the risks of using social media (Veldeman, Van Praet, & Mechant, 2015). Nonprofit organizations used social media at a higher rate than any

other industry because of the low-cost of advertising (Krueger & Haytko, 2015).

Information technology companies used social media at a rate of 40.8% and only 26.7%

of industrial companies used social media (Veldeman et al., 2015). Azhar and Abeln

(2014) found that the construction industry had not taken advantage of the social media

as compared to other industries because of the lack of understanding the full potential of

social media as a two-way communication tool, and because of privacy concerns and

security issues.

Before adopting a social media strategy, business leaders should consider the

company's focus, identify clear objectives and goals for using social media, and identify

the ideal social media management tools to best suit the company (Turner & Shah, 2014).

Other considerations for using SMM could be to determine if the product or service

would benefit from social media, which online platforms or tools would work best, and

lastly, business leaders should understand that while SMM can be effective, there might

be a need to use a combination of marketing strategies to reach the widest audiences

(Sajid, 2016). Business leaders may consider using a mix of entertaining and informative

content to improve customer engagement (Lee et al., 2014). Social media management

tools could help business leaders engage and influence consumers to be active on the

company's page, which might help to determine which SMM strategies were effective

(Turner & Shah, 2014). Managers should test advertising on one or two social media

platforms to measure effectiveness before creating a business strategy that was heavily

reliant on many social media platforms (Turner & Shah, 2014).

Benefits of Social Media Marketing

      SMM is a business practice used to bring awareness to a company's products or services and to influence consumers to purchase (Sajid, 2016). The benefits of social media included self-help for consumers, knowledge sharing between consumers and the company, referrals, increased profits, decreased operating costs, increased loyalty, increased awareness of new products, and brand recognition (Karimi & Naghibi, 2015; Sajid, 2016). Social media user-generated content impacted brand equity and brand attitude (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). Business leaders could use social media to learn more about consumers' habits (Choudhury & Harrigan, 2014). Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter feeds tracked consumers' current and future purchases through consumer-provided status updates which marketing managers might use to develop and implement strategies that drive consumer-buying behavior (Forbes & Vespoli, 2013).

      Social media applications enhanced business communication and collaboration performance, which increased business performance, and were customizable to suit the business objectives of a company (Sajid, 2016; Wang, Pauleen, & Zhang, 2015). Additional benefits of social media included inexpensive marketing, sales promotion, publicity, direct marketing collaboration on projects, writing blogs and microblogs, participation in virtual communities, and socializing networks in personal and professional settings (Georgescu & Popescul, 2015; Herman, 2015). Business leaders might use social media to target particular consumers by using the consumers' shared personal information (Boling et al., 2014). Social networking created entrepreneurial opportunities, which built social capital and may improve after-sales service, promote

product knowledge and upcoming events, and pass on savings to consumers through coupons and special sales (Boling et al., 2014).

The cost-benefit analysis and measuring the return-on-investment of content creation, implementation, posting content, and interacting with consumers added to the effectiveness of SMM strategies. Schaupp and Belanger (2014) discovered the actual value of using social media for sales, marketing, and customer service and found a significant value of using social media for internal operations. Buhalis and Mamalakis (2015) investigated the social media activities of the Princess Andriana Hotel in Rhodes, Greece, over a 14-month period and realized an increase in return-on-investment of 656%, proving social media effected revenue.

Nonfinancial benefits of social media included product reach, customer service, and high brand recognition (Buhalis & Mamalakis, 2015). Azhar and Abeln (2014) found that social media were useful for external communications. Maintaining an online presence and sharing information about products and services with consumers might assist business leaders in obtaining a successful social media campaign, which may translate into increased sales (Paniagua & Sapena, 2014). Companies saw an increase in consumer traffic on their web pages, improved return-on-investment, increased recommendations between consumers of products and services, and reduced marketing expenses (Constantinides, 2014). Improved efficiencies, such as using social media to handle customer service related issues, may enable a company to respond to and resolve customer complaints quickly, receive public recognition for handling issues, and turn negative feedback into positive feedback after issues were satisfactorily resolved (Turner

& Shah, 2014). Business leaders used social media platforms to share investor opinion and to predict stock returns and earnings (Chen, De, Hu, & Hwang, 2014). Amateur investors also used social media platforms to consult with friends rather than professionals for investing tips, thus solidifying social media platforms as sources that provided credible investment information (Chen, De, Hu, & Hwang, 2014). Understanding how and why small business leaders adopted innovations might offer insights into the value associated with SMM (Thompson, Williams, & Thomas, 2013). Since there are over 1 billion people with Facebook accounts, businesses should develop and employ SMM strategies to engage consumers (Chatzithomas et al., 2014).

Transition

In Section 1, I discussed the business problem guiding this study, the purpose statement, the central research question, and various research methods and designs that will shape my research. The discussion continued with assumptions, limitations, and a brief overview of the significance of the study pertaining to SMM strategies of small business retailers in the southwest region of the United States. Lastly, I concluded with an extensive literature review of existing studies and articles related to the SMM strategies of small businesses. Section 2 continued with the discussion of research design and included participant selection, ethical research, data collection, and data analysis. Section 3 included an explanation of the data collection process, the findings of my research, application to professional practice, the implications for social change, and recommendations for further research.

Section 2: The Project

Section 2 is a detailed plan to explore the SMM strategies used by small business retailers to engage customers. The steps detailed in this section will help readers understand how I conducted my research. I explained the role of the researcher, discussed the participants, and justified my research method and design. This section includes an explanation of the data collection instrument and method, the population for the study, and the sampling technique I used to choose my participants. Lastly, I conducted data analysis and established reliability and validity, while ensuring my research is ethical.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the SMM strategies that small business retailers used to engage customers. The target population included five small business retailers in SATX, with successful SMM experience and strategies. The results of this doctoral study may give small business retailers insights as to how they might use social media to engage customers effectively and could contribute to social change by increasing the success rate of existing and future small retail firms. Successful small businesses might employ more people, who in turn, could financially stimulate the local economy. The money generated by small businesses might increase taxation to help fund social services.

Role of the Researcher

When conducting a study, the responsibility lies with the researcher to collect, organize, and analyze emerging data throughout the research process (Collins & Cooper,

2014). Data might emerge from participant interviews or surveys and current literature on the topic. In qualitative research, the researcher becomes part of the research process (Draper, 2016). My duty as a researcher was to select a business problem that warranted further investigation, choose the appropriate method and design, remain objective and unbiased, identify prospective participants, and analyze and interpret the collected data. Researchers must follow ethical guidelines throughout the entire research process. The Belmont Report (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979), defined ethical standards and guidelines for the protection of humans, which I adhered to while conducting my study. Two critical components of ethical research, do no harm and provide full disclosure to participants, are necessary for ensuring ethical practices within research (Bromley, Mikesell, Jones, & Khodyakov, 2015).

As a professional in the Information Technology field, I was interested in learning more about the multiple benefits of social media and wanted to explore how small business leaders leveraged Internet technologies to increase their competitiveness. There are many benefits of social media technologies and I wanted to learn what strategies successful small business retailers used to engage customers. There is a need for more research on how to leverage social media so business leaders can fully understand and implement successful SMM strategies (Charlesworth, 2014). Other than my own personal interest and desire to add to existing literature on small business SMM strategies, I had no direct relationship with the topic of the study or with any of the interviewees.

Bias occurred at any stage of research and was hard to mitigate (Smith & Noble, 2014); however, by understanding research bias, I can develop mitigation strategies. Smith and Noble (2014) discovered that research bias negatively affected the reliability, validity, and outcome of a study. Poggenpoel and Myburgh (2003) posited that the researcher's discomfort with the topic, the researcher's unpreparedness during the research process, and the researcher conducting inappropriate interviews could cause research bias and negatively affected the outcome of a study. Chenail (2011) and Poggenpoel and Myburgh (2003) that to address bias, the researcher must remain prepared throughout every phase of the research process, ask open-ended interview questions, stay humble to the research, anticipate any issues that may arise during the interviews, and address personal feelings while questioning the participants. Member checking is a technique used to reduce researcher bias and allowed participants to approve or clarify any interpretations made by the researcher (Harvey, 2015). Another technique used in qualitative studies to reduce bias and increase research validity is bracketing, which helped phenomenological researchers become more aware of their assumptions and intentionality (Sohn, Thomas, Greenberg, & Pollio, 2017).

Participants

The participants of this study were small business leaders in the retail industry whose businesses grossed less than $7.5 million in annual receipts. The business leaders were business owners located in SATX who had at least five years of business experience and successfully used SMM strategies to engage customers. Adhering to strict criteria for selecting the correct participants will allow me to obtain critical data in less time and

interviewing an expert will help to capture detailed participant experiences (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Before soliciting participants, I requested approval from Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and adhered to proper ethical procedures to avoid any violation of human rights.

The Small Business Development Center (SBDC) in SATX was a resource at my disposal to solicit potential participants for my study. The SBDC assists small business entrepreneurs to be competitive in the global marketplace by providing free business consulting and a myriad of low-cost training services (SBA, 2016b). The SBDC's public database contains physical addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, and other pertinent information for small business retailers required to locate suitable participants for this study. Purposive sampling is a focused data collection technique and allowed me to reach data saturation quicker than some other methods (Yin, 2018). Snowball sampling was a strategy that allowed participants to recommend or refer me to someone who might be able to provide further insight into my research (Emerson, 2015). Using the purposeful snowball sampling technique also increased the chances that I was able to obtain the number of desired participants (Emerson, 2015). The snowball sampling method relies on established networks and adds credibility to research (Valerio et al., 2016).

Researchers should first establish a relationship and build trust with their participants (Browne & McBride, 2015). Recruiting participants occurred with discretion and followed strict ethical guidelines (Robinson, 2014). Participant recruiting can occur face-to-face, by advertising, or via the Internet. In order to establish a relationship and

build trust with the participants, I contacted the chosen business leaders via email and provided a short introduction and fully disclosed the intent of the study and my expectations of their voluntary participation. Voluntary participation leads to more robust data collection and accurate results (Lestari, Kotani, & Kakinaka, 2015). Participants were informed that participation was voluntary and anonymous, the purpose of my study, and that there was no compensation before making an informed decision. The business leaders who chose to participate in this study received a hand-delivered consent form, a signed copy of the consent form prior to the start of the interview, and had a choice of interview locations to ensure anonymity, confidentiality, and maximum comfort.

Research Method and Design

The three prominent methods of research are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods (Yin, 2018). Researchers used the research design and method to combine various components of research into a feasible plan for exploring questions and forming conclusions about a particular study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Understanding the different research methods brings awareness of the proper techniques to collect and analyze data and allowed the researcher to choose the best approach (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Gelling and Engward (2015) and Yazan (2015) agreed that researchers must choose the most appropriate research method and design to answer the central research question and accomplish the study goal. The chosen research method and design can help guide the researcher to determine the most effective way to answer the research question and achieve the goals of the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). I conducted a

qualitative multiple case study to explore the SMM strategies that small business retailers use to engage customers.

Research Method

Quantitative research aims to answer the *if* of a phenomenon, whereas qualitative research aims to explore a phenomenon through an activity (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Bryman (2015) stated that researchers used the quantitative method to determine the measurement, generalization, replication, and causality of the data. The mixed-methods approach is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, which can be a way to maximize and take advantage of the benefits both methods offer (Bryman, 2015; Morse & Cheek, 2014). The goal for qualitative researchers was to understand how participants view processes, practices, and phenomena in the contexts of their lives and social environments (Koch, Niesz, & McCarthy, 2014). Researchers used the qualitative method to discover a phenomenon by conducting interviews, analyzing the data, ensuring the quality of the analysis, and synthesizing the literature (Holt & Goulding, 2014). The qualitative research method was the best choice for my study because the goal was to learn the experiences of small business retailers who successfully used SMM strategies to engage customers and remained in business during the first five years. Marshall and Rossman (2016) affirmed that qualitative research involved collecting data by observing behaviors, exploring documents, and interviewing participants to record their perceptions. Quantitative research uses measurements and generalizations (Bryman, 2015). Mixed method research weakened the influences the qualitative and quantitative methods have individually and required a multifaceted approach to research (Hesse-Biber, 2015).

Neither the quantitative nor the mixed-methods approach was suitable for my study because exploring the subject of SMM strategies was too broad and was not applicable to all small businesses.

Research Design

Ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case studies are types of qualitative research designs. McGinley, O'Neill, Damaske, and Mattila (2014) affirmed that researchers used grounded theory to define or further characterize theories. Grounded theory was not suitable for my study because I was not trying to discover a new theory. Researchers used ethnographic design to understand phenomena within a cultural context (Crandall et al., 2016). The phenomenological approach helped others understand the human experience but was not suitable for my study because my goal was not to focus on how a person lives and relates to the world (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers employed a case study design to observe a particular event and to develop findings to describe the *how* and *why* of a phenomenon (Cronin, 2014). Yin (2018) stated that exploring similar events within different contexts added to the analytic depth of multiple case studies. Hence, I chose to conduct a multiple case study because I wanted to explore the real-life events, customer relationships, and the SMM strategies used by small business retailers.

Population and Sampling

The population for the study was five small business retailers located in SATX with a minimum of five years in business and who employed SMM strategies to engage customers. The SBDC of SATX was my source of contact information for prospective

participants. According to the SBA (2017), there are approximately 104,000 small businesses in SATX. The target population was a group chosen to transfer the study findings and selecting the target population involved setting attributes that either qualified or disqualified participants for the study (Robinson, 2014).

Sampling is critical to research validity in interview-based studies (Robinson, 2014). Sampling is the method used to select specific elements by which to conduct the study (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). According to Robinson (2014), sampling in interview-based qualitative research consisted of four parts: (a) deciding on the target population, (b) deciding on an adequate sample size, (c) choosing a sampling strategy, (d) and sample sourcing. To qualify for this study, participants had to be small business retailers with a minimum of five years' experience in the retail industry, located in SATX and used effective SMM strategies to engage customers.

Gentles, Charles, Nicholas, Ploeg, and McKibbon (2016) posited that establishing a sample size was necessary for the researcher to gather enough helpful information to fully understand the phenomenon. Deciding the sample size in the initial stages of research was critical for planning purposes such as the research timeline and project planning (Robinson, 2014). The focus for choosing a proper sample size was to obtain enough data to reach the desired objective (Yin, 2018); however, the sample size for case studies varied among researchers (Elo et al., 2014). Morse (2015) stated that sample size depended on the nature, amount of complexity, and scope of the phenomenon, and the subjective versus concrete nature of the topic. Another factor that influenced the sample size was the purpose of the study (Elo et al., 2014). Employing the snowball technique

increased my number of qualified participants. In purposive sampling, also known as judgment sampling, the researcher had general knowledge of the researched phenomena and selected participants based on possessed knowledge or experiences (Etikan et al., 2016). Using purposive sampling in smaller populations might be beneficial for transferability (Barratt, Ferris, & Lenton, 2015).

Ethical Research

Researchers adhered to strict ethical standards when working with human subjects (Bromley et al., 2015). An ethical protection for researchers is obtaining a signed informed consent from a participant prior to collecting any data. Informed consent was an important component in protecting the welfare of the individuals participating in research (Griffith, 2014). Participants should receive enough information about the research to make an informed decision (Bromley et al., 2015). Before contacting potential participants for my study, I obtained permission from Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before I contacted, selected, and interviewed participants. The IRB's role was to ensure that I complied with the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) (Walden University, 2017). Each participant received my contact information along with an informed consent form which detailed the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and the participation guidelines. Participants agreed to participate in this study voluntarily and without any form of incentive or compensation. Additionally, participants were informed that they could contact me via telephone, email, or in person if they chose to withdraw or no longer participate in this study.

I completed the National Institute of Health's (NIH) course in Protecting Human Research Participants that focused on conducting ethical research practices and ensuring participant protection. I ensured participants remained anonymous by not using any potentially identifiable information to maintain ethical protection, rights, and confidentiality. I am responsible for protecting a participant's identity (Oetzel et al., 2015). Griffith (2014) referred to participants numerically until each participant had a designated label. I labeled each participant in numerical order beginning at the number one until each participant had a number. Griffith (2014) suggested all documents and participant-related material be secured for a minimum of five years to ensure anonymity. I notified participants that I would take notes and use an audio recording device, which is secured by me in a locked, fireproof safe for a minimum of five years.

Data Collection Instruments

Allen et al. (2014) stated that researchers were the primary data collection tool in qualitative research. Some of the most common forms of data collection are interviews (individual or group), questionnaires, surveys, and observations (Yin, 2018). Parveen et al. (2015) used semistructured interviews to determine how effectively organizations used social media. Dessart et al. (2015) used semistructured interviews to ascertain the amount of engagement companies had with their customers. Each interview was individual, face-to-face, and semistructured and consisted of open-ended questions (see Appendix A). Face-to-face interviews were beneficial because interviewers were able to maximize contact with participants and conduct more thorough, in-depth interviews (Cardamone, Eboli, & Mazzulla, 2014). Ratislavova and Ratislav (2014) stated that

interviewers are able to view nonverbal cues in person and receive better quality

responses. Open-ended questions during an interview allowed me to understand how a

participant viewed a particular topic (Roberts et al., 2014), Participants also were able to

expound upon the questions and provide additional information. As noted in qualitative

research conducted by Cridland, Jones, Caputi, and Magee (2015), taking time to build

rapport with participants made participants feel more comfortable with sharing

information of a personal nature.

Academic officials should approve a research proposal before data collection

begins (Strom, Buyse, Hughes, & Knoppers, 2014); therefore, I obtained approval of my

research proposal from Walden's IRB, and followed the ethical guidelines as set forth in

the Belmont Report (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). Walden

University's IRB approval number for this study is 04-18-18- 0539410 and it expires

April 17, 2019. Before selecting a convenient location, date, and time to conduct

interviews, all participants completed and signed informed consent forms and agreed to

allow me to take notes and to have the interview audio recorded. Transcribing the

interview using audio recordings increased the accuracy of the data.

It was important for me to be aware of my own beliefs and preconceived notions

about the research topic to possibly reduce any influence or bias during the data

collection and analysis processes (Smith & Noble, 2014). Leedy and Ormrod (2016)

suggested ways to reduce bias by acknowledging first that bias existed and to minimize

personal views. Member checking was a validation technique I used to allow the

participants to clarify the interpretation of the information they provided and to add any

additional information (Harvey, 2015). Each participant received a written copy of the

interview to confirm the accuracy of the collected data.

Data Collection Technique

The contributing factors to small business failure warranted further exploration.

Interviews were a common data collection method in qualitative research and allowed

participants to give information beyond the interview questions (Doody & Noonan,

2013). DeMassis and Kotlar (2014) posited that interviews were the best tool to gather

information about a phenomenon from the participant's perspective. Each interview

followed the same construct; semistructured, face-to-face interviews that consisted of

predetermined questions (Appendix A) to gain an understanding of the participants'

SMM strategies. I contacted the San Antonio SBDC to obtain contact information for

potential participants and then contacted each participant via email to introduce myself,

build rapport, and to state the reason for my study. When choosing an interview location,

Scheibe, Reichelt, Bellmann, and Kirch (2015) stated that researchers should conduct

interviews at locations comfortable for the participants. Some researchers conduct pilot

studies, which can validate the study design; however, pilot studies could also

compromise internal validity if study logistics are deemed insufficient (Kistin &

Silverstein, 2015). I did not conduct a pilot study because I used a semistructured

interview technique.

To improve the rigor of my research, I followed the same interview protocol (see

Appendix B) for all the interviews with the participants. Following a set construct for

interviews increased reliability and validity (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Notes taken

throughout the interview and using an audio recording device ensured I have accurate information to record my findings (Griffith, 2014). Transcription of the interviews using NVivo, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, helped to identify themes and discover patterns in the data. Each participant participated in member checking to ensure the accuracy of my interpretations of their responses to the interview questions. Participants had the opportunity to confirm my interpretation of the interview through member checking. All notes and any audio recordings will remain locked in a fireproof safe for five years and then destroyed.

Data Organization Technique

Notes taken during the interviews and audio recordings assisted me in transcribing the interviews accurately. I used Microsoft Excel to help me manage multiple data sources properly and efficiently and maintain consistency throughout this study (Yin, 2018). Proper data organization, transcription, and coding allowed me to recognize recurring themes (Elo et al., 2014). Efficient organization and management of files allowed me quick access while conducting data analysis.

To maintain the confidentiality of participants, I created a file and assigned a unique number for each participant, such as P1, P2, and P3 until all participants received a number. Each participant had an assigned file using a number rather than a name or other identifying information. Electronic and hard copy files of all interview transcripts, audio or video recordings, and notes are stored in a secured container. I will shred all printed material and digitally sanitize electronic files after five years to ensure proper disposal and protect the participants' identities.

Data Analysis

Analyzing research data consisted of classifying, interconnecting, and describing

the phenomena (Graue, 2015). Noble and Smith (2014) suggested that data analysis

consisted of coding the data, transcribing data to find overarching themes, and identifying

recurring themes. One of my goals while transcribing each interview was to find

common words and phrases. I coded data to define, sort, and identify themes for data

analysis (DeMassis & Kotlar, 2014). NVivo is a software program used by researchers to

examine, manage and interpret data (Franzosi, Doyle, McClelland, Putnam-Rankin, &

Vicari, 2013), and can assist with coding.

Another technique used to improve data analysis and data saturation was

methodological triangulation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Methodological triangulation was

the method of collecting data by using two or more methods and was the most common

type of triangulation (Graue, 2015). Methodological triangulation enhanced the

credibility and accurateness of the interpretation during the data analysis phase (Van

Dijk, Vervoort, Van Wijk, Kalkman, & Schuurmans, 2016). The data analysis also

included a review of existing literature to explore any similarities or differences.

Reliability and Validity

Alignment between the research methodology, design, conceptual framework,

instrumentation, and interview questions enhanced the reliability and validity of the study

(Newman, Lim, & Pineda, 2013). Quantitative researchers used statistical data to

establish reliability and validity (Noble & Smith, 2015). The lack of a consensus by

which to judge qualitative research could make it difficult to achieve rigor (Noble &

Smith, 2015). Baskarada (2014) affirmed that achieving reliability in qualitative case studies occurred when the same results are obtained by following the data collection approach. Because there are no universal methods used in qualitative research to garner reliability and validity, qualitative researchers must employ alternative methods to ensure the study's findings are trustworthy (Noble & Smith, 2015). Strategies used by qualitative researchers to establish credibility included: (a) acknowledging any personal bias that may influence the findings (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002), (b) data triangulation (Long & Johnson, 2000), (c) obtaining different perspectives by examining similarities and differences (Morse et al., 2002), and (d) maintaining clear and transparent data interpretations (Sandelowski, 1993).

Reliability

Yin (2018) defined reliability as the consistent and repetitive measures used by the researcher while conducting a case study. Consistent and error-free data collection and analysis enhances the study's reliability (Hess, McNab, & Basoglu, 2014), which is why it was important to conduct each interview in the same manner by following a predesigned interview protocol (Appendix B). I enhanced reliability by conducting member checking of participant responses I gathered during the interview and by triangulating data I obtained from written notes and document reviews.

Noble and Smith (2015) stated that the application and suitability of research methods and the accuracy of the conclusions determined the soundness of a study. To achieve qualitative reliability, commonalities must exist between the various findings of multiple research studies (Onwugbuzie & Byers, 2014). Notes and interview responses,

together with a comprehensive review of existing academic studies helped to establish consistency.

Validity

To establish validity in qualitative research, the study's findings must be credible, confirmable, and transferable (Prion & Adamson, 2014). Achieving credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability establishes trustworthiness in qualitative research (Prion & Adamson, 2014). Credibility refers to a thorough investigation that garners high-quality data (Elo et al., 2014). Member checking is a technique used to establish confirmability and increases the quality of the results (Elo et al., 2014). Transferability means other researchers can make overviews of a study's findings (Elo et al., 2014). To ensure transferability, I followed an interview protocol, adhere to strict data collection and analysis techniques, and provide a thorough explanation of the findings from my study.

Transferability occurred by detailing the processes to determine the results of my study. Data triangulation, peer examination, and replication add to the dependability of a study's finding (Funder et al., 2013). Other factors that may enhance validity were the study's structure, methodology, and sample size, which was important to determine the quality of validity in my qualitative case study (Palic, 2015). Robinson (2014) confirmed that sample size had an effect on establishing validity. It was not necessary for me to add more participants to reach data saturation, which occurred when the participants' responses begin to repeat (Robinson, 2014).

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I described the confidentiality and protection of the participants'
identities and discussed the research question, method, and design that shaped and guided
this study. The discussion of ethical research practices, data collection, organization, and
analysis techniques helped me determine how small business retailers used SMM
strategies to engage consumers. Section 2 concluded with techniques used to establish
reliability and validity, which were important for the trustworthiness of the study.
Section 3 contains the presentation of findings, practical application, recommendations
for action and future research, and my reflections on conducting this study. Section 3
includes an explanation of the data collection process, the findings of my research,
application to professional practice, the implications for social change, and
recommendations for further actions of the research study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the SMM strategies small business retail leaders used to engage customers. The participants identified Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter as their most preferred social media platforms. I conducted methodological triangulation by using data obtained from participant interviews and reviewing the participants' SMM plans and company social media web pages. After reviewing the collected data, I identified three themes related to SMM strategies: (a) SMM strategies and social media platforms, (b) social media content, and (c) consumer engagement and retention. The DOI theory was the conceptual framework of this study aligned with the themes and findings from the previous literature.

Presentation of the Findings

The findings resulted from the data analysis concerning the primary research question for this study which was: What social media marketing strategies do small business retailers use to engage customers? I contacted five small retail business owners and explained the details of my study. I presented the business owners with the consent form, which they all signed and agreed to be audio recorded. Participants were informed that no personal information would be included in the final study, therefore all participants are only identified as P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5. I conducted semistructured, face-to-face interviews with five male and female participants who had owned their

businesses for more than five years, ranged in age from 37 to 48, and used successful

SMM strategies to engage customers.

Table 1.

Participants' Responses to Themes

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Theme 1	17	13	20	16	22
Theme 2	12	9	11	13	16
Theme 3	8	11	7	9	13

Note. Number of participant responses related to themes

The participants provided substantial responses to 10 open-ended interview

questions, which varied in depth and scope and provided me with insights into how small

business retailers use SMM strategies to engage customers. Along with conducting

semistructured interviews, the data collection process also involved reviewing company

SMM strategies and social media pages across multiple social media platforms. Each

participant attested to posting content across multiple social media platforms several

times per week as part of their business strategy to engage customers.

Audio-recording each interview allowed me to transcribe the interviews with

ease. I summarized each interview to conduct member checking. Member checking

required that all participants confirm the interview transcript to enhance validation and

approve my interpretations of their responses to the interview questions (Marshall &

Rossman, 2016). After all participants agreed that I accurately interpreted their

responses, I began data analysis. I used NVivo to help code and identify recurring

themes. Weber, Geneste, and Connell (2015) stated that coding data using NVivo could

help uncover recurring themes. The themes I extracted from the analysis of the data

aligned with this study's conceptual framework and review of the existing literature.

Emergent Theme 1: Social Media Marketing Strategies and Platforms

The first of the three themes that emerged from the data was the SMM strategies

and social media platforms used by the participants to engage customers. Online

marketing increased brand exposure and consumer perspective (Noel, 2014) thus leaders

should take advantage of the wide reach of social media to promote and share product

information (Ramanathan, Subramanian, & Parrott, 2017). Attouni and Mustaffa (2014)

used the DOI theory to conclude that social media were important tools to stay connected

to and communicate with the public. Social networking accounted for over 15% of

mobile data traffic (Moreno-Munoz et al., 2016). Business leaders considered that people

used social media at high rates when deciding the best customer engagement delivery

method (Kaun & Stiernstedt, 2014). As indicated in Table 1, participants used Facebook,

Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and Yelp to engage customers. Facebook, Instagram, and

Twitter were the most popular social media platforms used by small business leaders to

engage customers and also to remain competitive with larger businesses (Hibbler-Britt &

Sussan, 2015). Time spent on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other chat apps

increased from four percent to over 28% from 2015 to 2016 (Moreno-Munoz et al.,

2016). Four of the five participants used Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. In addition

to Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, P1 used Snapchat and Yelp and P5 used Facebook

exclusively to interface with customers.

Table 2.

Participants' Social Media Platforms

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Facebook	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Instagram	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Twitter	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
SnapChat	Y	N	N	N	N
Yelp	Y	N	N	N	N

Note. Y= yes, N = no

Social media differed from traditional media in several ways; the most notable was the low-cost alternative to traditional print and visual ads (Henderson et al., 2017). Each participant explained that they used social media because it was convenient and free or low cost. P2 and P4 mentioned that they paid to occasionally advertise on Facebook and Instagram to reach a wider range of customers or to target a specific demographic. In one population-based study that reached more than 1 million viewers, over 5,900 Facebook users clicked one Facebook ad campaign 6,094 times, which cost the researcher an average of $0.63 per click or approximately $3,839.22 (Arcia, 2014). Arcia (2014) concluded that researchers could use Facebook ad campaigns to effectively reach large populations and achieve multiple engagement goals.

Direct two-way communication between business and customer was facilitated by social media; another difference exclusive of traditional media (Lillqvist & Louhiala-Salminen, 2014). Instant messaging is an exchange of video, picture, text, and voice communications over the Internet in real-time (Ogara, Koh, & Prybutok, 2014) and is a feature of most social media platforms (Piwek & Joinson, 2016). Users could instantly

send messages to other users or a group via Instagram Direct (Anderson, 2016). Hild

(2014) learned that Instagram was an effective social media platform to receive direct and

indirect feedback from academic library users. Customers of P3, P4, and P5 used the

direct message feature on Facebook to inquire about products and to place orders.

Business leaders used social media platforms to encourage user participation

(Shan et al., 2014). Business owners might give a discount code in exchange for a

customer liking or following the company social media page (He, Wang, Chen, & Zha,

2017). Discounts, coupons, and contests were popular forms of social media engagement

(Srinivasan, Bajaj, & Bhanot, 2016). P4 posted contest opportunities on Facebook and

Instagram to gain customer attention. Effective use of SMM sparked customer

conversation, participation, and customer loyalty (Moreno-Munoz et al., 2016). Business

owners should provide business information on industry social media pages (He et al.,

2017). Posting content to local community social media pages was another technique to

spread brand awareness and gain new customers (He et al., 2017). Successful SMM

strategies positively impacted a company's reputation, global reach, and customer

relations (Floreddu, Cabiddu, & Evaristo, 2014). Study participants explained that since

incorporating social media into their business strategies, they engaged and interacted with

more customers outside of their immediate business area. The use of social media

facilitated the global reach for many businesses to gain access to customers worldwide

(Henderson et al., 2017). P3 and P5 both stated that unknown customers from all over

the globe placed orders via Facebook.

All five study participants expressed the importance of using social media to engage customers. One element of Rogers' DOI theory was how and at what rate people adopt innovations. Ryan and Gross (1943) revealed that it took 14 years before the majority of Iowa farmers began planting hybrid seed corn and only then after hearing of the success from early adopters (Valente & Rogers, 1995). He et al. (2017) discovered five primary factors business owners adopt social media: (a) social media perception, (b) personal characteristics, (c) social influence from peers, (d) current business performance, and (e) the reason for adopting social media. Business owners who adopted social media thought it was fun to engage customers and vital to their businesses. Other business owners adopted social media after seeing their peers employ social media strategies and increase their clientele (He et al., 2017). This concept is referred to by Rogers as late adopters, which are those who adopted an innovation after seeing success from the peers.

Rogers further explained that innovators were apt to experience new technologies. Business owners who chose to not adopt social media cited that their clients were older and loyal, the owners were comfortable with their cash flow and did not have a need to expand or increase business, and managing social media platforms was time-consuming and did not have noticeable benefits (He et al., 2017). P1 stated that business leaders who did not use social media could be missing out on potential revenue.

Emergent Theme 2: Social Media Content

Ashley and Tuten (2015) described social media content as any information delivered on social networking sites. Business leaders and customers used social media

platforms as communication channels for interaction, sharing information, making or

influencing purchasing decisions, and to provide persuasive messaging (Chang, Yu, &

Lu, 2015). Individual users, groups, and consumers and businesses shared content

(Kumar, Amber, Shukla, & Choubey, 2017). Social media content could be stored,

retrieved at a later date, modified or updated, and used to facilitate joint ventures between

companies and users (Shan et al., 2014). P4 stated that a new customer referenced past

posted content to place a new order. The participants in this study used multiple

strategies to create social media content to communicate, connect, and engage with

customers. This theme aligned with Rogers DOI theory in that study participants used

social media channels to communicate product information from the originator [source]

to the customer.

The second element of the DOI process is communications channels. Diffusion is

precise and includes elements of innovation, requiring at least two individuals to adopt

the innovation, and a communication channel (Rogers, 2003). Business leaders

effectively used communication channels to create organizational value and to influence

and control messages (Shankar et al., 2016). Communication channels could also be used

as mechanisms to share and influence the adoption of innovations. Efficient use of

communication channels could lead to the creation of new innovations or products and

the improvement in the quality of existing products (Wu & Huang, 2014). Study

participants chose to use multiple social media platforms to deliver messages;

information was transmitted from a source to the intended audience (Rogers, 2003).

Business leaders effectively used social media content to facilitate positive engagement and gain customer interest (Kumar et al., 2016). Customers responded to social media content by liking and responding to posted content (Kumar et al., 2016). Social media content changed how users perceived things. Table 2 shows participants' Instagram posts, which consisted of a combination of text, photos, and videos and followers; P5 uses Facebook exclusively. The study participants stated that customers preferred visual information over plain text.

Table 3.

Participants' Instagram Activity

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Posts	208	1,767	2,055	319	NA
Followers	1,617	1,139	862	580	NA

Note. Data current as of June 2018

Selecting content and choosing the most effective delivery method was important in creating social media content (Ordenes et al., 2018). Marketing professionals focused on the roles and activities of social media users to determine how to create engaging content (Huotari, Ulkuniemi, Saraniemi, & Mäläskä, 2015). P4's most successful social media campaign to engage customers were contests and giveaways. Furthermore, Schivinski, Christodoulides, and Dabrowski (2016) concluded that customers were content creators and contributors. Holton, Coddington, Lewis, and de Zuniga (2015) found that consumers' perceptions impacted content creation. Dash, Bhusan, and Samal (2014) used the DOI theory to explore user adoption of mobile applications and mobile users' attitudes and social factors. P1, P2, and P4 adjusted their SMM strategies because

customers expressed more interest in visual information rather than text. One goal for marketers was to create content that influenced outside users to create their own positive content for the company (Huotari, et al., 2015). Study participants stated that they gained new customers when current customers liked, shared, or commented on social media posts. Consumers created brand-related content by uploading images of products (Schivinski et al., 2016).

Zhu and Chen (2015) stated that in developing a marketing strategy, business leaders should survey the customer's wants and/or needs and decide on the best delivery method. P1, P2, and P5 reported that they considered customer needs and decided that social media were the best customer engagement tools for their businesses. Marketers used social media content to study and manage customer expectations and opinions (Erkan, 2015). Encouraging customer feedback allowed consumers to promote products and influenced the online community (Elkhani, Soltani, & Ahmad, 2014). All study participants revealed that the content on social media networking sites was an important factor in gaining and retaining customers. Customers attracted to certain social media content shared content with others, thus further promoting brand awareness (Chary, 2014). Replies such as likes and comments posted to social media content were indicators of the effectiveness of a message (Erkan, 2015).

User-generated content and live streams are popular forms of social media content (Somerfield, Mortimer, & Evans, 2018). Customers felt included and part of a company when their content was shared on a business social media page (Holton et al., 2015). GoPro consistently shared their followers' pictures and video footage (Erkan, 2015). All

five participants posted videos and pictures on Facebook and Instagram. P4 used

Facebook live to promote services. The live feature in Facebook allowed viewers to

watch a video as it was recorded in real time and also allowed the poster see comments

and respond to viewers during the recording (Kumar et al., 2017). Approximately 60,000

people watched as Apple unveiled the iPhone 7 via Facebook Live (Kumar et al., 2017).

One feature of live stream is that it can be accessed later if a follower missed a video as it

was shot live. Study participants commented that they mostly posted pictures to their

social media pages. Lunchbox Fund launched a campaign to feed South African children

anytime someone uploaded a picture containing food using the 'de app Feedie' mobile

application (Moreno-Munoz et al., 2016). Video content saw the fastest growth of

mobile data traffic on social media (Moreno-Munoz et al., 2016). Videos made up 32%

of data traffic on social media sites and are expected to increase to 55% by 2019

(Moreno-Munoz et al., 2016).

Compatibility was a factor of adoption defined by Rogers (2003) as the degree to

which an innovation met users' needs and expectations. Consistently posting brand

information had positive effects on purchase intentions, sales, and stock prices (Lin,

Swarna, & Bruning, 2017). Ashley and Tuten (2015) confirmed the importance that

posting and updating social media content frequently had on customer engagement.

Three study participants expressed that posting content to social media consistently was

part of their SMM strategy. The time of day was a factor in effective customer

engagement. Posting social media content during early morning hours or late at night

had 20% higher engagement rates (Sabate, Berbegal-Mirabent, Cañabate, & Lebherz,

2014). Lo et al. (2016) found that restaurant deals posted on Thursdays had the highest

rates of return than any other day of the week. P4 expressed that posting at specific times

of day was key in capturing the most attention by saying, "I try to post at the right time

on each of the platforms. Instagram is definitely at night; between 5 and 7 o'clock. So I

really try to remember to post to Instagram during that timeframe. Facebook is in the

middle of the day." Peak times for maximum effect for Facebook and Instagram were

between 12 pm and 4 pm, while most responses to postings on Twitter occurred between

4 pm and 8 pm (Srinivasan et al., 2016). All study participants developed successful

content creation and delivery strategies that allowed them to maximize customer

engagement.

Emergent Theme 3: Customer Engagement and Retention

Google searches for the phrase customer engagement went from 0 prior to 2007 to

over 6 million by 2017; however, research in customer engagement is lacking

(Harmeling, Moffett, Arnold, & Carlson, 2017). With the increased usage of social

media, marketing experts changed communication methods and included social

networking sites in their business strategies (Dijkmans et al., 2015). Marketers must

understand how to leverage social media platforms to engage customers. P5 stated that

engagement strategies should be adaptable to meet the changing needs of customers.

Marketers should pay close attention to customer responsiveness to certain engagement

strategies to determine effectiveness and adjust accordingly.

Retailers used social media in-application messaging and notifications as another

method to communicate and engage with customers (Zhu et al., 2014). Benefits of

customer engagement included brand loyalty, trust, and satisfaction (Zheng et al., 2015).

Customer engagement improved value co-creation (Jaakkola, & Alexander, 2014) and

business leaders created engagement strategies that leveraged and maximized this

phenomenon. There was a positive correlation between customer engagement and

product knowledge (Keng et al., 2014). Marketers should design strategies that focus on

improving customer relations and that involve heavy engagement within multiple online

communities (Yap & Lee, 2014).

     The goal of customer retention was to forge long-term relationships with active

and new customers that were mutually beneficial (Alshurideh, 2016). Table 3 shows the

study participant's Instagram followers, who represent a variety of existing and

prospective customers. Study participants were concerned with customer retention

strategies such as providing excellent customer care and positive interactions. P1 noted

that customers' needs changed over time and it was important to reevaluate business

practices to account for those changes and to incorporate new customer preferences.

Koosha and Albadvi (2015) concluded that retaining existing customers and acquiring

new customers were both important to long-lasting businesses. A strong social media

presence increased brand awareness and trust and positively affected the ability of

businesses to retain customers (Srinivasan et al., 2016).

     Srinivasan et al. (2016) concluded that SMM and brand trust positively influenced

customer retention, which had a strong influence on market share. Repeat customers

shared their positive experiences with others and were thought of as trustworthy by their

peers (Alshurideh, 2016). Satisfied customers were more likely to have brand loyalty and

recommend business through positive word of mouth (Biedenbach, Bengtsson, & Marell, 2015). P4 had more face-to-face interaction with customers and developed engagement strategies that created brand trust, credibility, and customer loyalty. Referred customers had higher contribution margins and retention rates than customers acquired using other strategies (Van den Bulte, Bayer, Skiera, & Schmitt, 2018). All study participants explained that word-of-mouth advertising generated business from prospective customers. P4 offered incentives to existing customers when they made referrals and saw a significant increase in new customers and revenue. Customer retention was critical to business survival (Alshurideh, 2016). Study participants agreed that long-term customer relationships were an important part of their business strategy.

Applications to Professional Practice

The business leaders who participated in this study were small business owners from the SATX region who had been in operation for over five years and employed successful SMM strategies to engage customers. Social media technologies were the most cost-effective medium for marketing and suitable for small businesses (Hassan et al., 2015). Small business leaders could use the findings that resulted from this study to increase their knowledge about how SMM was used to engage customers. Small business leaders could benefit from this study by developing successful SMM strategies to engage customers. Business leaders used social media to interactively engage and dialogue with customers (Lillqvist & Louhiala-Salminen, 2014). Suggestions for small business owners seeking to use SMM strategies to engage customers that emerged from

this study included: (a) the different SMM strategies and most useful platforms, (b) the

significance of social media content, and (c) customer engagement and retention.

Business leaders could use the findings from the first theme, SMM strategies and

platforms, to choose the social media platform that best fits their organizations. Turner

and Shah (2014) suggested testing multiple social media platforms before creating an

SMM business strategy. Kumar et al. (2016) found that firms relied more on social

media than traditional marketing strategies to engage customers. Leaders should take

into consideration the type of content posted on social media that attracted customers.

Study participants agreed that posting relevant social media content was important for

customer engagement. A surprising factor that emerged from this study was that the time

of day content was posted had an impact on customer responsiveness. Srinivasan et al.

(2016) found that Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram had peak times for maximum reach

and responses. Customers were more receptive to specific rather than generalized

content (Andrews et al., 2016). Providing customers with unique user experiences was

important to customer engagement and retention (Viswanathan et al., 2017). Study

participants noted that paying close attention to user preferences; posting visual messages

that appeal to and attract customers; providing enticing offers, incentives, or coupons;

and posting content at peak times could positively impact customer engagement and

retention. Business leaders and marketers must understand their target audience to create,

develop, and employ the most effective and beneficial SMM strategies for their

organizations.

Implications for Social Change

The results from this study have multiple implications for significant positive social change for small business owners. Social change refers to the transformation over time of social constructs and cultural patterns (Ololube, Onyekwere, Kpolovie, & Agabi (2012). Social change was influenced by other significant advancements like industrialization and affected multiple disciplines such as law enforcement, education, politics, culture, and administration (Ololube et al., 2012). Small businesses are vital to the U.S. economy and are major contributors to socioeconomic development throughout the world (Karadag, 2015). Small business leaders may live in the communities they serve, which might influence business decisions. Other contributions small business leaders might make to the local community could include becoming involved in local politics, sponsoring youth programs, donating to nonprofit organizations, influencing the next generation of young business leaders, and creating jobs for community members.

Using the results of this study, I was able to confirm that small business retailers could use SMM strategies to communicate with and engage customers. To remain competitive with larger firms, small business leaders used social media as an inexpensive, yet effective way to engage customers. Contributions to positive social change could include SMM best practices and strategies to improve company sustainability and growth, generation of employment, reduction in local poverty, and an enhancement of employee's standards of living. Additionally, small business leaders in other industries might benefit from the study and could develop strategies to support the sustainment and

growth of economies through employment and financial contributions within the

community.

Recommendations for Action

In this qualitative multiple case study, I explored the SMM strategies small

business retailers used to engage customers. Many organizations included social media

in their marketing strategies (Ananda et al., 2016) because direct two-way

communication between business and customer was facilitated by social media (Lillqvist

& Louhiala-Salminen, 2014). Brands increased their presence on social media, which

enabled consumers to drive the conversation and communicate with brands in real-time

(De Vries & Carlson, 2014). Brand marketing can be expensive; however, social media

were a low-cost solution for small businesses with limited marketing budgets (Herman,

2015). SMM could have a positive effect on revenues and profits (Kumar et al., 2016);

therefore, business leaders must effectively use social media to maximize potential

benefits and engage customers (Constantinides, 2014).

Company leaders used popular social networking sites like Facebook, LinkedIn,

Twitter, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Skype, and Instagram to engage consumers (Hibbler-Britt

& Sussan, 2015). Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are the most popular social media

platforms (Patil & Puri, 2015); however, Facebook alone has billions of users (Kane,

2015). Considering over 1 billion people have Facebook accounts, Chatzithomas et al.

(2014) confirmed that business leaders should develop and employ SMM strategies to

engage consumers.

Study participants cited SMM strategies and platforms, social media content, and customer engagement and retention as critical elements in their marketing and engagement strategies. Current and future small business retailers could use the emergent themes in this study to better understand the impact SMM could have on their own customer engagement strategies. Others who might benefit from the results and recommendations of this study include small business owners across various industries, leaders in the community planning and development field, and future marketing research students.

Participants in this study are business owners and community leaders in the SATX region. I intend to deliver a final copy of my approved study to each participant. Participants have permission from me to share this study on their social media sites or any community business forum. Future researchers will have access to my study via the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Database and any other person who wishes to have a copy of this study may email me a written request.

Recommendations for Further Research

Further exploration in the area of SMM might be necessary based on the information, results, and findings of this study. The SMM strategies documented in this research may apply to other small businesses outside of the retail industry. Internet technologies, social media platforms, marketing techniques, SMM, and customer engagement strategies are evolving every day, which leaves future researchers many opportunities to expand research on how to use SMM strategies to engage customers. Other avenues for further research might be using actionable metrics for social media

effectiveness and measurement. For example, research exists to show the potential

benefits of using SMM; however, there is an insufficient amount of literature related to

using specific metrics to determine exactly how social media enhanced business

performance (Paniagua & Sapena, 2014). Future researchers may want to use metrics,

such as Google Analytics, to measure how social media enhanced business performance.

There were three limitations in this study that could be improved upon in future

research. The limitations of the study were: (a) the target population was small business

retailers, (b) the geographical location was specific to the SAT region, (c) and the small

population size of five small business retailers. The results of this study were unique to

the small business leaders in the retail industry and might not be transferable across other

industries, indicative of issues experienced in other regions in the United States and the

rest of the world, representative of all retail businesses in SATX, or detail every small

business retailer's experiences. Opportunities for future research could include focusing

on small businesses in other industries, expanding the geographical location, or

expanding the sample size to enhance the study results.

Reflections

This process has been a long, arduous journey. It is overwhelming unbelievable

that I am here now, but here I am. This journey has been challenging and rewarding all at

the same time. My doctoral journey started at a very challenging time in my life when I

needed a mental distraction. I did not know everything required to complete this level of

education, but I am happy and glad that I stayed the course. My professional career in IT

and my desire to start my own small business led to my interest in researching SMM

strategies. That and the fact that I had no idea what I would write about when I attended my first Residency shortly after registering for my very first doctoral class. Up until the point I had begun my research, the only thing I knew about social media was how to use certain applications and how they allowed me to communicate with my circle of friends. Of course, I had seen the ads from the companies informing me of a specific product, but I did not understand the rationale behind the ads. I learned so much about the *why* of certain SMM strategies; the more a consumer knows about a product, the more likely they are to buy it. Through existing research, I was able to understand the many SMM strategies used in business.

When I began my research four years ago, I had trouble finding articles related to small business customer engagement and SMM. There were many articles on the use of social media in business to business relationships or social media usage in small and medium enterprises, but not much on small business customer engagement and SMM. It was not until late 2016, early 2017 that I began finding more articles focusing on small business and SMM. This proved that there was a gap in the literature concerning SMM and small business customer engagement and that there was a need for this research.

What I found most interesting was that all study participants echoed many of the same experiences; however, each participant may learn new strategies or techniques to market their businesses. SMM is still in the early stages and some small business leaders do not know how to exploit the benefits of SMM (Paniagua & Sapena, 2014). My knowledge of social media was enhanced by this study. I also learned multiple

considerations small business leaders should make when developing and implementing successful SMM strategies for customer engagement.

Conclusion

In this qualitative multiple case study, I explored the SMM strategies small business retailers use to engage customers. The data collected for this study were from face-to-face, semistructured interviews of five small business retailers in the SATX region that consisted of 10 open-ended questions. Interviews contained information that allowed me to gather key evidence, identify common themes, and triangulate data, which suggested the positive relationship between SMM and customer engagement. Further data were collected from the participant's business social media pages and websites.

Small businesses play a vital role in creating new jobs, innovations, and economic growth (Karadag, 2015). Small business owners faced marketing challenges to gain a competitive market position (Hutchinson et al., 2015). Using SMM to engage customers is one strategy that may lead to an improvement in the survival of small businesses (Wamba & Carter, 2014). Some of the benefits of using social media to engage customers included knowledge sharing between customers and the company, increased profits, decreased operating costs, and brand recognition and loyalty (Karimi & Naghibi, 2015; Sajid, 2016). Business leaders should consider developing effective SMM strategies because customer engagement is a key component for business success (Hibbler-Britt & Sussan, 2015).

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1.   What social media platforms do you currently use to support your retail

operations?

2.   What SMM strategies do you use to engage customers?

3.   What are your most effective SMM strategies to engage customers?

4.   How has social media improved customer engagement?

5.   What SMM strategies are important to retail operations?

6.   What SMM strategies have been beneficial to your business?

7.   What SMM strategies are unique to retail operations?

8.   What positive effects on your business have using SMM strategies had on

engaging customers?

9.   How have you adjusted your SMM strategies based on customer feedback?

10.   What additional information would you like to share concerning your SMM

strategies?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

The main research question is: What social media marketing strategies do small business retailers use to engage customers? In this qualitative multiple-case study, the interview will contain 10 open-ended questions to gain insights from experienced small business retailers in San Antonio, Texas.

Selecting participants: The researcher will contact participants by telephone or e-mail.

Setting place and time for interview: Interviews will take place at an agreed upon location between the researcher and participant.

Explanation of research study: The researcher will go over the purpose of the study, obtain consent from the participant, and provide a consent form to each participant.

Recording the interview: The researcher will record each interview. The researcher will mail a thank-you card to each participant one day after the interview.

Transcription of interview: The researcher will transcribe the recorded interview of each participant. The participants will receive a copy of the transcription and interpretation of their interview.

Member checking: The researcher will contact each participant by e-mail or telephone to confirm accuracy of the transcription.

Follow-up questions: The researcher will ask any follow-up questions determinant on quality and importance of responses.