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# Online Marketing Strategies for Increasing Sales Revenues of Small Retail Businesses

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Asia Lockett

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Walden University  
2018

Abstract

Online Marketing Strategies for Increasing Sales Revenues of Small Retail Businesses

by

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MBA, Ashford University, 2013

BS, California State University Dominguez Hills, 2002

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

October 2018

## Abstract

Small retail business leaders use online marketing to connect with consumers and the community. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies some small retail business leaders use to implement online marketing to increase sales. Data were collected from 4 small retail business owners who successfully used strategies to implement online marketing in California. The conceptual framework for this study was Rogers's diffusion of innovation theory. Data collection techniques and sources were semistructured, face-to-face interviews, and review of public business documents, company websites, social media websites, and analytical tools. A thematic analysis of the data yielded 4 themes: social media platforms and strategies, online marketing strategies and challenges, online content strategies, and follow-up strategies. Business leaders of small retail organizations who want to increase revenue, remain competitive, overcome challenges associated with online marketing, and increase communication by implementing new technology might elect to align with the strategies identified in this study. The implications for positive social change include the opportunity for small retail business leaders to increase revenue while providing more job opportunities to benefit employees, employees' families, and the community.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate my study to my family, especially to my father, Richard. My father was there for me in every aspect of my journey by encouraging, motivating, and inspiring me to achieve the highest academic degree. I also dedicate my study to my children, Stephanie, Sean, and Summer, as they understood the time I spent researching and focusing on my doctoral study was a requirement, not an option.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The advancement of technology offers small business leaders an opportunity to evaluate data and use the information to improve their productivity (Keegan & Rowley, 2017). According to Dolan, Conduit, Fahy, and Goodman (2017), online marketing increased in content and changed the way individuals and organizations interact. To realize and understand the potential benefits of online marketing, small retail business leaders need to ensure their processes align with technological advancements. Failing to recognize potential benefits of online marketing might cause loss of productivity, revenue, and communication (Cheng & Liu, 2017).

To sustain a competitive advantage and increase revenue and communication, small retail business leaders must plan to satisfy customer requirements and ensure innovative technological strategies are implemented (Cheng & Liu, 2017). In this study, I explored strategies small retail business leaders use to implement online marketing to increase derivative sales. Directly and indirectly, the retail industry is the most significant private employer in the United States and contributes an estimated \$3.53 trillion annually to the U.S. gross domestic product (National Retail Federation, 2018).

### **Background of the Problem**

Practical use of various online tools by business leaders leads to new opportunities (Gaikwad & Kate, 2016). The Internet is a trusted source that consumers turn to before purchasing products and services (Smith, 2017). Business leaders use the Internet as a marketing tool for financial success and to aid in fostering communication with the visibility and channels of online sales and social media advertising becoming

robust ways to reach various markets for business expansion (Banica, Brinzea, & Radulescu, 2015). In 2013, there were 28.8 million small businesses, representing 99.7% of all organizations (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2016). According to Jones, Borgman, and Ulusoy (2015), consumers are using Internet technologies in increasing numbers, which presents opportunities for businesses to reach and connect with more people through websites and social media sites. Smith (2017) discovered 69% of consumers use social media to share information about products and services. However, succeeding with online marketing requires resources to create quality content and build followers.

The benefits of online marketing include: (a) economic pricing, (b) the targeting of diverse demographics at once, (c) providing products and services conveniently, and (d) allowing customers to easily research products and services to expedite the purchasing decision (Durmaz & Efendioglu, 2016). Online marketing provides opportunities for businesses to gain economic value via collaboration with stakeholders, customers, and employees (Purkayastha & Sharma, 2016). Small retail business leaders must incorporate online marketing strategies into their business plan to decrease the possibility of failure, grow their business, and become more profitable.

### **Problem Statement**

Some small business retail leaders struggle to implement social media marketing strategies for advertisement, employee recruitment, and communication for increased revenue (Schaupp & Belanger, 2014). In 2015, 31.8% of small retail businesses had websites to leverage online marketing, yet 67.4% could not grasp opportunities offered

by online marketing, which resulted in a loss of opportunities in online markets (Cesaroni & Consoli, 2015). The general business problem was that small retail business leaders encounter difficulty using online marketing to increase the quality of communication with customers and to increase derivative sales. The specific business problem was that some small retail business leaders lack strategies to implement online marketing to increase derivative sales.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies some small retail business leaders use to implement online marketing to increase derivative sales. The target population included business leaders from four small retail businesses in California who I selected because they had successfully implemented online marketing strategies to increase derivative sales. The implications for positive social change included the potential for business leaders to provide job opportunities for the public.

### **Nature of the Study**

I selected a qualitative method as the approach for this study. The qualitative method was appropriate to understand the techniques small retail business leaders use to create and apply online marketing into business plans. Using the qualitative method aided in identifying the online marketing strategies small retail business leaders use to increase derivative sales by uncovering communication strategies and branding methods. In this study, the goal was to explore the successful practices of small retail business leaders'

online marketing, identify relevant implementation issues, and assess the effectiveness of the use of online technology in retail business settings.

Researchers use the qualitative method to explore a phenomenon and to understand the perspectives of the participants (Yin, 2014). The quantitative research method would not have been a beneficial approach to this study. In quantitative research, statistical data are analyzed and examined for relationships or differences among variables (Cokley & Awad, 2013). Therefore, I did not use the quantitative research method. In comparison, the use of a mixed-method design explores both qualitative and quantitative methods to examine the phenomenon (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2013). I did not select a mixed-method design for this study because the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data was not required by the research question or aim of the study.

There were many qualitative designs to consider; however, other designs were not beneficial for the research in this study. Researchers use a phenomenological design to explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of individuals' experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). A phenomenological design was not selected for this study as the views of individuals were not required to understand the phenomena. Narrative research is storytelling presented by participants with real-life experience (Wang & Geale, 2015). The use of a narrative approach is a complex methodology, and the analysis of storytelling was not required to complete this qualitative study. Ethnography is a field-based study to understand social interactions, behaviors, and perceptions in detail (Yin, 2014). The focus of this study was not to explore individual group practices; therefore, an ethnographic method was not appropriate.



A multiple case study was the qualitative design I employed in this study. A multiple case study inquiry is beneficial for interacting with participants and for personal observation to understand the phenomenon from different viewpoints as opposed to an ethnographic study, phenomenological study, or narrative inquiry designs (Yin, 2014). A multiple case study design provided me with an in-depth understanding of the requirements and decisions small retail business leaders apply to implement online marketing procedures. The use of a multiple case design permits researchers to ask the appropriate open-ended questions, explore the modern marketing phenomenon, and develop a rapport with participants (Cronin, 2014; Yin, 2014). A qualitative multiple case study approach was an appropriate methodological selection for this study because it allowed me to explore the circumstances and conditions of using online marketing strategies to grow a business successfully (see Yin, 2014).

### **Research Question**

The overarching research question that guided this study was: What online marketing strategies are used by small retail business leaders to increase derivative sales? I developed interview questions for the study based on this research question.

### **Interview Questions**

1. What online marketing strategies have you implemented to increase derivative sales?
2. What motivated you to start using an online marketing strategy?
3. What are the obstacles you encountered while developing and implementing online marketing strategies?

4. What online marketing strategies are most effective or beneficial for your company?
5. What online marketing strategies have been least effective for your company?
6. How do you measure the success of your organization's online marketing strategies?
7. What were the key challenges to implementing your successful strategies for online marketing?
8. How did you overcome key obstacles to implementing successful strategies for online marketing?
9. What online marketing strategies do you use to retain your consumers for follow-up sales?
10. What additional information would you like to share regarding online marketing strategies implemented to increase derivative sales?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was the diffusion of innovation theory as first presented by Rogers in 1962. Rogers (2003) explained how innovation is communicated through specific channels over time to members of a social system. The four components of the diffusion of the innovation process are the social system, innovation, communication channels, and time (Rogers, 2003). Dearing (2009) suggested the process of diffusion innovation starts slowly and over time begins to accelerate positive communication.

The use of the diffusion of innovation theory with a multidisciplinary approach produced a rich and diverse understanding of diffusion dynamics (Frattini, Bianchi, Massis, & Sikimic, 2014). The robustness of this theory derived from the many disciplines and fields of diffusion studies, and the nature of the theory suggests leaders determine what innovation will be adopted (Dearing, 2009). Information flows through social networks as an innovative form of communication (Rogers, 2003). Once business leaders implement an online marketing strategy, they have created a social system, which supports continuous interaction with employees, stakeholders, and consumers. I used the diffusion of innovation theory as the conceptual framework in this study to understand the online marketing strategies small retail business leaders use to increase derivative sales.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Diffusion of innovations:* A theory developed to explain how a new product is diffused, gains momentum, and is adopted through a network over time (Dearing, 2009; Frattini et al., 2014; Girardi & Chiagouris, 2018).

*Digital marketing:* An interactive tool that consumers use to access products and services in the form of television, radio, Internet, and web services (Durmaz & Efendioglu, 2016).

*Innovative technology:* New, groundbreaking methods and processes implemented to produce goods or services (Moats, 2015).

*Internet marketing:* The result of modern means of communication to provide a product or service through the Internet (Banica et al., 2015).

*Social media marketing*: Marketing specifically designed for dissemination over websites through social interaction that creates accessible and scalable publishing techniques (Constantinides, 2014).

*Traditional marketing*: Product placement and promotion by using printed ads and commercials (Banica et al., 2015).

*Web 2.0*: A group of Internet-based applications built on the ideological and technological foundations allowing the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Keegan & Rowley, 2017).

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

#### **Assumptions**

The assumptions for this qualitative research study were outside influences beyond the researcher's control. Assumptions are accepted as accurate given the study population and can affect the inferences drawn from the study (Lynch & Welch, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Assumptions should help researchers and practitioners identify applications and answer the research question (CITE). No certainty exists that assumptions develop relevant statements to explain the phenomenon in a study (Gill, 2014). The assumptions I held in this study were: (a) participants were truthful with all responses to interview questions, (b) data collected from interviews provided sufficient feedback for data saturation, and (c) participants provided real-life experiences.

#### **Limitations**

Limitations derive from the conceptual framework and the design of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Limitations are out of the researcher's control and are

potential weaknesses in the study (Guetterman, 2015). I identified two limitations in this study. First, it was possible that participants were not honest and forthcoming in their responses to the interview questions required for data collection. Second, participants were small retail business leaders in California, and results might differ in other states.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are defined as boundaries of the study within the researcher's control (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In this multiple case study, the three delimitations were: (a) participants were small retail business leaders, (b) the specific geographic area in California, and (c) participants needed to have a minimum of 6 months of experience using online marketing. Delimitations may have impacted the findings of this study by providing unforeseen factors beyond the researcher's control.

### **Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study might be valuable to small retail businesses by providing information demonstrating the potential importance of online marketing. The results from this study reveal successful online marketing strategies that could be used to aid in purchasing decisions and the creation of relationships between small retail businesses and consumers. Researchers have discovered business leaders who create an online presence can benefit from free media, continue to generate sales, and improve local economies (Sheng, Amankwah-Amoah, & Wang, 2017).

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

The results of this study might contribute to effective business practices by providing pragmatic marketing approaches beneficial to small retail business leaders for

increased sales revenues. Using online marketing strategies offers business leaders access to new markets with improved communication to customers and the identification of emerging trends within the economy (Corley, Jourdan, & Ingram, 2013). Online marketing strategies are cost-effective and increase the growing importance of the social media presence (Corley et al., 2013). Online marketing is a pervasive strategy for increasing sales leading to more revenue for businesses, and more visibility to products and services further increases sales (Erdur, 2016).

### **Implications for Social Change**

The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by providing small retail business leaders with an understanding of successful strategies for online marketing. Business leaders might gain an understanding of strategic processes for online marketing to improve sales. By adopting new methods of selling and communicating, small retail business leaders' online presence could increase the probability of long-term growth, increase exposure, and attract new customers. The implications for positive social change include the opportunity for small retail business leaders to increase revenue while providing job opportunities to benefit employees, employees' families, and employees' communities.

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

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore successful online marketing strategies by small retail business leaders. The overarching research question for this study was: What online marketing strategies are used by small retail business leaders to increase derivative sales? To address this research question, I

reviewed literature on case study analysis, innovation theories, online marketing strategies, social media marketing strategies, technology advancement strategies, traditional marketing strategies, and online marketing strategies to assist business leaders in increasing the profitability of small businesses in California.

Online marketing is a valuable tool for small retail businesses and consumers. Erdur (2016) posited online marketing could be considered the foundation of the web economy. Rogers (2003) identified the value of online marketing for small business retail leaders aligns with the diffusion of innovations theory. In this review, I related extant literature to the success of the innovation process, productivity, advantages, and economic growth. To reach a broader range of customers, business leaders should gain and use knowledge with current technologies and concepts of online advertising (Gaikwad & Kate, 2016).

To conduct this review of the literature, I obtained information from the field of business innovation studies. I accessed scholarly peer-reviewed literature through the use of databases available from the Walden University Library, including ABI/INFORM Complete, Emerald Management Journals, Science Direct, Business Source Complete, and Google Scholar. Keyword search terms included *business marketing strategies*, *diffusion of innovation*, *social media marketing*, *traditional marketing*, *marketing case study analysis*, *small retail business development*, *technology integration*, *consumer communication techniques*, *revenue building strategies*, and *business strategies*. The literature I reviewed for this doctoral study consisted of 262 references with 246 sources having a publication date between 2014–2018. The percentage of references within 5

years based on the anticipated chief academic officer approval date was 93%. The literature review includes 117 sources with 94% (110 articles) being peer-reviewed sources with publication dates between 2014–2018.

### **Diffusion of Innovation**

The diffusion of innovation theory was selected as the conceptual framework for this study. Rogers first proposed the diffusion of innovation theory in 1962 (Ball, Ogletree, Asunda, Miller, & Jurkowski, 2014). The diffusion of innovation theory serves as a theoretical lens through which researchers can view a research problem. The theory has also been used by firms to adopt an innovation at different points of technological advancement (Rogers, 2003). The diffusion process can be defined as innovative ideas communicated through various channels between participants of a social system (Rogers, 2003). Communication transpires when various members of a social network acknowledge creating and implementing current ideas. Successful deployment of the diffusion of innovation theory in marketing goods and services to end-users has been shown to be a success since the 1970s (Al-Hakim & Lu, 2017). Innovations, as well as technological advancements, have been the primary areas of concentration for most organizations; researchers then applied the diffusion theory in marketing-based studies (Dearing, 2009; Dibra, 2015).

Rogers (2003) termed diffusion of innovation as an approval over time by the social system. The penetration or acceptance of a new idea is the result of the diffusion process (Dearing, 2009). The five attributes identified by Rogers entail refer to the extent a given innovation is understood as having: (a) a relative advantage, the degree to which



the user perceives benefits or improvements upon existing technology by adopting an innovation; (b) compatibility, the area the innovation aligns with the end-users' values and habits; (c) complexity, the degree to which the innovation is perceived; (d) trialability, the ability of an innovation to be placed on trial without total commitment and with minimal investment; and (e) observability, the extent to which members of the targeted social system notice the given change (Dibra, 2015; Ma, Lee, & Goh, 2014; Zhang, Yu, Yan, & Spill, 2015).

In agreement with Rogers' diffusion theory, Degerli, Aytekin, and Degerli (2015) explained that individuals differ in their willingness to adopt a new idea or product. People are hesitant to make a change, and the process of innovation can be challenging; hence, those who are innovative appreciate the process and are usually the first to embrace any current innovation (Raynard, 2017). Diffusion of innovation can be negative or positive depending on the nature of the innovation (Raynard, 2017). Although standard theories reflect technological enhancement, the diffusion of innovation theory provides information about the stages of prediction, modeling, and decision making to adopt or reject technology (Gayadeen & Phillips, 2014).

One aspect of technology concentrates on applied innovation research as well as how components can be used interchangeably (Aizstrauta, Ginters, & Eroles, 2014). The innovator uses the diffusion of innovation and transfers ideas to adopters (Caiazza & Volpe, 2017). Multiple steps occur before new products, practices, or ideas are accepted (Jahanmir & Lages, 2016). By using the diffusion of innovation theory, small business leaders can implement system-wide changes to increase results for company development

(Dearing, 2009). The diffusion of innovation theory does not offer actual vicissitude but instead arises from innovators' developed platforms (Frattoni et al., 2014).

The objectivity of a diffusion model represents the level of an innovative idea among a given set of prospective adopters (Andergassen, Nardini, & Ricottilli, 2017). Whereas, anticipated technological innovation consequences create uncertainty in the minds of potential adopters (Rogers, 2003). Aizstrauta et al. (2014) asserted that different approaches to diffusion of innovation are identified through various perspectives. Therefore, the diffusion of innovation is specific to leaders' requirements and organizational goals.

Zhang et al. (2015) discovered four core determinants of success which integrate: (a) communication channels, (b) innovation characteristics, (c) adopters' components, and (d) the social system. Zhang et al. furthermore conveyed interpersonal communication and mass media as channels used by individuals to understand information about new technologies. Innovators and early adopters were members of the social system (Pickles, Barrientos, & Knorrninga, 2016). Innovators represented approximately 2.5% of the social network and were among the first adopters (Lichtenthaler, 2016). Innovators possessed the capability to comprehend and apply sophisticated technical knowledge to help establish internal innovation from an external social system (Pickles et al., 2016). Thus, potential adopters were influenced to embrace products via internal and external forces using the diffusion theory (Zolait, 2014).

Al-Hakim and Lu (2017) used diffusion of innovation as a baseline theory and noted that many attributes determine a given innovation's adoption, including

compatibility, complexity, relative advantage, and observability (Al-Hakim & Lu, 2017; Pelc, 2014). Pelc (2014) posited that the diffusion of innovation theory has been well investigated and used to explore and determine factors influencing the adoption of a given innovation or new technology. The theory illustrates an explanation about why, how, and at what rate new insights of technology spread (Rogers, 2003).

Askarany (2016) postulated that the diffusion theory supports other institutional and economic methods and reveals innovation with its relative benefits to adopters, values, and regulations. In the diffusion of innovation theory, there are considerable impacts on the acceptance and dissemination of innovations among members of a social group; nevertheless, Askarany implied diffusion of a given innovation follows various ideologies. Byambaa, Janes, Takaro, and Corbett (2015) reinforced the diffusion of innovation theory to include the attributes, compatibility, complexity, and relative benefits used to determine a critical action to improve an innovation's adoption. Byambaa et al. determined that the diffusion of innovation theory is an essential, all-encompassing, theoretical framework to plan as well as execute given adoption strategies and operations to identify business technological challenges.

Organizational leaders may create a competitive advantage by enhancing the rate of adoption of new technology (Bashir, Yousaf, & Wani, 2016). Knowledge of the diffusion of innovation theory further demonstrates how business leaders utilize various tools and available resources under specific scenarios to innovate while maximizing profits. Bashir et al. (2016) further postulated that most technological improvements necessitate suppliers to become proactive in their approaches. Zolait (2014) implied there

are external and internal influences to drive product innovation within the organization. Business leaders should maximize all available resources to succeed with new approaches.

Makkonen and Johnston (2014) identified the adoption of innovation and diffusion operating on the macro- and microlevels as a process-oriented theory. The adoption of innovations leads to rejection or decision-making processes resulting in the use of a given innovation now, and in the future (Mbuya, Bounds, & Goldman, 2016). However, decision-makers must plan, evaluate, and execute the use of innovative ideas and ensure the process provides a significant influence on increased results despite attitudes or rejection (Ma et al., 2014). Akca and Ozer (2014) further postulated the construct of diffusion innovation is not a potential predictor in settings in which technological adoption is mandatory across complicated business settings, but rather a process requiring ideas, mass media, and advertising. Ideas for innovation are usually communicated over time via channels among multiple members of a precise social system by focusing on informal communication channels (Raynard, 2017). Diffusion theory centers on innovative information across a social system by incorporating time and processes to increase organizational productivity (Zolait, 2014).

The diffusion of innovation theory is commonly referred to as a valuable change model when guiding technological-based innovations (Shinkevich et al., 2016). Communication, education, and business viewpoints influence decisions with specific innovation and are the reason for the denial or acceptance of the innovation (Akca & Ozer, 2014). Raynard (2017) asserted the concept of diffusion of innovation is the

recognition of influences and leads social innovation. Furthermore, social contacts, interpersonal communication, and other interactions are primary influences in the adoption of new behaviors (Zhang et al., 2015). An example of a new behavior is the implementation of social media. Dahnil, Marzuki, Langgat, and Fabeil (2014) conducted a study with consumers who used social media as a channel to conduct business and discovered online communication increased sales and built loyalty. Their research also presented evidence of small and medium-size business's turnover rates decreasing with the increase of social communication and consumer purchases. Members of a social system might accept a change model if the approach is beneficial and presented positively (Dearing, 2009).

Some business leaders are receptive to new ideas from the experiences of early adopters. Innovative ideas develop from methods of diagnosis and economic interpretation by decision-makers and are diffused among members of a social system (Caiazza & Volpe, 2017; Kiwanuka, 2015; Shinkevich et al., 2016). Furthermore, the diffusion of technology is a continuous and slow process with variations of increased acceptance rates from innovators (Gayadeen & Phillips, 2014; Johannes, Lochstoer, & Mou, 2016). Ball et al. (2014) categorized the diffusion theory as beneficial to gain insights from and for its aspects influencing the adoption of new technologies and modifications in a business setting.

In a study by Johannes et al. (2016), office technology was modified to meet employee requests for a comfortable work setting. By assessing the lack of advanced office technology within the organization, the researchers determined the modification

would strengthen the possibility of employees' long-term commitment to the company. After implementation, Johannes et al. surveyed each employee and confirmed modification of office technology increased employee morale and decreased turnover rates. Business leaders should address new ideas, develop methods for implementation, and meet the needs of employees to grow the organization (Kiwanuka, 2015).

Diffusion theory framework explores the change process and incorporates elements of innovative ideas (Scott & McGuire, 2017). Marketers might experience challenges from those not receptive to change when applying the diffusion theory (Rogers, 2003). Furthermore, the adoption process begins when a user accepts the innovation and ends when the desire has ceased (Scott & McGuire, 2017). Users evaluate a product or concept and decide if moving forward is the best decision. The diffusion of innovation theory helps small retail business leaders implement new ideas, increase communication channels, and present strategies to market new products successfully (Zhang et al., 2015).

### **Social Media as a Tool in Business**

Social media is a communication tool. The Internet phenomenon of social media marketing allows small retail business leaders to incorporate Internet communication in their business plans and has become a platform for advertising (Cant & Wiid, 2016). Online communication is significantly different from traditional marketing and has become one of the most critical aspects of a company (Kozlenkova, Palmatier, Fang, Xioa, & Huang, 2017). Nobre and Silva (2014) reported that online communication assists the branding efforts of small business leaders with a technological structure and

platform. The results of their study provided insight on Internet sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and YouTube. These Internet sites are highly used by businesses to promote the companies' brand awareness, increase consumer connections, and reach millions of users synchronously. The development of second-generation, Internet-enabled applications, specifically Web 2.0, was a significant development in business online communication concepts (Atwong, 2015). Researchers have found that the Internet creates a need for balancing priorities and contributing to successful advanced marketing strategies in small businesses (Boling, Burns, & Dick, 2014; Caruth, 2016). Online communication is an essential tool to help business leaders succeed with online sales (Jones et al., 2015).

Social networking offers small business leaders substantial communication benefits, empowers purchasers, and reduces marketing costs (Boling et al., 2014; Leventhal & Swanson, 2016). According to Wang, Pauleen, and Zhang (2016), businesses who established social media accounts were gaining prominence within the retail industry. Jones et al. (2015) implied that using social media as a tool can target more customers effectively and is intended to reach multiple audiences. Bolat, Kooli, and Wright (2016) recommended innovative marketing techniques and forums for small businesses to aid with increased sales and other ideas, including how to reduce costs and improve profits when marketing online. Bolat et al. also provided an in-depth analysis of the benefits online media can offer SMEs such as flexible communication and positive financial performance. Although some organizations rely on social networking to brand and enhance the selling of products, other innovative resources are required to solve

problems when marketing online (Boughzala, 2016). Participating in high-level social media activities grants small retail business leaders the opportunity to deliver strategies and innovative marketing techniques to remain competitive (Oyza & Edwin, 2016).

Business leaders use social networking to communicate with audiences in various demographics. The utilization of web-based social networking innovations enables organizations to take part in two-way correspondence and attain broader audiences (Icha & Agwu, 2015). According to Kennedy (2016), the leadership's ability to communicate with a community directly impacted the organization's name. Kennedy further stated that the views of social media communication are egocentric, selective, colloquial, open, and supportive. The implementation of social networking offers leaders the capability to share their internal activities and decisions with consumers not regularly accessed (Kotni, 2017; Kucuk, 2016). Huarng and Roig-Tierno (2016) implied the ubiquity of online networking measures is a beneficial approach to connecting a business's name, forming valuable relationships, and obtaining business partners. Huarng and Roig-Tierno discussed the involvement of innovation activities within business networks as relevant factors in financial performance. Moreover, business leaders should invoke online correspondence and develop online partnerships to increase sales (Kennedy, 2016; Maman Larrauffie, 2014).

Some companies employ web-based social networking as an approach to communicate with groups, buyers, and partners. Li and Kannan (2014) conducted a field study to provide managers with insight into the importance of online communication and how different methods channel through each other. Employing online networking was



one route for leaders to connect with consumers; however, web-based social networking and demographic selection applications from some business entrepreneurs placed a strain on communication (Li & Kannan, 2014). In contrast, Lim (2015) postulated the appropriation and viable usage of the Internet is mainly for correspondence and not consumer engagement. Pucci, Nosi, and Zanni (2017) attested entrepreneurs should increase web-based social networking procedures based on the organization's needs and should incorporate social networking into general marketing designs. Some business leaders use Facebook to accomplish correspondence, introductions, and contacts with a more extensive customer base (Leong, Jaafar, & Sulaiman, 2017). Leong et al. (2017) further noted most business leaders experienced challenges with online networking, which includes estimating the effect on the business, reconciliation with other advertising activities, the absence of assets, the absence of administrative support, social adjustment, and control of the correspondence message. Moreover, online marketing experts confronted challenges in employing web-based social networking for correspondence if they did not have vital assets or web-based social networking advertising techniques (Jones et al., 2015).

Some small retail business leaders lack tools and strategies to engage customers with social media (Gholston, Kuofie, & Hakim, 2016). The Internet is a widely-used tool for companies to communicate with consumers and expand the business (Donnelly, Simmons, Armstrong, & Fearne, 2013). According to Hajli (2014), technology increases rapidly, and consumers have the intent to purchase based on the role of social interaction on the web. Although social media appears quite common for retail businesses, some

business leaders have failed to grasp the concept (Cesaroni & Consoli, 2015). The assimilation of social media positive impacted businesses by increasing traffic, customer awareness, and overall revenues (Jones et al., 2015). However, social media provides a platform to build goodwill and improvement for the public image of small businesses (Ramsaran-Fowdar & Fowdar, 2013). Talafuse (2015) conducted a study about firms which adopted social media marketing to grow the business. The results determined social media marketing to be a challenging platform, yet the technology increased communication with customers while offering products and services. The significance of social influence focuses on relationships as well as user intent. With social media, small businesses have a global presence encompassing competitive visibility, product promotion, employee engagement, building customer and supplier relationships, and marketing products and services (Taneja, Pryor, & Hayek, 2016).

Marketers view social media as the future of communication to share information (Mogos, 2015). Mogos (2015) discovered social media marketing is a methodical combination of marketing and technological concepts with specific objectives such as: (a) enhanced communication with consumers, (b) increased sales, and (c) improved brand awareness associated with social media marketing. Naturally, social media marketing has developed different media platforms such as blogs and viral videos. As an organization's message rapidly spreads from one user to another, the news has appeared to resonate with a trustworthy third-party (Hsu, Yu, & Wu, 2014).

Hudson, Huang, Roth, and Madden (2015) emphasized how business leaders use social media for a variety of reasons and encounter longevity and momentum

Nevertheless, Toombs and Harlow (2014) conveyed small firms should not deviate from using social media or blogs as these tools are significant for rapid growth in an online community. In contrast, research conducted by Parida, Lahti, and Wincent (2016) noted disadvantages with some small retail business leaders online advertising strategies are lack of credibility, lack of consumer trust, and lack of experience. Upon completion of the research, Parida et al. confirmed disadvantages would decrease as businesses gain credibility with consumers.

The implementation of social media renders small retail business leaders a chance to create ideal opportunities and facilitate brand connection with potential customers (Snelson, 2016). Social media platforms, such as, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter are used to win the trust of potential and existing customers (Todor, 2016). Entrepreneurs are taking advantage of copious social media opportunities and are starting to execute new social media programs at a higher rate. Global firms recognize social media marketing as a reliable marketing channel with innovations utilized in advertising campaigns. Taneja and Toombs (2014) indicated small commercial leaders are currently applying social media marketing to enhance business viability, sustainability, and visibility. According to Murphy (2017), small firms must compete, strengthen awareness, and focus on attracting more consumers to procure goods and services in an online community. Cheng, Lourenco, and Resnick (2016) stated small businesses tend to observe marketing activities as unnecessary and perceive online marketing as costly. In contrast, online marketing is not costly, exceeds boundaries, and delivers goods and services to Internet users from various demographics (Layton, 2014). Overall, social media marketing has

four key advantages: (a) direct response, (b) personal communication, (c) tangibility, and (d) reaching specific audiences (Yasmin, Tasneem, & Fatema, 2015).

As discussed in this section, knowledge of online marketing trends is helpful to provide entrepreneurs a platform for increasing brand awareness, connecting with consumers and enhancing business sustainability. Social media is an online platform used by business leaders to market products, market services, and manage customer relationships (He, Wang, Chen, & Zha, 2017). Understanding the benefits of social media tools will help business leaders increase return on investment, promote content, and improve business performance. Drummond, McGrath, and O'Toole (2018) suggested the impact of social media tools extend virtual communication platforms and provides resources to enhance relationships and develop business relationships. Use of social media is a powerful business tool with opportunities and benefits to businesses.

### **Social Media Marketing Strategies**

Social media marketing is a beneficial distribution channel to end-users (Van den Eijnden, Lemmens, & Valkenburg, 2016). According to Ceric, D'Alessandro, Soutar, and Johnson (2016), beneficial social media marketing strategies include learning how to access new markets, how to access various demographics, and how to use virtual storefronts. Popa (2015) indicated the social media engagement is the newest, most efficient, and eminent means of conducting business and has gained popularity over time. Moreover, social media is indispensable for companies and individuals (Popa, 2015). Social media marketing is used by organizations to obtain additional consumers and to increase brand awareness. Keegan and Rowley (2017) conducted a study to evaluate

strategies and challenges business leaders encounter when increasing social media marketing advertising. The study implied social media marketing is a new stage of engagement and networking requires useful analytical tools (Keegan & Rowley, 2017). The lack of engagement or proper tools creates challenges for business leaders to implement an online marketing platform (Keegan & Rowley, 2017). The study further suggested new networking opportunities for marketing practitioners and developing an online site for the organization is one of the most challenging methods. Implementing social media marketing is a strategic decision-making process, and marketers should engage business leaders during the development process.

According to Blasco, Moliner-Velazquez, Servera-Frances, and Gil-Saura (2016), companies use the Internet to advertise merchandise, obtain ideas, and collect data. The Internet also permits businesses to sell products online rapidly and efficiently (Durmaz & Efendioglu, 2016). Perez-Danielescu (2014) posited social media marketing advertising has become more efficient as technology advances and grants small retail business leaders the opportunity to advance the business while capitalizing on emerging and social trends. SMEs mirror online marketing techniques to gain a competitive edge against rivals and to attract new partners (Dahnil et al., 2014). Researchers have explored how beneficial social media marketing is for both retailers and consumers. According to Wu, Wen, Dou, and Chen (2015), online marketing relies heavily on consumer creativity and the effectiveness of the marketing tools for the retailer. For example, in 2017, global e-commerce sales attributed to 2.3 trillion U.S. dollars, with an estimated increase of 7.4% in 2018 (McNair, 2018; Verma, Sharma, & Sheth, 2016). The increase in online retail

sales attributes to consumer trust factors in e-markets, online advertising, useful marketing tools, and positive consumer experience.

Social media marketing has unlimited possibilities (Schwarzl & Grabowska, 2015). Chary (2014) noted social media content draws in purchasers, increases volume, and improves a company's image. Henceforth, online marketing is a primary indicator of growth and will increase as the number of Internet end-users increases (Demishkevich, 2015). Social media marketing measures are designed to create a strong web presence and are a necessity to reach more customers effectively, reliably, and efficiently (Chary, 2014). Schwarzl and Grabowska (2015) noted key indicators of development are the growth of the number of Internet users. In their study, statistical data demonstrated what consumers were willing to purchase, how often consumers bought online, and what sites consumers were likely to follow. Results confirmed marketing online for a minimum of 6 hours or more each week generates three times as many leads as traditional marketing (Schwarzl & Grabowska, 2015). The benefits of using the Internet to market should be evident and should provide small retail business leaders an opportunity to compete on equal terms with larger competitors as well as increase sales (Li & Kannan, 2014; Popa, 2015).

Social media is a successful tool for assisting organizations to develop and understand consumer needs (Kim & Lee, 2015). Although social media strategies have helped numerous organizations develop in the industry, e-markets are subdivided and present challenges when attempting to satisfy consumer needs (Chary, 2014; Kim & Lee, 2015). Leeflang, Verhoef, Dahlstrom, and Freundt (2014) noted e-marketing promotion is

one of the challenges business leaders encounter as it requires changes in monetary, political, and social conditions. Leeflang et al. compared traditional marketing to online marketing and discovered specific methodologies are required to attract and communicate with people on the web. In a similar study, Miao (2014) elaborated on companies advertising procedures chosen to address political and social conditions. Results in both studies confirmed consumers are attracted to companies whose products are affordable, political views are similar, and social conditions are coequal (Leeflang et al., 2014; Miao, 2014). In combination with the Internet, advertising on the radio, television, and magazines are all marketing techniques small businesses use to increase sales. In 2017, the U.S. spending on online advertising was approximately \$72.09 billion, which is approximately 36.8% of the total U.S. advertisement spending (McNair, 2018). Hence, the online advertising industry provided companies with the opportunity to reach customers in large numbers both synchronously and asynchronously.

Social media marketing strategies in organizations have advantages and disadvantages. Taherdoost and Jalaliyoon (2014) highlighted social media advertising as opportunities, enhanced client support, and brand improvement. Schaupp and Belanger (2014) suggested social media advertising is the chance to transform influencers into advocates. Schwarzl and Grabowska (2015) insisted social media advertising is excellent for open door learning exchanges. Taherdoost and Jalaliyoon emphasized challenges consisted of the absence of brand control, rivalry from other brands, and time designation. The advantages of online advertising included social networking tools and proper marketing for demographics. The disadvantages were security issues and methods

to measure the effectiveness of social media advertising adequately (Taherdoost & Jalaliyoon, 2014). The effects, beliefs, and concerns toward measuring the success of online advertising were assessed and determined “likes” or “follows” have an impact on increased sales and social media presence is beneficial to small retail businesses (Mir, 2015; Yasmin et al., 2015).

The online setting is a tool used to share innovative marketing strategies (Oyza & Edwin, 2016). The examination affirmed Rogers's (2003) diffusion of innovation theory concerning the rate of selection of innovations. The prospects and trials of utilizing web-based social networking advertising procedures in business associations are factors small retail business leaders must consider with web-based social networking tools. McArthur, Weaven, and Dant (2015) stated the reception of social media advertising and information detours business leaders from applying the innovation, integrating technology, and continuing online partnerships. Advertising experts in organizations are using online communities to support positive change, create a platform to assist innovators with additional advertising procedures, and develop strategies for future use (Lim, 2015).

Constantinides (2014) discussed why business leaders need to actualize systems to attract the planned target group of buyers. Constantinides further emphasized the high application of social media advertising will increase consumer trust and drive direct sales. According to Bleier and Eisenbeiss (2015), trust in a retailer helps consumers to believe their data is in safe hands and alleviated privacy concerns, which in return increased purchase decisions. Yakhlef (2015) suggested gaining customer trust which includes



specific factors the retailer cannot control. Yakhlef proposed online retail environments invoke emotional aspects of experiences, which shape a customer's retail experiences and determines the chances of a customer's future purchases. Positive customer experience is a fundamental approach to sustaining trusting relationships. However, the spatial relationship between the retailer and consumer supports continuous transactions. Building relationships are an effective strategy to promote communication and value in small retail businesses (Popa, 2015).

The literature on the experiences of marketers adopting social media for marketing strategies is limited; however, some academic studies revealed that marketers are pleased with social media marketing experiences, customer engagement, and the increase in sales after implementation (Constantinides, 2014). Marketing on the Internet offers proportionate avenues for promotion, product branding, and brand loyalty. Small retail businesses improved sales with consumer engagement and management interaction (Smith & Barrett, 2016). Management development activities aided in the success of the business and engaged managers in the implementation phases of online marketing (Keegan & Rowley, 2017). Small retail business leaders who aim to increase success rates should make technological changes, appeal to target markets, participate in online forums, and develop appealing websites for products and services (Ceric et al., 2016; McCann & Barlow, 2015). Social media marketing is mandatory in today's fast-growing network of activities across the world and is a simplified approach to progression (Faisal, 2016). According to Nunan, Sibai, Schivinski, and Christodoulides (2018), the impact of social media marketing influences customer satisfaction and is notable for identifying

diverse opportunities to increase sales. Furthermore, the perception of online marketing strategies is essential avenues of communication across business channels (Iankova, Davies, Archer-Brown, Marder, & Yau, 2018). In summary, strategies connecting the creation and sharing of content online will help business leaders achieve branding goals and improve communication with audiences.

### **Social Media Advancement Strategies in Business**

Small retail business leaders lack resources to advance in technology for increased opportunities on the Internet. Without the proper tools, small retail businesses encounter barriers, which decrease online marketing opportunities. The capabilities of a company often determine the success of the organization (Ragab, 2016). Alford and Page (2015) stated that small businesses use Web 2.0 to possess sustainable competitive advantages. Alford and Page further postulated minimal marketing techniques center on technology barriers, action research, financial limitations, and lack of Web 2.0 experience. Ragab (2016) postulated small business leaders encounter high IT adoption failure rates because of lack of knowledge, culture, and resources. Chong, Li, Ngai, Ch'ng, and Lee (2015) explored the challenges organizations encounter globally in marketing and the constant changes in customer satisfaction. Five challenges business leaders encounter are effect, endorsement, acknowledgment, affiliation, and brand consistent quality (Chong et al., 2015). Coincidentally, online marketing methodologies increase branding opportunities by adjustment of procedures and intensified strategies (Boughzala, 2016). In the research study, Boughzala (2016) noted that leaders should plan web-based social media efforts to create income and to build branding for increased

consumer activity. Furthermore, advertising via Web 2.0 is a path for entrepreneurs to advance the business image and to increase product awareness (Boughzala, 2016).

Mobile payments and social media implementation are technology-based methods and build customer relationships. Improvements in mobile and wireless technologies have led to ubiquitous access to data for both consumers and firms (Pantano & Priporas, 2014). For example, at the end of 2014, an estimated 24 million households used mobile payments to complete purchases (Dennehy, 2015). Mobile retailing is a new power for consumer buying and allows high-speed connections, availability, and pleasurable shopping experiences for consumers (Pantano & Priporas, 2014; Prado, 2016). Mobile retailing is a concept of expedited service eliminating long wait times both in-store and via telephone. The concept of electronic retailing provides companies with a platform of technology and information to use as a competitive marketing weapon (Hassan, Nadzim, & Shiratuddin, 2015; Schaupp & Belanger, 2014). Therefore, creating a web presence on sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter to increase selling opportunities for small businesses and maximize social capital (Boling et al., 2014).

By adding social media as an advertising platform, businesses build social relationships and opportunities for growth in multiple demographic areas (Oyza & Edwin, 2016; Talafuse, 2015). Technological change is constant and social consequences occur when small business leaders fail to adapt (Kitchen & Proctor, 2015). Factors associated with consequences are the electronic word of mouth (EWOM). EWOM is a marketing method of communication for influencing customers. With proper resources, specific guidelines, and best practices, EWOM marketing is a credible low-cost option

for small retail business leaders (Reimer & Benkenstein, 2016). Consumer-generated feedback such as EWOM will increase online presence, increase communication, and increase revenues (Grossberg, 2016). Tariq, Abbas, Abrar, and Iqbal (2017) analyzed the impact of EWOM and brand awareness on consumer purchase intentions. The benefits noted in the study revealed a decrease in negative customer reviews, customer service feedback, inferior products, and loss of communication (Tariq et al., 2017). According to Reimer and Benkenstein (2016), business leaders should use EWOM to diffuse messages and to notify customers about new products because EWOM is a form of innovative technology created to help small retail businesses achieve competitive advantages.

Organizations must be practical when using EWOM as a marketing method (Pech, 2016). Social media and its ubiquity are a platform of technology for small retail businesses, and the implementation of web-based advertising affects correspondence and engagement through EWOM (Rosario, Sotgiu, De Valck, & Bijmolt, 2016). EWOM has adverse feedback and might negatively impact brand image and purchase decisions. According to Reimer and Benkenstein (2016), the advancement of technology permits customers to share experiences and opinions through EWOM. Sandes and Urdan (2013) discovered how business leaders should distinguish what impacts discussions on the web, how to interpret the validity of online discussions, and how to create strategies to diffuse negative commentary about the company. Findings determined companies managing EWOM by actively responding to both negative and positive comments will reduce the impact on brand image, however, will not change a purchase decision. With the concept of EWOM's accessibility, companies prioritized EWOM to stimulate overall sales.

Valuable objectives of web-based networking are to follow consumers who make positive assessments on sites like Twitter and Facebook and comprehend the clients motivations for using social networking as a discussion platform (Sandes & Urdan, 2013). Entrepreneurs can participate in online advertising but should express caution when diffusing commentary.

The presence of other customers' opinions impacts buying decisions. According to Rosario et al. (2016), EWOM allows consumers to offer information concerning services, brands, and goods to other consumers via the Internet through the use of tweets, reviews, and blog posts. The more consumers review a product online, chances are improved that other consumers become aware of the product's existence (Roy, Datta, & Basu, 2017). The repetition of the message through EWOM attracts consumers' attention to the topic of interest and increases interaction with businesses (Perez-Danielescu, 2014). Amblee and Bui (2014) indicated EWOM had gained attention and strength among marketers over the last 5 years because it is free media among consumers and businesses. Huete-Alcocer (2017) posited marketers seek and encourage consumers to deliver EWOM positively as it motivates individuals to make purchases expeditiously. Tariq et al. (2017) discovered EWOM influenced the purchase intentions among consumers, revealing EWOM has a positive and significant effect of increasing brand awareness. In a study by Erkan and Evans (2016), online advertising created a need for an efficient feedback mechanism to facilitate the exchange as well as storage of EWOM. As noted, EWOM serves as a reputation system allowing customers to communicate through discussions and review of ratings online. Findings revealed EWOM is a powerful

marketing instrument and provides diverse communication platforms. Conversations on EWOM platforms are credible, useful, truthful, and practical implications about consumers' purchase experiences (Erkan & Evans, 2016).

Approximately 60% of the private employment sector is small retail businesses whose leaders contribute to innovative marketing and economic development (Asunka, 2016). Molinillo and Japtura (2017) expressed creativity and innovation are required to implement specific strategies for continued success. Cheng and Liu (2017) classified innovative technology as the core for small businesses and business leaders who choose to invest in technological strategies have advantages over competitors. Additionally, Moon and Lee (2014) emphasized consumers make decisions based on the simplicity and convenience. Organizations integrate social media applications such as social networking sites and blogs as a marketing strategy and effective means to engage and communicate with a target audience or market (Felix, Rauschnabel, & Hinsch, 2017). Moreover, small firms are encouraged to consider a broader approach to customer relationship management, which has the potential of creating value for consumers by allowing collaborative experiences (Seo & Lee, 2016). In addition to broader approaches to customer relationship management, implementing social media marketing strategies in businesses can improve organizational performance, optimize strategic management discussions, and increase opportunities among diverse demographics (Archer-Brown & Kietzmann, 2018; Kumar, 2018).

In summary, social media marketing emerged as an integral aspect of many businesses' marketing strategies. The concept of social media use serves as an undeniably

essential tool used to market to the general population and serve as a simplified approach to analyze consumer reactions (Constantinides, 2014; Hajli, 2014). Furthermore, social media improves the level of engagement with consumers, targets appropriate markets, and develops communication between small retail businesses and consumers. The literature uncovered an array of topics such as company engagement; marketing strategies; advantages of online marketing; benefits of using Facebook, Twitter, and other web-based social networking sites; and benefits of EWOM. Chong et al. (2015) asserted that the goal of online networking is to showcase products or services and use the Internet as a platform to increase brand awareness and revenue. Furthermore, the use of online networking strategies can help increase revenue, generate website traffic, and appeal to new audiences (Lee, Er, Kim, Li, & Palmatier, 2018).

### **Transition**

The assessment of literature in this study included a review to answer the overarching research question of what online marketing strategies were used by small retail business leaders to increase derivative sales. The literature review included information on the diffusion of innovation theory, social media use in business, the value of social media marketing strategies, and social media advancement strategies in the retail industry. Small business leaders should apply online marketing strategies to increase derivative sales, to foster communication, and to engage consumers. Small retail businesses might achieve sustainability when applying the diffusion of innovation theory to online marketing strategies. Moreover, business leaders may use this literature review

to support marketing concepts, to justify implementing new technology, and to overcome diversification associated with social media marketing in the organization.

Online marketing and innovative technology concepts comprise awareness of social influences and behavioral trends to connect buyers and sellers (Abdulnasir, 2015). Concepts associated with social media marketing grants small businesses the opportunity for economic growth and development by opening communication channels and creating brand awareness (Baldwin, 2015). Layton (2014) identified the increase of adaptive change in marketing systems commences with co-evolution of social practices and innovative change within the organization. Business leaders must understand the need to advertise online, communicate appropriately using EWOM, and attract Generation Y consumers effectively (Boughzala, 2016).

Diversification is a significant component of a company's growth (Arasti, Khaleghi, & Noori, 2017). Empirical evidence about social media marketing strategies assists business leaders who are uncertain about implementing online marketing in the business plan (Appiah-Adu & Amoako, 2016). Business leaders must understand current technology, consumer demands, and social responsibility are essential to maximize profits in society (Abdulnasir, 2015). Although business leaders encounter competitive environments stemming from an abundance of innovative technologies, websites such as Facebook and Twitter are essential media channels for maintaining a competitive advantage (Chary, 2014; Shaikh & Gandhi, 2016). Furthermore, online marketing is vital to small retail businesses success rate by unceasingly promoting a brand, a service, or a product (Oyza & Edwin, 2016).



Reviewed in Section 1 were the focus of the study and the implementation of small retail businesses' online marketing strategies for increased revenue and communication. Explored were the background of the problem as well as the problem statement, purpose statement, nature of the study, research question, interview questions, conceptual framework, operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and the significance of the study. A review of the professional and academic literature was provided, which highlighted the diffusion of innovation theory as well as the conceptual framework for this study.

Section 2 will discuss the role of the researcher, research method, research design, participants, ethical guidelines, data analysis, and the foundation of reliability and validity. Section 3 contains an explanation of the data collection and analysis process. This section will also include findings of the research study, implications for social change, recommendations for action, suggestions for further research, and conclusions.

## Section 2: The Project

Section 2 includes detailed explanations of the plan I will follow to explore and understand online marketing strategies that small business leaders in retail companies use to increase derivative sales. Section 2 will provide information about the project, the researcher's role, participants, research method, and research design. Section 2 will also include specific information relating to the population, sampling method, data collection, ethical research issues, and the reliability and validity of the study.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies some small retail business leaders use to implement online marketing to increase derivative sales. The target population included business leaders from four small retail businesses in California who I selected because they had successfully implemented online marketing strategies to increase derivative sales. The implications for positive social change included the potential for business leaders to provide job opportunities for the public.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher is vital to the data collection process. In qualitative research, the researcher accesses the thoughts and experiences of the participants (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Furthermore, the researcher is responsible for being competent, open, honest, and explaining the study without biasing participants (Sutton & Austin, 2015). According to *The Belmont Report*, researchers must be ethical and follow the guidelines established to protect the research participants (National Commission for the Protection

of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). My role as the researcher in this study was to interview four small retail business leaders from four companies, collect and analyze data from them, and maintain their confidentiality throughout the interview process.

Sutton and Austin (2015) stated that researchers should reflect positions and articulate subjectivities to avoid confirmation bias when conducting research. Confirmation bias may occur at any phase of research, and the researcher must establish a comparison case to seek out similarities and differences across accounts to ensure different perspectives are represented (Noble & Smith, 2015; Sutton & Austin, 2015). To preserve subjectivity, researchers must be reflexive during the interview process (Durmaz & Efendioglu, 2016).

Assumptions about motivations and influences are developed through a cultural lens and create cultural bias (Boddy, 2016). To mitigate cultural bias, researchers must display genuine respect for participants and be cognizant of cultural assumptions (Roulston, 2016). Researchers must also understand marketing strategies and consumer perceptions are culturally bound (Kastanakis & Voyer, 2014). I provided consideration to various cultural differences and what is considered acceptable within diverse cultures to participants to circumvent cultural bias. The utmost respect was provided to participants by actively listening, not providing an opinion, and keeping a log with written notes to avoid possible cultural bias during this phase.

Yin (2014) stated that to ensure data addresses the initial research question, the use of an interview protocol is necessary. For this research, I used an interview protocol

(see Appendix A) to conduct interviews. Semistructured interviews did not begin until approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was granted. I conducted semistructured interviews with participants to obtain the strategies they used to implement online marketing. The participants' information was kept private and confidential. Password encryption on my computer protected the collected electronic data, and a personal, locked safe protected the collected nonelectronic data. All transcripts will be held for a minimum of 5 years and then discarded.

### **Participants**

The target population was business leaders from four small retail businesses in California who I selected because they had successfully implemented online marketing strategies to increase derivative sales. For this study, eligible individuals were business leaders with a minimum of 5 years of experience at small retail businesses in California with less than 30 employees. Participant recruitment is vital to the success of a research study, and yet many research projects fail to recruit a sufficient number of participants (Newington & Metcalfe, 2014). The participants I selected were in executive management at their companies, had the qualifications and experiences required to answer the research question, and had over 6 months of experience in the position.

Acquiring participants is an essential step in conducting research (Grossoehme, 2014). In qualitative studies, some populations are more difficult to access than others (Newington & Metcalfe, 2014). To access populations, researchers use multiple strategies to recruit participants for a study (Yin, 2014). In this study, I used a purposeful sampling technique to ensure the inclusion of proper participants. Yin (2014) recommended

purposeful sampling to select qualified individuals in a study. I gathered the qualified individuals through an Internet search process of small retail businesses in California. After obtaining multiple business names and business leaders' contact information from my Internet search, I contacted each business via the business telephone number and scheduled a face-to-face appointment to discuss the study in detail, formalize the research process, and obtain verbal intent from the possible participant.

Establishing a positive rapport with participants strengthens the engagement of the research process (Yin, 2014). Sutton and Austin (2015) posited that strong working relationships require trust. To foster a positive working relationship with participants, I assured them the study would focus on their views and experiences as business leaders while safeguarding their identities. Additionally, I guaranteed full disclosure of the research and my intent to process as recommended by Yanchar (2015). For the advancement of participant selection, I requested authorization from Walden University's IRB to conduct the research. Once IRB approval was received to conduct the research, the business leaders were contacted at their business office telephone number. The four business leaders agreed to participate by replying "I consent" via e-mail along with a copy of the informed consent form to my Walden University e-mail address.

## **Research Method and Design**

### **Research Method**

The use of the qualitative method was suitable to engage business leaders in semistructured interviews with open-ended questions. When using qualitative methods, a researcher strives to understand the perspectives of participants or a situation by

exploring firsthand experiences to provide meaningful data (Ruel, 2017). Researchers use the qualitative method to understand the experiences of the community or employees (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). The purpose of qualitative research is to investigate a new field of study to ascertain and theorize prominent issues (Jamshed, 2014). In preparation for this study, I reviewed different qualitative studies by Dikko (2016), Leung (2015), and Yin (2014). The qualitative research method was most appropriate for this study to convey why business leaders implement online marketing strategies. Exploring the application of the innovation process to small retail businesses was performed through my investigation of their online marketing business practices.

Quantitative research methods are appropriate when factual data are required to answer the research question, when general information is mandatory, and when variables can be isolated and defined (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & de Lacey, 2016). According to Barnham (2015), quantitative research focuses on numbers, statistics, and quantitative measurements as a basis for representing findings. Furthermore, quantitative methods analyze statistical data to examine the relationships or differences among variables (Cokley & Awad, 2013). I did not use a quantitative method for this study because quantitative research is sampling, measuring, and examining relationships with numerical data analysis and my intent with this study was not to examine the differences among variables or measurements of statistical data.

Researchers use the mixed-method approach to explore and examine a phenomenon (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2013). Mixed methods combine elements of both qualitative and quantitative research approaches for the broad purpose of increasing the

breadth and depth of understanding (Palinkas et al., 2015). According to Ozawa and Pongpirul (2014), mixed methods are primary when social, economic, and cultural contexts are essential to assess the performance. A mixed-method approach did not align with my goals for this study because only qualitative data were necessary to answer the research question, not both qualitative and quantitative.

### **Research Design**

I used a multiple case study design in this study to collect and analyze data to explore the phenomenon under study. The multiple case study design addressed the *how* and *why* research question. Hyett, Kenny, and Dickson-Swift (2014) emphasized that researchers should use multiple case study designs in certain contexts to collect and analyze data. Case study design involves exploring the phenomenon within a contemporary setting to answer the research question (Dumez, 2015; Garcia, 2014). According to Yin (2014), a case study can be exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive. Researchers use multiple case studies to gather sources and to collect data (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). A multiple case study design can be used to conduct semistructured interviews with individuals involved in a specific area of business (Zieba, Bolisani, & Scarso, 2016). For example, an exploratory case study by Runfola, Perna, Baraldi, and Gregori (2017) used semistructured interviews to determine how business journals influence decisions. The multiple case study method was appropriate for this study because it assisted my understanding of the techniques small retail business leaders use to apply online marketing to business plans, by exploring patterns of similarity and different strategic approaches.

Researchers use multiple case studies to seek answers to and understand complex experiments (Garcia, 2014) and to gather sources and collect data (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). A multiple case study design discloses the relationship between events as perceived by the participants in the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Ponelis (2015) conducted a multiple case study to understand information systems in SMEs. A multiple case study design corresponded with the purpose of this study and was the most appropriate design to employ for this study.

Phenomenological research differs from other modes of qualitative inquiry because the researcher attempts to understand the essence of a phenomenon from the perspective of participants who have experienced it (Gill, 2014). Using a phenomenological method might cause an eidetic generalization as opposed to an empirical generalization (Englander, 2016). The goal of phenomenologists is to obtain the dimensions of human experiences and how groups of individuals share the same experiences (Pell, Kuang, Viboud, & Chowell, 2016). A phenomenological approach did not correspond to the overarching research question in this study. Furthermore, business leaders answered specific, open-ended, online marketing strategy questions through semistructured interviews; consequently, I did not use a phenomenological design in this study.

Ethnography is a qualitative research design that focuses on the culture of people at a place or institution (Hamilton, 2015). Ethnographic researchers provide insight into experiences of daily life such as political, economic, and social dynamics (Jamshed, 2014). Researchers who use this approach provide data sources to reach triangulation



(Vernon, 2015). I did not select an ethnographic design for this study because the focus was not to explore the practices of a group of individuals.

Narrative research is storytelling presented by participants with real-life experience (Wang & Geale, 2015). Interview data and data analysis include a narrative or paradigmatic analysis of the narratives (Ison, Cusick, & Bye, 2014). Sunderland, Chenoweth, Matthews, and Ellem (2014) used narrative inquiry to research a public interdisciplinary awareness project included a customized, online, multimodal storytelling platform to explore the lives of people with disabilities internationally. Their study provided an in-depth analysis of participants' modes of storytelling to define what their disabilities meant to them. The narrative inquiry approach was not an appropriate or adequate method to convey the participant's experiences in this study.

Valid research requires quality, data saturation, and content validity (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Saturation means no additional data discovered pertains to the sample population (Saunders et al., 2017). Data saturation transpires when the emergence of new themes is obsolete (Yin, 2014). Member checking is a technique selected to establish validity and credibility and is conducted by asking all participants to confirm the data previously provided (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). If I had not achieved data saturation in this study, additional participants would have been selected until there were no new emerging themes. In this study, I assured data saturation by retrieving information from interviews, public business documents, websites, and social media webpages from small retail businesses to explore the strategies they used to implement online marketing until no new data or additional themes occurred.

### **Population and Sampling**

The target population for this study was four business leaders from four small retail businesses in California. The population was appropriate for this study because some business leaders understand the challenges of online marketing. The population aligned with the overarching research question because the participants for this study had applied knowledge and experience on how to implement online marketing strategies in a small business. A qualitative inquiry aims to gain knowledge of the research topic, understand behavior, and understand motivation when sampling participants (Emmel, 2015; Jervis & Drake, 2014). Caruth (2016) used the inclusion criterion to establish participant experiences in the subject of balancing cognitive strategies in small businesses. According to Eldredge, Weagel, and Kroth (2014), defining a study population early in the research process helps assure the overall validity of the study results. An inclusion criterion for the purposeful sampling method determined the appropriate participants who used online marketing strategies in the businesses to meet participant criteria. Purposeful sampling was used in this study to interview four business leaders and to discover the phenomenon. Purposeful sampling provides information by using small case amounts and small sample sizes to help the researcher identify the phenomenon (Hancock, Amankwaa, Revell, & Mueller, 2016; Palinkas et al., 2015).

The sample size is selected based on the information the sample population holds and should be small because qualitative studies aim to create relationships with participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Morse, 2015). For example, Caruth (2016) selected a sample size of 25 small business leaders who successfully adopted online

marketing. However, too small of a sample size might prevent the findings from being valid. In contrast, too large a sample size might amplify the detection of differences, emphasizing statistical differences not relevant to the study (Faber & Fonseca, 2014). In qualitative studies, the researcher cannot guarantee a particular sample size will reach data saturation (Yin, 2014). The sample included participants who answered the research question by providing knowledge and expertise in the field of business.

Data saturation is a concept in qualitative research and differs based on sample sizes (Emmel, 2015). During the research process, researchers conduct various interviews without considering new ideas or themes, which is data saturation (Faber & Fonseca, 2014). Emmel (2015) stated the lack of standard processes could lead to premature data saturation by researchers. To deviate from the risk of premature data saturation, I ensured data saturation by using an interview protocol (see Appendix A) and by using a set of interview questions to interview business leaders who implemented online marketing strategies to increase derivative sales. Data saturation occurs when all questions explored repeat the same information, and no new themes emerge (Saunders et al., 2017). In this study, data saturation occurred when no new themes emerged. Administering a second Internet search for additional small retail businesses in California would occur if data saturation did not transpire after the fourth participant. The action plan was to add small retail businesses who successfully implemented online marketing to increase derivative sales until data saturation occurred.

Researchers must understand many factors when choosing an interview site and plans to connect with research participants for a qualitative study (Barnham, 2015). For

this study, all interviews took place in a comfortable and private setting. Comfortable settings allow participants to speak freely about the research topic (Dikko, 2016). Using a comfortable and quiet interview setting for the participant was suggested by Jamshed (2014). Participants selected a private, quiet, and comfortable interview location.

### **Ethical Research**

Researchers use consent forms for confidentiality and to ensure the protection of participants' rights (Swanson & Betensky, 2015). Obtaining informed consent involves explaining: (a) the purpose of the study, (b) how the research might contribute to the business, (c) the procedures for conducting the study, and (d) the nature of the study. The informed consent process includes an explanation about: (a) risks and benefits of participating in the study, (b) compensation, (c) confidentiality, (d) contact information to request additional information about the study, and (e) participant rights (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, & Cheraghi, 2014). Participants were provided with informed consent forms via e-mail. The participants replied, "I consent" to the e-mail with the informed consent form if they agreed to participate. Notification from research participants was required to withdraw from research participation. Participants could withdraw by notifying the researcher with an oral (telephone) or written (e-mail) notice. If a participant chooses to withdraw, I will immediately return any documents provided as well as delete any recorded data.

Compensation to participants in research projects is not obligatory. Controversies exist in the forms and levels of incentives, compensation, and to a lesser extent reimbursement to study participants in resource-constrained settings (Mduluzza, Midzi,

Duruza, & Ndebele, 2013). Incentives can change a participant's willingness to participate (Mduluzi et al., 2013). No offering of incentives of any form to participants occurred in this study.

*The Belmont Report* protocol was used to comply with ethical protection of participants. Ethical principles revealed in *The Belmont Report* comprise: (a) respect for other persons, treating individuals with autonomy; (b) beneficence, where the researcher respects the participants' decisions and keeps them from harm; and (c) justice, where if there is any form of compensation it will be deserved and distributed accordingly (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). *The Belmont Report* is a guide the IRB follows to guarantee researchers will conduct ethical research (Metcalf & Crawford, 2016). I selected the participants once IRB approval was received.

Confidentiality of consent has been recognized as an integral part of ethics in research (Sanjari et al., 2014). To assure participants' confidentiality is not to discuss or repeat without permission. Morse and Coulehan (2014) specified unique concerns about privacy in qualitative research because of its production of thick descriptions of phenomena. I ensured confidentiality of data collection before obtaining participants' consent. Newington and Metcalfe (2014) recommended adopting the highest ethical standards when protecting participants. A password-enabled computer is storing electronic data for a minimum of 5 years before deleting. Voice recorded data is kept on an encrypted password file for a minimum of 5 years before deleting. Business documents, research journals, the signed informed consent forms are secure in a home

locked nondigital safe for a minimum of 5 years before the destruction of records. To safeguard confidentiality, trust, and anonymity, researchers use pseudonyms to protect and decrease unanticipated stress (Bryman & Bell, 2015). I used pseudonyms such as CO1, CO2, CO3, and CO4 to reference the four businesses and PT1 through PT4 to reference participants of each business in the study. I did not provide participant names in documentation relating to the study. The collected data was restricted and accessed only by the researcher. Walden University's IRB approved the study before I began data collection. The IRB approval number for this study is 07-17-18-0665122.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

As the researcher, I was the primary data collector. Data were collected by obtaining company business documents and conducting semistructured interviews. Researchers use several instruments and documents for collecting and storing data (Behr, 2014). Business documents, such as, the company's business plan and financial goals for each quarter were reviewed and provided insight into the strategic mindset of how the business leaders increase profitability. Semistructured interviews follow a schematic presentation of questions or topics explored by the researcher (Jamshed, 2014). Listening, reviewing, and interpreting the data is the researchers' role in this study. By using a semistructured interview process with open-ended questions, the goal was to seek information from small business leaders regarding strategies used for implementing online marketing. Open-ended questions are more likely to engage the participants in higher-order thinking (Cakir & Cengiz, 2016). Participants received a copy of the open-ended questions used for the semistructured interviews.

Appropriate data collection techniques are determined when conducting semistructured interviews. Recording participant responses, understanding perceptions, and understanding feelings are appropriate interviewing techniques (Behr, 2014). According to Owens (2014), the interview process consists of the central question, open-ended questions, and follow-up questions. Central questions explore the phenomenon. Follow-up questions increase an understanding of the participants' responses. In this study, conducting semistructured interviews provided protocols and guidelines for appropriate data collection (Dikko, 2016). Appendix A includes a copy of the interview protocol required for this multiple case study. The interview protocol is a set of guidelines provided to the participants during the semistructured interviews.

Reliability and validity are elevated when researchers use member checking and triangulation (Behr, 2014; Birt et al., 2016). Recording and reviewing repeated themes furnished reliability and validity within the study. One essential element of the project's success is open and honest communication among the participants and researcher (Mahmood, Asghar, & Naoreen, 2014). The researcher's role is central to the study and is an instrument to collect data from the participants, render a voice for the participants, understand the data, and provide informed commentary (Xu & Storr, 2012).

Data collection required a positive rapport with participants. Relationships evolved by making a telephone call to recap the agreement and the reason for the research. The telephone conversation discussed the purpose of the study, selection criteria, and the benefits of the study. During the telephone call, a convenient date and

time for a 1-hour meeting with each participant to validate the data were scheduled.

Member checking confirmed interpretations of the participants' responses.

Anney (2015) recommended follow-up meetings with participants to validate elements of the collected data. Member checking can be completed in-person and requires asking the participants to review the researcher's interpretations of the participant's responses to ensure accuracy (Koelsch, 2013). Member checking sessions enable participants to reconfirm data and ensure the researcher's elucidation of the information mirrors actual encounters (Elo et al., 2014). Member checking enhances the credibility and validity of the study by verifying the interview responses with participants (Birt et al., 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Morse (2015) posited member checking grants participants an opportunity to provide information not presented in the semistructured interviews. In this study, after data collection, transcription, and analysis, member checking was conducted.

According to the interview protocol (see Appendix A), after I received the signed consent form from the business leader, time in a private setting was scheduled to begin each semistructured face-to-face interview. Oltmann (2016) stated face-to-face interviews are the best mode to conduct interviews. Following the interview protocol (see Appendix A), consent was requested to record the session with an iPhone 7 and a Dream digital recorder as a backup device. An audio recording of interviews is a practical approach to conducting interviews (Roulet, Gill, Stenger, & Gill, 2017). An alphanumeric code for each participant ensures confidentiality. Researchers assign codes to study participants to



preserve their identities (Roulet et al., 2017). In this study, assignment codes were PT1, PT2, PT3, and PT4.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

Data collection involves the compilation of copious amounts of data, a variety of study methodologies, and ends when the researcher has completed the research study (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Data collection methodologies for this study included face-to-face, semistructured interviews with predetermined open-ended interview questions. A review of public business documents followed the semistructured interviews. The collected data requires the use of an analytical approach to understanding the phenomenon (Grossoehme, 2014).

The primary data collection source was semistructured interviews, which included applicable, relevant, and direct questions to the participants of this study. According to Jamshed (2014), interviewing is the most generic format of data collection in qualitative research. Jervis and Drake (2014) stated semistructured interviews are more efficient for producing data at a lower cost in case studies. Semistructured interviews, as compared to questionnaires, are more potent in eliciting data and allow researchers to explore people's views in greater depth (Alshenqeeti, 2014). When conducting face-to-face interviews, the researcher can clarify statements provided by the participants. Conducting a telephone interview is efficient for follow-up and member checking (Birt et al., 2016). The possible disadvantages of face-to-face interviews versus using e-mails or telephones are travel, cost, and time (Vogl, 2013).

The data collection method in this study was semistructured face-to-face interviews. An iPhone 7 was selected to record each interview, along with a Dream digital recorder as a backup device. Using a device recorder will remind the researcher of critical situational factors discussed during the interview and decrease transcribing error during data analysis (Sutton & Austin, 2015; Vogl, 2013). According to Paiva et al. (2014), recording devices in qualitative research assist with ensuring accuracy and validity in the study. Recorded data are beneficial to the researcher for data analysis and to support the reliability of the study.

The review of public business documents, websites, and the companies' social media web pages was a secondary method of data collection in evaluating the organization's online marketing activities. Yin (2014) stated specific records, in addition to other data collection methods aid the researcher in collecting the required information to continue the study. Document review is advantageous as it provides the researcher with the opportunity to examine the information at various times (Yin, 2014). In contrast, Yazan (2015) stated to be mindful when using business documents as an instrument to collect company data. Secondary data might be disadvantageous as it could be old, inappropriate to the study, and have a different objective than the study (Dunn, Arslanian-Engoren, DeKoekkoek, Jadack, & Scott, 2015). Whereas, Tripathy (2013) posited secondary data will vary but should be adequate and relevant to identifying information. Jamshed (2014) proposed creating relationships with participants before reviewing private business documents as secondary data because the participants must understand the nature and purpose of the study. Participants should trust the researcher

before granting access to private materials. In this study, an evaluation of public business, websites, and company social media pages in connection with the phenomenon was administered.

The role of the researcher enhances the validity of the study, and member checking strengthens the study's credibility (Birt et al., 2016). Once the semistructured interviews were complete, data transcription began. Member checking was completed to verify the data with participants via FaceTime, telephone, or in-person. Member checking helps confirm the accuracy of collected data (Simpson & Quigley, 2016). I reconvened via telephone with the participants to review the findings, discuss the themes, and validate the collected data. Requesting each participant to review the first draft of data analysis for clarity and precision offers the opportunity to validate the information and include additional information (Dikko, 2016).

### **Data Organization Techniques**

An iPhone 7 and Dream digital recorder were the devices selected to voice record the participants' responses. NVivo 12 was used to help analyze the transcript. Researchers often use the software program NVivo as a tool in the organization of varied sources of information (Castleberry, 2014). Data was retrieved with the use of NVivo 12 to classify and create a transcript of recorded interviews. NVivo assists with pattern matching, coding, and identifying emergent themes (Castleberry, 2014). Multiple folders were created to sort through the various themes in conjunction with the participants' alphanumeric privacy codes. Each voice recorded interview was placed in the respective individual folders and stored with password encryption on a personal computer. A journal

was used to write notes during the recording of the interviews. The notes written in the journal assisted with the data review process. I will store nonelectronic notes in a securely locked safe for a minimum of 5 years from the end of the study.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was the step after transcription and member checking. According to Yin (2014), data analysis is examining, categorizing, and tabulating the evidence to produce empirical findings. Elo et al. (2014) suggested data analysis represents a systematic and objective means of describing and quantifying phenomena. Elo et al. further implied that in qualitative research, content analysis is the stage during which the creation of concepts occurs.

The data collection method for this proposed study included semistructured interviews and public business document review to address the overarching research question. Methodological triangulation was performed to identify common themes, online marketing challenges, and engagement strategies. Triangulation was used to collect, compare, and confirm the data discovered in the public company documents, online sites, and interviews. Use of triangulation determined the participants' tone and reactions towards the interview questions. If the collected data is consistent, the validity of the findings increases (Paiva et al., 2014). Methodological triangulation is a precise way to understand the phenomena (Turner, Cardinal, & Burton, 2015). Methodological triangulation is used to validate findings and increase the validity of the study (Joslin & Muller, 2016; Vernon, 2015). Methodological triangulation helped to determine the results of the study.

Developing a process to analyze the data is required in qualitative research (Yin, 2014). Organizational methods and document reviews are essential steps in data analysis (Paradis, O'Brien, Nimmon, Bandiera, & Martimianakis, 2016). Participant responses, online site reviews, and public document reviews were used to analyze the online marketing engagement activity and establish methodological triangulation. I used Microsoft Excel to list common themes, participant responses, and notes about the semistructured interviews. To sustain confidentiality, I identified the files by using the identification codes assigned to each business and participant.

As discussed by Yin (2014), the next step in the data analysis process is to organize the data by categorizing and coding. Baskarada (2014) posited pattern matching might be used to enhance the internal validity of a qualitative study. Data analysis is a systematic process and remembering the research question while coding helps keep the qualitative researcher focused on relevant codes (Stuckey, 2014). All notes and transcripts were reviewed to ensure themes, issues, and patterns were coded correctly. Colored highlighters were used to code, thematically group, and categorize all related information.

NVivo 12 software provided by QSR International and Microsoft Excel was selected to organize and analyze the data. The use of NVivo allows the researcher to perform data entry, data analysis, create tables and graphs, as well as log events and changes related to the data (Castleberry, 2014). NVivo was used to generate transcripts from the recorded interviews, assist with coding functions, coding patterns, create diagrams, and theme characteristics (Castleberry, 2014). The predetermined themes were

grouped accordingly and correlated among themes with the diffusion of innovation theory and the proposed conceptual framework for this study. Reviewing the literature and comparing to current information as well as themes finalizes the data analysis process (Firouzkouhi & Zargham-Boroujeni, 2015).

### **Reliability and Validity**

#### **Reliability**

Qualitative researchers encompass methodological strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings (Noble & Smith, 2015). Reliability in qualitative research means research with diverse paradigms. Validity refers to the appropriateness of the data, processes, and tools (Leung, 2015). Reliability and validity ensure the rigor of qualitative findings (Anney, 2015). To mitigate bias in the study, researchers must select the appropriate survey method when asking questions and validating the data (Oltmann, 2016). Researchers confirm reliability through (a) comprehensive data use, (b) continually comparing data, (c) extensive use of different cases, (d) use of tables, and (d) refutation analysis (Leung, 2015).

Dependability refers to the stability of data over time and under different conditions (Elo et al., 2014). Dependability in this study required a journal of specific documentation for data analysis purposes. Researchers also use a checklist of questions for assessing the clarity and appropriateness of the research question (Leung, 2015). I used open-ended interview questions. A member checking meeting was scheduled to improve dependability and reduce mistakes with data collection. Member checking enabled the participants to review the data and guarantee the exactness of their answers.

During the process of member checking, participants establish reliability by reviewing and affirming the summaries reflect or do not reflect their views (Noble & Smith, 2015). Listening to the interviews at different times, paraphrasing, and transcribing into coded Microsoft Excel files helped avoid inaccuracies. I asked participants to review the information for accuracy, and any additional or inaccurate information was noted or removed.

### **Validity**

Validity refers to the appropriate tools used to process data (Leung, 2015). Researchers must review the credibility, transferability, and confirmability to validate the research (Noble & Smith, 2015). Researchers must also double check and evaluate the trustworthiness of the data through various methods (Elo et al., 2014). Confirmability and consistency tests validated the results.

**Credibility.** Coding transcripts and reviewing similarities establish credibility (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Researchers use credibility as criteria to prove the accuracy and trustworthiness of the study (Wright, O'Brien, Nimmon, Law, & Mylopoulos, 2016). Voice records of the semistructured interviews and specific open-ended questions helped establish validity and credibility during the research process.

Member checking addresses the co-constructed nature of knowledge by providing participants with the opportunity to engage, add to interviews, and decrease the incidence of incorrect data several months after the semistructured interviews (Birt et al., 2016). After the semistructured interviews, member checking provided participants with the data results to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences. During the interviews,

participants had the opportunity to provide information about online marketing strategies within the businesses. Researchers use triangulation to test validity through the various sources of data to be analyzed (Joslin & Muller, 2016). In this study, triangulation was used to check and validate data collected from the research and to assure all interview questions had a response.

**Transferability.** Transferability reveals if the findings apply to other contexts (Noble & Smith, 2015; Sutton & Austin, 2015). Transferability is facilitated through thick descriptions and purposeful sampling to explore the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Anney, 2015). Researchers also use inclusion criterion in the sampling to determine the population for the study (Eldredge et al., 2014). Inclusion criteria maintained transferability and reassessed the study as it progressed. Specifying clear and concise descriptions of the findings retain the readers' attention (Yin, 2014). Providing detailed data and an explanation of the findings allows for the transferability of information within the study by other readers. Information about the interview protocol, analysis techniques, and data saturation is available to the readers and future researchers.

**Confirmability.** In research, confirmability is the extent of findings shaped by the participants and not the researcher (Sutton & Austin, 2015). To determine confirmability within a study, Anney (2015) established an audit trail to review documents for cross-checking. Therefore, a journal to notate the events during the research was a selected method for this study. The journal had detailed notes of the voice-recorded semistructured interviews, and information disclosed by participants.



**Data Saturation.** Data saturation enhances the credibility and validity of the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation ensues when additional data does not reveal new themes (Saunders et al., 2017). According to Morse (2015), data collection is not necessary after the occurrence of data saturation. Data saturation occurred after interviewing the third participant from CO3 and the fourth participant from CO4. However, if data saturation had not occurred after interviewing the fourth participant, the sample size of the study would increase until no new themes emerge. Four qualified business leaders who used online marketing strategies to increase derivative sales were the interviewed sample size.

### **Transition and Summary**

Section 2 included information on the role of the researcher, participant recruitment, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection techniques, data organization techniques, data analysis, and reliability and validity. In Section 2, the action plan was to recruit participants who owned small retail businesses for at least 5 years and conduct face-to-face semistructured interviews. In addition to the semistructured interviews, applying a multiple case study design to address the overarching research question was completed, and a collection of data, as well as a thorough review of public business documents.

Section 2 also contained the explanations for selecting a qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study design, purposeful sampling techniques, semistructured interview questions, and member checking procedures. Furthermore, purposeful sampling was used to aid in identifying the phenomenon. NVivo 12 was used to retrieve and analyze the

data, and member checking sessions with participants helped ensure responses were accurate and valid by reconfirming the collected data.

Section 3 includes a summary of the analyzed data and the application of a qualitative exploratory multiple case study method to understand the perspectives of the participants. Section 3 will encompass a presentation of the qualitative research findings, the presentation of business practices, and implications for social change. Also included in Section 3 are recommendations for future research, reflections, and the conclusion.

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

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies some small retail business leaders use to implement online marketing strategies to increase derivative sales. I collected data from four small retail business owners who had successfully implemented online marketing strategies in California. My data collection techniques were semistructured, face-to-face interviews; review of the companies' public business documents; review of company websites, and review of social media websites. By analyzing the data from these sources and performing methodological triangulation, four themes emerged: social media platforms and strategies, online marketing strategies and challenges, online content strategies, and follow-up strategies. Each theme aligned with the diffusion of innovation theory as well as the findings from my review of the literature.

Understanding online marketing is an opportunity for business leaders to grow their business and increase sales (Kozlenkova et al., 2017). The results of this study indicated online marketing content and social media sites engaged consumers. Business leaders should use digital marketing tools, such as Google Alerts and Crazy Egg, to measure the impact of brand awareness, company hashtags, and competitors on social media. Online marketing strategies include interaction, communication, and acknowledgment of new technology (Faisal, 2016). Small retail business leaders should subsume digital marketing into their strategic plans. Encompassing digital marketing in a strategic plan might increase business and consumer relationships. The findings from this

study add to the limited amount of research available for online marketing in small retail businesses.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The overarching research question for this study was: What online marketing strategies are used by small retail business leaders to increase derivative sales? Data analysis revealed which online marketing strategies small retail business leaders implemented. Four themes originated from my interpretation of the data, and they aligned with the literature review as well as the conceptual framework of the study.

### **Public Document and Online Site Review**

A review of the companies' public documents, websites, and social media sites served as a source of data in this study. The participants provided information on website domains as well as social media pages. All participants verbally shared their future online marketing plans. I used an iPhone 7 to voice record each interview, along with a Dream digital recorder as a backup device. I transcribed the voice-recorded interviews into Microsoft Word to aid with theme development. The collected data revealed how participants chose specific social media sites to advertise the company's products and services. The data I obtained provided information necessary to complete an analysis of public documents, content posted on the company websites, and content posted on the online sites used to engage consumers (see Appendix B).

Data collection from the semistructured interviews, public documents, business websites, and the business's social media sites resulted in the discovery of four themes (see Table 1). I conducted member checking by asking all participants to confirm the data



### **Emergent Theme 1: Social Media Platforms and Strategies**

The first theme to emerge from the data collection regarded the social media platforms and strategies used by the participants in their retail businesses. Social media platforms are online communication channels people use to share content (Alharbie, 2015). Company leaders use social media platforms to communicate with consumers and share information relating to products, services, and events as well as to network and to help communicate the company's mission (Felix et al., 2017). According to Gholston et al. (2016), some business leaders rely on online platforms more than others and frequently use Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Hudson et al. (2015) found that France, the United Kingdom, and the United States influence social media engagement and online brand promoting more than other countries. Facebook is preferred over other social media sites by online marketers to develop relationships and increase sales (Nobre & Silva, 2014).

The online platforms used by all participants in this study were Facebook Advertising, Instagram, and Twitter Advertising. Participants 1, 2, and 3 implied Facebook is widely used as a marketing tool to advertise products, network, and engage consumers. Participants used other platforms, such as LinkedIn Ads and Pinterest Ads, for networking. Participant 4 expressed LinkedIn Ads were preferred over Facebook Advertising and Instagram to engage consumers and share information. Table 2 reflects the various online platforms used by participants to share information, advertise products, engage consumers, and network.

Table 2

*Online Platforms Used by Participants to Advertise Products*

Online platforms	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4
Company website	Y	Y	N	Y
Facebook advertising	Y	Y	Y	Y
Instagram	Y	Y	Y	Y
LinkedIn ads	N	N	N	Y
Pinterest ads	N	Y	N	N
Twitter advertising	Y	Y	Y	Y

*Note.* Y = Yes, N = No.

Business leaders were aware that social networking is a new way to communicate with consumers. Facebook offers the most comprehensive tools for personalization and has over 1.5 billion users (Nobre & Silva, 2014; Van den Eijnden et al., 2016). All participants in the study used Facebook's tools as a strategy to communicate with consumers. Baldwin (2015) posited many businesses are using web-based technology and interactive approaches as a new marketing channel to improve competitiveness with larger organizations. Participant 3 noted, "Facebook Live allows end users to view business activities in real-time, which builds interest for future company events and competes with other retail companies simultaneously." Facebook Live offers features such as purposeful content, private group videos, and voluntary interaction among all members while allowing business leaders to increase globalization (CITE). Participants 1, 2, 3, and 4 opted to use Facebook Live as a strategy to increase consumers' purchasing decisions by sharing press releases and posting videos. Participant 2 stated, "Facebook Live grants us [Company 2] the opportunity to share additional information without

overbearing our customers.” Participants 1 and 3 expressed promoting citywide company-sponsored events through Facebook Live, and attendance had been exceptional. In contrast, Participant 4 used Facebook but preferred LinkedIn to drive participation for company-sponsored events. In alignment with the diffusion of innovation theory, social networking is the adoption of innovative behaviors (Muller & Peres, 2017). Business leaders communicate to consumers by adopting new technologies to increase awareness.

Building networks, building communities, and customer relationship management are benefits arising from the use of social media in small businesses (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). Participant 4 articulated, “Many digital tools can be used to market online, but without appropriate employees, it is difficult to use digital tools effectively.” Thus, each business must employ knowledgeable individuals who can assist with using the appropriate tools to market online. Oyza and Edwin (2016) expressed the benefits of using social media to increase exposure and website traffic. Participants 1 and 2 hired marketing personnel to create and host the company website and social media pages. Participant 1 noted, “Employing highly capable people enables us [Company 1] to influence different buyers, market company events, and review the feedback on the web.” Participant 2 expressed the importance of hiring individuals who have at least 2 years of experience with hosting company social media pages because “Experienced individuals understand the importance of using the correct hashtags and phrases to influence consumer shares and likes.” Creativity and innovation in any organization are vital to its successful performance (Anderson, Potocnik, & Zhou, 2014).



Furthermore, consumer engagement generates leads, improves sales, and develops loyal customers (Oyza & Edwin, 2016). According to the diffusion of innovation theory, members use effective communication channels to distribute information among users (CITE). All participants used online tools as a strategy to network, to help build the community, and for customer relationship management. Additionally, business leaders understood how to diffuse information by employing the appropriate individuals to contribute ideas and help spread company information via digital channels.

According to Rogers (2003), members of a social system adopt innovations. In this study, the participants' implementation of online tools and social media platforms correlated to Rogers's diffusion of innovation theory. Members of a social system view the adoption of innovations as positive advancement opportunities (Rogers, 2003). Business leaders of small retail businesses in this study combined knowledge of digital tools with social media platforms to adopt new technology for increased sales. The collected data revealed the relative advantages of innovation for small businesses such as free advertising, information sharing, and increased customer interaction. Innovators are motivated individuals who adopt new ideas (Rogers, 2003). Participants in this study deviated from traditional marketing strategies and adopted new technologies as a strategy to communicate with consumers and share information about products, services, and events.

In alignment with the diffusion of innovation theory, the use of online marketing tools is an effective strategy with minimal costs to target consumers (Hu, Lin, Qian, & Sun, 2018). All participants in this study selected digital tools to engage members of a

social system asynchronously. Neeley and Leonardi (2017) indicated that knowledge of social media strategies is a critical source of competitive advantage. Moreover, business leaders who have used social media as a strategy to engage consumers for increased revenue understand the influence social platforms have on consumers (Yahia, Al-Neama, & Kerbache, 2018). In this study, I found that business leaders understand how to use successful strategies to improve engagement among members of a social system.

### **Emergent Theme 2: Online Marketing Strategies and Challenges**

The second theme to emerge was online marketing strategies and challenges. Online marketing is a technology used to gather momentum for industry advancement (Faisal, 2016). Participants in this study noted many challenges when using online marketing to increase sales. The first challenge discussed was tracking website views. According to Lewis and Reiley (2014), website advertising profitably increases purchases by 5%. Participant 2 noted concerns with website traffic by stating,

If consumers are not clicking pages on the website, it shows a lack of engagement. We [Company 2] measure consumer engagement by using a site called Crazy Egg. The site is free and allows us to obtain click activity on our webpage, which helps us to determine consumer engagement and attitudes.

End users' attitudes can be positively or negatively affected by advertising (Mir, 2015). Participant 2 further expressed, "Once we [Company 2] determine consumer perceptions, attitude, and level of engagement, we understand how to revise website pages for increased traffic." Participant 2's responses indicated knowledge of diffusion approaches to spread useful messages through innovation to end users, as suggested by Dearing

(2009). Participant 1 used the free measuring tool Google Alerts. Google Alerts is a service offered by Google that tracks and reports website traffic. Participant 1 posited, Google Alerts is a great tool to find out what people say about the company. By using Google Alerts as a tracking system, we [Company 1] have overcome challenges associated with product costs, shipping, and the ease of online purchase transactions made on the company website. Google Alerts has helped us [Company 1] understand the areas in need of improvement.

Participants 3 and 4 discussed challenges associated with online marketing but did not use measuring tools such as Google Analytics or Crazy Egg to determine website traffic behavior. Participant 3 reaffirmed the company does not have a website to advertise, therefore, a measuring tool to assess consumer traffic was not necessary. Participants in this study were aware of using new concepts and strategies are beneficial attributes for business leaders in determining e-tailing opportunities (Kotni, 2017). Business leaders understand when measuring tools should be used to evaluate consumer behavior on company websites.

In addition to challenges associated with tracking website views, participants discussed strategies used to overcome challenges by using free advertising on social media sites. For example, the Facebook platform allows the posting of advertisements from users. However, when ad-click behavior is discovered, the advertiser is notified to pay per click, or the ad is blocked. Ad click behavior is user habit, attitude, and commercial intention (Jerath, Ma, & Park, 2014). Participant 2 expressed concern about the difficulties with advertising on Facebook. Participant 2 said,

If we [Company 2] do not post for a few days, our advertisements will be pushed to the bottom of news feeds unless we pay per click. However, if we use the pay per click option, our advertisements will be seen based on ad click behavior.

Digital marketing presents tremendous opportunities; however, knowledge is limited about the challenges companies encounter when implementing digital marketing (Leeflang et al., 2014). Participant 2 further expressed the use of pay per click advertising is an additional strategy used in addition to posting on the company's social media pages. All participants identified challenges and strategies associated with implementing online marketing. Dorr, Cohen, and Adler-Milstein (2018) postulated a standard component of innovation is the use of data, information, and knowledge to drive diffusion. Rogers (2003) identified knowledge as a stage to overcome innovation challenges during the diffusion process. Business leaders understand how to use effective advertising methods to overcome digital marketing obstacles.

Consumers' attitude toward a brand can influence their product evaluation and the ability to share online advertisements with others (Wu et al., 2015). In this study, two participants discussed challenges with social media advertising, whereas two participants discussed challenges using different online advertising methods. All participants provided strategies to overcome online marketing challenges. Participant 3 said,

The lack of a live setting on Instagram is a hindrance. Facebook is a free, effective advertising platform when users are sharing the company's information on their pages. Our [Company 3] strategy to get users to share our page is to conduct a raffle. The top three users with the most shares will be entered in a

drawing to win a free product. Raffles create a contest among our customers, which in return is free advertising on multiple social media pages. Sharing contests have increased product inquiries 10% in the last year and contributed to 7% of online sales.

Participant 3's strategies suggested the need to appeal to an audience, which are characteristics of early adopters as noted by Rogers (2003). The use of free advertising on multiple online platforms provides business leaders with opportunities to target an audience, to offer products, and to increase website traffic.

In addition to free advertising, business leaders use low-cost personalized ads to attract consumers in various geographic locations. According to Duffett (2015), the usage of online advertising influences consumers intent to purchase. Participant 1 posited, "Attempting to minimize advertising costs are some challenges we [Company 1] have experienced with applying online marketing methods to grow the business. Online advertising means serving customers in different geographic areas and building trustworthy relationships." Trust moderates the impact of advertising personalization between businesses and consumers (Bleier & Eisenbeiss, 2015). Participant 1 further implied, "Solutions to overcome online marketing challenges require creating a connection with the target audience, designing compelling offers, and establishing a trusting brand identity." In connection with Rogers's diffusion theory, maintaining longevity in businesses requires crafting a clearly defined plan to satisfy the needs and wants of a social system (Guows & Rheede van Oudtshoorn, 2011). It is apparent that

business leaders are conscious of solutions to minimize online advertising expenditures, target an audience, and establish a brand.

Successful strategies in small businesses require innovation, accelerating customer value, and expansion (Yang, 2018). Remaining sustainable in the retail industry is a goal that all participants in this study have expressed. Although participants in this study disclosed various challenges with implementing online marketing, business leaders also expressed strategies such as providing excellent customer service, use of effective marketing platforms, and how to create brand awareness among consumers. Moreover, additional research provides strategies to reduce challenges, opportunities for development, and virtual business models for online marketing in emerging economies (Chandna & Salimath, 2018; Gouvea, Kapelianis, & Montoya, 2018). In summary, business leaders understand the challenges associated with online marketing and are knowledgeable with strategies for continued success.

### **Emergent Theme 3: Online Content Strategies**

The third theme was about online content. Online content posted on the companies' websites and social media sites increased awareness and attracted new consumers. Retailers employ a method called retargeting to tailor advertisements to individual consumers based on interests and preferences (Bleier & Eisenbeiss, 2015). Content posted by leaders on the businesses online sites is personalized and presented to the masses to reflect consumers interests (Bleier & Eisenbeiss, 2015; Moon & Lee, 2014). Online mass personalization was a strategy used by all participants to reach multiple demographics asynchronously and synchronously. Participant 1 posited, "We

[Company 1] are aware of how important online content is when attempting to reach a larger audience. We [Company 1] must complete the necessary tasks to ensure online content is accurate when posted.” Gopinath, Thomas, and Krishnamurthi (2014) discovered online advertising to have a direct impact on sales and will continue to increase over time with consistent content. Participant 4 noted, “Establishing a dominant website with strong, concise, and explicit content is helpful to generate successful search engine results.” A review of public business documents helped to understand what social media platform participants used to engage consumers. The information in Table 3 displays the company’s number of followers on each social media platform.

Table 3

*Company's Number of Followers on Each Social Media Platform*

Social Media Platform	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Facebook	1,112	1,149	4,996	1,570
Instagram	2,236	662	5,105	3,500
LinkedIn	0	0	0	7,668
Pinterest	0	1,010	0	0
Twitter	4,459	1,276	3,678	5,005

*Note.* Some companies did not subscribe to social media platforms.

Therefore, the number 0 reflects subscription status.

Marketing trends based on digital technology have a significant impact on strategy (Grossberg, 2016). Some participants posted content on the company sites relating to industry statistics, press releases, and information about company products. Participant 3 expressed the need to influence consumers to, “Buy into what we [Company 3] are selling by creating a buzz.” Consumers prefer selective exposure to company

advertising (Fransen, Smit, & Verlegh, 2015). Participants were aware of how to attract and retain their audience with online content. Information placed on the company website as well as on social media pages delivered a variety of information for multiple demographics. Companies must have suitable resources to facilitate and deliver online content (Ceric et al., 2016). Using marketing strategies such as posting strong online content to reach consumers was a preferred method by all participants in this study.

Social media has become an essential medium of marketing in the 21st century (Tariq et al., 2017). Participant 3 posited, “Understanding what hashtags and sales pitches work on social media helps us [Company 3] to post content end users will read.” The content participants posted on websites and social media pages were meant to pass through end users as a form of EWOM. Retailers and consumers consider EWOM technologies as a primary source of social buying experience (Amblee & Bui, 2014). Participants in this study used EWOM as a tool to transfer positive, insightful, and accurate content among social groups. The dissemination of content in social networks is a powerful tool with potential benefits to increase social networks (Osterrieder, 2013). Participant 1 expressed concern for inaccurate information posted on the Internet. “We [Company 1] will not post misleading information on any sites. Our [Company 1] focus is on meeting the needs of customers and ensuring the company brand is represented positively.” Participant 1 is aware of the consequences of providing invalid information to consumers, which correlates to compatibility as the perceived match between the innovation and adopters’ values, past experiences, and needs (Smith et al., 2018). Henceforth, marketing experts should manage the relational capital of the company,



which are consumers, collaborators, employees, and communities (Perez-Danielescu, 2014). Participant 4 noted, “Focusing [Company 4] on core competencies and developing strong content for consumers to view online is a known formula, which continues to help grow the business.” Furthermore, including useful, relevant, and accurate content on company media sites will attract consumers.

The use of online marketing strategies is a convenient way to share information among consumers around the world (Faisal, 2016). Participants implemented online marketing to create brand awareness to promote the business. The Internet is a channel of advertising and selling (Perez-Danielescu, 2014). Participant 2 postulated, “The advantages of Facebook and other online platforms are the capability to drive sales, which is measured by consumer engagement.” Furthermore, Participant 2 confirmed an increase of at least 35% in revenue within the first 6 months of implementing online strategies. According to Ramsaran-Fowdar and Fowdar (2013), Facebook tools can help marketers achieve company objective such as running advertisements, creating product polls, and building business fan pages. Business fan pages will assist business leaders with increasing likes, follows, and shares on the company site. Participant 3 said,

It is hard to measure the likes and shares we [Company 3] receive, however, online advertising consists of obtaining follows. Having many followers helps increase brand awareness, thus potentially increasing sales. To date, our [Company 3] sales have increased by at least 65% since incorporating the appropriate content into the business online marketing strategy.

Participant 3's statement implied the importance of a support network to implement innovative ideas as suggested by Rogers's diffusion of innovation theory. Dearing (2009) explained diffusion occurs through social need, social perception, and social pressure. The structure of a social system is robust, and marketers can facilitate diffusion of innovations and influence the rate of adoption over time (Zhang et al., 2015).

According to the participants, online content was an essential strategy for increasing derivative sales. Participant 4 stated, "Small businesses are limited to advertising dollars. However, we chose to leverage the opportunity to grasp digital concepts and use the tools available to develop content aimed for success." A review of public documents, business websites, and social media pages (see Appendix B) revealed the content each participant posted on behalf of the company. The data in Appendix B displays the participants' ability to create hashtags, link products to other online sites, and provide feedback shared by customers. Business leaders understand that using strong content as an online marketing strategy to advertise and share information with customers will create brand awareness.

Incorporating theory in research will help elucidate the processes that link contexts (Moats, 2015). The online content theme was constant and related to Rogers's element of communication channels. Roger's diffusion of innovation theory implied innovation is communicated through specific channels (Rogers, 2003). In alignment with the diffusion of innovation theory, business leaders used online content and digital tools to communicate with end users for purposes of sharing information, creating brand awareness, and building relationships. Ma et al. (2014) expressed by sharing information

business leaders may attempt to enhance their professional reputation and status in the online community. Participants of this study used various digital tools to build the company's professional reputation online and inform end users about pertinent information of the company. Digital tools selected to convey information was photos, videos, literature, and radio interviews. Participants determined the accurate content to post on company websites and social media pages, which in return allowed positive EWOM to circulate among consumers. Understanding what content to display was a key strategy indicated by participants. All participants in this study selected strategies to implement online marketing for increased sales. Additionally, participants chose various digital tools to communicate with consumers, build relationships, increase product knowledge, and create brand awareness to remain sustainable in the retail industry.

#### **Emergent Theme 4: Follow-Up Strategies**

The fourth and final theme was the follow-up strategies used by participants. All participants discussed using follow-up strategies as a method to retain customers. For continued success, companies need to maintain a positive relationship with their existing customers and anticipate future needs (Todor, 2016). Participants in this study provided details about follow-up strategies such as correspondence, phone calls, creating interpersonal relationships, and sharing product information. Figure 2 depicts a diagram of the participant follow-up strategies used to retain customers.

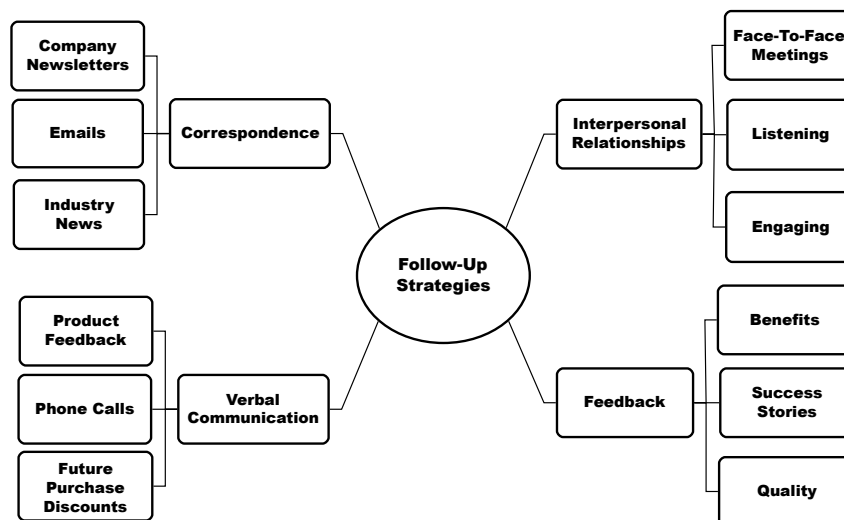


Figure 2. Diagram of participant follow-up strategies.

To optimize marketing strategies, business leaders must be customer-oriented (Appiah-Adu & Amoako, 2016). According to Participant 2 and 4, correspondence is a critical strategy for maintaining customer relationships. Business strategies are designs and accepting a business model as another form of innovation will open opportunities in achieving competitive advantages (Purkayastha & Sharma, 2016) Participant 2 noted, “Providing a steady stream of tips and other insightful information to our [Company 2] customers has proven to be useful.” In contrast, Participant 4 said,

We [Company 4] send monthly communication e-mails and newsletters providing industry information, which helps overcome critical challenges associated with customer purchasing decisions. Participant 4 further postulated e-mail correspondence is the most effective and least expensive. We use a contact list tailored explicitly for direct communication.

According to Molinillo and Japtura (2017), the extended use of digital marketing in SMEs is pivotal in making communication useful. Although all participants used electronic correspondence, Participant 1 and 3 preferred phone calls as a method of following-up with customers. Contact with customers is essential, and business leaders understand communicating with customers is valuable.

Effective communication is the bedrock of any industry (Ismail & Khalid, 2015). All participants in this study expressed how verbal communication is a vital component to following-up with customers. Participant 3 stated,

In our society, we text, e-mail, and post more than we talk. We [Company 3] prefer to call our customers for feedback about our products. Making phone calls to express our [Company 3] gratitude helps brand our company name and assists customers with making future purchasing decisions.

Brand speaks through all types of communication (Latiff & Safiee, 2015). Creating brand awareness is a strategy that requires verbal and nonverbal communication skills.

Participant 4 noted, “Although e-mail marketing has proven to be most effective, new and continued sales require different forms of communication. We [Company 4] call our customers to obtain feedback and suggestions about our products.” All participants conveyed the businesses strategy to offer returning customer discounts after a follow-up call or e-mail was complete was a successful strategy. Some diffusion processes are successful, and some fail (Greve & Seidel, 2014). However, business leaders focus on factors interconnected with successful strategies to increase sales. According to Participant 3, “Offering a verbal discount on a second purchase helps to keep them

[customers] returning.” Participant 1 stated, “A strategy we [Company 1] favor is talking to people because we can provide an innumerable explanation about our products, create interpersonal relationships, and influence sales with a traditional marketing technique, rather than a modern technique.” Statistics reflect the number of worldwide Internet usage and population is over 1.2 million (Internet World Stats, 2018). Despite the growth of Internet usage and online marketing in recent years, many small businesses are still opting to utilize traditional marketing strategies as a method of communicating with customers (Cant & Wiid, 2016). Business leaders understand the proper methods of communication for increased sales.

In combination with verbal communication, participants noted the importance of building interpersonal relationships with customers. Participant 2 discussed how essential interpersonal relationships are within the community. Participant 2 said,

Fostering relationships enables us [Company 2] to build a positive rapport with individuals within the community. Attending community events grants us the opportunity to increase brand awareness, however, working with other organizations to foster growth is what helps us maintain sustainability. Creating relationships is a crucial strategy for continued sales and growth.

According to Participant 2, “Fostering relationships is an essential strategy to increase customer support.” The diffusion theory element of communication channels suggests diffusion is a social process and occurs through channels between sources (Rogers, 2003). Effects of the adoption of established relationships comprise direct and indirect influences between the business and consumers (Makkonen & Johnston, 2014). In

summary, business leaders understand the importance of building interpersonal relationships within a social network.

Progressing toward sustainability requires radical solutions beyond developing new products in the marketplace (Lim, 2015). Company 1 prepares meals for the homeless within the community monthly. Participant 1 stipulated, “Volunteering to help the homeless and participating at various events throughout California has helped establish our [Company 1] brand and create interpersonal relationships, which are fundamental to our continued success.” Participant’s 1-4 asserted verbal and nonverbal communication is a beneficial strategy to build long-term relationships and increase revenue. Establishing a holistic approach to promote and encourage the acceptance and adoption of sustainable practices is one of the many strategies used by marketers (Lim, 2015). Creating a blueprint with successful strategies helps business leaders build long-term relationships within communities.

The final follow-up strategy discussed by participants was the importance of feedback. Fransen et al. (2015) posited the use of specific strategies empower conditions in which people are reluctant to change. Participant 3 expressed the benefits of requesting feedback regarding product information create an open-door policy between the employees and the customer. “We [Company 3] ask our customers to review our webpage and provide feedback on our products in need of improvement. Obtaining product feedback grants us the opportunity to enhance the quality of our products for increased sales.” Participant 2 said,

Once our [Company 2] customers provide feedback, we ask them to share success stories and write reviews on the sites we sell our products on. The more reviews and success stories we have via EWOM reinforces the quality of our products and drives business. Over time, the benefit of success stories and positive customer reviews has had a positive impact on our success.

According to Rogers (2003), communication occurs through channels between sources and can take any form. Participant 2 noted the benefits of EWOM as a communication channel, which aligns with Roger's second element of the diffusion of innovations process.

Consumer reviews can be positive or negative for the business and business leaders should tactfully respond to both (Latiff & Safiee, 2015). Participant 1 noted, We address negative comments about our [Company 1] products as soon as we are aware of the feedback. Addressing the problem consists of reaching out to the customer to determine the cause of the problem and determine if we can provide a solution.

Participant 3 articulated the use of a similar method as Participant 1 and stated,

Pictures and videos might help sell our products, but words and good customer service is what people remember. By focusing on the commentary, we [Company 3] can make the appropriate changes internally and prevent negative situations from occurring in the future. It is easy for customers to share negative feedback with other consumers, but we want them to share positive feedback about our company.



Notably speaking, participants in this study are aware of the benefits of positive customer reviews relative to diffuse communication channels. Assenova (2018) implied the diffusion process is complicated. However, it is evident in the complexity of diffusion; business leaders understand how to influence feedback with methods beneficial to the company.

According to participants in this study, follow-up strategies consisted of correspondence, verbal communication, building interpersonal relationships, and feedback. Relationships are reciprocal and are most effective when channels of communication are increased (Kozlenkova et al., 2017). In alignment with Rogers' (2003) diffusion of innovation theory, interpersonal relationships create awareness and are direct. Participants used various strategies and direct channels to communicate company and industry news, provide product information, engage customers, and share success stories. Furthermore, the element of communication in the diffusion theory implies communication is a behavior and increases the connectedness of social networks (Rogers, 2003). Marketers use many forms of communication paths to personalize information to promote products, which influences consumers' purchasing decisions (Gaikwad & Kate, 2016). Business leaders understand how communication strategies will interconnect consumer purchases to influence future transactions.

Research conducted by Steward, Narus, and Roehm (2018) expressed the importance of customer feedback and reviews. To enumerate, business leaders who use communication channels as a strategic tool to create interpersonal relationships with consumers can increase sales. Notably discussed, positive EWOM and electronic

correspondence is critical elements in digital marketing and can generate substantial consumer engagement (Helm, Ligon, Stovall, & Van Riper, 2018). In closing, successful follow-up strategies discussed in this study are useful, innovative, and can be used by business leaders to increase customer retention and revenues.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The findings of this study indicated strategies some small business leaders used to implement online marketing and increase derivative sales. Companies around the world use online marketing technologies, and there are limited options for fostering competition (Schwarzl & Grabowska, 2015). Online marketing is a journey, which includes customer engagement as well as the use of innovative tools (Schwarzl & Grabowska, 2015; Watkins, 2017). Small business leaders use online marketing tools to increase sales, decrease advertising costs, and communicate to buyers asynchronously and synchronously (Kotni, 2017). Practical strategies for increasing brand awareness and growing consumer relationships requires business leaders to hire knowledgeable employees (Hunt, 2017; Moon & Lee, 2014; Vien, 2015). The findings of this study could help business leaders use online marketing strategies methodically for organizational longevity and profitability. The four themes identified in this study support the literature in the area of social media marketing strategies, social media advancement strategies in business, and new technology implementation.

The first theme is social media platforms and strategies used by small retail business leaders. These findings can help online marketers choose the proper tools to reach end users while meeting the needs of the business. Using strategies specific to

social media platforms will help business leaders increase brand awareness, market products, and showcase company expertise (McCann & Barlow, 2015). The second theme, online marketing strategies and challenges, provides business leaders with strategies to overcome online marketing challenges. All participants expressed difficulties associated with online marketing and discussed how to overcome specific challenges. Understanding the effectiveness of how online marketing is used to promote a business is a useful development strategy (Jelfs & Thomson, 2016). The third theme comprised of follow-up strategies business leaders use to maintain an on-going customer relationship. Business leaders should have follow-up strategies implemented after each purchasing transaction is complete. Overall, participants noted the need to contact customers via e-mail or text to ask if they were satisfied with their product(s). After-sales follow-up builds confidence and positive relationships between customers and businesses (Nuseir, 2018). Last, the fourth theme is online content used to engage end users. Business leaders require robust material to promote products and attract an audience. Participants conveyed the importance of sharing information about the company products on the business's social media sites. Content is the core of social media and in combination with promotional sales offers are considered a channel to diffuse information among a social group (Icha & Agwu, 2015; Rogers, 2003). According to Nuseir (2018), online marketing in business has benefits and disadvantages to cope with the innovation. However, the various aspects of technology can be used to promote digital media, increase communication, and retain customers.

The findings of this study contributed to relative information available about online marketing strategies. The study focused on information provided by small business leaders in the retail industry. Their experiences illustrated strategies to implement Internet marketing, communicate, attract, and retain end users to increase profits in small businesses. Researchers have noted the importance of digital marketing practices, and determined business leaders must rethink their marketing strategies with the changing Internet paradigm to maintain sustainability (Hunt, 2017; Schwarzl & Grabowska, 2015; Seo & Lee, 2016; Vien, 2015). Hacklin, Bjorkdahl, and Wallin (2018) posited successful firms develop business models of innovation, are top performers within their industry, create value, and build static relationships with customers. Recommendations and strategies from this study might help business leaders increase brand awareness, increase revenue, build relationships, and maintain longevity within the retail industry.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The findings from this study revealed online marketing and the use of employing the proper online marketing strategies had a positive impact on the increase of sales in some small retail businesses. Online marketing aids business leaders with a chance to connect and communicate with the public (Watkins, 2017). The implications gathered from this doctoral study reveal the opportunities small retail business leaders must create jobs within the community.

Researchers demonstrate how small businesses foster economic development in communities and business leaders increase relationships (Hatcher & Hammond, 2018). Furthermore, the impact of economic development is growing with numerous public and

private organizations (Hatcher & Hammond, 2018). The information provided in this doctoral study could grant small retail business leaders the ability to reduce the unemployment rate in their local community while fostering positive relationships. To maintain sustainability, small retail business leaders should utilize online marketing tools and present valuable content to engage consumers.

The results of the study confirmed the importance of new technologies, using the proper platform, employing experienced individuals, and overcoming challenges. According to Kim, Jun, and Kim (2018), online marketing is well known and can attract more customers by sharing experiences through textual contents of reviews. Online marketing is an opportunity for business leaders to engage other business professionals, network, and support organizational growth through renewability. Moreover, online marketing is the art and science of selling products or services over digital networks (Hunt, 2017). The potential positive social change with online marketing is the opportunity to communicate and engage the public, to increase revenue, thus increasing jobs within the community.

### **Recommendations for Action**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies some small retail business leaders use to implement online marketing to increase derivative sales. Online marketing involves locating the proper mix of strategies to appeal to the target market for increased sales (Faisal, 2016). Business leaders use the Internet as a channel for selling and advertising (Perez-Danielescu, 2014). The four emergent themes discussed in this study included identifying online marketing strategies for small business

leaders. Small retail business leaders could use the information encompassed in this study to develop or enhance online marketing strategies for increased revenues.

Digital marketers should use appropriate platforms to communicate, attract, and retain end users. In this study, participants and other researchers suggest strategies to reach the end users such as the application of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other tools. The Internet is a global system with an array of tools to assist business leaders with advertising, resources, and facilitating communication (Hsu et al., 2014). Business leaders can interact with an audience and build a positive rapport by using the World Wide Web (Popa, 2015). Business leaders should implement online marketing in conjunction with social media to increase communication between the community and the business.

The results of this study specified that follow-up strategies are a necessity to maintain on-going relationships with consumers. Business leaders should use Google Alerts and Crazy Egg as an analytical tool to measure the impact of traffic and what consumers are reviewing on their business sites. The use of analytical tools offers business leaders an opportunity to understand the motive and needs of consumers (Smith & Barrett, 2016). As noted by participants, follow-up e-mails or text messages inquiring about the service or product will build a positive rapport with customers. Business leaders must understand the importance of shaping consumer perceptions and attitudes to retain long-term relationships.

Business leaders and companies should integrate digital marketing into their business plans. Digital marketing is a unique marketing approach (Mogos, 2015).

Inclusive of proper content, digital marketing creates an online presence that small businesses require to compete in the retail industry. Incorporating digital marketing in business plans will offer benefits to companies who want to increase advertising by using technology as a resource (Mogos, 2015). The content delivered to consumers through the Internet influences purchase decisions and creates brand awareness (Karam & Saydam, 2015). According to Kresh, Laible, Lam, and Raisinghani (2018), utilizing e-marketing strategies will help build and maintain relationships with consumers. Moreover, business leaders who adopt new technology for increased consumer interaction reflect social empowerment and understand the importance of customer relationship management (Sigala, 2018). Business leaders should implement digital marketing to deliver content, promote products, and build brand awareness. In closing, the use of effective online marketing strategies promotes consistent messages to consumers while fostering increased awareness of a company's products, services, and brand (Camilleri, 2018).

I will disseminate a 1-2-page summary of the study's results to the California Small Business Association (CSBA). The CSBA is a two-way communication network between members and legislature. Additionally, the CSBA provides information to members about state and government programs as well as resources and solutions to meet the needs of small businesses. The results of this study will be distributed to participants if specifically requested. In addition to publishing in the ProQuest database, this study could be in journals such as the *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Marketing Education*, and the *Journal of Business*. Further approaches to distributing this study include submitting to *Harvard Business Review*,

*McKinsey Quarterly*, and the *Ivey Business Journal*. Dissemination can also occur at conferences and seminars such as the Small Business Institute, Professional Retail Store Maintenance Association, and Social Media Marketing World.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The information and findings in this study provided various opportunities for further research in online marketing. This doctoral study had two limitations. First, participants possibly were not honest and forthcoming in their responses required for data collection. Second, participants were small retail business leaders in California, and results might differ in other states. Participants were excited, confident, and enthusiastic about sharing their online marketing strategies used within their company. All businesses had social media pages but did not have websites or pay for advertising. Additionally, measuring tools such as Google Alerts and Crazy Egg was not used by all participants of the study. Therefore, the capability to increase data analysis through public document review was exiguous.

Assumptions in this study were (a) participants were truthful with all responses to interview questions, (b) data collected from interviews provided sufficient feedback for data saturation, and (c) participants provide real-life experiences. First, data collection revealed participants were truthful when answering the interview questions. The information displayed in Appendix B connected to the interview questions and produced findings relative to the study. Second, the collected data confirmed information required to reach data saturation. Data saturation was reached after interviewing the fourth participant. Last, I discovered the participants' provided real-life experiences and aligned



with the interview questions when data analysis was conducted. Given the study population, the assumptions in this study were accepted as accurate.

In this research study, the three delimitations were (a) participants were small retail business leaders, (b) the study was delimited to a specific geographic area in California, and (c) business leaders were to have a minimum of 6 months of experience using online marketing. All participants were small business leaders of retail businesses located in California. Each participant possessed the knowledge and expertise required to participate in the study. Delimitations were controlled and limited the scope of the study.

The literature for online marketing in small retail businesses is limited, and future researchers can grasp the need to increase the information relating to online marketing. I recommend expanding the participant size and extending the research beyond California. First, increasing the participant size might reveal additional themes and strategies used by small retail business to increase revenue. Second, a larger participant size might influence a different research outcome and could produce findings not discovered in this study. The last recommendation for further research is to extend the research in other states.

Business leaders in different demographic areas might offer knowledge and expertise not provided in the regional location of the study. For example, additional strategies might exist to assist with challenges, how to obtain followers, and how to persuade followers to *like* or *share* social media content. Further research within these categories will add to the limited literature about online marketing in small retail businesses.

## **Reflections**

I began my DBA journey approximately 3 months after obtaining my second master's degree. Walden University's curriculum was challenging and mirrored the curriculum in my master's program, and I often pondered withdrawing from the program. However, I considered future career opportunities and continued with the journey. I have endured multiple challenges and overcome many obstacles over the past 3.5 years.

My interest in online marketing has increased over time. Our society is obsessed with the Internet, social media, and anything associated with online communication. By exploring the rapid adoption of online communication by some and the slow adoption by others, I realized the value online communication holds. My research has provided an in-depth understanding of the Internet, Web 2.0, social media, and online marketing strategies in some organizations. I also understand the necessity and requirement of techniques and tools to manage online platforms for growth as well as sustainability. This study enriched my knowledge of online marketing as well as the difficulties some business leaders have when implementing new technologies to increase revenue. I am conscious of my preconceptions and biased notions about the research problem. Online marketing is not new but is continuously improving with the development of new technologies. Business leaders must understand the many benefits of online marketing to foster organizational sustainability.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the strategies some retail business leaders use to implement online marketing to increase derivative sales. The ability of

small retail business leaders to increase derivative sales with the use of online marketing strategies require employing the proper individuals, use of effective advertising methods, and selecting explicit online content. Through data collection and analysis, a total of four themes emerged, which was (a) social media platforms and strategies, (b) online marketing strategies and challenges, (c) online content strategies, and (d) follow-up strategies. Data collection sources in this study included (a) semistructured face-to-face interviews, (b) review of the companies' public documents, (c) review of the companies' websites, and (d) review of the social media sites of small retail businesses in California. The collection of data was to understand the strategies business leaders use to implement online marketing and increase derivative sales. The findings relate to the diffusion of innovation theory as presented by Rogers in 1962. Moreover, the collection and analysis of data revealed successful strategies business leaders used to market online, build customer relationships, and foster growth within the community.

Each of the participants discussed the importance of communication in the retail industry. Sharing company information with the use of EWOM was necessary for increased sales and understanding how to engage an audience was imperative for increased website traffic. All business leaders in this study participated in social media advertising, which increased company sales by a minimum of 25% within 6 months of implementation. Additionally, business leaders established direct relationships within the community to increase brand awareness, increase growth, and maintain sustainability. Business leaders used various communication channels to develop and promote products and services in the retail industry as well as enhance organizational performance.

Furthermore, findings in this study revealed opportunities for small retail business leaders to develop online marketing strategies, increase revenue, and provide jobs to the public.

The results of this study confirmed online marketing strategies are vital for organizational sustainability and strategic methods are essential. Small business leaders could benefit from the data provided in this doctoral study by implementing successful strategies for increased sales with consumers and by creating brand awareness.

Consumers can contribute by sharing their experience of the organization with other consumers and provide feedback about products and services.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

**Research Question:** What online marketing strategies are used by small retail business leaders to increase derivative sales?

**Interview Purpose:** In this study, the interview will contain 10 open-ended questions and additional follow-up questions to determine online marketing strategies small retail business leaders use to increase derivative sales.

### **Participant Selection Process:**

- Participants contacted either by telephone or e-mail.
- Participants will receive a copy of the informed consent form upon agreement to participate.
- The participant will be instructed to confirm their participation by replying to the e-mail, "I consent."
- Participants receive a copy of the interview questions and interview protocol prior to the interview.

### **Interview Setting:**

- Interviews will take place in a private setting desired by the participant.
- The researcher will review/reiterate the terms of the informed consent form and give the participant the opportunity to ask any questions.
- Researcher reminds each participant of the study's purpose, participating in the interview is voluntary, and the interview is confidential.
- Participants receive reminders there is no compensation, and they may withdraw at any time.

### **Recording the Interview:**

- The researcher reminds each participant of the recording and receives confirmation.
- The researcher alerts each participant that a journal is a secondary way of capturing notes from the interview and to mitigate bias.

**After the Interview:**

- A thank-you note is sent to each participant one day after the interview along with an e-mail.
- The researcher will transcribe the recorded interview of each participant and send a copy of their interview for feedback.
- Member checking will occur by contacting each participant in person or by telephone to review interpretations of the participants' responses the recorded information for accuracy.
- A determination occurs to identify the need for follow-up questions or the need for a second interview after the translation of data occurs.
- Collected electronic data will be stored with password encryption, and nonelectronic data will be stored in a home locked safe for a minimum of 5 years before discarding all transcripts.

Each participant receives a summary of the published study.

## Appendix B: Public Business Document Review

	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
About	Company BIO, Date of inception, Mission statement, Vision, and Products and services	Company BIO, Date of inception, Mission statement, Vision, and Products and services	Company BIO, Date of inception, Mission statement, Vision, and Products and services	Company BIO, Date of inception, Mission statement, Vision, and Products and services
Photos	Event photos, Keynote speaker photos, Stakeholder photos, Product photos	Event photos, Keynote speaker photos, Stakeholder photos, Product photos	Event photos, Stakeholder photos, Product photos	Event photos, Keynote speaker photos, Stakeholder photos, Product photos
Social Media Sites	Hashtags, Followers, Subscribers, Product Feedback	Hashtags, Followers, Subscribers, Product Feedback	Hashtags, Followers, Subscribers, Product Feedback	Hashtags, Followers, Subscribers, Product Feedback
Videos	Event videos, Product videos, Volunteer activity videos	Event videos, Product videos, Volunteer activity videos	Event videos, Product videos	No videos
Websites	Company website, Customer reviews, Radio advertisements, Links to products on other websites	Company website, Customer reviews, Links to products on other websites	No company website	Company website, Customer reviews, Links to products on other websites

*Note.* Data as of July 2018