2016

Exploring Strategies Required for Small Business Sustainability in Competitive Environments

Christian Ozioma Akaeze
Walden University

Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Christian Ozioma Akaeze

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Review Committee
Dr. Charles Needham, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Robert Miller, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Alexandre Lazo, University Reviewer, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
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Abstract

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MBA, Devry University, 2010

BS, Ambrose Alli University, 1994

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Business Administration

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Abstract

Owners of small businesses contribute approximately 39% of the gross domestic product and create 2 out of every 3 new jobs, but only 25% of startup small businesses stay afloat after 5 years. Guided by the resource-based view theory of the firm, the purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies small auto dealership business owners use to sustain businesses in New York City. Data were collected through semistructured interviews from 3 participants who owned small auto dealership businesses and succeeded beyond 5 years. Data analysis entailed using coding techniques and cluster analysis. Member checking was used to strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of the interpretation of participants' responses. The 3 themes that emerged in the final report related to small business owners' strategies for success, influence of customer satisfaction on small business survival, and influence of prior industrial experience on small business owners' success. Findings from this study may contribute to social change by indicating some strategies that business owners use to sustain business and mitigate harmful effects of job loss. Data from this study may contribute to the prosperity of small business owners, their employees, and local community. The beneficiaries of this research include small business owners, practitioners, and policy makers.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my wonderful wife, Nana, for her boundless love and support throughout the doctoral journey. I also dedicate this study to my children, Chris Jr, Solomon, and Samuel, for all the sacrifices, prayers, and missed vacations during my stormy periods of this journey. This doctoral study is for my wife and children as a reminder that God is able to do all things. My hope is that this achievement will be a source of inspiration to future generations of my family and symbolize that success is a result of discipline, commitment, hard work, and perseverance.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank God for the grace, strength, and resources to complete this doctoral study. I want to thank my research committee chairman, Dr. Charles Needham, personally, who graciously extended me a life raft after my earlier terrible experience in the early stage of my effort. Dr. Needham was always willing and ready to help, encourage, and advise me through the successful conclusion of this doctoral journey. I doff my hat in salute to you for your mentoring. I also wish to thank committee members Dr. Robert Miller, my second committee member, and Dr. Alexandra Larzo, university research reviewer (URR) for their guidance and support. My special acknowledgement goes to Dr. Gene Fusch, for his inputs and guidance through teleconference that contributed to the knowledge to complete this doctoral research study. The last acknowledgment is to Dr. Freda Turner, Director of the Doctor of Business Administration program, for her teachings, leadership, and encouragement.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Results of globalization include intense and aggressive competition, increased customer demand, and shorter product life cycles (Tuanmat & Smith, 2011). Managers of small firms operate in increasingly competitive environments, despite the liability of insufficient resources for competing and the inability to pursue a competitive advantage (Armstrong, 2013). Small entrepreneurial ventures in the United States are valuable for the contribution to economic development regarding job creation, industry leadership, and wealth generation (Chow & Dunkelberg, 2013; Feinberg, 2013; Karadag, 2015; Siow Song Teng, Gurpreet, & Anwar, 2011). The majority of small business owners believed that business environments are becoming increasingly competitive. Whereas large competitive businesses already have growth, small firms struggle to balance survival with growth. From the perspective of Feinberg (2013), few researchers have considered the increasingly important role of competition on small firm survival. The intent of this study was to explore the strategies that small business owners require to succeed in a competitive environment.

Background of the Problem

Owners of small businesses are the economic engine contributing approximately 39% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in the United States (Ho & Barnes, 2013; Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011). Small business owners create 2 out of every 3 new jobs and produce 2.5 times more innovations per employee than large business firms. Small businesses fail at a high rate of 75% within the first 5 years (Plehn-Dujowich, 2010). Most auto dealerships are small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Fraser, Tseng, &

Hans-Henrik, 2013). High failure rate may lead to the collapse of the small business sector that could affect unemployment rates and the economy of a nation (Plehn-Dujowich, 2010). Competition in a globalized world equally affects domestic and international firms, as well as small and large firms, making competition unavoidable for most firms (Chen & Chen, 2013).

Scholars confirmed that large firms have a near 100% survival rate, while small businesses have a low survival rate (Chen & Chen, 2013). Small business owners experience challenging times to improve the economy (Geho & Frakes, 2013). Lack of education, training, and support required for the identification and use of business skills contribute to incompetence and eventual small business failures. Contribution to the improvement of future small business practices include the possibility through ascertaining strategies, which small business owners require in (a) development, (b) expertise, (c) techniques, and (d) proceedings (Quazi, Bell, & Bryant, 2010).

Problem Statement

In 2012, approximately 160 franchised auto dealership business owners in the United States failed and had to close their businesses, according to the statistics from the U.S. Department of Commerce (2012). More than 200,000 autoworkers lost jobs when some industry leaders failed and filed for bankruptcy (Williams, 2012). Approximately 31.6 % of auto dealership owners operate business up to 3 years with approximately 5.3% operating beyond 5 years (Suter & Bwisa, 2013). The general business problem is that individuals often embark on small business initiatives without adequate preparation and information. The specific business problem is that some auto dealership owners lack strategies to sustain a small business within competitive environments longer than 5 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies small auto dealership business owners use to sustain a business beyond 5 years. The population for this study was three small auto dealership business owners, with locations in New York City (NYC), because the owners sustained each business for a minimum of 5 years. The results from the data may contribute to social change by increasing success of existing and aspiring small business owners within the auto industry and provide insight into strategies that contribute to sustainable development.

Results of the study may assist small business owners to learn strategies required for business practices in competitive environments to decrease the high rate of business failures. Data from this study may also have implications to help small business owners succeed and survive in a changing globalizing environment. Positive social change may include reduction in small business failure rates, increase in viability of small businesses, increase in jobs, increase in revenue, and a reduction of the unemployment rate. The social impact of the study results could influence a reduction of small business failure rates leading to sustainable businesses, which in return may save jobs.

Nature of the Study

This study was a multiple case, exploratory study using a qualitative method. Qualitative research is an interpretive and naturalistic approach upon which researchers base the observations and interpretations of people's perceptions of different events

(Neuman, 2011). From the perspective of Khan (2014), scholars use qualitative research to explore potential antecedents and factors that researchers do not know or explore. Exploration of individual experiences, meaning, and interpretations is possible through the effective use of qualitative inquiry (Birchall, 2014).

According to Harrison and Reilly (2011), scholars combine elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches in mixed methods research for the purpose of understanding and corroboration. Mixed method was not suitable for this study because the mixed methods strategy lacks flexibility for interpretation of results (Harrison & Reilly, 2011). The quantitative method is an objective, scientific, and experimental research method (Chen, 2011). The quantitative method involves a requirement for numerical data and defined variables of a study (Slife & Melling, 2012). Quantitative method was not appropriate for this study because data were not numerically measurable quantities.

The notable designs for qualitative method are case study, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and the narrative research designs (Yin, 2012). Case study research is an investigation and analysis of a single or collective case, intended to capture the complexity of the object of study (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). As a study design, case study involves interest in individual cases rather than the methods of research inquiry (Yin, 2012). Case study was the most suitable design for this study because a case study has a level of flexibility not readily offered by other qualitative approaches such as grounded theory or phenomenology. Case study researchers use natural occurring sources of knowledge such as people or observations of interactions that occur in physical space (Hyett et al., 2014). Hyett et al. (2014) indicated that the intent of individuals who use case studies is not to produce generalizable outcomes. Case study is not an inherently comparative approach to research where the objective is not statistical research (Thomas, 2011).

Research Question

The automobile industry is a highly competitive and complex business environment within the United States (Parmer & Dillard, 2015). Auto dealerships compete to gain new customers and advertise heavily to retain existing customers for repeat purchases (Parmer & Dillard, 2015). Most dealers sometimes sell their new vehicles below invoice price to remain competitive (Balfanz & Verran, 2015). Development of management strategies is a means through which owners improved the competitiveness of businesses and boosted the U.S. economy (Alasadi & Al Sabbagh, 2015). The central research question for this study was this: What strategies do small auto dealership owners in NYC use to sustain business within competitive environments beyond 5 years?

Interview Questions

Some small firm owners perform better than others do because of a lack of best practice strategy that owners could use to grow (Tell, 2012). Such firm owners successfully adopt management strategies suited to the business environments in which they operate (Tell, 2012). According to Alasadi and Al Sabbagh (2015), management skills development is a means of improving the competitiveness of businesses and boosting the nation’s economy. Skills are the ability of an individual to perform tasks in an effective manner (Fahed-Sreih, & Morin-Delerm, 2012). The skills that would differentiate business leaders include knowledge about the work and management quality (Fahed-Sreih & Morin-Delerm, 2012). Even in highly competitive environments, some small firm owners made decisions that led to sustenance and firm growth. This study explored what strategies some successful owners of small auto dealership firms used to sustain business and if they knew useful strategies that other small firm owners may use for success. The open-ended interview questions to address the central research question were the following (see Appendix A):

1. What skills and practices have influenced your experiences with small business management, survival, and sustainable success?
2. What is the relationship between staff training, experiences, and the success of your firm?
3. What is an effective skill for success and sustenance to manage small businesses in a competitive environment?
4. What skill sets, both hard and soft, do managers need for business improvement in current and future small business operations?
5. What have you done differently compared too many owners who failed within 5 years to explain the success of your business venture?
6. What is the relationship between your prior industry experiences and the success of your firm?
7. How does your organization reinforce management skills and business practices for long-term sustenance?

8. Describe in detail the relationship between your organization's tangible and intangible resources and your organization's success.
9. Describe in detail the critical factors that you believe contributed to your success beyond 5 years.
10. What additional information can you provide to improve skills to manage a small business in a competitive environment?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the resource-based view (RBV) theory. The RBV is a framework for management to detail and estimate the basis of a firm's competitive advantage and effectiveness (Barney, Ketchen, & Wright, 2011). The foundation of RBV dates back to the notable work of Penrose (1959), which researchers have used to assess resources in studies. In accordance with the RBV concept, scholars have linked the essence of a business to the concept of resources and determined the choice of different uses for resources over time by administrative decisions (Penrose, 1959).

To conform to the RBV concept, resources are a source of competitive advantage when they are economically valuable, unique, strategic, and difficult to replicate (Musso & Francioni, 2012). In accordance with the RBV concept, a firm consists of tangible and intangible resource stocks that are exclusive to the firm (Musso & Francioni, 2012). The heterogeneous nature of resources and the uneven distribution between competing firms is a cornerstone of RBV, which researchers have used to explain competitive advantage (Warnier, Weppe, & Lecocq, 2013). The RBV of a firm is a useful concept for researchers to note the nature of superior firm performance and the strategic uses of resources by firm owners.

Congruent to the concept of RBV of a firm, managers control business with heterogeneous resource endowment accountable for the variability in financial performance across firms (Musso & Francioni, 2012). Scholars have used RBV to develop the important framework for explaining and predicting the basis of a firm's competitive advantage and performance (Kozlenkova, Samaha, & Palmatier, 2014). This framework includes the close exploration of the strategies related to a firm's competitiveness and sustainability. An organization is a collection of both tangible and intangible resources (Brahma & Chakraborty, 2011). Intangible assets are resources that have no physical substance that business managers employ to add a value to their business entity (Yallwe & Buscemi, 2014). Intangible assets are not stand-alone assets, such as a plant or equipment, and they do not create value or generate growth by themselves (Yallwe & Buscemi, 2014). Empirical study results included intangible, knowledge-based elements as sources of competitive advantage (Jugdev & Mathur, 2013).

Business managers use RBV to assess a firm's strengths and weaknesses in designing business strategies (Brahma & Chakraborty, 2011). The intent in the current study was to explore the application of management strategies of a firm's resources, which was why RBV was applicable. According to Chen and Chen (2013), small business owners experience more resource constraints than large corporate leaders. The RBV is a basis to illustrate what strategies successful owners in the small auto sales sector of NYC use to achieve business sustainability and competitiveness. Degravel (2012) posited that RBV is a suitable perspective for capturing strategy because of its methodological attributes, which adapt well with small business strategies. RBV is a useful tool for entrepreneurs in explaining strategies, which owners may use to create business value within a competitive market environment for sustainability beyond 5 years.

Operational Definitions

Business failure. Business failure occurs when a firm owner has not made a net profit for 2 years and may lead to business termination (Lussier & Halabi, 2010).

Business survival. Business survival is the term researchers have used to identify businesses that meet the definition of neither failed nor successful business because the businesses continue to exist despite previously approaching failure (Tundui & Tundui, 2012).

Competition. Competition is a rivalry conduct, which encompasses seeking or endeavoring to gain while someone else is endeavoring to gain from the same resources at the same time, usually triggered by limited availability of resources or opportunities (Meng & Layton, 2011).

Competitive advantage. Competitive advantage is the benefit an organization has over competitors in the form of a low cost provider or differentiation (Calandro, 2011).

Gross domestic product (GDP). GDP is the quantitative measurement of the total output of goods and services which a nation has for a specified period (Lexa, 2012).

Management skills for SMEs. Management skills for SMEs is the ability managers use to steer enterprises toward their goals, objectives, and beyond through competent supervision of resources such as human, financial, and information (Chinomona, 2013; Zarook, Rahman, & Khanam, 2013).

Resource-based view (RBV): RBV is an approach for small businesses to verify the status of the policies based on available resources (Degravel, 2012).

Small business. Small businesses are the businesses in which one or two persons manage and make all the important management decisions (Hunter, 2011).

Small business owner. Small business owners are individuals who establish and manage a business for the principal purpose of making profit and growth (Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011).

U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). A U.S. governmental agency that has resources to assist small business owners in running the business both at startup and growth phases (Harris & Patten, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Polit and Beck (2004) suggested that assumptions are conditions in research taken for granted and assumed as truth. I assumed small-business practitioner participants would give honest, thoughtful, and comprehensive responses during the interviews. A further assumption was that participants would give accurate information on lived experiences. An additional assumption was that the sample of participants in the study was representative of the small-business population throughout the area under study for the purpose of saturation and sufficiency. The research design and methodological procedures minimized the impact of these potential problems.

Limitations

Limitations are external conditions that restrict the scope of a study or could affect the outcome of study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). A limitation for this study was the short time limit for the study. Potential participant bias and inability to recall events accurately was a limitation of the qualitative study incorporating participant interviews. Limitation of the research included the specified area for the study location. The location was heterogeneous with a medium population density and results may not apply to areas with either low or high population densities. Shideler and Badasyan (2012) suggested that small businesses are more important to rural areas than urban areas. The data may not reflect the enthusiasm of rural small business practitioners. However, the focus of this qualitative research was to form an understanding of events rather than to generalize the results (Kolb, 2012).

The sample size of three auto dealership small-business practitioners potentially limited the study, because the sample may not represent the entire small business population throughout the United States. The study was limited to practitioners in small auto dealerships who employed 100 or fewer employees even though the administrators from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA, 2011) listed small businesses as employing up to 500 employees. Findings may not apply to small businesses relatively larger in scope with over 100 employees. Additional limitations were participants' potential unwillingness to share the full extent of business decisions, choices, and experiences in an interview setting. The nature of an exploratory case study approach includes a boundary of not being fully generalizable (Mistarihi, Al Refai, Al Qaid, & Qeed, 2012). Limitations included the extent to which researchers can generalize results from this study beyond the selection in NYC of three small auto dealership owners for exploration (Mistarihi et al., 2012).

Delimitations

Delimitations are conditions intentionally introduced or imposed by a researcher to limit the scope of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The conditions may include using participants of certain ages, genders, or groups. The conditions may also involve conducting the research in a single setting or multiple setting (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). A delimitation of this study was the boundaries of an auto dealership owner's settings in NYC, which limited the scope of the research. The interviews with study participants focused on the perceptions regarding small business management skills from a practitioner's experiences. The results of the study may not prove generalizable given the parameters, which included a sample of auto dealership small-business practitioners from companies employing a maximum of 100 individuals in NYC. Limitations and delimitations identify weaknesses inherent in the study that potentially affect transferability of the study's findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Significance of the Study

Value of Study to Business

Only few scholarly articles regarding changes in competitive business environments and small business performance exist relevant to the strategies managers require for sustainability in challenging environments (Latham & Braun, 2011; Tuanmat & Smith, 2011). Limited small business research has been mainly the result of difficulty collecting data from private sources (Chen, Hope, Li, & Wang, 2011). Addressing the gaps in the existing literature regarding the management skill required by small business practitioners to succeed in a competitive environment is significant (Naia, Baptista, Januário, & Trigo, 2014).

By exploring the strategies that affect the successful performance of small businesses, the results of the study may demonstrate strategies that small business owners implement for sustainability regardless of the field or competition. According to Cader and Leatherman (2011), previous research results indicated that small firms have high probability of failure. Approximately 50% of small startups survive for more than 5 years (Arasti, Zandi, & Talebi, 2012). New information from the study could have an effect on the practices and management of small businesses that increases the success, sustenance, and survival rates beyond 5 years.

Contribution to Business Practice

Businesses decline for various reasons including (a) globalization, (b) changing technology, (c) evolving markets, and (d) competition (Hemphill & Perry, 2012). Leaders of large organizations avoid business failures by investing in new equipment and technology, while smaller business practitioners do not have the same advantage (Hamrouni & Akkari, 2012). Further exploration of management strategies and practices may help to determine the best strategies required by small business practitioners in a competitive environment, and the results of the study may offer insights into successful strategies and practices. Results of this study may expand existing knowledge and identification of management strategies that demonstrate success despite competitive challenges to small business owners. The results from the study may equip aspiring and existing small business practitioners with information to survive in a competitively challenging environment.

Small business enterprise owners typically lack strategies and a long-term vision for better business performance (Noor, 2013). According to Cant and Wiid (2013), insufficient management skills, expertise in functional areas such as marketing and human resources, and financial knowledge are the major causes of SME failures. Small business enterprise owners may not achieve full performance and may place the survival of the business at risk without a strategy for potential growth (Noor, 2013). The potential knowledge from this study may facilitate economic empowerment, expansion of knowledge for small business management, and ensure the survival of small businesses. The failure rate of small businesses is high (Farrington, 2012). The survival rate of small businesses in America is just under 20% within 5 years (Arasti et al., 2012). New knowledge regarding small business management strategies from this study may lead to improved and effective small business practices. Improved small business management strategies could translate to a higher small business success rate.

Sustainability is the economic viability of an organization (McFarlane & Ogazon, 2011). Sustainability practices are the diverse efforts by business owners toward the preservation of resources for future and present needs (James, 2013). Exploring and documenting the sustainability strategies that successful small auto owners use to succeed beyond 5 years within a competitive environment could potentially contribute to a reduce failure rate. The results of the study may contribute to business practices with information and a blueprint on sustainability strategies for success critical for startup owners and existing owners to succeed beyond 5 years.

Implications for Social Change

A business in decline affects jobs, families, and communities (Boyd, 2011). Factors such as competition, low demand for products, lack of strategies, lack of knowledge, and poor locations are impactful on successful SME managements (Cant & Wiid, 2013). The results of the data from this study may contribute new insights into how practitioners of small businesses can succeed beyond 5 years. Small business owners may survive competition by implementing new strategies and practices from the new insights in this study. Small business practitioners contribute to economic growth through job creation and total production output (Vlad, 2011). Owners of successful small firms may continue to provide employment for the employees who depend upon these jobs for their livelihood (Boyd, 2011).

Small business practitioners are usually equal opportunity employers whose workforce includes the underrepresented segment of the workforce (Majumdar, 2013; Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011). Unemployment in the United States in 2011 was high, and what many small business owners need is new strategies and practices to sustain business (Box, 2011). Information from this research is valuable to the determination of skills and practices for implementation of successful small businesses that benefit communities through salvaged businesses and sustained careers. Expectations from the study of small business management strategies and practices are potentially beneficial to small business practitioners to make management decisions.

Some SME owners fail despite government and private support (Cant & Wiid, 2013). Information from this study may aid small business owners to position businesses for survival, particularly in a competitive environment. Aspiring and fledgling small business owners may establish and market businesses for success using sustainability education acquired through this study. Small business owners may develop strategies and practices that increase viability and profitability, leading to the creation of sustainable employment. According to Coetzee, Preez, and Smale (2013), high and persistent unemployment can become a threat to democracy. The implication for social change is the potential reduction of unemployment through reductions in small business failure rates. Creation and sustainability of small businesses are important to the economic prosperity of any nation; otherwise, the nation's leaders risks stagnation of the economy (Cant & Wiid, 2013). Successful business owners may contribute to the creation of economic empowerment in the communities. Economic empowerment may allow individuals to realize the dreams of home ownership and financial security, thereby increasing the quality of life in the society. Increased employment opportunities in communities may results from successful small businesses and benefit the society and the economy in general.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this literature review was to identify relevant and salient literature regarding strategies that successful small business owners use to sustain business in competitive environments beyond 5 years. The literature review was foundational in answering the overreaching research question on the strategies small auto dealership business owners used to sustain a business within the competitive environment beyond 5 years. A review of scholarly and peer-reviewed journal articles, seminal literature, and dissertations was useful to answer the research question and explain the phenomenon of three small auto dealer owners' success, viability, and sustenance.

For a clearer understanding of the phenomena surrounding small auto business ownership, the literature review includes an explanation of the RBV theory. The literature section includes examination of competitive strategies and the application strategies for small business sustenance. In addition, the literature review includes secondary sources of articles from journals and dissertations that cover the categories of business sustenance, competitive advantage, and an overview of Penrose's (1959) RBV.

For this study, the literature organization was the broad-to-specific approach for literature reviews. First, the study audience has generic information and, later, the specifics of the research topics. A subsection consists of general issues regarding small business failures and narrows down to specific issues in the literature until reaching the articles most specifically similar to the research questions and the problem statement. Additional subsections consist of the introduction, the background, and related aspects of research topic, with links to many related, broader articles.

The strategy for searching literature is the systematic integrated literature reviews (SILR). The SILR strategy for searching literature is useful to researchers for effective retrieval, integration of existing information, and provision of directions. The SILR is also useful to researchers for (a) understanding and minimizing pitfalls of previous academic work and (b) obtaining an estimated sample size (Im, Eun-Ok, & Chang, 2012). The basic steps for searching literature, ensuring good results, and getting relevant results includes identifying the important concepts of the search. The next step is the choice of the keywords that describe these concepts and determination of whether synonyms, related terms, or other variations of the keywords need inclusion. An effective way of choosing the keywords is construction of a table containing the concepts (Im et al., 2012).

An additional step for searching for literature was to determine which search features may apply, including truncation, proximity operators, Boolean operators, and expression search. According to Im et al. (2012), scholars may choose a relevant database, library catalog, and create a search expression, using syntax, appropriate for the search tool. Final steps included the evaluation of results, modification of search as needed, and going back to Steps 2 through 4 and revision of query accordingly.

Many databases provided resource material for the review appropriate to identifying current research in business management. Journal articles, dissertations, small business literature, and other reference material from the Walden University online library resources supported the literature review. The primary databases searched included Auto Dealerships, Small Management Enterprises, Small Business, and Management. Specific databases included SAGE Publications, ScienceDirect, ProQuest, Emerald Management Journals, EBSCOhost, Management & Organization Studies, government databases, and LexisNexis Academic.

Additional database searches involved ProQuest Central, ProQuest Dissertation, and Google Scholar. Various keywords for conducting research on scholarly documents included *small business, small businesses in United States, business competition, business competitive environment*, and *qualitative analysis in the small business enterprise industry.* Other key search terms in this study included *qualitative research, competitive advantage, small business development,* and *case study* or a combination of keywords.

The literature consists of searches using 342 journal articles in the original database with the listed keywords or phrases. Of the 342 articles cited, 92.5% had a publication date between 2010 and 2015 (see Table 1). The total references used in each category was (a) 16 books; (b) 316 journals and articles; (c) three dissertations; (d) two government and corporate reports, and (e) no websites. From the references of 342, 316 (92.5%) were published within the last 5 years, and 319 (including the dissertations) were peer-reviewed and published in the last 5 years (93.2%). A literature review is the multidocument extract of past studies (Christopher, Jin-Cheon, & Jaidka, 2011). Research literature review is a systematic method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing the existing body of studies completed by researchers, scholars, and practitioners (Fink, 2010).

The literature review includes context for articles published in numerous journals with reports of research (Kucan, 2011). For this study, the literature included an introduction of the research questions and the body of themes identifying the scope and themes from groups of studies (Christopher et al., 2011). Additional literature reviews were methodological to identify the types of research methods and conclusion, including a critique stating flaws and gaps in the literature. The review consisted of an in-depth exploration, analysis, and discussion of information pertaining to the research question on what strategies small auto dealership business owners use to sustain a business within the competitive environment beyond 5 years.

The position of literature review is usually at the beginning of a research project (Seuring & Gold, 2012). The literature review section consists of an overview of small business in the United States. The subsection consists of introduction to purpose of the study, small businesses, and the conclusions of relevant studies in chronological order. Additional subsections are relevant studies of small business, competitive advantage, and chronological presentation of conclusions of the studies. A further subsection regards business strategies and small businesses including knowledge that researchers learned. Other subsections include small business survival, sustenance, and the past findings, small business management strategies, and the application to solving business problems and discussions of RBV as a conceptual framework with the application to research.

The literature review is an important step in the entire research process (Seuring & Gold, 2012). A purpose of the literature review is to include an overview and synthesis of information grouping similar articles, which includes a framework and overview (Seuring & Gold, 2012). The intent with literature reviews are mapping, consolidation, and evaluation of the intellectual territory of a topic and identifying knowledge gaps that further enrich the existing body of knowledge (Seuring & Gold, 2012).

Table 1

Source of Data for Literature Review

Publications	Published Within 5 Years of Expected Graduation Date	Older than 5 Years	% of Sources
Journal articles	316	000	92.5
Dissertations	004	000	1.075
Books	019	002	5.7
Others	002	000	0.7
% of Total	99.4%	0.6%	100
Total Sources: 342			

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore what strategies small auto dealership business owners use to sustain small business beyond 5 years. Business managers may use strategies for some of their business units to compete within smaller businesses (Eboreime & Adedoyin, 2013). The strategies small business practitioners lack consist of management, entrepreneurial expertise, and marketing strategies (Brinckmann, Grichnik, & Kapsa, 2010). A management strategy involves the efficient administration of resources such as human, financial, and information (Chinomona, 2013).

RBV Theory and Small Business

The RBV is a strategic management theory that researchers have used to analyze firm resources, capacity, and routines, which are fundamental to firm operations and competitive advantage. (Nisakorn, Jarunee, & Tritos, 2013). Edith Penrose developed the

RBV in the late 1950s because of her dissatisfaction with the neoclassical economic approach to business growth of a firm (Wilson, 2012). From an RBV perspective, firm managers include the motivation to achieve economic optimization, which drives resource management, and thereby the organizational conduct and performance (Verbeke & Tung, 2013).

Firm managers may obtain Ricardian-like rents (a reward for the services of fixed properties) from acquired resources (Marzo, 2014). Organizational resources consist of the systems, the routines, and the relationships embedded in a company (Nisakorn et al., 2013). Managers may use organizational resources to gain competitive advantages. Firm managers enhance a competitive advantage through identification and manipulation of organizational resources, capabilities, and systems using the RBV conceptual guidelines (Degravel, 2012).

Small businesses represent a large share of total business operations in most nations (Junaidu, Abdul, Mohamed, & Sambasivan, 2012). Categories of the resources that managers control are physical capital resources, human capital resources, and organizational capital resources, depending on the characteristics. The resources in a firm are tangible and intangible or a combination thereof (Silver Coley, Lindemann, & Wagner, 2012). Firm resources include assets, capabilities, strategies, organizational processes, information, and knowledge. Firm tangible resources, such as plants that individuals physically use for a firm, are the physical capital resources (Junaidu et al., 2012).

Notable actions in firms where managers apply RBV include control of resources and implementation of strategies for sustainability, profitability, and efficiency. The supposition in the RBV is not simply that organizations are all encompassing of resources. An assumption in RBV is that managers concentrate on using the varying critical resources to develop a sustainable competitive advantage (Jang, 2013; Mazurenko & O'Connor, 2012). An additional assumption in RBV is that managers strongly consider divergence and fixity of a company's resources for a sustained competitive advantage. Managers of a firm sustain a competitive advantage by stopping competitors from copying strategies when resources are diverse and fixed (Degravel, 2012). When strategic resources are mobile and homogenous, the competitive advantage of a firm is not sustainable, because competitors can duplicate the resources (Ritthaisong, Johri, & Speece, 2014).

To develop and sustain a competitive advantage, managers of firms should attach the importance to the significance of resource divergence and fixity. According to Ritthaisong et al. (2014), managers should develop exclusive firm resources that competitors cannot duplicate. First, managers may use rare and valuable resources to produce a competitive advantage. Valuable resources are useful to managers for efficient and effective management of the firms. Second, resources must have certain characteristics to produce a long-lasting advantage. The valuable resources are difficult to imitate, substitute, and transfer from one organization to another. Small business managers use RBV for analyzing SME resources to link external sources with performance (Kamyabi & Devi, 2011). According to Kamyabi and Devi (2011), researchers used the RBV to argue that SME managers use external accountants as a source of professional services chiefly because of a gap in their internal resource base.

Small business leaders need support and advice because of the economic contribution and vulnerability to market imperfections (Kamyabi & Devi, 2011). By relying on external sources, SME managers can obtain the capabilities and knowledge they need from external service providers (Kamyabi & Devi, 2011). Activities in which SME managers internally lack the necessary resources such as knowledge, strategies, skills, expertise, and competence is obtainable from external source (Kamyabi & Devi, 2011). The underlining statement in RBV is that obtaining resources from external sources is important because of smaller firms' limited resources (Kamyabi & Devi, 2011).

Managers of SME operating in a competitive environment can employ external sources to integrate operational considerations within long-term plans to enhance their sustainability (Kamyabi & Devi, 2011). The external resource, such as strategies managers need to operate small business successfully beyond 5 years, is a contribution of the study. The RBV concept is a useful application in case studies of small businesses. To demonstrate a case for SME managers maximizing financial returns while at the same time proactively making progress toward Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), researchers applied RBV (Torugsa, O'Donohue, & Hecker, 2012).

The RBV of the firm includes the inside of the firm, its resources, and capabilities, to show the profit and value of the organization (Penrose, 1959). Theorists have applied RBV to explain differences in performance within an industry. In line with the RBV of the firm, differences in performance happen when well-succeeded organizations possess valuable resources that others do not have, allowing them to obtain a rent in its quasi-monopolist form. An origin of RBV is the need to explain competitive performance of firms using firm resources and not a firm's product (Armstrong, 2013). The intent from an RBV perspective is to determine how a firm's internal resources affect its competitive advantage. The use of RBV facilitated an explanation of strategies used by small auto business owners to survive competition (Armstrong, 2013).

Strategic Factors Markets Model

Strategic factors markets model, a strong form of RBV, included development by Wernerfelt (1984) and Barney (1986). When the implementation of a strategy requires the acquisition of resources, a strategic factor market develops where business owners buy and sell resources necessary to implement their strategies (Barney, 1986). The basic principle behind strategic factors markets model is that leaders of firms are profit-maximizing units, achieving above normal profits. Obi (2013) argued that in line with strategic factors markets model, firm performance consist of firm level and external factors and the misfit between external moderating factors and firm level factors affects the degree of a firm's performance. Conforming with strategic factors markets model, the value which leaders of a firm generate in the future is a part of acquired resources.

Dynamic Capabilities View

The dynamic capabilities view of the firm is the weak form of RBV which is in varying terms (Marzo, 2014). According to Arend (2014), researchers use dynamic capabilities view to describe how existing firm owners realize quasi-rents through efficient redeployments of a firm's unique resources to match changing environments. The underlying assumption of dynamic capabilities view is that leaders in a firm sense new opportunities, reconfigure resources and capabilities in line with recognized opportunities, and environmental change may create and sustain a competitive advantage (Breznik & Lahovnik, 2014). To conform to dynamic capabilities view, the leaders develop value from general inputs in a specific and path-dependent way.

Capability-Based View

An alternative useful theory for this study is capability-based view which is an origin of the RBV (Monsur & Yoshi, 2012). The capability-based view is a link between generic competitive strategy and RBV. According to Helfat and Peteraf (2003), theorists of capability-based view develop specific capability through path dependent processes by vigorous efforts of continuously gathering experiences. In accordance with the concept of RBV, capability means organizational capability but in capability-based view, capability means dynamic capability and covers various entities like organization, individual employees, and teamwork. In RBV, a resource is an asset or input to production (tangible or intangible). In RBV, organizational capability is the ability of an organization to perform a coordinated set of tasks using organizational resources to achieve a particular result (Monsur & Yoshi, 2012).

In capability-based view, under the capability concept, many important magnitudes exist which bring dynamism in resource development (Monsur & Yoshi, 2012). In contrast to the RBV of a firm, an important conceptual emphasis of capability-based view includes a specific capability development in a firm that is more important than general capability (Monsur & Yoshi, 2012). The core of capability-based view concept is the firm's leader's capability to up-grade by an evolutionary process involving several development stages. Other core emphasis of the capability-based view concepts includes that capability of a firm's lifecycle. An additional important concept of the capability-based view in contrast to RBV is that firm's capability developments are coordinates of individual capability and organizational capability. Monsur and Yoshi believed that leaders of a firm can strive for diverse sorts of objectives to obtain a competitive advantage if their target and process are specific. However, the choice of RBV over capability-based view of the firm for the study is because of the intent to explore the specific organizational sustainability strategies. The concept of capability-based view is a connection to the issue of teamwork and social capital which is not the interest for this study.

Knowledge-Based View

Another alternative useful theory for the study is the knowledge-based view. The knowledge-based view of the firm, an extension of the RBV, is the products and services produced by management using tangible resources including the resources, which is a function of the firm's expertise (Samiha & Triki, 2011). The knowledge-based view of the leaders of a firm posits that knowledge assets may produce a long-term sustainable competitive advantage for the organization because knowledge-based resources are socially complex and difficult to imitate. The RBV depicts companies as a collection of resources and capabilities required for product or market competition. The knowledge-based view of strategy differs from other schools of thought in strategy because of its singular intent is on knowledge as the driver of strategy (Takeuchi, 2013).

In view of the RBV, knowledge is a generic resource and special characteristics making knowledge the most important and valuable resource. The knowledge-based view of strategy is useful to researchers for injecting new thinking along three dimensions that includes (a) placing humans at the center of strategy, (b) treating strategy as a dynamic process, and (c) having a social agenda. The interpretation of knowledge as a resource establishes the theoretical connection between the RBV and the knowledge-based view.

The RBV of the firm is in alignment with knowledge as a generic resource and is the most strategically significant resource of the firm. The RBV of the firm concept is not in alignment with the assumption of special characteristics neither distinguishing between different types of organizational knowledge-based capabilities (Samiha & Triki, 2011). The capabilities of a firm involve the integration of multiple knowledge bases, which are complex bundles of skills and accumulative knowledge, through organizational processes that ensure superior business performance. Referencing the RBV of the firm as a unit that has the ability for individuals integrating specialize knowledge, for production to occur in a firm, the knowledge is acquired, assimilated, transformed, and exploited (Ndinguri, Prieto, & Machtmes, 2012).

Knowledge, expertise, intellectual assets, and competencies are the main drivers of superior performance in the information age (De Luca, Maia, Cardoso, de Vasconcelos, & da Cunha, 2014). According to De Luca et al. (2014), superior performance has become a priority for competitive firms. Knowledge is the most important resource of a firm. Material resources decrease when used, while knowledge assets increase with use over time. Competitors find technology, capital, market share, or product resources easier to copy whereas knowledge is the only resource difficult for competitors to imitate. An important knowledge-based view of the firm's proposition is that the organization exists to create, transfer, and transform knowledge into competitive advantage (Samiha & Triki, 2011). The choice of RBV over knowledge-based view of a firm for this study is because knowledge is the major important strategic resource with knowledge-based view of the firm.

Small scale business leaders are the driving force for economic growth, employment, and poverty alleviation (Adebowale, 2011; Nair & Chelliah, 2012; Ojokuku, Sajuyigbe, & Ogunwoye, 2014). Nevertheless, practitioners in small business sectors encounter diverse challenges that hinder long term survival and development (Ojokuku et al., 2014). Small businesses have slim-to-fair chances of survival (Fadahunsi, 2012). Up to 70% of new start up small business managers will fail in the future (Ucbasaran, Westhead, Wright, & Flores, 2010). Competitive environment is a complex interaction of factors within external and internal environments (Predic & Stosic, 2014).

Competition in the global market of the 21st century is rigid and complicated (Eboreime & Adedoyin, 2013). Factors of business competitiveness, business growth, and business development are either internal or external factors. An external environment consists of factors outside of the direct control of a firm (Predic & Stosic, 2014). In addition, external environments are factors affecting the business of all participants in one economic system (Predic & Stosic, 2014). A competitive environment is the development of competitive potential and the efficiency of market participants (Tileaga et al., 2014). Despite the presumed competitive disadvantages in relations to big firms, small business owners contribute immensely to the economy in the United States (Armstrong, 2012). Small business owners are indisputably deficient in the ability to compete against big firms giving their economies of scale and scope (Armstrong, 2012).

Empirical studies indicated that some ownership characteristics for the growth of small firms include the level of education and previous experience with business ownership or management (Fadahunsi, 2012). As an enterprise management tool, business owners may use the level of education they possess to enhance entrepreneurial motivation and the ability to use a number of useful skills for managing enterprises (Fadahunsi, 2012). Business owners who choose to go into business, in areas in which they have formal education, have some specific advantages as entrepreneurs (Fadahunsi, 2012). In this sense, educated individuals have a increased likelihood of growing and surviving businesses than less educated counterparts (Fadahunsi, 2012).

Business owners or managers with prior management experience may grow and survive businesses than individuals without that experience (Fadahunsi, 2012). Entrepreneurs' characteristics are the characteristics of the person or persons who provide resources for the establishment of the businesses. Diverse personal characteristics of business owners can contribute to the growth prospects of their businesses (Fadahunsi, 2012).

Competitive Advantage and Sustainable Competitive Advantage

A firm has a competitive advantage when the firm managers implement a value creating strategy not simultaneously implemented by competitors (García-Castro & Ariño, 2011; Grant & Royle, 2011). Firm managers achieve a competitive advantage in several ways that determines and differentiate their strategies (Miculescu & Miculescu, 2012). A firm's management consists of a sustainable competitive advantage when competitors cannot duplicate the benefits of the firm's value (García-Castro & Ariño, 2011). From the perspective of the RBV, managers achieve the competitive advantage of a firm by the ability to obtain and accumulate strategic resources (Hung, Huang, & Gosling, 2011). The first fundamental assumptions for classifying a firm's valuable resources are its heterogeneous distribution across the firms (Mazurenko & O'Connor, 2012). The second assumption is the productive resources cannot transfer from firm-to-firm without cost (Barney, 1991).

The two assumptions resulted in the formulation of two fundamental arguments regarding firm resources. First, managers use resources both rare and valuable to produce a competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Managers contribute to firm efficiency and effectiveness using the organizations valuable resources (Mazurenko & O'Connor, 2012). The second argument is that resources must have certain characteristics to produce a long-lasting advantage. The resources are difficult to imitate, substitute, and transfer from one organization to another. According to Andersén (2011), most RBV scholars agree that human resources regarding the knowledge and skills of the employees are the most important resources (Andersén, 2011).

Resource theorists suggested that a firm differs from another because of the unique advantage and strategic orientations (Fonseka, Yang, & Tian, 2013). The theorists suggestion regarding the uniqueness of a firm distinguishes *sustained* competitive advantage from a competitive advantage. A company's competitive advantage only becomes sustained competitive advantage when competitors cannot easily duplicate the advantages (Barney, 1991). Sustained competitive advantage is the competitive advantage that business managers can sustain. The advantages are unique by members of a firm and characterized by variety and fixedness.

The attributes of sustained competitive advantage of firms includes sufficient valuable resources for performing strategies, improving effectiveness and efficiency, and generating a sustained competitive advantage. Resources should appear rare, because competitive advantages will sustain not for long and will lose value when managers share resources with competing firms. Although organizational resources are valuable and rare, resources lose value and rareness if competitors can easily obtain the resources. Finally, resources should remain irreplaceable, valuable, rare, and with non-replaceable alternative resources (Gligor & Holcomb, 2014). If competitors develop unique strategies of equivalent value, a firm will not sustain sustainable competitive advantage regardless of valuable, rare, and imperfectly replaceable resources.

By implementing the attributes of resources and retaining divergence and fixity, leaders can potentially generate sustainable competitive advantage. Based on Barney's (1991) concept, researchers emphasized the importance of a firm's resources in small enterprises, arguing that deliberately generating and combining resources generate sustainable competitive advantage. The potential of knowledge-based resources in SMEs was well highlighted by Wiklund and Shepherd (2003). Managers of SMEs have both advantages and disadvantages over the management of larger companiess (Breznik & Lahovnik, 2014). The fundamental question in the strategic management field is how managers of firms achieve and sustain a competitive advantage. Managers may address the lack of strategies in SMEs to compete against large firms by increasing resources for effective business performances and prevention of firm failure (Aragón-Correa, Hurtado-Torres, Sharma, & Garía-Morales, 2008).

Leader's resources of SMEs such as experiences and knowledge are not replicable, immobile, and are potential critical forms of sustainable competitive advantage. The concept of RBV is that a firm does not need all resources and only needs resources that are rare, valuable, non-substitutable, and difficult to imitate, to gain competitive advantages (Gligor & Holcomb, 2014). To generate sustainable competitive advantage, managers need to use only some critical resources (Grant & Royle, 2011). With globalization, many automobile manufacturers internationalize for survival. Automobile manufacturers create tacit knowledge and diffuse the knowledge internally between headquarters and the affiliate auto dealers, and externally, by collaboration between manufacturer and global suppliers (Rugraff, 2012).

The automobile manufacturers transfer tacit knowledge from the headquarters to affiliates auto dealers located throughout the world to gain competitive advantage (Rugraff, 2012). Using only the efficient intra-firm transfer of tacit knowledge no longer guarantees the survival of auto manufacturers (Rugraff, 2012). Small auto dealers do not have such knowledge readily available, yet some owners survive. The intent of this study is to document the strategies which successful owners use to survive a competitive environment beyond 5 years.

Challenges in the Auto Sales Business

The automotive industry is one oldest industry in the world (Fraser, Watanabe, & Hvolby, 2013). The industry is a competitive and complex business sector (Parmer & Dillard, 2015). Auto dealers represent automakers at the point of sale and act as continuous contact between the car producers and the customers (Allard, Liljander, Semeijn, & Polsa, 2011; Fraser et al., 2013; Fraser et al., 2013). In addition, auto dealers stock up used car and new car inventory (Balfanz & Verran, 2015). Auto dealers invest in showrooms, sales training, and brand-specific repair capabilities (Allard et al., 2011). Majority of auto dealers sell their new vehicles at or below invoice price to remain in competition (Balfanz & Verran, 2015).

Auto dealership owners compete to gain new customers, and advertise heavily to retain existing customers for repeat purchases (Parmer & Dillard, 2015). Authorized independent sales dealers are mostly individual independent dealers (Noor, 2012). Successful car dealers are self-starters who have internally driven strong desires to compete, to excel against self-imposed standards, and to pursue and attain challenging goals (Suter & Bwisa, 2013). Success is measures of good management that relates to the achievement of goals and objectives in business life (Chittithaworn, Islam, Keawchana, & Yusuf, 2011). Successful car dealers demonstrate a high-level of creativity and innovation, and demonstrate a high-level of management skills and business know-how (Suter & Bwisa, 2013).

The automobile industry is a major force in the U.S. economic (Hiraide & Chakraborty, 2012). Auto sales decreased to a 30-year low with industry employment reduced to half in 2000. Industry reports indicated automakers are hiring again and the auto sales rose in 2014. The auto industry is a competitive business environment (Sultana & Khairul, 2014). The main products are commuter vehicles, light vans, pickups, vans, and sport usefulness automobiles (Sultana & Khairul, 2014).

Five main existing car sale models are (a) brand stores, (b) auto trading market, (c) sales of multi-brand stores, (d) chain stores, and (e) online sales (Li, 2014). Managers cannot depend on one popular product to achieve the perfect sales target without an appropriate strategy (Lan, Sheng, & Zhang, 2014). Car sales are disappointing for industry stakeholders in 2012 because of a sluggish economy (Okutomi & Amasaka, 2013). One unavoidable consequences of an economic recession is a high rate of business failure (Xu & Lone, 2012). Some dealers self-organize tangible and intangible assets to improve efficiency (Morisse, 2013). The effect of a global recession on world economy in 2010 was severe and threatening to the survival the U.S. auto industry (Hiraide & Chakraborty, 2012).

Small Business Organizations in New York State

Small businesses are the backbone of the U.S. economy, the driving force of job creation (Jasra, Khan, Hunjra, Rehman, & Azam, 2011; SBA, 2011; Valadez, 2011). Small firms categories based on the number of employees classified by the Bureau of

Labor Statistics include organizations employing between one and forty-nine employees (Fox, 2013). Nearly 200,000 owners established small businesses in NYC and inadvertently influence the city's economy according to officials from the NYC Small Business Services (NYCSBS, 2014). Small business success is a critical part of the nation's economy (Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011). According to officials from the SBA (2011), nearly 28 million small entrepreneurs in the United States in 2010, and since 2000, created 65% of new jobs. Approximately 60,000 business owners received licenses in 55 different categories from management of the Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) that ensure a fair and vibrant marketplace for consumers and businesses. According to officials from the NYCSBS (2014), second hand auto dealers are one of the 55 different categories of businesses licensed by the DCA, with approximately 1,100 operating in NYC.

Managers of the New York State Small Business Development Center (NYS SBDC) provide expert management and technical assistances to startup and existing business owners across the state (Ritala, 2014). Officials of NYSBDC examine projects that advance job development, investment, and economic growth priorities of New York State, with an emphasis on manufacturers, exporters and technology-oriented firms. Officials of the Empire State Development Corporation (ESDC), which include a division for Small Business, offer valuable resources for small businesses. ESDC officials' direct programs and initiatives to support small business growth as well as helping entrepreneurs maximize opportunities for success. When trying to assess the importance of economic sustainability of small business throughout New York State, small business owners may use the checks and balances included on the SBA and subsidiaries websites for assistance toward stability and sustenance. The information on the sites are mainly toward effective business management through annual necessary training, follow up, and assistances (Ritala, 2014).

Weaker economic markets often surround new small business startups and entrepreneurial ideology in rural areas, which tend to lack professional services such as affordable lawyers and accountants, as well as managerial training (Doris & Kusce, 2013). Market development research, in addition to economics, is another relative factor that small business owners must examine, prior to starting a new small business in NYC. SBA managers offer social and environmental growth factors to assist entrepreneurs and small business owners with decision making for future longevity using research models. Small business owners in NYC contribute immensely toward economic prosperity of the city. The wealth of complimentary information which SBA officials provide 7 days a week 24 hours each day, are potential tools for owners against small business failure.

Competitive Business Environments

Competition is the foundation of the U.S. economic policy (Musetescu, 2012). Promoting competition is a practice broadly acceptable to managers as the best available tool for promoting consumer well-being (White, 2012). A competitive environment is the changing external structure in which a business competes and operates (Predic & Stosic, 2014). Competitive environment is the dynamic system that a business manager competes. Some firms succeed and others fail because of uncertain business environments which affects small businesses than large companies (Islam, Khan, Obaidullah, & Alam, 2011).

The competitive environment in any organization consists of those elements that directly influence the organization and upon which organizational leaders have a special influence (Grigorescu, 2013). The more sellers of a similar product or service, the more competitive the environment in which a firm competes. Environments in which economic and financial actors elaborate strategic decisions are characteristically uncertain (Parnaudeau, 2011). The condition of a business environment limits the flexibility of the business. The world economic conditions may result in an increase in the prices of raw materials, forcing supply company managers to charge more with raising overhead costs. Local events, such as regional labor shortages or natural disasters, affect competitive environments. A firm manager's direct competitor provides products or services similar to the firm's product or services. For example, a small auto dealership owner competes with other local small roadside auto dealership owners, as well as the used car unit of large auto dealerships.

Some business owners encounter competition from indirect competitors who are providers of dissimilar products or services. For example, a small auto dealer competes with other local roadside auto dealerships, but the dealer also competes with nearby authorize auto auctions or car rentals. Small business managers lack the ability to compete against big box retailers with their economies of scale and scope (Armstrong, 2012). The differences in strategic resources that the various firm managers relies on to compete may carry liabilities. Most small retailers choose to pursue strategies that differentiate them from large competitors, because managers of large firms lack discretionary strategic choices (Armstrong, 2012).

Differentiation of products or services in a competitive environment involves the development of an element of the business that competitors cannot copy. The ability to outperform competitors and produce above average profits lies in the pursuit and execution of an appropriate business strategy (Hsieh & Chen, 2011). Small firm managers' strategies tend to have a limitation that focuses on differentiation and a value orientation (Armstrong, 2012). If an auto dealer offers the same products and services as those of competitors, customers have no reason to remain loyal to the dealership. However, if the auto dealer's customer service and sales processes is different, customers wanting that type of services must visit the only auto dealership personnel that provide the specified service. Competition is inevitable in a highly dynamic and uncertain environment.

Managers who use a business strategy are concerned with how businesses achieve a competitive advantage (Hsieh & Chen, 2011). The dynamic change in a business environment results to close competition among companies in the global market (Permatasari & Dhewanto, 2013). Competitions results to the discovery and development of managerial skills in diverse ways depending on the existing entrepreneurial networks and support (Thomas et al., 2014). Combination of value and cost leveraging opportunities results to higher price flexibility and increased competitive advantage (Md. Maruf, 2011). Small business owners include a higher probability of failure at a rate higher than large businesses, with substantial effects on a nation economy. To survive in a competitive business environment, small business owners may require the management strategies necessary to gain a competitive advantage over competition.

Competition among business managers increased significantly in virtually all areas of business (Hsieh & Chen, 2011). Most company managers cannot avoid competition in a globalizing world. The challenge manager’s encounter in the era of globalization is in differentiating their firms and producing quality products and services to compete in the international market. The globalization results in crowded markets and new opportunities for companies.

Creating product differentiation may result to increase in challenges for managers of organizations to rely on quality and innovation as a process for a firm identity (van Rensburg & van Niekerk, 2010). Managers may plan a business strategy through innovation to win global market competition. For strategies to remain effective and further the competitive advantage, to achieve profitability, managers of an organization may exploit and expand on strengths, and reduce or eliminate weaknesses. A business' competencies are resources and capabilities that business managers use to differentiate the products and services, or reduce costs compared with competitors.

Business resources may remain tangible or intangible assets such as strategies, knowledge, and expertise. Intangible assets are nonmonetary assets, identifiable, and without physical substance (Dumitrescu, 2012). The resources are valuable to the business, adding value to outputs in which customers place a positive distinction with firms, over those of competitors. A study in which business managers undertake to identify the internal strengths and weaknesses of organizations, as well as organization’s external opportunities and threats are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis (Antony, 2012; Helms, Rodríguez, Lisandro de, & Hargrave, 2011). A SWOT analysis is a method of analyzing a business, the resources and environment (Antony, 2012). To analyze the firm's internal assets, and external assets, managers may conduct a SWOT analysis of the firm. The SWOT analysis is an important tool for providing qualitative information in an organized manner (Brooks, Heffner, & Henderson, 2014).

Strengths are the actions managers of firms take for efficiency which competitors may find difficult to copy. Weaknesses are the weak points of an organization, the factors that do not meet the set standards (Antony, 2012). Opportunities exist in the environment within which firms operate through market, competition, industry, and government. Threats are those factors which can put in danger the survival of a firm, if managers identify them on time, threats can become opportunities (Antony, 2012). Managers may use a SWOT analysis for increasing an organizations competitive advantage (Rothaermel, 2013). A business' strengths and weaknesses comprise the internal analysis, for identifying the competencies. Managers may use the external analysis to examine external the environment of a business, for any opportunities and threats that externalities pose to a business. A firm's competitive actions should flow from a strategy (Stambaugh, Yu & Dubinsky, 2011). By effectively identifying the competencies of a business when conducting an internal analysis, managers identify strengths and weaknesses as factors in the strategy formulation process (Hätönen & Ruokonen, 2010). By implementing strengths and eliminating weaknesses, business managers gain a competitive advantage, which managers reflect on company's profitability.

Managers obtain competitive advantages through the strengths and competencies of the business, which competitors cannot match in the market (Brooks et al., 2014). Through these strengths and competencies, business managers may differentiate products and services or significantly reduce costs to compare with competitors. Direct competitors may sell the same type of product or service. Indirect competitors are competing businesses even though the businesses sell a different service or product. The products or services offered by indirect competitors are those products which consumers may substitute one for another (Brooks et al., 2014). An example of indirect competition is travelers given the option to travel by plane, train, or car; therefore, airlines must also compete with train lines and buses.

Other examples of competitive business environments include the many choices offered with Smartphone companies. The automobile industry is a competitive business environment (Modi, 2012). The automobile industry product includes a variety of vehicles in different segments. Customers seeking to buy a new car or full-size truck have many options. In addition to choice, economic competition forces industry managers to increase efficiency and continually find ways of improving production process. Another advantage of economic competition is allowing anyone with a specialized skill set to create something better than what the market offers. The effect of market competition is a positive reflection on the economy (Fischer & Fox, 2011; Nikolovska & Mamucevska, 2014).

Unfortunately, economic competition comes with significant disadvantages (Nikolovska & Mamucevska, 2014). Politicians may invest wealth disproportionately into what earns the highest profit, leaving less money for social services, such as police departments, public schools, and emergency aid. A nations leader that outsource production to companies overseas may collaborate with suppliers who provide poor working conditions and low wages, exploiting workers, and offering inadequate incentives. Some politically minded economists would also argue that a disadvantage of economic competition is the reduction of the amount of human labor required to produce goods, as machinery replaces assembly jobs once filled by human workers (Nikolovska & Mamucevska, 2014).

Small Business Success

Managers must compete against competitors managing other similar firms to survive and grow because small business managements operations are not in a vacuum. One small business management, growth strategy is potentially another small business management’s survival strategy, depending on direct competition with larger managements (Armstrong, 2012). Small business managers may focus on both survival and growth when pursuing competency-based strategies; however, small business managers risk firm’s survival when pursuing flexibility-based strategies (Armstrong, 2013).

Virtually all small firm managers pursue strategies to compete even though some of the strategic growth strategies may endanger their various survivals (Armstrong, 2013). Failure of startup business owners is at a substantially high rate than existing small business, which fails at a considerably higher rate than large businesses (Philip, 2011). According to Valdiserri and Wilson (2010), in the past most researchers focused on large firms. The lack of existing research and uniformity or consensus for a definition of failure contributes to the confusion regarding the reason small businesses fails (Cochran, 2001).

Small Business Failure

Business failure is the discontinuance of business with losses to creditors and shareholders, while business success is the continuation of business with no profits losses (Siow Song Teng et al., 2011). From 2007 to 2009, employees of businesses with less than 50 employees lost jobs at a rate higher than small and large businesses with more than 50 employees (Malchow-Moller, Schjerning, & Sorensen, 2011). Business failure occur when income decreases or expenses increase, leading to insolvency of a firm and restricting the possibilities of net equity (Minello, Scherer, & da Costa Alves, 2014). High small business failure rates have multiple definitions (Cochran, 2001).

Determining factors of the failure rate of firms include effectiveness of the management and adequacy of capital (Salman, von Friedrichs, & Shukur, 2011). Business failure has connection to a firm manager's decisions and behaviors, and conducts of the firm (Minello et al., 2014). The success or failure of a firm may relate to aspects of the manager's behavior, and to the elements internal to the organization, as well as elements of the external environment (Minello et al., 2014). Small business classification is by industry, number of employees and industries annual sales, from SBA (Salas-Fumas & Sanchez-Asin, 2011).

Additional classifications of small business by sizes include, number of owners and managers, annual sales, net income, net worth and a combination of characteristics (Campbell et al., 2012). Scholars have inaccurately recommended solutions based on the inconsistency of past research findings because of differing definitions of failure (Salas-Fumas & Sanchez-Asin, 2011). Small businesses fail for multitude reasons include bankruptcy, voluntary termination, an opportunity cost, and partnership dispute (Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011). Other reasons small businesses fail are legal dispute, personal limitations of owner, elective discontinuance, merger with or acquisition by another firm, and death of the small business owner. Businesses must survive to succeed (Stafford, Bhargava, Danes, Haynes, & Brewton, 2010). Approximately half of startup small businesses survive up to 5 years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Less than one-half of new businesses survive for approximately 5 years. The SBA data reveals on the average across all industries, that approximately 75% of new businesses failed within the first 5 years (SBA, 2011).

No comprehensive U.S. government data collection exists in 2011 on non-bankruptcy small business closures (SBA, 2011). Small firms are more prone to bankruptcy, because limited access to the credit markets large firms (Salman et al., 2011). Considering all factors contributory to business termination, small business failure rate is over 80% the first 6 years (Arasti et al., 2012). Small businesses have a low survival rate and only about, half of all new small businesses survive 5 years with about one-third surviving up to 10 or more years (Hibbler-Britt & Sussan, 2015).

Small Business and Sustainable Development

A fundamental concept in management science is the sustainable development (SD), which scholars defined in many ways (Taranenco, 2013). The SD is a concept managers use to meet needs of the present without compromising the potentiality of future generations to meet the needs (Taranenco, 2013; Webb, Hodge, & Thompson 2012). The concept of SD means all forms and methods of socio-economic development that focuses primarily on ensuring a balance between social, economic, ecological, and natural capital items. Managers of a sustainable business create profit (Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011). Societies can achieve sustainable economic development through the support and development of small and medium enterprises (Taranenco, 2013). The results from the analysis of national and international data reflect that small and medium enterprises are an important part of the economy and significant in socio-economic developing countries.

Managers used the concept of sustainable development to find solution to ecological crisis caused by intense industrial exploitation of resources (Bryzhan & Hryhoryeva, 2014). Managers used sustainable development to address the continued degradation of the environment and seek primarily environmental quality preservation. The expansion of SD concept includes the quality of life in its complexity, economically, and socially. The topic of sustainable development remains a concern for justice and equity between *countries* and *generations*.

According to Tshabalala and Rankhumise (2011), sustainability is the balancing of environmental, social, and economic outcomes to endure which managers are changing as a way to innovation. Often, the term *sustainability* means the ability of the company leaders to react to changes in the external and internal environment (Taranenco, 2013). When considering sustainability, business managers consider the economic bottom line and the effects of the business upon society and the wider environment (Webb et al., 2012).

From the perspective of Webb et al. (2012) scholars base sustainability on the idea that human activities depend on the environment and resources. Health, social security and economic stability of society are essential in defining quality of life. Small business managers may realize substantial benefits through the incorporation of sustainability practices as part of the general business strategy. The SD is a concept of socio-economic development of all countries which the members of the United Nations (UN) recommend (Taranenco, 2013). One important part of SD is economic growth which small businesses is the principal driving force for the sustainable economic development (Chidi & Shadare, 2011). Managers use SD programs for job creation, stimulation of entrepreneurial skills, and private ownership of businesses.

Sustainable economic development is the insurance to businesses spanning from rational use of resources and effective management of the firm (Taranenco, 2013). To conform to SD, managers ensure sustainable financial situations because of improving asset structure, social development, and dynamic teams in external environments. Societies can achieve sustainable economic development through the support and development of small and medium enterprises (Taranenco, 2013).

Small business managers contribute to create a competitive environment and new markets, support innovation activity, attenuate social inequalities, form the middle class, and a new attitude toward work and property. Business owners are not aware that the lack of knowledge may entail an underutilize business opportunity, and miss an opportunity for the company's growth and increased productivity, and competitiveness (Doris & Kusce, 2013). Business owners benefit from the ability to recognize good business opportunities regarding the individuals in the process of becoming successful entrepreneurs (Doris & Kusce, 2013).

The expansion of small enterprises is an important factor in ensuring sustainable development of the economy (Taranenco, 2013). The European Union members (EU) proposed a program for improving legislation, environmental management tools, financial support, local expertise, and communication and information using the concept of sustainable development for small businesses. This EU member’s proposal is a thorough analysis to help small businesses and medium enterprises to apply the best European environmental legislation (Taranenco, 2013).

Literature Gaps

Technology, social media, leadership, education, and training are some predominant factors affecting the success of small businesses (Abdul Jumat, Jasmani Binti, & Nek Kamal, 2013; Geho & Dangelo, 2012). Another factor that affects the success of small businesses is age (Huang, Nandialath, Alsayaghi, & Karadenzi, 2013). Additional factors are gender, years in operation, the use of a social media strategy, and financing (Hibbler-Britt & Sussan, 2015). However, sustainability strategies that managers in competitive environments need for success are minimal. Few studies exist that answers the question on strategies required by small auto dealership business owners for success within competitive environments beyond 5 years.

Themes Emerging from Literature Review

Potential themes and insights from the research problem resulted from the assessments of the literature regarding small businesses sustainability strategies. Each theme related to the phenomenon of what some small businesses owners do to succeed, while many owners fail. The resultant potential themes included racial and cultural business owner profiles and differences, as well as a lack of effective marketing. Additional themes included lack of business knowledge and training. Other potential themes included inability to obtain financing and capital, motivation to embark upon business ventures, sustainability options, and the lack of needed technology. Potential themes or perceptions for further exploration may include the role of mentoring, networking knowledge, and business owner spirituality.

Summary

Literature review included the application of sustainability strategies by small business owners as understood through prior studies. The review of professional and academic literature included scholarly articles and government documents. The introduction began with identification of various reasons why small business managers fail. Following the introduction is the identification of factors for success used by small auto dealership managers for survival beyond 5 years. Based on the research and review of literature, external success factors, such as access to capital, education, and racial disparities are contributory to small auto dealership owners' survival rates beyond 5 years. Further inquiry may lead to assessing issues, such as environment and industry to determine the effects of competition on small business ownerships in auto dealership industries.

Transition

Section 1 was an introduction to the essence of the doctoral study. The content of Section 1 includes an overview of the study, and a discussion on the background of the study. In addition, Section 2 includes the problem statement, and the purpose statement. Additional content of Section 2 includes the nature of the study, the research questions, definition of terms, and the conceptual framework. The purpose of the qualitative case study was to explore management skills and practices required by small-business practitioners to succeed in a competitive environment. A collection of data from three small auto dealership business owners responded to open-ended, semistructured interview questions.

Management strategies that practitioners require to optimize small businesses and survive in a competitive environment resulted from a research problem statement, purpose statement, questions, and conceptual framework. Business management in a competitive and changing environment with scare resources formed the basis of the conceptual framework. The literature review contained information regarding skills that influence management decisions and choices of small-business practitioners. The findings of the study may not generalize results given the small geographic location and the limit of three small business owner participants operating in a unique contextual competitive environment. Section 2 includes a detailed description of the research method and design, population and sampling, data collection instruments, and techniques used in the study. The chapter includes a detailed dialogue of data collection and organization techniques, data analysis techniques, reliability, and validity.

Section 3 includes a review of the purpose statement and research question. Section 3 includes the results of the study, a detailed commentary of the empirical evidence, and the conceptual framework related to the research question. In Section 3, were included the findings and recommendations from the review and analysis of the interviews. Section 3 includes the discussion regarding implications for social change, research recommendations, and research reflections.

Section 2: The Project

Part of the effect of globalization in the world is intense and aggressive competition among firms (Tuanmat & Smith, 2011). Managers use competition as a means for developing skills and practices required for success in business (Thomas, Gudmundson, Turner, & Suhr, 2014). Competitive advantage results from the use of a small initial investment to gain high returns in relation to investment (Md. Maruf, 2011). Small firm owners are more prone to failure than large firm managers are because of limited access to credit markets (Salman et al., 2011). Salman et al. (2011) suggested that there have been few studies on failure of small firm. Small businesses are important to the United States economy, accounting for approximately 99.7% of the 23 million U.S. businesses in 2010 (Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies small auto dealership business owners use to sustain small business beyond 5 years. The population for this study was a selection of three small auto dealership business owners with locations in NYC based on each business existing for a minimum of 5 years. The research findings may contribute to social change by increasing success of existing and aspiring small business owners and provide insights into strategies that contribute to sustainable development.

Role of the Researcher

According to Whiteley (2012), a researcher is the primary person to obtain data from participants. Researchers generate data through personal interviews or focus groups, making observations and recording notes, possibly participating in an event and reflecting on this participation, or taking photographs. Qualitative research data include text data, narratives, and stories told by people regarding their experiences recorded digitally, on tape, on film, or in photographs, or in notes taken by the inquirer (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2010). Onwuegbuzie et al. (2010) suggested examining data descriptively to notice similarities and differences in the data, categories, patterns, and themes, and describe and interpret data to provide a rich description of the experience as lived. Through facilitative interaction, the creation of the context for participants emerges to share rich data regarding participants' experiences and life (Chenail, 2011).

A researcher facilitates the flow of communication, identifies cues, and sets participants at ease. Derrett and Colhoun (2011) posited that researchers carry a larger part of responsibility regarding the outcome of the data collection process and have diverse roles for varied reasons. My role in this research effort was creating the research interview guide contacting the potential participants, collecting data through face-to-face or telephone interviews, and analyzing the results through computer software. Other roles were identifying themes from the patterns in the data collection and presentation of the research results in Section 3. My work experience as an auto sales professional for 4 years (2008 to 2012) and an auto sales manager for 3 years (2012 to 2015) provided exposure to various auto business management operations.

The Belmont Report is a list produced in 1979 by a U.S. government commission that includes guidelines for involving vulnerable research participants including minority populations (Rogers & Lange, 2013). The Belmont Report includes protections against the misuse in research of individuals or groups without consent, or any likelihood of benefit. The Belmont Report also includes protection of people with mental challenges and the vulnerability from unjust research.

In the study, I purposefully selected participants to eliminate vulnerable humans in line with the Belmont guideline of the groups identified. Purposeful sampling is useful to researchers for seeking information-rich cases for in-depth studies (Elliott, Combs, & Boyce, 2011). Participants received assurance that their identity was strictly confidential and that only the person in charge of research would listen to interview audiotapes and read verbatim transcriptions (Elliott et al., 2011).

Biases are the designs of the human mind and are a tool to make sense of the information to reach a decision (Shalini & Arora, 2012). Bias management is a major challenge for qualitative researchers who employ interviews as a data collection method (Chenail, 2011). The normal process for researchers to test the quality of their interview protocol and for identifying potential researcher biases is the pilot study (Chenail, 2011).

According Chenail (2011), pilot studies are for testing proposed research methods to determine if a planned procedure is as envisioned by the researcher. Chenail suggested the use of an interviewing-the-investigator technique to mitigate biases in qualitative researches. For the study, a pilot study was not necessary because to test the interview questions I used an interviewing-the-investigator technique to mitigate biases by acting as the interviewee and enlisting a colleague to conduct the interview. The oversight function was to identify biases that took place concurrently as the interview progressed. In contrast, oversight function happened at a separate time after interviews by reviewing recording of the interviews.

The reason for an interview protocol is the facilitation of interactions that create the context to encourage participants to share rich data regarding their experiences (Whiteley, 2012; Xu & Storr, 2012). According to Whiteley (2012), a researcher facilitates the flow of communication, identifies cues, and sets participants at ease. I performed as a discovery-oriented research instrument and constructed study-specific sets of open-ended questions. Participants contributed their perspectives with little or no limitations through open-ended questions.

Participants

Participants in this study were small auto dealership owners. According to Geneste and Weber (2011), most small business owners work full-time in their businesses and make the business decisions. Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) recommended at least three interviewees for case studies based on the principle of data saturation. Three owners from three small auto dealership businesses in NYC participated in interviews to discuss their business strategies. Further criteria for selecting participants in this study included an ownership of a small auto dealership business in NYC, for at least 5 years. For qualitative case studies, participants having experience of the phenomenon of interest is necessary (Yin, 2011). A purposeful participant selection for this study was based on the participants demonstrating the ability to survive in business as a means of generating business profits in a competitive environment. I purposefully selected participants who were owners of small auto dealerships to ensure the participants had adequate experience regarding the phenomenon under study. Faseleh-Jahromi, Moattari, and Peyrovi (2014) used purposeful sampling in a qualitative study to select 10 nurses with different job levels in the qualitative grounded theory approach study to explore Iranian nurses' perception of social responsibility. Nag and Gioia (2012) used purposeful sampling and the qualitative method to gain insight about the competitive, strategic, and technical problems in the evolving metal casting industry. Elliott et al. (2011) used purposeful sampling technique to select 12 participants from four of nine elementary schools that participated in the recess pack program in a qualitative study to explore participants' views on how the recess packs affected physical activity levels during recess.

Contacting local businesses by phone was a means to gain access to participants for this study. Searching through the NYC local phone books was also useful for the identification of names and contacts of participants. The initial contact took place by telephone, when I requested an interview with the owners. The next step was the introduction of the proposed research and purpose, provisions of the criteria to participate, and explanation of the confidentiality and informed consent process. Following the introduction was the exchange of e-mail addresses so I could e-mail a consent form if the owners met the established criteria and agreed to participate voluntarily. All participants who agreed to complete the interview signed a consent form stating their participation in the study was voluntary. Social networking is a part of globalizing the world economy, with a number of people using social network sites such as Facebook (Mansumitrchai & Chiu, 2012). According to Amerson (2011) and Back

(2013), researchers achieve success using social networks such as Facebook to locate participants. Obtaining participants by way of Facebook and LinkedIn contacts was another reliable alternative way I made contact with participants or company gatekeepers. The gatekeeper is a manager in an enterprise who guards and restricts access to participants (Scourfield, 2012). Convincing the gatekeeper or the office managers in the small auto dealerships facilitated access to participant for this study (Scourfield, 2012).

Each participant had the opportunity to review the informed consent letter and ask questions about interview process prior to signing. Participants asked questions regarding the study research prior to responding by e-mail. E-mail based communication in a globalizing world has transformed into an all-encompassing form of interaction (Al-Alwani, 2015). Lenters, Cole, and Godoy-Ruiz (2014) used e-mail to recruit participants with a balanced mix of gender, region of origin, year of participation, and level of training in their exploration of networking among new global health researchers. E-mail was the appropriate method of communication when participants needed clarification at any time. E-mail was only useful to schedule the interviews, but not for interviewing participants in this study. The next step involved obtaining consent from participants to establish a time and place for an interview. I requested permission from the participants to record the interview for accuracy and understanding. With permission, recording and notation of interviews during the interview process followed, to ensure the capturing of details and observations. Interviews were in person and by phone, while recording at the same time to ensure retention of information for recall and analysis. Small samples were appropriate and acceptable for case studies (Geist & Hitchcock 2014; Molenberghs et al., 2014; Yin, 2011).

Participants in this study took part in an interview process to identify the successful strategies for survival in a competitive business environment. Varga-Dobai (2012) posited the relationship between researchers and participants is in opposition to self and others, with self as the researcher while others represent the research participants. Individuals keep in touch with friends and make new friends based on shared affinities through applications of mobile communications (Chiou & Huang, 2013). A researcher's engagement with participants on social networking sites can yield important benefits for the researcher in data collection, participants' recruitment, and gaining and maintaining participants' trust (Côté, 2013). I established a working relationship with each participant through consistent phone communication and e-mailing once participants agreed to participate in the study.

According to Banfield et al. (2013), complex issues regarding data ownership and confidentiality often hampered information sharing. Assigning letters and numbers to participants' interview data collection facilitated confidentiality during coding and analysis for this study. Each participant had the choice to withdraw from completing the interview at any time without penalty. Participants experience fundamental ethical research hazards when they participate in a study without consent and proper understanding of the purpose (Bowker, 2011). The process of the study had no foreseeable risks or harm to human participants. The consent form included a statement that data from the study would remain in a home safe for 5 years to protect participants' rights. The computer hard drive is the central storage unit for information pertaining to the data, which individuals may use to store over 1,000 gigabytes of data (D'Onofrio & An, 2010). I saved data collected for this study on a computer hard drive with password protection, in a home office drawer for safekeeping. For this study, shredding of all hard copies and deletion of all electronic data will be the means for disposing of all data after the recommended 5-year period of storage. No names of the participants appeared on any forms, only letters and numbers used appeared to minimize the risks of exposure and protect professional reputations.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

Qualitative research includes the multifaceted complexity characterizing human experience and the sociocultural context in which humans act (Goussinsky, Reshef, Yanay-Ventura, & Yassour-Borochowitz, 2011). According to Farquhar, Ewing, and Booth (2011) and Snyder (2011), qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people construct to justify their experiences in the world. Qualitative research is an inquiry in a natural setting, an exploratory study of experience-as-lived and everyday life in the world (Wahyuni, 2012). The goal of using a qualitative method was to generate deep details of the phenomenon of interest, the lived experience of people in natural settings. For the study, I used the qualitative research method to understand what strategies small auto dealership owners use to stay in business within competitive environments (Coole, Radford, Grant, & Terry, 2013; MacGregor & Wathen, 2014; Townsend & Cox, 2013). The qualitative method suits the needs for studies that involve interpreting the actions and interactions of participants (Coenen, Stamm, Stucki, & Cieza, 2012). Qualitative research data are normally text data, narratives, and stories in which individuals include experiences digitally, in photographs, on tape, or with written notes. Unlike quantitative methods, qualitative methods include participants' responses in their words and express personal labels.

In a qualitative study, the inquirer is the instrument of research. A major philosophical difference between qualitative research and quantitative research is the contribution of researchers to research outcomes (Bansal & Corley, 2011). A quantitative method is the appropriate research method for studies with theories or hypotheses that explain variables (Hunt, 2014). A qualitative study is the useful research method for synthesizing human experiences resulting in an inductive analysis. Deductive analysis occurs during a quantitative study, generating a numeral summary that allows the researcher to reject or accept the null hypothesis (Lesselroth, Yang, McConnachie, Brenk, & Winterbottom, 2011).

Unlike quantitative methods, the qualitative method includes responses of participants in their words to express their personal categorizations and perceived associations (Coenen et al., 2012). The mixed method is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Mixed method is useful to researchers for integrating quantitative numerical data with the qualitative meaning and understanding of participants' experiences (Keele, 2011). Petticrew, Refuess, Noyes, Higgins, and Mayhew (2013) posited that mixed method is for synthesizing approaches, with the integration of quantitative and qualitative data in a single study. Mixed method did not meet the needs for this study because of the desire to fill the gap where mixed methods tend to include only certainty with little or no allowance for competing interpretations to coexist (Harrison & Reilly, 2011).

The qualitative case study approach suited the needs of this study more than a quantitative or mixed method approach to understand the survival strategies that small auto dealership owners use to stay in business beyond 5 years. A mixed method includes quantitative data with the qualitative data for the validation of the explanation of the quantitative data (Bansal & Corley, 2011). In addition, the mixed method approach was not the suitable research method for this study because of time constraints and the in-depth data collection process involved.

This study involved rich insights into the strategies business owners used to survive competition. The justification for qualitative method was the appropriateness for collecting descriptive data from participants in words rather than numbers (Barrat, Choi, & Li, 2011). Using the qualitative research method, I worked on assumptions, unlike the quantitative method, that includes theories.

Research Design

Research designs are models that link the components of research in the exploration of research questions to draw conclusions in a study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Wright & Craig, 2011). All elements of research designs were from the purpose of the study to understanding what practitioners in small business do within competitive environments. The preferred research design was a case study approach. A case study design is an empirical inquiry involving the exploration of a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context. The case study design includes a preference when studies involve unique and revelatory cases involving the study of an individual, event, or program (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

Case study is particularly useful when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident according to Jones and Rowley (2011). Qualitative exploratory case study involves exploration of the greater meaning of a research issue (Mayer, & Boness, 2011). Jones and Rowley (2011) used case study method to explore uses and outputs of personal contact networks. Hashim, Hashim, and Esa (2011) used qualitative case studies to study, observe, and analyze particular cases in a perfect setting. Ritvala and Salmi (2011); Houghton, Casey, Shaw, and Murphy (2013) used multiple-case-study design to understand contemporary phenomenon in their qualitative studies. I chose multiple-case-study design to facilitate the understanding of real-life contemporary phenomenon in context. The justification for using case study design was that case study designs consist of contextually rich data use to study a phenomenon on real-life context and provide in-depth understanding of the nature and complexity of the phenomenon (Alex, Näslund, & Jasmand, 2012).

Other design options for a qualitative method are (a) phenomenology, (b) ethnography, (c) narrative, and (d) grounded theory (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). From the perspective of Hunt (2014), researchers study the meaning of lived experiences of a group of people around a specific phenomenon using the phenomenological research design. However, the phenomenological design approach was not a suitable research design for this study, because the design was better suited for exploring lived experiences. Ethnography is the study of shared behaviors, beliefs, and language of an intact cultural group in the field in a prolonged time (Boden, Muller, & Nett, 2011). An important feature of the ethnographic study is the researcher's ability to access the environment of the participants, conceptualize participant's experiences and make sense of participants experiences (Yanow, 2012). Ethnographic was not as suitable as the case study design for this research because ethnography involves researchers immersing in the daily activities of participants, by delving into the daily lives, behaviors, and activity of a community or culture (Down, 2012; Pritchard, 2011).

From the perspective of Dickey (2011), researchers use a narrative design to identify the chronological narration of the life stories and experiences by individuals. Narrative inquiry involves composition, ordering of life experiences, and developing a core focus on the study as the experience lives (McMullen & Braithwaite, 2013). Narrative design was not a suitable research design for this study, because the design works best when the subject is an individual or a small group (Hunt, 2014). Narrative design was not an appropriate research design because this study did not involve gathering the life stories and experiences of individuals narrated chronologically (Dickey, 2011).

The grounded theory design involves generation of new theories beyond the descriptions of individual lived experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Grounded theory design is only appropriate when a researcher gathers data by interview or observation and generates or discovers a theory based upon or grounded in the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Grounded theory did not apply to this study, because the intent is not to discover new theories (Mutshewa, 2010). Grounded theory design was not the appropriate design for this study because the design included systematic procedures from which a researcher develops theory inductively from the corpus of data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). When sample sizes are smaller, detailed analysis of participant responses are without difficulty (Benard, 2012).

Data saturation is the point at which no new information or themes are observable in data collection (Johnson, Hobson, Garcia, & Matthews, 2011). Estimating adequate sample size relates to the concept of saturation, the point when participants do not provide additional value, and data is at the point of diminishing returns. Scholars use case studies to observe, study, and analyze particular cases in a perfect setting (Hashim et al., 2011). For qualitative research, 15 participants is the smallest acceptable sample size, (Mason, 2010).

Participant numbers ranging from five to 30 is appropriate to find a point of data redundancy, where the data reflects no new information (Dworkin, 2012). Case studies should contain 15 to 30 interviews (Marshall et al., 2013). Single case, studies may contain up to 15 interviews (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013; Nitecki & Abels, 2013). From Curry (2009), researchers have concluded that approximately 20 participants is the sample size at which saturation occurs. Marshall et al. (2013) suggested that three participants were adequate for this case study based on the principle of data saturation. Paying attention to participant responses and stopping collection of data when the responses became repetitive was an appropriate action to ensure saturation for this study.

Population and Sampling

My intent was to explore the management skills small business practitioners require for survival in a competitive environment using the case study of small auto dealers in NYC. The selection of data-rich cases for a thorough analysis is the logic and power of purposeful sampling (Suri, 2011). Purposive sampling is the process to select participants based on the knowledge or expertise which participants possess (Bagheri, Yaghmaei, Ashktorab, & Zayari, 2012; Mori & Kaale, 2012; Poulis, Poulis, & Plakoyiannaki, 2013). The knowledge or expertise could help researchers better understand research problems, questions, as well as specific issues related to the study.

I used purposive sampling to select three small auto dealership business practitioners with the necessary expertise and experience to contribute in this study. Patton (as cited in Elliott et al., 2011) concluded that purposeful sampling involves the search for information rich cases, for an in-depth study. Purposeful sampling is the technique to obtain a non-representative subset of a larger population to serve a specific purpose (Pirlott1, Kisbu-Sakarya, DeFrancesco, Elliot, & MacKinnon, 2012). Past research efforts involved the use of purposive sampling method for selection of participants. Other factors exists that affect sample size in qualitative studies; researchers use saturation as a guiding principle during their data collection (Mason, 2010).

Estimating adequate sample size relates to the concept of saturation, the point when analysts gain no new data and no new meanings from existing data emerging (Wilson, Thomas, Burns, Hewitt, & Osei-Waree, 2012). Shabankareh and Meigounpoory (2013) posited that a sample size is justifiable with the concept of saturation. The common sample sizes for qualitative studies are 20 and 30. Mason (2010) recommended the use of the concept of saturation to determine qualitative sample size because analyzing a large sample is time consuming and impractical. In the study, I followed the concept of saturation and interviewed three participants with the expectation that data saturation occurs by the third interview.

The criteria for selecting participants included current ownership of a small-sized auto dealership company in the city of NYC. The participants owned or operated a dealership successfully for at least 5 years. Participants must have a willingness to participate in the face-to-face interview process for approximately 60 minutes (Samujh & El-Kafafi, 2010). Participants who did not meet the criteria were not eligible to participate in the study. The interview setting took place in a comfortable and nonthreatening environment that enabled participants to respond with open and honest personal experiences. The face-to-face interviews are at the participants' convenience (Javalgi, Granot, & Alejandro, 2011). No interviews took place at public places such as public libraries or other comfortable locations agreeable to the participant. Participants selected a setting that minimized interruptions for interviews lasting for a period of 60 minutes to avoid redundancy.

Ethical Research

Informed consent is a significant concept of moral and lawful requirements that protect participants partaking in a study (Jeong et al., 2012; Lambert & Glacken, 2011). Informed consent is important to ensure that the person giving consent has sufficient information and the capacity to understand to make decisions without duress (Lambert &

Glacken, 2011). Confidence, information, and voluntariness are three elements to ensure the person giving consent has the capacity to understand, and have sufficient information of the valid informed consent.

A well-written consent form does not guarantee participants' understanding, particularly in populations with underdeveloped local languages and high levels of illiteracy (Gazzinelli et al., 2010). Tindana, Bull, Amenga-Etego, de Vries, and Aborigo (2012) used verbal explanation regarding research to enhance participants understanding of the process. To ensure understanding of the research process by the participants in the study, verbal explanations regarding research was appropriate to facilitate the participant's understanding. The IRB is an institutional committee that exists to review a proposed research in a given institution. The IRB faculty review research proposals to ensure the protection of participant's rights and adherence to the regulations set forth by Walden University.

The Walden University IRB staff's role is to ensure that all doctoral proposals submitted for approval meet the institutional regulations, applicable, and professional conduct appropriate for the study. The Final doctoral manuscript included the Walden IRB approval number 09-30-15-0278037. Written permission from all participants, in accordance with Walden's IRB protocols ensured participants willingness prior to inclusion of the interview data in this study.

Request through company contact with an invitation through e-mail facilitated the participation of the small auto dealership (see Appendix B). Lambert and Glacken (2011) posited that participants had the right to refuse, withdraw at any time without penalty.

The invitation to participate included an explanation of the process involved for withdrawing from the study. To exit the study, the participant only needed to send an e-mail or make the phone call for withdrawal to inform me. Each participant had the option to withdraw from the study at any time they were uncomfortable and lost the interest to participate but no participant in this study withdrew from at any point.

A common practice by scholars is to offer incentives for participation in a study (Zeugwu, Laird, Mullins, Saluja, & Winston, 2011). Participants received no incentives to take part in the study. Upon publication of the study, participants will receive an electronic copy of the completed study on request. Secured access and coding of data ensured the privacy of the participants. Hanson, Balmer, and Giardino, (2011) recommended respect for the participants and research locations when collecting data. To establish trust with the participants, I kept the names of study participants confidential at all times during the study as required by IRB regulations. The assignment of numbers and initials to participants and data were the appropriate measures necessary to maintain the privacy of participants in this study.

The Walden university protocol ensures that all data is secure, kept for a period of 5 years, and only accessible to the researcher. Data savings are on a computer hard drive, with password protection secured in a home library for safekeeping and appropriate destruction is by shredding after 5 years. According to Alex (2012), the concept information privacy includes the protection of personal data. Walden University protocol is that researchers destroy data after the IRB critical time-period to protect participant's privacy. Institutional review boards (IRBs) serve an essential role in the protection of human participants in research and help ensure that research is conducted safely and ethically (Goldman et al., 2010). Cronin-Gilmore (2012) suggested storing all data in a safe cabinet before destroying the data. I stored all data in a locked home file cabinet and will destroy the data 5 years after the study is complete. Final publication of the study will not include participant names or the names of organizations.

Data Collection Instruments

Data collection instruments are tools used to collect data from human participants (Shea, Grinde, & Elmslie, 2011). In the qualitative research process, instrumentation is pivotal (Chenail, 2011). Hashim et al. (2011); Leedy and Ormrod (2013), Xu and Storr (2012) served as primary data collection instruments to collect data from participants. To identify any biases or assumptions at the beginning of the research, I was as the primary data collection instrument, served as the only interviewer, and collected information from participants. According to Yin (2011), qualitative researchers are the primary instrument. Nevertheless, from the perspective of Leedy and Ormrod (2013) research data collection should involve the reuse of an existing instrument or developing new instruments. Facilitating conversations during fieldwork and making sense of the research data is a function for researchers and the primary person in qualitative research (Chereni, 2014).

Broderick, Wright, and Kristiansen (2011); Hood, Hart, Belgrave, Tademy, and Jones (2012); Mizock, Harkins, and Morant (2011); Morrison-Sandberg, Kubik, and Johnson (2011) used semistructured interviews to standardize questions within an interview protocol consistency. Similarly, to generate responses relevant to research problems, I used semistructured interviews with open-ended questions within an interview protocol to standardize the questions. According to De Fina and Perrino (2011), interviews is a common cross-disciplinary research instrument which researchers in diverse fields use as valuable research methods alone or in combination with other techniques such as participant observation. Qualitative researchers use data from semi-structured or unstructured interviews (Kisely & Kendall, 2011). Semistructured interviews is significant for the emphasis on the meaning of questions, rather than the wordings, making an interview interactive and free from mining participants for facts (Mizock et al., 2011).

The semistructured interviews with participants encouraged the exchange of additional questions for better understanding of research questions, responses, increase trust and rapport during sensitive discussions. Mizock et al. (2011) conducted semistructured qualitative interviews with 40 Black and White-identified participants to assess the influence of race in deviations from the interview script. Morrison-Sandberg, Kubik, and Johnson (2011) conducted semistructured interviews with informants to gain insight into current obesity-related school nursing practice in elementary schools in Minnesota. Pettersson, Ekström, and Berg (2013) conducted semistructured interviews with 14 athletes from the Swedish national teams to explore the reasoning of elite combat-sport athletes regarding rapid weight loss and regaining of weight before competitions.

An interview guide, a digital voice recorder, and a journal were the primary data collection tools for the study. The digital voice recorder was a Samsung smart phone voice-recording device while a second I-phone six smart phone was available as a backup. The interview protocol included 10 open-ended questions and included questions in major areas of small enterprise management skills that contribute to the ongoing viability and survival of the auto dealerships (see Appendix A). The use of open-ended interview questions facilitated the exploration and order of the management skills contributing to the success of small businesses in competitive environments (Broderick, Wright, & Kristiansen, 2011). The interview protocol consisted of enquiries regarding product qualities and attributes that customers are seeking through the dealerships. Other constituent enquiries within the interview protocol were skills, experience, and personal attributes required by small business managers. Broderick et al. (2011) determined that additional constituents of an interview protocol are enquiries regarding the formal and informal mechanisms to maintain consumer trust (Broderick et al., 2011). As suggested by Roulston (2010), participants provided further details through follow up or probing questions for the study.

Each participant chose the time and location for the one-on-one interviews. Samujh and El-Kafafi (2010) interviewed study participants for approximately 60 minutes to collect data for a study. The interview process consisted of administering interview questions in interviews that lasts to 60 minutes for the study. In addition to audio recording of the interviews, I made observations of body language, nonverbal cues, and gestures by the participants and maintained handwritten notes. According to Black, Palombaro, and Dole (2013), researchers detail confirmability through an audit trail, triangulation, and reflexivity. For this study, I triangulated the data sources by comparing transcribed data with interview notes (Oleinik, 2011).

Ekekwe (2013), Panepinto, Torres, and Varni (2012), and Williams, Dixon, McCorkle, and Van Ness (2011) used the expert validation strategy to ensure the reliability of the instrument by presenting interview questions to experts for their views of the instrument. In addition to interviewing the interviewer validation, three professionals in the auto sales industry field-tested study instrument by reviewing and providing feedback on the clarity of each interview question. The data collection instrument for the participant interviews is in Appendix A.

The strategy for addressing validity and reliability in case studies require the use of different methods at distinctive stages of the research process (Yin, 2014). Construct validity confirmation in the study involves member checking. Yin suggested that pattern matching, explanation building, exploring rival explanations and logical models are appropriate to ensure internal validity in the data analysis phase for the study. Finally, demonstrating reliability in the data collection stage occurred following a strict case study research protocol. To enhance dependability in this study, participants had up to 24 hours to check and approve any aspects from the interpretation of the data participants gave during the interviews. The participants' approval was a way to determine whether the data analysis was in alignment with the participants' experiences (Carlson, 2010).

The reflexive journal note was a support of triangulating data for the coding and identification of themes from the data collection. A part of the interview sessions was a clear detailing of the process of recording participants' responses, and participants could withdraw from the study at any time by e-mail or phone call without repercussion. To ensure that study notes match participant responses, the last part of the interview process was a review of the hand written notes. Participants assisted with amending notes to reflect what they said during the interview sessions to ensure accuracy.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection process began with introductions to explain the purpose of the study, encourage participation, explanation of the withdrawal process through phone calls, and offer of an opportunity to ask questions. Appropriate data collection technique for the study included the semistructured face-to-face interviews. Morrison-Sandberg, Kubik, and Johnson (2012) gained insight into researching the problem using semistructured interviews. Mâsse, Naiman, and Naylor (2013) conducted semistructured interviews with school informants to collect data in a research study. Semistructured interviews based on an interview guide with open-ended questions regarding small business management practitioner's views of small business survival in competitive environments (see Appendix B) were appropriate. Participants freely exchanged relevant experiences through lead interview questions on varying aspects of a research topic (Bjerregaard, 2011). For the study, the interview setting, time and place was the choice of the participant. Each interview began with a review of the purpose and the reason of the study. The review included the consent form and details regarding participant's rights to withdraw. A research field note was appropriate to gather data including names, dates, questions, responses, and general observations for the study. Following the interview, participants asked questions and replied with personal reflections. Participants also provided supporting documentation, during the interview process. Each interview took up to 60 minutes.

The advantages of open-ended interview questions include (a) participant is at ease; (b) open-ended interview questions may allow an inquirer to identify participant's habits, attitudes, and beliefs; and (c) the questions may facilitate detailed answers regarding the questions asked (Kendall & Kendall, 2010). Additional advantage is that open-ended interview questions are opportunities for the researchers to ask extra questions. Other advantages are (a) open-ended interview questions are helpful to researchers because the questions are not scripted, and (b) open-ended interview questions enable participants to express thoughts freely.

The disadvantages of semistructured interviews include (a) interviews require more time and expensive, and (b) participants may have less interest to discuss sensitive topics (Kendall & Kendall, 2010). Pilot studies are studies which researchers usually position themselves as a test of their proposed research design (Yin, 2011). From the perspective of Turner, (2010), researchers use pilot studies to test and refine research questions. According to Pritchard and Whiting (2012), pilot studies are not necessary for qualitative approaches in which researchers have flexibility to learn on the job. For this study, a pilot study was not necessary as a test of the proposed research design or refined research questions.

Member checking is the most effective way of eliminating the possibility of misrepresentation (Carroll & Huxtable, 2014). Member checks is use to decrease the incidence of incorrect data and the incorrect interpretation of data with the goal of providing authentic and original findings (Harper & Cole, 2012). For the study, member checking included sharing the findings with the participants to allow participants to critically analyze the findings and comment appropriately.

Restating the summary of information and questioning the participant during the interviews enhanced determination of accuracy in this study. The participants agreed or disagreed with summaries as reflecting the views, feelings, and experiences, which enhanced the accuracy of the study's credibility (Harper & Cole, 2012). If the participant disagreed with the summary, they amended the summary appropriately. Houghton et al. (2013) used member checking to ensure the credibility, dependability, and transferability in a multiple case study to illustrate specific research strategies. Member checking was appropriate because it involved participants reading transcription of the interviews to ensure that data was credible and consisted of accurate records (Carlson, 2010; Carroll & Huxtable, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013).

Data Organization Technique

Reflective journals are written documents that students create while thinking of various concepts, events, or interactions over a period of time for the purposes of gaining insights and learning (Davies, Reitmaier, Smith, & Mangan-Danckwart, 2013). According to Hayman, Wilkes, and Jackson (2012), journals are valid methods of accessing rich qualitative data which researchers use as a method of data collection (Hayman et al., 2012). Reflective journals are use as critical interpretive tools for conducting analysis (Slotnick & Janesick, 2011). Reflective journaling was appropriate for the study to permit the potential exploration of further experiences from participants (Davies et al., 2013; Hayman et al., 2012; Slotnick & Janesick, 2011).

Hayman et al. (2012) posited that a journal note is in chronological order by date and time. The journal includes notes written during the interviews, as well as categories of the ascribed meanings to participants’ responses (Hayman et al., 2012). According to Shek and Wu (2013), who analyzed reflective journals of five outstanding students for many themes emerging from the reflection, reflective journals was appropriate to take notes during interviews in this study. For the study, I saved the data in a home safe for 5 years before the final destruction by shredding of the hard copies and erasing the electronic data.

Data Analysis

Triangulation is the use of more than one approach by researchers to the investigation of a research question to enhance confidence in the ensuing findings (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012). Triangulation is the process which occurs when researchers use multiple sources to draw conclusions (Cope, 2014). Four forms of triangulation include (a) data triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theoretical triangulation, and (d) methodological triangulation (Black et al., 2013). The appropriate data analysis process for the research design in the study was methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation involves using more than one type of method to study a phenomenon (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012; Marques et al., 2011). The multiple methods of data collection in methods triangulation are important in articulating the comprehensive view of a phenomenon (Cope, 2014). With methodological triangulation, researchers use multiple methods of data, including interviews, with an analysis of a company's internal and external documents (Cao, 2011).

Methods of data collection can include interviews, observation, notes and journaling recorded throughout the research process (Cope, 2014). The use of more than one method for gathering data in a study may occur at the level of research design or data collection (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012). A company's internal documents include annual reports, and policy documents (Cao, 2011). External documents include published news, announcements, and other relevant web sites. Bekhet and Zauszniewski (2012); Black et al. (2013); and Cao (2011) used the source triangulation as a strategy in their studies; therefore, triangulation was the appropriate strategy of sources to compare transcripts. The data through semistructured interviews validated data from the company documents, and notes from the face-to-face interviews in this study. To conform to Cao (2011) who applied methodological triangulation for confirmation of the reliability and validity in the study to determine a success predictor, methodological triangulation was appropriate.

Triangulation of data involved analysis of all primary data from the semistructured interview questions, secondary data collections from business brochures, pamphlets, and websites. The initial phase of an analysis involved the independent reading of transcripts and identification of specific codes. After the identification of specific codes was the development of a comprehensive code list through re-reading along with following the initial interviews and transcriptions. Next was the refinement of codes, collapsing, or elimination of codes when appropriate. Charach, Yeung, Volpe, Goodale, and dosReis (2014), generated and refined codes continuously until no new unique codes in the study are identifiable. I continued the process of generating and refining codes until no new unique codes were identified in consistency with the epistemology of qualitative research methods. Miquelutti, Cecatti, and Makuch (2013), recorded and transcribed verbatim of single semistructured interviews with each participant before performing thematic analyses on categories of relevant themes. Study analysis is in alignment with the steps recommended by Yin (2011) which includes; (a) transcribing interviews and records; and (b) reviewing the transcribed notes to obtain the general meaning of the data. Additional steps are (a) coding of the data, by arranging data into manageable themes; and (b) explaining the meaning of the case study.

NVivo software, a qualitative program for data analysis, expedites thematic coding and includes the categorization of the collected data during the analysis stage (Bergin, 2011). NVivo trademark software is for researchers to collect, organize, and analyze diverse data types (Castleberry, 2014; Zapata-sepúlveda, López-sánchez, & Sánchez-gómez, 2012). NVivo trademark software is user-friendly unlike Atlas.ti trademark software with a complex analysis process (Scales, 2013). NVivo software was appropriate for the study to assist in the coding, referencing, counting, sorting, and displaying of the data to gather from the participants (Bergin, 2011; Gläser & Laudel, 2013; Hanson et al., 2011).

The searching and identification for themes within data collection is through NVivo software programs. With a developed coding manual, analysts may compile and organize all transcripts using QSR International’s NVivo 9 qualitative data analysis software (Hanson et al., 2011). In accordance with Mâsse et al. (2013), coding of transcripts continued until saturation and I re-explored any discrepancies between codes until an attainment of 100% satisfaction. The iterative process of organizing codes into categories was reflexive, using constant comparison between transcripts to identify common and recurrent themes. As common themes developed from interpretation of interviews, increased understanding of business management skills for reducing small-business failures to the benefit of small business owners resulted.

Emergent themes will come from the literature and conceptual words by reflexivity, through critical and repeated examination of thematic expressions and emergent coded themes (Whiteley, 2012). Themes are the confirmations of observable patterns identifiable through the analysis of transcribed interview data elements (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). According to Yin (2014), a researcher uses coding for the discovery of themes contained within transcripts and includes data to reach saturation to ensure reliability, validity, and creditability. NVivo trademark software program is essential for simplifying the process of identifying themes and pattern recognition as part of a repetitive data analysis process. The step for using the software includes placing data in different categories, matching categories with sources of evidence, and creating flowcharts (Yin, 2014). Additional steps included tabulating the frequency of certain words or thoughts, examining relationships, and placing data in other relevant classifications.

The conceptual framework is the connection between the literature, method, and the results of the study (Borrego, Foster, & Froyd, 2014). The core of the RBV perspective is how a firm's internal resources affect that advantage (Armstrong, 2013). Studies grounded in the RBV (such as this one) may guide managers' investments in strategic resources (Issa Mahmoud, Othman, & Mohd Noor, 2014). The data analysis technique was the exploration of the strategies owners use to sustain small businesses in a competitive environment. Richards and Morse (2013) used verbatim quotes from the participants to support the analysis of the research data. I located the research within the current field of study using verbatim quotes from the participants to support the analysis of the data where necessary. Finally, through highlights of any current gaps and using the verbatim quotes, I presented an argument for future research.

Reliability and Validity

A major challenge is the achievement of the highest possible quality when conducting and reporting research (Cope, 2014). Reliability and validity may affect the practical relevance of research through provisions of measured assurances (Street & Ward, 2012). Street and Ward (2012) posited that reliability and validity is assurance that actions derivable from study conclusions do not include bias.

Measured assurance that conclusions are not hearsay, but valid science is essential to reliability and validity of study findings (Street & Ward, 2012). For every research study, readers raise questions about validity, reliability, and generalizability (Loh, 2013). Trustworthiness of research is an important methodological issue because peers in the same field need to perceive the research as trustworthy for people outside the field to trust the qualitative research findings (Loh, 2013). The trustworthiness of qualitative finding are credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability (Lincoln & Guba Black et al., 2013). Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are the common criteria use to assess the rigor of qualitative research (Cope, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013).

Reliability (Procedural)

In qualitative research, procedural reliability has a relationship with consistency, typically meaning that another person should examine the work and come to similar conclusions (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011). Careful documenting and reporting allows the reader to assess how the inquirer collected, produced, and interpreted the data; however, threats exist to reliability at every stage of the qualitative research process. The threats to procedural reliability during data collection include inaccurate and unsystematic interview questions, as well as inaccurate transcriptions (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011).

Failure to tape-record or take notes may increase random errors (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011). Lacking a comprehensive research plan, a coherent set of field notes on all evidence, or a documented case analysis is also problematic. Relations that develop between researchers and participants may also threaten procedural reliability during data collection. According to Ihantola and Kihn, researchers undermine the procedural reliability of qualitative research if they do not collect data over long enough periods, do not pose additional questions to interviewees, or not aware of informal evidence. Errors may also occur in data classification, attaching data to constructs, drawing linkages between constructs, reduction, interpretation, and development of links with theory (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011). Threats to procedural reliability during data analysis and interpretation also include research preconceptions.

Validity (Contextual)

In qualitative research, contextual validity includes the credibility of case study evidence and the conclusions drawn (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011). The primary focus in qualitative research is the capture of lived experiences by individuals and convincingly representing lived experiences in a text, to demonstrate that an inquirer fully understands the case (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011). Some of the threats to the contextual validity of qualitative studies include insufficient or biased knowledge of earlier studies and theories. Potter, Mills, Cawthorn, Wilson, and Blazeby, (2013), undertook data collection and analysis concurrently until saturation occurred. I reviewed the data collection and analysis concurrently and repeatedly until data saturation occurred and no new themes from the data arose.

Threats to contextual validity during the research design phase include contradictions in logic such as a mismatch between research questions and the study design (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011). Some of the threats to contextual validity during data collection that did not happen during this research include observer-caused effect, observer bias, researcher bias, data access limitations, and complexities and limitations of the human mind. Finally, the threats to contextual validity during the data analysis and interpretation include a lack of descriptive validity of the settings and events which effect size (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011).

Dependability

Dependability is the steadiness of data over comparable conditions (Polit & Beck, 2012). Dependability is comparable to the concept of reliability in quantitative research, where the qualitative researcher uses dependability to connote the stability of the research data (Houghton et al., 2013). A study is dependable when another inquirer concurs with the decision trails at each stage of a research process (Cope, 2014). Replication of the findings involves using appropriate process and descriptions with similar participants in similar conditions. Achieving dependability is when other researchers agree with the decision trails at each stage of a research process (Cope, 2014).

To address dependability, an audit trail of field notes, memo writing, and reflexive notes was appropriate (Carlson, 2010; Charach et al., 2014; Houghton et al., 2013). Audit trail is a clear documentation of all research decisions and activities that readers may use to examine narrative accounts and attest to dependability. Audit trail rigor through outlining the decisions made throughout a research process is a basis for the achievement of methodological and interpretative judgments of an inquirer (Houghton et al., 2013). In a qualitative research, an audit trail is appropriate for keeping careful documentation of all components of a study for external auditing (Carlson, 2010).

Keeping field observation notes, interview notes, journals, records, calendars, and various drafts of interpretation are all parts of creating audit trails (Carlson, 2010). Member checking is an opportunity for participants to approve particular aspects of the interpretation of the data. Member checking is a process of discovering whether the data analysis is congruent with the participants experiences (Carlson, 2010). For the study, I provided the transcripts from the participants’ narrative contributions during the interview sessions and asked participants to verify the accuracy.

According to Reilly (2013), member checking involves testing the data, analyzing categories, interpretations and conclusions with participants who supply the data as an important process to insure truthfulness and authenticity. Participants for the study individually edited, clarified, elaborated, and at times, deleted their own words from the narratives. As suggested by Carlson (2010) participants for the study had access to the interpretations of their narratives regularly to verify reasonableness in line with the concept of member checking.

Credibility

Credibility is the degree to which individuals perceive a message believable by the individual receiving the message (Gerdes & Øhrstrøm, 2011). The representation regarding the truth of the data or the participant views and the interpretation is credibility in qualitative studies (Polit & Beck, 2012). Credibility is in research to connote the value and believability of research findings (Houghton et al., 2013). A qualitative study is credible when individuals share the same experience immediately recognizing the descriptions of human experiences (Cope, 2014). A processes involved in this research to enhance credibility included conducting the research in a believable manner (Houghton et al., 2013). The trustworthy dimensions of credibility include the perceived morality of the source like truthfulness, fairness, and lack of bias (Gerdes & Øhrstrøm, 2011).

Prolonged engagement, triangulation, and member checking are valuable to enhance credibility of a study (Black, Palombaro, & Dole, 2013). Prolonged engagement involved spending adequate time of prior visits and 60 minutes of interview time in the settings with participants to understand the phenomenon. The appropriate way to ensure credibility in the study was through triangulation, and member checking. Using member checking, the participants read the transcription of interviews to ensure credibility and accuracy of the record (Houghton et al., 2013). I asked the appropriate questions while avoiding questions to obtain the yes or no answers. Enhanced credibility came by describing personal experiences and verifying research findings with the participants. To support credibility when reporting the study, I demonstrated engagement, methods of observation, and audit trails by documenting stages of the study starting from identification of research problem and reflecting the key research methodology decisions. In a study, participant transcript reviews establishes creditability (Cope, 2014; Yin, 2011).

Transferability

Transferability is a reference of the findings that can apply to other settings or groups (Houghton et al., 2013; Polit & Beck, 2012). Transferability represents the extent to which the results of a study are generalizable or transferrable to different contexts or settings. In qualitative research, generalizability is the process of whether the research results are transferable (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011). Research results are transferable when researchers can extend to a wider context, have theoretical generalizability, empirical applicability, practical usefulness, contextual generalizability and constructive generalizability. Severe threats to the transferability of a qualitative study may occur from selective plausibility. Ihantola and Kihn (2011) suggested that severe threats to transferability is when a researcher fails to reconnect empirical findings of the study to other cases, and fail to explain how new evidence enhances the understanding of the research questions.

The lack of comparison between empirical findings and previous theoretical contributions can lead to myopic conclusions. Ihantola and Kihn (2011) found claims regarding discovery of something already demonstrated in other studies. Most rigorous research methods possible are important in high quality research (Goffin, Raja, Claes, Szwejczewski, & Martinez, 2012). The conventional criteria that researchers use for evaluating methodological rigor are internal validity, external validity, construct validity, and reliability (Goffin et al., 2012). The four conventional criteria apply to both quantitative and qualitative research. Consequently, better criteria for evaluating qualitative research are confirmability, credibility, transferability, and dependability.

The criterion of transferability is relevant to the intent of a research to generalize the topic or phenomenon (Cope, 2014). Polit and Beck (2012) posited that transferability in referring to findings that can apply to different settings or groups. Houghton et al. (2013) confirmed that scholars use transferability to refer the transfer of the findings from the completed study to another similar context or situation while still preserving the meanings and inferences. Transferability is the extent to which people realize a specified effect of a particular treatment in a different research environment (Cambon, Minary, Ridde, & Alla, 2012).

Cope (2014) determined that for qualitative research, the criterion of transferability is important if the study results are to have meaning for individuals and readers not in the study. According to Black et al. (2013), researchers enhance transferability through thick descriptions that allow readers to evaluate relatedness to the individual contexts. Conforming to the concept of transferability involves providing enough information regarding participants and research environments to enable readers to assess the findings for adequacy and transferability (Cope, 2014). The evidence of transferability includes using a chain of evidence, accurately recording actions, and documenting the use of assumptions in the study.

To address transferability relative to future research, I described the original context of the research. Black et al. (2013), Cope (2014), and Houghton et al. (2013) addressed transferability by adequately describing original context of study. According to Houghton et al., future researchers may make informed decisions regarding the transferability of the findings to any specific settings. Provision of sufficient information on the participants and research setting is the avenue for readers to assess the findings fitness or transferability (Cope, 2014).

Confirmability

Confirmability is the ability to demonstrate that research data represents the participants' responses and not the researchers' biases viewpoints (Cope, 2014; Polit & Beck, 2012). According to Houghton et al. (2013), researchers closely link confirmability to dependability in referring to the neutrality and accuracy of the data. Cope (2014) suggested that confirmability lie in the report of conclusions, interpretations, and illustrations that the finding is directly from study data.

Confirmability in the study was through a detailed audit trail, triangulation, and reflexivity. Reflexivity is the practice of making personal biases and roles known (Black et al., 2013). My association with study topic is working as a sales professional with over 8 years of experience in the automobile sales industry. Confirmability during the report of the research findings was by providing quotes from participants to depict each emerging theme (Cope, 2014). As suggested by Houghton et al., (2013), the confirmability was through audit trail rigor achievable by outlining the decisions made throughout the research process. I used the audit trailing to establish rigors of a study by providing the details of data analysis and some of the decisions that led to the findings.

Saturation

Saturation is the point at which the research data becomes repetitive and reveals no new data during the coding process for any of the categories (Mason, 2010). For a majority of qualitative studies, saturation point is the determinant of sample sizes. Generally, 20 participants is the sample size at which saturation occurs (Curry, 2009). Habersack and Luschin (2013) posited that the point of data saturation is an assumption that data collection is a capture of everything important in a study. Saturation in data analysis occurs when additional individual analyses would not result in a new phenomenon structures, interpretive models, and reaction typologies. For the study, I reached saturation by collecting data until no new information was obtainable and data began to replicate.

In a study conducted by Essers, van Dulmen, van Weel, van der Vleuten, and Kramer (2011), the results achieved saturation after viewing 17 consultations in the study in which the researchers identified 19 context factors that could potentially explain the deviation from generic recommendations on communication skills. Carlsen and Glenton

(2011) used the point of saturation to describe the status of sample size in focus group studies in health journals. Mason (2010) ensured the point of data saturation through careful observation at the point of diminishing return. I ensured data saturation through observations to identify the point of diminishing return when more data did not lead to more information.

Transition and Summary

The purpose of the qualitative case study was to explore skills and practices small business practitioners in NYC require to succeed in a competitive environment. Section 2 included the method and research procedures useful to conduct qualitative case study research. The outline of Section 2 included the purpose statement, role of the researcher, participants, and the research method. Section 2 also includes the research design, population and sampling, ethical research, and data collection. Additionally, the outline of Section 2 included the data organization technique, data analysis, reliability and validity, and summary. In Section 3, I provide the results of the research study, recommendations for professional practice and social change, and suggestions for future research.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

In Section 3, I provide the findings of the study on the strategies that small auto dealership business owners use to sustain a business beyond 5 years. Section 3 also includes (a) an overview of the study, (b) presentation of findings, (c) application to professional practice, and (d) implication for social change. Additionally, Section 3 includes recommendation for actions, recommendations for further study, reflections, and summary and study conclusion.

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies small auto dealership business owners use to sustain a business beyond 5 years. The problem was the lack of strategies to sustain a business beyond 5 years by some small auto dealership business owners. The study consist of one central research question: What strategies do small auto dealership owners in NYC use to sustain business within competitive environments beyond 5 years? The participants for this study consisted of three small auto dealership owners in NYC with at most two owners that were in business for at least 5 years. This section includes a review of findings from data collected for this multiple case study. The results of the research connect to both the research question and the conceptual framework of this study.

The conceptual framework was the RBV theory. I conducted semistructured interviews with small business owners who were in business for more than 5 years in NYC to have them answer the overarching research question for this study. The interviews took place in an environment convenient to participants who provided detailed information on their experiences after signing a consent form. Participants responded to 10 open-ended interview questions. After transcribing the interviews, I used NVivo 9 trademark qualitative analysis software to organize the data for patterns and themes.

Overview of Study

Age and education were not part of the criteria for selection of participants in this study; however, participants revealed their training background that contributed to their success. The participants were in business ranging from 5 to 29 years, which satisfied criteria of the study of small auto dealership owners who owned or operated a dealership successfully for at least 5 years. The participants had high school diplomas and professional training certificates from various institutions.

Data collection occurred through face-to-face semistructured interviews with study participants who contributed to the research findings. The inductive content analysis involved reading through data repeatedly for themes that emerged from all data relevant to the overarching research question. I tested the interview instrument for question clarity through the process of interviewing-the-interviewer, by reading out the questions to two colleagues. Thereafter the two colleagues read out the same questions. The reviewers acknowledged that they understood each question and recommended no changes. The prospective participants of the study received an invitation letter to participate through gatekeepers who signed community partnership letters. The participants who agreed to participate in the study subsequently received an informed consent form, presented in person, and completed the form by indicating the consent to participate.

The participants each selected their business locations for the face-to-face interview. After completing the interviews, I transcribed the digital recording of each interview into an MS Word document. The study did not involve collecting any personal identification information. I handed participants the transcribed interviews for their review. After receiving responses from the participants, I made all requested corrections to the data and uploaded the transcribed participant interviews into NVivo 9.

I reviewed the uploaded data and formed the initial developed codes. After developing the initial codes, I performed axial coding and theoretical coding to identify emergent themes and relationships before reassembling the data around the central theme. The results of the data analysis appear in the following subsections according to the 10 interview questions.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this study was this: What strategies do small auto dealership owners in NYC use to sustain business within competitive environments beyond 5 years? Small businesses owners contribute immensely to the U.S. economy and have created up to 86% of new jobs in the United States (Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011). However, some small business owners encounter challenges in competitive environments and as a result fail at a high rate of up to 75% within the first 5 years (Plehn-Dujowich, 2010). I used semistructured interviews to gain insight of strategies that small auto dealership business owners require to succeed beyond 5 years in NYC.

The subheadings related to participants' responses include (a) the demographic characteristics of the participants and the results of their lived experiences, (b) the emergent themes, (c) conclusions, and (d) the conceptual framework and study of literature. Participants in this study were three small auto dealership business owners who were in business for more than 5 years and in NYC. The conceptual framework for this qualitative case study was RBV theory as developed by Edith Penrose in the late 1950s.

Many of the responses from the participants supported the assumption in RBV that managers concentrate on using the diverse critical resources to develop a sustainable competitive advantage (Jang, 2013). Source of evidence, described in the data collection section, consisted of face-to-face interviews with participants. The specific business problem was that some auto dealership owners lack strategies to sustain a small business within competitive environments longer than 5 years. Each participant answered the open-ended questions in face-to-face meetings as part of data collection.

I distributed five invitations letters to potential participants through e-mail, and four agreed to take part in the study. The research design was qualitative and the strategy for data collection involved collection of interview responses from participants to uncover patterns, themes, and rival explanations with respect to the participants' experiences. I coded the transcribed interview data and evidence through the process of open coding, axial coding, categorization, and thematic analysis. The data analysis process ended when data saturation occurred. The results of the data indicated the participants had a commitment to their customers' satisfaction for business success.

The central proposition of RBV theory is that firm managers can achieve a state of sustained competitive advantage if they acquire and control valuable, rare, inimitable, and nonsubstitutable (VRIN) resources (Kraaijenbrink, Spender, & Groen, 2009). The concept of RBV details explanation of the internal sources of a firm's sustained competitive advantage. Data analysis of the interview responses indicated 20 emerging themes, which I classed within six categories.

The following themes emerged from the analysis of the interview data: (a) consumer satisfaction, (b) business knowledge, (c) effective supervision, (d) human capitals, (e) genuine commitment, and (f) aggressive marketing. The consumer satisfaction themes were (a) build good reputation, (b) right business location, (c) capital investment, and (d) right products (tangible). The business knowledge themes were (a) consumer based knowledge (CBK), (b) product based knowledge (PBK), (c) industry based knowledge (IBK), and (d) prior industry experience (PIE).

The effective supervision themes were (a) delegation of authority, (b) access to owners and managers, and (c) free flow of information and communications. The human capital themes were (a) professionalism, (b) staff training, and (c) staff retention. The genuine commitment themes were individual self-discipline, punctuality and focus, optimistic view, faith, perseverance, and resilience. The following themes fell under aggressive marketing: (a) Internet marketing, (b) marketing research and analysis, (c) product and service differentiation, (d) competitive pricing, and (e) use of business technology. Further analysis produced two major themes, customer satisfaction and prior industry experiences, which morphed from the six themes.

Emergent Theme: Consumer Satisfaction

Responses for consumer satisfaction originated from most interview questions, particularly from Questions 3, 4, and 5, which explored the strategies that contributed to the success of the business owners. Customer satisfaction is considered as the standard for performance and progress in trading systems (Nazari, Divkolaei, & Sorkhi, 2012). The responses indicated that business owners should focus on customer satisfaction, needs, and provide professional and quality customer service when doing business with existing and potential customers. Consumer care, build good reputation, capital investment, right products, and right location are some the factors of consumer satisfaction which participants mentioned.

The three participants suggested that business owners should put customers first and practice have ability to communicate effectively with customers in a friendly way (see Table 2). Each participant offered a different insight into each subtheme. For example, one participant stated,

> Our best form of advertising is making sure whatever customers have problems with, we address those problems efficiently and very quickly. I make sure I address the problem so I have that customer continually coming back to me in the near future, and their family members.

According to Bengesi and Roux (2014), business owners who focus on customer needs tend to have the most effective strategy to meet the challenges in a competitive business environment.

Table 2

Customer Satisfaction

Themes	number of response	% of respondent agreement
Consumer satisfaction	17	25.0
Build good reputation	1	1.5
Capital investment	1	1.5
Right products (tangible)	2	3.0
Right location (intangible)	3	5.0

Emergent Theme: Business Knowledge

The theme business knowledge originated from Questions 1,3,5,6, and mainly Questions 10, in which I explored the participants' insight into improving skills for managing a small business successfully in a competitive environment. Participants shared their thoughts about strategies that drive sales, customer satisfaction and performance for sustained success. According to Tan (2011), knowledge is the most important organizational resource with unprecedented value, which managers regard as a source of sustainable competitive advantage. Two of the three participants (nearly 70%) suggested that understanding the business, industry, and customer trending assisted in growing their businesses (see Table 3). Consumer-based knowledge, product-based knowledge, industry-based knowledge, and prior-industry experience are some the factors of business knowledge that participants mentioned. One participant indicated, "You need knowledge of what it is that you are trying to sell or whatever you're conducting business with."

Table 3

Business Knowledge

Themes	number of response	% of respondent agreement
CBK	3	5
PBK	6	9
IBK	6	9
PIE	11	16

Emergent Theme: Effective Supervision

Management that wants to implement excellence in business should consider supervision as important to the success (Tutuncu & Kucukusta, 2010). The findings of this study indicated that effective supervision improves ethical practices. Participants claimed that effective supervision provided a tool to control employees' behavior because a leader's value regarding supervision is essential for affecting and controlling behavior that enhances productivity. Responses to Interview Questions 1, 2, 5, and 7 asked participants to provide the relationship between staff training, experiences, and the success of their firms.

Delegation of authority, owners or managers accessibility, and free flow of information and communications are some the factors of effective supervision that participants mentioned. One participant said, "It's all about you communicating with the men that you have under you. Your men are only as good as the manager who's managing them." All participants indicated that effective supervision contributes to success in business (see Table 4).

Table 4

Effective Supervision

Themes	number of response	% of respondent agreement
Delegation of authority	1	1.5
Owners/managers accessibility	1	1.5
Communications	2	3.0

Emergent Theme: Human Capital

Baptista, Karaöz, and Mendonça (2014) suggested that human capitals comprise of tangible and intangible features, which owners use to positively influence startup survival and to survive the critical first years after startup. Human capital, including abilities of employees, is a primary factor business managers rely on to differentiate their products or services and build a competitive advantage (Hargis & Bradley, 2011). In the study, professionalism, staff training, and staff retention were some the examples of human resources that participants mentioned (see Table 5). One participant said,

> In this business quite often the managers, the business owners, they don't mind change. They like to have the flow change every couple of months, and people come and go." That's not good for growing business. What you want to have is the same folks there that were there 2 years ago, because those customers that saw them will feel comfortable and will be more willing to come back a second and third time.

The findings supported Baptista et al.'s (2014) claim that human capital and capabilities to interact effectively with people has a significant relationship to business success.

Table 5

Human Capital

Themes	number of response	% of respondent agreement
Professionalism	1	1.5
Staff training and staff retention	4	6.0

Emergent Theme: Genuine Commitment

The findings from the interview data indicated that commitment to the business objectives is important for business survival. Self-discipline, perseverance, enthusiasm, optimism, punctuality, focus, faith, and resilience are some the factors of genuine commitment theme participants mentioned. Armstrong (2013) revealed that managers enable the survival and growth of small businesses through commitment and focus on workable strategies. Information from the interviews data indicated that in a competitive business environment, commitment enables business owners to focus on skills and practices that keep the businesses profitable. One participant said, “There's no success in life without discipline in what you do.” Another participant said “A person that's prepared every day to go to work . . . . is a person that's prepared to succeed.” Another participant concluded that,

> People lose focus all too often” . . . . “the most important mindset . . . he has to come in mentally prepared to work every day to build a successful day, successful week, successful month, and obviously, a successful year.

Table 6 shows the number of responses from participants.

Table 6

Genuine Commitment

Themes	number of response	% of respondent agreement
Self-discipline	1	1.50
Punctuality and focus		.05
Optimistic view and faith		.05
Perseverance, and resilience		.05

Emergent Theme: Aggressive Marketing

Hsu (2011) defined marketing strategy as a set of business principles which enterprise managers use to serve their customers and achieve profitability. Aggressive marketing stemmed from responses to Interview Questions 3, 5, and 10, on participants insights about skills required by managers of small for success and sustenance. The purpose of the question was to explore aspects of the strategies which participants in a competitive environment used to gain and retain customers for success. Marketing strategy is designed to guide an enterprise to use its resources to meet the requirements of target customers and realize marketing goals more efficiently than its competitors (Hsu, 2011). Internet marketing, marketing research and analysis, product and service differentiation, competitive pricing, and use of business technology are some the factors of aggressive marketing theme which participants mentioned. Information from interview data suggested that small business owners could improve profitability through marketing and building trust with customers.

All participants suggested the use of Internet as an effective marketing tool while recommending competitive pricing technique as a way to get customers in (see Table 7). One participant said,

> Lots of dealers don't utilize the web as a tool to benefit them . . . they put out prices, but they do it in a haphazard way. They don't aggressively price their cars so that they bring customers from all over the tri-state or metropolitan area . . . . If you utilize that tool properly, you're going to build your business, because you're going to reach much, much more than you can if you did it with electronic media, like TV, or newspaper.

Another participant said,

> Of course, if you're buying a car for $10,000, you want 11 for it. . . Then same car, I buy it from the auction. . . . The main thing is pricing, because the business is manly on the Internet.

Effective marketing strategies lure customers to buy the product and services because of the espoused value and benefits that the customer will derive (Zeriti, Robson, Spyropoulou, & Leonidou, 2014). All participants emphasized the need for business owners to have strategies for market analysis, quality product differentiation, cost management skills, and competitive pricing to succeed.

Table 7

Marketing

Themes	number of response	% of respondent agreement
Internet marketing	1	1.5
Aggressive marketing	2	3.0
competitive pricing	2	3.0
Use of bus tech tools	1	1.5

Summary of Themes

Further analysis of the interview data revealed two primary themes: (a) Customer satisfaction, and (b) Business owner's prior industry experience. According to Guba (1978), some of the most obvious themes in a collection of data are those that regularly occurred and recurred. The more the same concept occurs in a text, the more likely the concept is a theme (Guba, 1978). Repetition was the obvious identification of the two major themes from a collection with 6 themes. The two major themes were the most reoccurring repetitions of the 20 emergent themes. Customer satisfaction reoccurred in the data 25% of the time while prior industry experience occurred 16% of the times.

This result supports the suggestion by Nawi, Al Mamun, and Raston (2015), that customer satisfaction is the essence of enterprise success, especially in the competitive business environment. For sustenance, within competitive business environment, small businesses owners should therefore focus on operational strategies which would lead to an improvement in overall customer satisfaction (Nawi, Al Mamun, & Raston, 2015). In addition, the findings regarding the importance of a business owner's prior experience aligns with Unger (2011) that an entrepreneur's pre-entry knowledge and experience have a direct impact on the entrepreneurial success. According to Paunescu (2013), existing empirical research suggests that pre-entry knowledge of the market and entrepreneur's prior practical and managerial experience will influence a business chance of survival and future growth. The startup stage of business planning and service design receives influence by the entrepreneur's traits and personality (Paunescu, 2013).

The results for the themes stemming from this study's data and analysis explain the strategies by small auto dealership owners to survive in business beyond 5 years in NYC. The conceptual framework underlying this study was the RBV theory by Penrose (1959). A small business is a collection of tangible resources and intangible resources. For small and medium enterprise owners intangible assets are important and valuable drivers of business success (Steenkamp, & Kashyap, 2010). Two significant tangible asset identified in this study were customer satisfaction and prior industry experiences. According to the participants, intangible assets are important to the success and sustenance of small businesses by owners. One participant said, "Well, the tangible part of this business is the product. All right? Intangibles is everything else." A small business owner may have the capital and product, but without the right intangible resources to support, the business owners may fail. Location contributes to business success considering the small business owners' need to generate profitable and sustainable revenue source.

Effective supervision enhances growth and sustainability as the owner becomes an inspirational leader to motivate employees. One of the study participants said, "Intangibles are the follow-up. Intangibles are how you treat the customer. Intangibles are how the process goes from sales to delivery and how quickly you can do that. Those are all the intangibles." Another participant added that,

> If a customer comes into the dealership and writes a deal, you don't want him to spend the entire day with you. First of all, it's a disservice to the customer, number 1. That's an intangible that eventually wears on the customer's mind and doesn't result in a feeling like they have a satisfied delivery. You may have done everything right; but, if the delivery doesn't go smoothly and out in an efficient manner, the customer is going to think of the last thing that happened, It took awfully long to get from the time they bought the car to the time to took delivery of the vehicle.

Business approaches to addressing customer needs seem the most effective strategy to meet the challenges in a competitive business environment. Small business owners need to demonstrate a friendly and caring attitude because an owners' capability to interact effectively with people has a significant relationship with business success. According one participant,

> You have to understand how consumers think and what it is that they want. Customers are the reason for small businesses' existence, and caring for customers and treating them fairly will promote sustainability. Small business owners need to develop marketing strategies to gain competitive advantage. In the auto sales market environment, business owners' need aggressive marketing strategy with knowledge of existing marketing tools, like the use of Internet, to

understand the needs of customers, and appropriate prices which customers are willing to pay.

Considering the competitive business environment such as auto sales industry, commitment, discipline, persistence, resilience, and focus on business objective are important for business success and survival. Small business owners perceive intangible assets to be essential, and important to the success off their business (Steenkamp & Kashyap, 2010).

Applications to Professional Practice

A multiple case study is relevant to understanding the strategies for small business success and sustainability. The purpose was to explore the strategies that owners of small auto dealership business use to survive in business within competitive environment beyond 5 years. The findings section includes the evidence from participants, analysis of the data, and interpretation of the results. The findings and recommendations might serve as the basis for owners to change the ways of operations leading to development of the small businesses sector of the U.S. economy. The results could guide small business owners struggling to survive as they improve strategies and practices. The results offer insights into successful strategies and practices that may promote the effective use of small firm tangible and intangible assets. This study expands the body of literature for small firms (owed by not more than two people) where the quantity and quality of resources impose capability limits within the business. Small businesses traditionally lack resources, which limits their range of possible strategic options (Degravel, 2012). The findings from this study relate the RBV theory. From the RBV perspective, business owners sustain competitive advantage depending on organizational resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable and nonsubstitutable in an organizational setting that has the policies and procedures to exploit the resources (Barney, 1991). The firm resources and capabilities is a unique combination of tangible and intangible assets that allows a firm owner to gain competitive advantage in the market place (Welsh, Davis, Desplaces, & Falbe, 2011)**.** The RBV is an excellent perspective for capturing strategy because of its methodological attributes, which fit well with small business strategies (Degravel, 2012).

The results indicate that doing business differently enables small business owners to succeed beyond 5 years. According to Zhang and Zhang (2012), value creating business decisions form foundation for creating competitive advantages. In professional practice, business leaders may gain practical insights from the results of the study regarding how to identify, evaluate, and manage organizational tangible and intangible assets. The results of the research may help managers identify resources required by small business owners to remain competitive in a competitive market environment. The findings were relevant to professional practice, as the study may provide information regarding how small business owners operate their businesses. The result could provide a practical guide for business owners to change business practices and improve business strategies that may promote sustainability and growth. The study’s findings and recommendations add to the knowledge of business development by identifying the importance of small business strategies.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for social change from the doctoral study include the potential to develop strategies for small business success, growth, and sustenance in competitive environments through effective business practices. Successful owners contribute to strengthen the U.S. economy through profitability and growth of small business sector. I anticipate that knowledge offered in this study would (a) aid small auto dealership business owners in competitive market environments, (b) educate aspiring and startup small business owners in establishing and marketing for success.

In addition, such knowledge would include suggestion on strategies for small business owners to increase profitability, thereby creating sustainable employment for the community. Development of strategies for sustainability by small business owners through implementation of recommendations, may improve the unemployment problem in the U.S. Business owners might change business practices that could promote growth because of encouragement from the findings of this study. The information could affect social change through reduction in the unemployment rate and crime when business owners use study data to expand. Successful business ownership could create economic empowerment in urban communities in NYC that could allow residents to realize their dreams of home ownership and financial security to increase the quality of life for Americans.

Recommendations for Action

The intent of this study was to provide small business owners within highly competitive markets environments with strategies that increase business success. Small business owners are not adequately benefiting from value creation opportunities associated with their intangible assets (Laihonen & Lonnqvist, 2010). Small business owners may consider the information in the study for starting a business, increasing business productivity and sales, or maintaining an existing business. Using the information as a resource by successful small business owners may prove inspirational to entrepreneurial success. The participants provided valuable insights into their knowledge management processes, procedures, and practices; including, their perceptions regarding the critical capabilities needed for future success. The recommendations are consistent with the RBV of the firm, meaning implementation is mindful of the budget, resources, and capabilities limitations of small business enterprises. The qualitative data obtained from this study provided business owners' insights to determine strategies to increase the success rate of small business.

Six recommended steps for action identified from this study should benefit current and future small business owners for sustainability and growth. Existing and aspiring small business owners should focus on (a) consumer satisfaction strategies, (b) aggressive marketing strategies, (c) genuine commitment to business, (d) human capital strategies, (e) business knowledge strategies, and (f) effective supervision strategies. Responses from participants indicated that a different management approach is fundamental for success in a competitive market environment. The findings from the study indicated that relationships with customers helped to retain customers and brought new customers and uncovered the benefits of developing cordial relationships with customers. Lee (2011) posited that customer-centered approaches result in cordial relationships with potential customers for profitability. Therefore, owner's involvement in daily operations of the business with discipline motivates employees to commit themselves to attainment of small business goals. I will disseminate the findings of the study through scholarly journals, and business journals. I will present the findings at small business workshops and conferences, and offer written materials to chambers of commerce, and business incubator programs.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of the study was to explore the strategies that small auto dealership owners use to succeed beyond 5 years in NYC. The findings indicated that some strategies that were important to succeed in a competitive business environment. Conducting quantitative studies could expose a different perspective to the importance of these strategies on small business sustainability and growth. The study focused on small auto dealership business owners in NYC. A valuable recommendation for further study is to explore how factors such as age, education, and type of small business affect the success of a small business owner. Further study could provide useful information using small auto dealership business owners in different geographical location in the U.S. Subsequent researchers should analyze this study to further the research and probe into the knowledge of small business success. The results of more research, when considering other variables, would provide small business owners a more comprehensive analysis of business success.

Reflections

My doctoral study experience at Walden University provided an opportunity to learn from my study participants. I had the opportunity to interview small auto dealership business owners in business for more than 5 years in NYC. Conducting the study has broadened my understanding of doctoral research and increased my understanding of small business management. The initial attempt to obtain participants commitment was seemingly difficult even though I gave out introductory letters. Some owners were reluctant because they thought that I was planning to startup another dealership around.

Despite the challenges, the data collection is valuable information for small business enterprise leaders, business practitioners, and future researchers. The situation changed when I showed participants the IRB community partnership letters, Walden University approval letter and the introductory letter. I had no preconceived notions regarding the small business strategies and practices other than the understanding that resource constraints exist within the sector. I was comfortable with all participants who had abundant knowledge regarding their business as the interview progressed. The data were through semistructured interviews from the experiences study participants. The study enhanced my understanding of small businesses and has stimulated my interest to establish a small business after graduation.

Summary and Study Conclusions

Small business owners are the backbone of the U.S. economy contributing up to 39% of the GDP in the United States (Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011). Small business owners create two out of every three new jobs and produce two and a half times more innovations than large business firms. The problem of small business sector in the U.S. was how to survive beyond 5 years as up to 75% of small businesses close within 5 years (Plehn-Dujowich, 2010). The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies small auto dealership business owners use to sustain a business beyond 5 years. The findings may serve as the basis for the development of small business sector to achieve economic growth in the U.S. The results could become a guide for small business owners struggling on the successful strategies and practices to improve and survive competitive market environment.

I conducted semistructured interviews to gain insights of strategies that small business owners require to succeed beyond 5 years. Participants in this study were 3 small auto dealership business owners who were in business for more than 5 years and in NYC. The conceptual framework for this study was the RBV theory of firm. Data collection had 20 emergent themes that I placed under six categories (a) consumer satisfaction, (b) business knowledge, (c) effective supervision, (d) human capitals, (e) genuine commitment, and (f) aggressive marketing. Responses from participants indicated that customer satisfaction was pivotal to the success and survival their small business. Cordial relationships with customers facilitate the retention of customers and new consumers by the small auto dealership business owners.

Participants submitted that self-discipline, commitment and focus enabled owners to succeed and continue to survive in business. Aggressive marketing strategies were pivotal to the success of small business owners revealed by the participants that competitive pricing and product differentiation contributes to success. Additional aggressive marketing strategies which participants use to remain in business for more than 5 years include service differentiation, and cost management. Participants provided insights into the strategies small business owners need to succeed beyond 5 years. The results could guide small business owners struggling to survive as they improve on their strategies and practices. The findings relate to the RBV theory of a firm from the conceptual framework of this study. The implication for positive social change includes the potential to reduce the unemployment rate and crime. The recommendation from this study consists of strategies that can benefit current and future small business owners for sustainability and growth. In addition, this study's findings could provide owners with a practical guide to change small business practices and improve the strategies that could promote sustainability and growth. I had the opportunity of interviewing small business owners who were in business for more than 5 years in NYC and conducting the study widened my understanding of doctoral research and the small business sector of the economy. Conducting the study broadened my understanding of small business management and practices from the assumption that successful small firms only need large capital investment. My thinking changed because of the findings that tangible resources such as customer service and prior industry experience is critical to small business survival.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

This section includes the semistructured interview questions that I will use during the interview sessions. The results and themes will be part of section 3 of this study.

Time of the interview: ____________

Date: ___________________________

Place____________________________

Interviewer Christian Akaeze (researchers)

Interviewee (P01)

The purpose of this study is to explore the best business strategies required by entertainment managers to inhibit the replication of products and improve sales profit.

Questions

The following are the interview questions.

1. What skills and practices have influenced your experiences with small business management, survival, and sustainable success?
2. What is the relationship between staff training, experiences, and the success of your firm?
3. What is an effective skill for success and sustenance to manage small businesses in a competitive environment?
4. What skill sets, both hard and soft, do managers need for business improvement in current and future small business operations?
5. What have you done differently compared to many owners who failed within 5 years to explain the success of your business venture?

6. What is the relationship between your prior industry experiences and the success of your firm?
7. How does your organization reinforce management skills and business practices for long-term sustenance?
8. Describe in detail the relationship between your organization's tangible and intangible resources and your organization's success.
9. Describe in detail the critical factors that you believe contributed to your success beyond 5 years.
10. What additional information can you provide to improve skills to manage a small business in a competitive environment?

Thank you so much for helping with this interview. Your real name will not be disclosed in this interview or in the future interviews.

Appendix B: E-mail Invitation Letter

Dear (Participant, Name)

My name is Christian Akaeze. I am currently pursuing a Doctorate of Business Administration (DBA) through Walden University in Minneapolis. My doctoral study project is “Management Strategies to Inhibit the Replication of Entertainment Products” I am interested in exploring the best strategies used by leaders of entertainment industry to address the replication of entertainment products to improve the bottom line profits.

As a leader of the industry, you are well placed to help me with this study because you are in charge of the management, production, distribution, or marketing of entertainment products. The interview will be limited to 30 minutes and will be scheduled at your convenience. Your participation and information will be protected consistent with Walden University’s confidentiality guidelines. Your participation will be instrumental in providing the required data to best analyze the strategies required to inhibit entertainment replication. If you decide to participate, I will send you a consent form via email that dictates your rights during the process and the purpose of the doctoral study. I will conduct interview through face-to-face or telephone.

At the end of this study, I will share results and findings with participants, scholars, and other stakeholders. Participation in the interviews will be voluntary, and the right to decline to take part or stop at any time during the interview will be respected. Please advise if you have any questions or require any additional information. My contact information is XXXX or XXXX.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Christian O. Akaeze (Walden University DBA student).

Appendix C: Protecting Human Subject Research Participants Certificate

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **christian akaeze** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants”.

Date of completion: 04/01/2014

Certification Number: 1441092