E-Commerce Adoption Strategies for Small Retail Businesses

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ABSTRACT: A lack of e-commerce adoption strategies can negatively affect the sustainability of traditional small retail businesses. Business leaders of traditional small retail businesses who fail to implement e-commerce strategies can experience a loss of market share to ecommerce small retail companies. Grounded in the technology-organization environment framework, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies traditional small retail business leaders use to adopt e-commerce to foster the sustainability of their business successfully. Participants were five business leaders from small and medium enterprises in Atlanta, Georgia, in the United States, who successfully adopted e-commerce strategies into their traditional business structure. Data were collected from semi structured interviews and a review of company documents. Through thematic data analysis, three themes were identified: (a) strategies to adopt ecommerce, (b) challenges small business leaders face when implementing these strategies, and (c) resolutions found to maintain the sustainability of their business. A key recommendation for business leaders is to understand online consumerism comprehensively and the technology needed to operate their business using an online platform. The implications for positive social change include the potential to create new web-based employment opportunities for the youth in the local community.

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The survival and growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) mainly depend on leaders who understand the importance of change. The ability to effectively implement strategies for innovation is the definitive component that fosters sustainability for the future of SMEs. Consumers have transitioned into the era of convenience afforded to them by the presence of online transactions and e-commerce. Traditional business means have metamorphosized into a virtual platform, where the Internet has become the preferred medium. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies used by SME business leaders

I. BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

E-commerce has become a rapidly growing structure where more businesses flourish and extend offerings on a global scale. However, reduced overhead and other typical expenses fragment the business leaders experience when operating their business with an online presence and updated business structure. More than 99% of businesses are SMEs.
.SME business leaders should consider the impact that e-commerce has on the global economy and the benefits of implementing online capabilities. E-commerce has become more than a fleeting trend; it was a development that may have influenced the traditional economy.

Problem Statement
The surge in e-commerce has posed a real threat to traditional small retail businesses (Lock & Seele, 2017). The traditional small retail businesses grew less than 50% in revenue than their e-commerce counterparts (Liu et al., 2017). The general business problem was that business leaders of traditional small retail businesses were at high risk of failure due to the loss of market share to e-commerce small retail companies. The specific business problem was that some business leaders of traditional small retail businesses lacked e-commerce adoption strategies to
foster the sustainability of their businesses

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the e-commerce adoption strategies used by business leaders of traditional small retail businesses to foster the sustainability of their businesses. The targeted population of this study included business leaders of five traditional small retail businesses in Atlanta, Georgia, who have successfully used ecommerce strategies to foster the sustainability of their businesses. The findings of this study may promote positive social change by implementing ecommerce strategies that support the sustainability of small retail businesses resulting in sustainable employment opportunities.

Nature of the Study

The three research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Yin, 2017). The qualitative research method is a process used to investigate social or humanistic phenomena in their original setting, such as understanding values, experiences, behavior, and social response of a local population (Yin, 2017). Quantitative research involves collecting numerical data and testing hypotheses to conclude (Yin, 2017). Mixed-method research includes the tangible evidence and social perspective acquired through qualitative research and the numeric components and hypotheses obtained during quantitative research (Angeles et al., 2017). The qualitative research method was the best choice to conduct this research because of the social and humanistic factors of the phenomena expressed in their original setting, such as understanding the values, experiences, behaviors, and social responses of a local population. The quantitative research method does not fit this study because there are no quantifying variables or hypotheses to consider. The mixed-method research study does not fit because of the inclusion of quantitative research.

Research Question

1. How e-commerce strategies can foster the sustainability in business?
2. What challenges or barriers did they face when implementing e-commerce adoption?
3. What e-commerce adoption strategies do business leaders of traditional small retail businesses use to foster the sustainability of their businesses?

Operational Definitions

Big data analytics: Big data analytics are technology systems capable of converting the data that a firm collects into business value by leveraging it into actionable insight *E-commerce adoption strategies:* The organization of plans and efforts for ecommerce adoption informs managerial decision-making for marketers and e-retailers. In addition, these plans foster the transition and growth of the organization into the electronic commerce platform *Organizational goals:* Organization goals define and strategize the desired state of profit and success in a firm. General organizational goals are in the firm's mission/vision statement; *Positive social change:* Positive social change is the process through which community settings influence their members, the surrounding community, and the larger society. Examples of these community settings include adult well-being, positive youth development. *Small and medium enterprises:* SMEs are a central part of economies worldwide, comprising 99% of enterprises and 60% employment. These businesses maintain revenue, assets, or a specific number of employees below a certain threshold.

E-Commerce Adoption Strategies for Small Retail Businesses

E-commerce adoption has gained substantial momentum as strides become more environmentally responsible. As a result, small retail businesses face the decision to adopt ecommerce and transform their operations into a more *web-friendly* environment. Seethamraju and Diatha (2019) conducted a study of the impact of e-commerce on small retail businesses using the TOE framework as a guideline for their research. The authors highlighted the traditional business model of small retail convenience stores in India and the low levels of adoption of digital technologies to manage supply-side and customerside processes and maintain a high volume of low-level transactions of cash and credit. The primary payment application used in India is considered unreliable by SME leaders and consumers and sufficiently supported by the payment interface system.

Seethamraju and Diatha (2019) identified that the factors that presented challenges for small retail business leaders when considering e-commerce adoption are primarily related to the digital transaction of funds. In the context of

technology, technology presents many challenges in the arena of digital financial transactions. ICT infrastructure must embody tangible resources such as physical assets and intangible resources such as skills (Billal et al., 2019). Digital payment processing is essential for e-commerce adoption and must be fully operational to meet basic organizational expectations (Seethamraju & Diatha, 2019). Seethamraju and Diatha concluded that small retail businesses in India are struggling to adopt new technology.

Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I discussed the role of the researcher in the data collection process and the criteria and strategies for recruiting participants. Additionally, I discussed the research method and design, population and sampling, and implications for ethical research. Finally, I described the data collection instruments, data collection techniques, data collection processes, data organization, data analysis, and implications for the reliability and validity of the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the e-commerce adoption strategies used by business leaders of traditional small retail businesses to foster the sustainability of their businesses. The targeted population of this study included business leaders of five traditional small retail businesses in Georgia who have successfully used e-commerce strategies to foster the sustainability of their businesses. The findings of this study may promote positive social change by implementing ecommerce strategies that support the sustainability of small retail businesses resulting in sustainable employment opportunities in the community.

I. RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN

Research methods are used as different courses of action to study an empirical reality (Yin, 2017). The research design refers to the chosen strategy to effectively address the research problem in the blueprint for collecting, measurement, and data analysis (Yin, 2017). This section provides information and justification of the research method and design.

Research Method

The three research methods are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods (Yin, 2017).

Researchers use these methods to identify, process, and analyze information about a topic (Yin, 2017). A quantitative research method involves mathematical calculations, econometrics, simulations, and surveys (House, 2018). The analysis and measurement of the data, quantities, amounts and the relationship between variables are critical factors in quantitative research methodology (Yin, 2017). Quantitative researchers use closedended questions to gather and analyze numeric data to test hypotheses and the significance of the relationship between variables (Venkatesh et al., 2013).

The following research method used in empirical research is qualitative methodology. Qualitative research explores the phenomenon by discovering participants' experiences, practices, strategies, and perceptions (Van & Struwig, 2017). This type of research is an interactive process for researchers to collect data through interviews with people that give their perspectives (Yin, 2017).

Mixed-methods research combines both quantitative elements and qualitative elements during the research process. The decision to use the mixed-methods mitigates the limitations of using either a quantitative or qualitative approach (Venkatesh et al., 2013). In addition, this method can answer a broader range of research questions because numbers can illustrate words better, and words can add meaning to numbers

Research Design

Research methods focus on the way data are collected, while research designs outline the framework for obtaining and analyzing research data (Yin, 2017). I considered three research designs: phenomenology, ethnography, and case study. The phenomenological approach can delve into the participants' experiences and feelings about those experiences (Yin, 2017). Researchers who use this design aim to interpret the lived human experience of participants (Adams & van
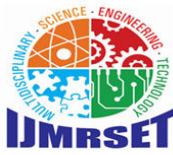
Manen, 2017 Ethnological research design explores a group of people's business culture or social world (Yin, 2017). This design focuses on understanding and interpreting shared behavioral patterns, experiences, and beliefs in a cultural or social environment (Hill O'Connor & Baker, 2017).

Case study research design is an in-depth analysis of a specific, real-life business problem with a contextual, bounding setting (Yin, 2017). There are two dimensions of the case study research design: single case study and multiple case studies (Yin, 2017). Many researchers choose to employ the multiple-case study approach to compose a more robust interpretive outcome (Yazam, 2015). However, the main advantage of conducting research using multiplecase studies was the extensive amount of data collected

Population and Sampling

The study population consisted of traditional small retail business leaders in Atlanta, Georgia, in the United States. First, I acquired business information by searching Google Internet search engine databases for traditional retail small business leaders located in Atlanta, Georgia. Then, I contacted these individuals through email, social media sites, phone calls, and visits to the businesses. I used the purposive sampling technique for this study. With this method, the researcher purposefully chooses participants from a specific population to conduct interviews, gather information about individual experiences, and analyze the data about the phenomenon (Yin, 2017). In addition, researchers use the purposive sampling technique to engage with participants and collect data through interactions (Levitt et al., 2018).

Researchers conducting qualitative multiple case studies could achieve data saturation with a sample size between four to six participants (Malterud et al., 2016). Therefore, I initially used a sample size of five participants but was prepared to conduct more interviews if I did not reach data saturation with the original sample. The initial five participants were knowledgeable about successful e-commerce adoption strategies used to sustain their businesses.

Ethical Research

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects must adhere to ethical research principles that protect the participants (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Additionally, researchers should develop and practice ethical standards throughout the study to maintain integrity. In this study, I adhered to the guidelines for ethical research as they are in the *Belmont Report* (The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Per the *Belmont Report*, the researcher should follow three ethical principles: (a) respect participants, (b) not harm the participants and maximize the research benefits, and (c) treat participants fairly and ensure justice in distributing the study's benefits and burdens (The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979).

Researchers should ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participants to gain their trust and cooperation. Researchers could use an informed consent form to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality (Yin, 2017). An informed consent form is an official policy and an implied agreement between the researcher and individuals participating in a study (Grady et al., 2017). I invited participants via email (Appendix A) to prospective participants to brief them about the study. The invitational email (Appendix A) included an introduction about me and of the study as well as for instructions for the consent form. Individuals who agreed to participate in the study responded to the email stating "I consent" and sent it back to me within ten business days. I also informed these individuals that I intended to record the interview and collect some documents from their websites. I informed the individuals that participation will not conclude with compensation or incentives. They could withdraw from participation, without penalty, at any time before or during the interview by notifying me verbally or via telephone or email.

II. DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUE

Researchers could use various data collection techniques, such as observations or semistructured interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). To collect data for this study, I was the primary collection instrument, and I used semistructured interviews as my primary collection technique. I conducted these interviews using a predefined interview protocol (Appendix B). The primary purpose of the interview protocol was to stay focused on the study's objective and conduct interviews methodically (Bundy, 2017).

I sent invitational emails (Appendix A) to all prospective participants before conducting any interviews. The invitational email included the study's objective, interview questions, confidentiality protection affirmation, a statement about the voluntary nature of the participation, withdrawal instructions, and an informed consent form.

Qualitative researchers use one-on-one semistructured interviews, where openended interview questions foster the data collection and gain insight into the study's subject (Ridder, 2017). In addition, semistructured interviews are a platform to cultivate trust through the flexibility of bidirectional communication

III. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Reliability and validity are essential components of qualitative research as they are benchmarks for the quality of research (Yin, 2017). Researchers implement various strategies to produce a dependable, credible, confirmable, and transferable study to achieve data saturation through methodological rigor, reliability, and qualitative case study research (Hadi & José Closs, 2016). In addition, qualitative researchers utilize interview protocols to attain commonality and strengthen validity, consistency, and reliability.

Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research means that the same results will be consistent when using the same methods under the same circumstances (Mohajan, 2017). Leung (2015) described reliability as the reproducibility and consistency of the outcome. Researchers exhibit reliability or dependability by implementing inclusion, comprehensive data, and performing constant data comparison (Leung, 2015). The dependability of a study relies on the rigor applied, transparency displayed, and the level of documentation (Nowell et al., 2017). To ensure reliability and dependability in this study, I conducted audio-recorded interviews, transcribed the interview, and entered the information into the NVivo application for data analysis.

Validity

Validity in qualitative research concerns what an instrument measures and how well it does so (Mohajan, 2017). Validity is essential to the quality of research and the accuracy and truthfulness of data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the findings (Dennis, 2018). Credibility is the trustworthiness of the findings (Saunders et al., 2017). The researcher conducts extensive engagement ad observation of the participants to foster credibility (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Transferability is the usability of research findings in different circumstances (Saunders et al., 2017). Transferability involves providing a detailed description of the research process, including the research method, process, and raw data (Casey et al., 2013

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I provided an overview of my role as the researcher in the data collection process, planning for participant recruitment, and the decisions I made in my study. Additionally, I discussed the method and design, population and sampling, and the implications for ethical research. In conclusion, I described the data collection instruments, data collection techniques, data organization, data analysis, and implications for reliability and validity for the study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

IV. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore e-commerce adoption strategies used by business leaders of traditional small retail businesses to foster the sustainability of their businesses . I collected data by conducting semistructured interviews of five traditional small retail businesses in Atlanta, Georgia of the United States. Participants shared their experiences as business leaders tasked with incorporating e-commerce into their traditional business operations. The three themes that emerged from the data analysis were: strategies used to adopt e-commerce, challenges traditional small retail businesses experienced.

V. PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

The research question for this qualitative multiple case study was: What ecommerce adoption strategies do business leaders use to foster the sustainability of their businesses? The three themes that emerged from the data analysis were: (a) strategies used to adopt ecommerce, (b) challenges traditional small retail businesses face when implementing ecommerce strategies, and (c) resolutions found to maintain the sustainability of their businesses.

Documents that were obtained from the websites of the participants' online business' included Etsy's Marketplace House Rules, Shoptify's Terms of Service, and Instagram's Marketplace Commerce Eligibility Requirements.

Theme 1: Strategies Used to Adopt E-Commerce

Theme 1 focuses on the traditional small retail businesses realization of the initial need to develop strategies for incorporating e-commerce into their business structure. Table 1 depicts the subthemes that were derived from the responses given by the participants in this study as well as the document reviews. The participants explained the strategies they used to adopt e-commerce into the traditional business processes. Acknowledging the need to develop strategies to sustain their small business was apparent. Participants described similar strategies for e-commerce adoption that included the consideration of the TOE framework. Technology, organization, and environment were all contributing factors when developing e-commerce adoption strategies.

Theme 2: Challenges Traditional Small Retail Businesses Face When Implementing   These Strategies

Theme 2 depicts the challenges traditional small retail businesses face when implementing e-commerce adoption strategies. Many companies face challenges, such as highcompetition, gradual market saturation, and development (Bartók & Matošková, 2022). Table 2 includes the subthemes that emerged from responses given by the participants in this study as well as the documents reviewed.

Theme 3: Resolutions Found to Maintain the Sustainability of Their Business

Theme 3 is composed of the resolutions traditional small retail business leaders found to maintain the sustainability of their businesses. Table 3 includes the subthemes that emerged from responses given by the participants in the study as well as the documents reviewed. Participants explained the process of resolutions for the challenges that they faced when they implemented ecommerce adoptions strategies.

Applications to Professional Practice

The results of this study revealed that traditional small retail businesses that successfully adopted e-commerce into their business structure were able to sustain business. Factors that contributed to developing the strategies to adopt e-commerce included technology, organization, and environment, among others First, leaders need to develop a strategy for adopting e-commerce in their business structure. During a time when traditional businesses were challenged to compete with ecommerce giants such as Amazon and Ebay dating back to the early 2000s; traditional small retail businesses needed to develop a strategy to remain sustainable. The technology age of consumerism, convenience, and the looming COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 proved to be the turning point for brick-and-mortar businesses. Incorporating new technology would be the foremost concern of business leaders who desire to adopt ecommerce. It is important to understand what technology will be most useful, how to acquire it, how to use it, and how to train others to use it. Technology is an ever-evolving science that will require ongoing learning and upgrades to the programs and processes.

Implications for Social Change

The results of this study may contribute to positive social change as traditional small retail business leaders adopt e-commerce. Business leaders should consider the best methods to incorporate e-commerce into their business structure to foster sustainability of their business in the wake of changing consumer habits. Products are now more assessable by way of the internet, e-commerce, and expedited delivery.

When traditional small retail business leaders incorporate e-commerce into the business structure, they are poised to increase sales and a growing business that serves individuals beyond their local communities. The positive social impact growth that traditional small retail businesses will incur may lead to increased employment opportunities for the business as well as delivery expeditors which, in turn, increases tax revenues in local governments.
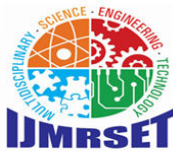
Recommendations for Action

The traditional small retail business leaders who participated in this study successfully implemented e-commerce adoption strategies to foster the sustainability of the businesses. The results of this study could provide traditional small retail business leaders with successful ecommerce adoption strategies that will be helpful during the implementation and transition of the new business structure. Overall, traditional small retail business leaders could benefit from the adoption strategies presented in this study.

E-commerce adoption strategies can be unique to the needs of various types of traditional small retail businesses. The traditional methods of commerce have evolved with the advances made in technology and during the era of convenience. Traditional businesses must compete with the capabilities and their ability to reach of consumers worldwide. My first recommendation is that traditional small retail business leaders gain a comprehensive understanding of e-commerce to develop strategies for adopting the process into their business structure. Technology is a necessary component of ecommerce operations

My final recommendation for traditional small retail business leaders is to be environmentally responsible for the operations of their business processes. Environmental responsibilities are considered critical when managing a business. Many factors will need to be considered, such as methods of packaging and delivery. Responsible packaging of items being shipped my require research on recycled cardboard and plastics. Efficiency in delivery may require traditional small retail business leaders to seek parcel delivery services that use fuel efficient vehicles

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this study revealed that traditional small retail business leader who successfully adopted e-commerce into their business structure has been able to foster the sustainability of their businesses. They have found more capabilities through their online services, and they have been able to reach far more potential customers through their social media platforms. The participants in this study offered advice for traditional small retail business leaders that are developing strategies to adopt e-commerce. According to these participants, a successful online traditional small retail business must continue to have an online presence because there is so much competition with e-tailers with small businesses. There is always something new happening, and to be successful, one will need to stay current with trends. Also, logistics with supplies and shipping are major factors in building patronage from customers. This research can be helpful to small business leaders who are looking to expand their business capabilities online.

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