



## AN EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY OF DHOFAR AUTOMOTIVE

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### KeyWords

Automobile Industry, Business Environment, Business Sustainability, COVID-19, Dhofar Automotive, Oman, Pandemic.

### ABSTRACT

The Nobel covid-19 had devastating effects on every business sector let it be the food, fashion, clothing, or automotive industries. Oman like other countries took all the necessary steps required to minimize the spread of the virus by implementing policies and regulations around the Sultanate. The study highly focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on the automobile industry by taking Dhofar Automotive as an example to present the research objectives. Both primary and secondary sources are used to collect data for this project. Primary data is collected using interviews and questionnaires by interviewing the managers and circulating the online questionnaire among the employees of Dhofar Automotive. The secondary data i.e., the financial data is collected from financial reports, published in journal articles, newspaper articles, websites, and books. The qualitative analysis is done through thematic and descriptive analysis. The SWOT and PESTEL analysis were also conducted to analyze the qualitative data. The quantitative analysis of the statistical data like dates, GDP, growth rate, economic rate, etc. is conducted. The data analysis is done using SPSS and MS excel tools. This study aims to determine the impact of covid on the selected automobile company, how it managed to survive over 3 years of the pandemic, how it sustained its business, how the company determined the most profitable year in the pandemic, micro and macro factors that influenced their activities and possibly suggests some IT tools that the company can implement to develop and sustain in the future.

## Introduction

The sustenance of businesses in the modern world has become very competitive, especially during uncertain events like calamities or pandemics. After the spread of the global pandemic, COVID-19 that emerged from China in 2019, the world endured a lot of crises. Like other countries all around the globe, the Sultanate of Oman also had a major negative effect on its development and business sustenance. An article by Sultan Qaboos University (2022), states that during the beginning of the pandemic travel and tourism declined, businesses slowed down, and restrictions on transportation were imposed which declined consumer spending not only in Oman but globally.

The demand reduced as economic activities like shopping, consuming, traveling, etc. were interrupted. This research will be done to analyze the problems that have evolved for an Omani automobile company named Dhofar Automotive during the three years of the COVID-19 pandemic and the company's strategies to sustain itself in the market. According to the official webpage of the Zubair Automotive Group (2022), the exclusive distribution rights for Jeep, Chrysler, Dodge, Fiat, Ram, Alfa Romeo, and Mopar automobiles in Oman are held by Dhofar Automotive. It is a venture between Shanfari Automotive and Zubair Automotive Group. Since the beginning of the coronavirus until now, many businesses, industries, and sectors have transformed (Yan et al, 2022). Due to the deadly pandemic, the government decided to close all organizations and industries, the borders were closed, the transportation in the cities was controlled and slowed down, the market faced a shortage of raw materials and the price of some components increased, providing the vehicles part for repair and maintenance sectors. In this study, we ought to find out the challenges, limitations, impacts, factors, and solutions implemented by Dhofar company during the pandemic.

The hypothesis for this study is:

Null Hypothesis,  $H_0$ : The COVID-19 pandemic affected the business sustainability of Dhofar Automotive.

Alternative Hypothesis,  $H_a$ : The COVID-19 pandemic didn't affect the business sustainability of Dhofar Automotive.

## Statement of the Research problem

According to Tuusa (2022), today's enterprises of all sizes, ranging from established companies to fresh start-ups require sustaining their business. Globally, the higher authorities and company executives have recognized the significance of combining business sustainability alongside plans and management. Due to various rising competition, most firms are struggling with obstacles to stay in business nowadays. Uncertain events like natural calamities, pandemics, international conflicts, etc. pose a barrier to the company's ability to survive in the market. Natural disasters and pandemics are inevitable. Because of such unpredictability, most businesses deteriorate or discontinue. Dhofar Automotive, Oman, like most firms throughout the world, encountered difficulties during the epidemic. The corporation, like the other entities, was also in a huge dilemma due to the sudden implementation of laws by the Oman government that caused lockdowns and other negative impacts on business operations. Despite the time wasted in figuring out what to be done next, the company did find ways with the help of Information Technology to sustain its business. One of the major problems for Dhofar Automotive during the pandemic was that a lot of time was wasted in search of alternatives to keep the business alive. This research aims to analyze the problems faced by the company thoroughly and to provide suggestions for the enhancement of the company's IT tools which will help the company to thrive during such uncertain events.

## Research Aims and Objectives

The study's major goal is to examine the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Dhofar Automotive's business sustainability and the approaches the company initiated to sustain its operation during that period. This project also aims to propose information technology ideas to enable the company's sustenance in unpredictable occurrences. The project objectives are:

- To evaluate the company's sustainability during the COVID-19 phase.
- To examine the company's three-year report during the COVID-19 phase.
- To determine the profitable year for the company during the pandemic years.

- To find out the MICRO & MACRO factors affecting the company during COVID.
- To suggest IT tools for enhancing business sustainability during uncertain events.

## LITERATURE REVIEW:

### Business Sustainability

According to Bansal and DesJardine (2014), business sustainability can be defined as “the ability of firms to respond to their short-term financial needs without compromising their (or other's) ability to meet their future needs”. According to Alqassabi (2019), small and medium enterprises (SMEs) drive today's economy toward innovation, economic growth, development, and employment. They contribute to more than 55% of the GDP in the OECD Countries (OECD, 2021). To promote Oman's vision for 2040, it is vital for business owners to clearly understand the purpose and manage the workflow of their business. Management, cooperation, investment, innovation, and future planning are some of the key aspects that kept many businesses still running after the pandemic. Oman's economy has seen a quick but steady rise after the covid-19 pandemic hinting at a strong and stable business and cooperative sustainability process.

### Importance of Business Sustainability

- Brand recognition competitive advantage
- Increase efficiency
- Availability of new opportunities
- Satisfy the customers

### Ways of Sustaining Business

- Leadership Quality
- Innovation
- Economic Factors
- Corporate Governance
- Creating Shared Value

### Pros & Cons of Business Sustainability

#### Pros of business sustainability

- Increased sales, attracts new customers
- Better customer relations
- Brand recognition
- Better business reputation
- Cost Savings
- Enhanced profit leads to reduced operational costs

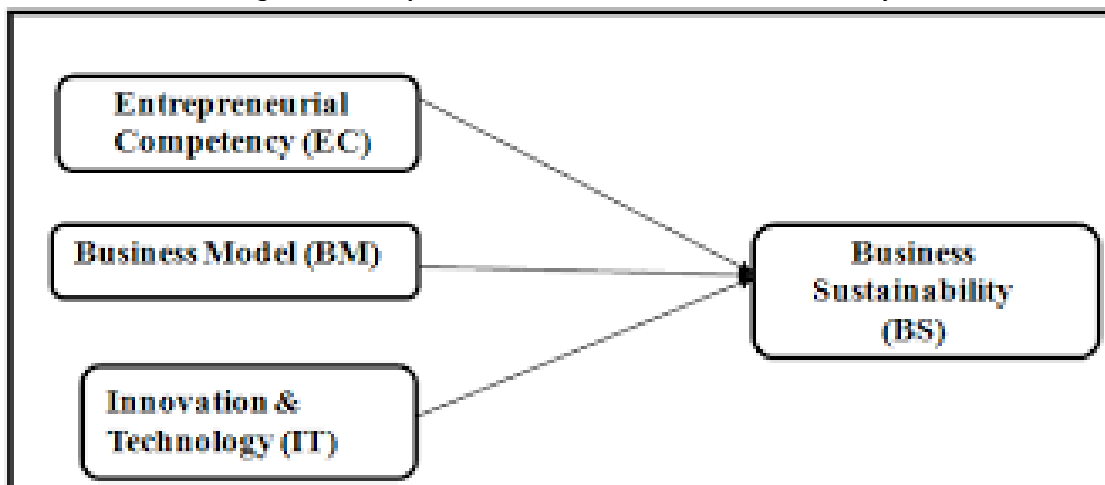
#### Cons of business sustainability

- Increase in prices
- High expectations of people
- Lack of capital investment
- Increase in capital cost
- High cost of labor
- Hardships & increased competition
- Increased taxation

## Business Sustainability Frameworks

Conceptual Framework for Business Sustainability - Usha & Devakumar

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Business Sustainability**

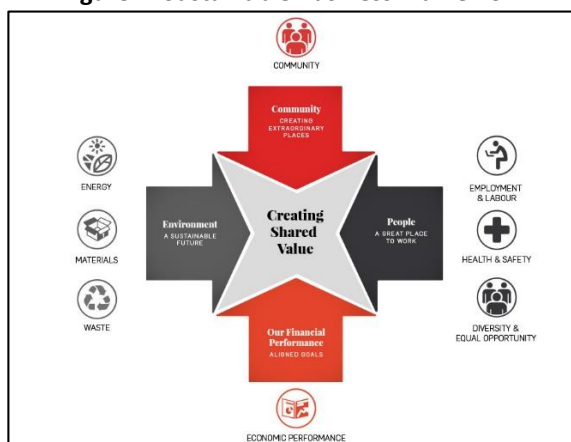


Note. From Conceptual Framework for Business Sustainability, by Usha & Devakumar, 2018,  
(<https://doi.org/10.5958/2321-5763.2018.00072.0>).

A conceptual framework for business sustainability developed by Usha and Devakumar (2018) shows the three main elements that may influence business sustainability, which are Entrepreneurial Competency (EC), Business Model (BM), and Innovation and Technology (IT). Entrepreneurs need to pay attention to every department and improve the quality and standards as time passes by to maintain sustainable growth (Siwan et al., as cited in Usha & Devakumar, 2018). Entrepreneurial competence has been highlighted as one of the key factors that would have a substantial influence on the long-term viability of businesses. Data gathering and processing become easier through the implementation of innovative business models as per the needs of the company. It helps to boost company performance which in turn leads to sustainable growth (David et al., as cited in Usha & Devakumar, 2018). As a result, the innovativeness of a company's business model has been highlighted as a crucial aspect in ensuring the long-term viability of both the framework and the firm itself. The usage of technology in entrepreneurship leads to new developments in goods for medium-sized businesses' growth (Matejun, as cited in Usha & Devakumar, 2018). The long-term growth and sustainability of any enterprise depend on its capacity to foster an environment where innovation and technology may flourish from the bottom or roots of the company. The researchers Usha & Devakumar (2018) have thus developed a paradigm that considers innovation and technology (IT) as a crucial aspect of company sustainability, alongside entrepreneurship competence and the business model.

## Sustainable Business Framework – Scentre Group

**Figure 2: Sustainable Business Framework**



Note. From The Sustainable Business Framework, by Scentre Group, 2016,  
(<https://scentregroupsustainability.com/the-sustainable-business-framework/>).

Scentre Group (2016) has developed a sustainable framework that provides the Group with a set of pillars to stand on and key areas to focus on to guarantee that its sustainability policies help realize its mission of building remarkable places that bring people together and enhance their lives. The main four pillars of sustainability identified by the Group after a detailed analysis of the internal and external business environments are community, people, financial performance, and environment.

The Group believes that influencing a large 'community' positively may enhance the chances of business survival as it improves the lifestyle of the community. Taking care of and investing in the 'people' working in an organization may increase brand image by enhancing employee retention, the health and safety of the employees, diversity, and equal opportunity for all. Good 'financial performance' is a key factor for business sustainability as it may aid the company in generating profits which in turn will help the company grow. Taking the 'environment' into account while operating the business may help the company to plan waste management, energy usage, and materials to aid a sustainable future for the business as well as the planet (Scentre Group, 2016).

#### Sustainable Business Framework – Minor International Public Company

**Figure 3: Sustainable Business Framework**



Note. Sustainability Framework, by Minor Public Company, 2018,  
(<https://www.minor.com/en/sustainability/framework-strategy-and-roadmap>)

The four components of Minor International Public Company Limited's (2018) sustainability framework are, enabling workforce development; Contributing to end-to-end customer satisfaction; Dedicating to long-term and sustainable partnerships; and addressing environmental impact. An emphasis on social responsibility and sound corporate governance are two key drivers that support these four components.

Enabling workforce development or 'driving people development' focuses on strengthening the available human resources in the organization and cultivating future leaders for the benefit of the business and the community. Training the workforce to embrace diversity, develop skills, and develop future leaders with a focus on sustainability may all aid in the sustainable growth of the business. 'Engaging in end-to-end customer experience' is a factor to achieve sustainability that focuses on providing superior goods and services to consumers while minimizing negative effects on society and the environment in all the business dealings, from initial contact to distribution and promotion. 'Committing to long-term and sustainable partnerships' emphasizes establishing mutually beneficial, long-term relationships with all relevant stakeholders. It is necessary to make sure the companies' collaborators prosper with them for long-term success. 'Addressing environmental impact' focuses on being committed to minimizing negative effects on the environment and maximizing favorable ones in all locations where the organization conducts business. This component also im-

plies that companies must save the planet's natural resources and fight to preserve biodiversity to attain sustainable growth. 'Social responsibility' refers to instilling in the staff and the business associates a sense of social responsibility and working together to further this value. Additionally, the goal of social responsibility is to foster individuals and potential leaders who can contribute to corporate success while also caring deeply about their influence on society. 'Superior corporate governance' helps in creating long-term success when implemented in all business operations as it provides a solid foundation to the organizations by adhering to sound corporate governance policies and procedures.

### **Impact of COVID-19**

The total impact and effects of covid-19 cannot be just measured by the lives that were lost to it. The outbreak was first reported in December 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei Province of China. Later the origin of the outbreak was linked to the Huanan seafood wholesale market. News of people being infected with pneumonia for unknown reasons was reported and the number of patients rapidly increased (Ciottia et al., 2019). The disease then spread like wildfire leading to global concerns, the closing down of borders, reduction in the economy while costing thousands of deaths on the other side. This urged virologists to prioritize covid-19 based research up to 10-20% worldwide. Billions of euros were donated for the research which aided the findings and helped in the rapid production of vaccines (Harper et al., 2020). Hettiarachchi et al. (2022) studied the impact of covid-19 on areas such as education, training, environment, healthcare, economy, and daily life behavior. The authors found that all the sectors were affected, some positively and others negatively. The covid-19 pandemic has affected economies and businesses all around the globe.

#### Impact of COVID-19 in Oman

Since the declaration of the pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Ministry of Health of Oman has taken up countless precautions and measures to control the outburst of the virus (Thumiki & Jurcic, 2021). With the help of community participation, the ministry was able to spread awareness to various cities, villages, and committees. Magd and Karyamsetty (2021), conducted a survey in Oman providing statistical analysis on how the pandemic situation has proven to be an opportunity for certain companies to implement CSR and sustainability actions. The survey result showed that companies around Oman have innovatively implemented CSR that benefited not only the companies but also the society, economy, and environment. Technological globalization has allowed consumers in Oman to venture out from their traditional form of shopping to online platforms. This gives rise to the E-commerce and M-commerce market in Oman (Al-Hawari et al., 2021).

The pandemic had a devastating effect and lead to the destruction of many businesses in Oman. This led to the complete closure of businesses, imports, and export causing a standstill moment for the economy. Then came the tough times of lockdowns and curfews which caused further damage to the somewhat existing small businesses (Bansal & DesJardine, 2014). In the long run, the sustainability of companies and organizations was challenged. To cope with these challenges, many businesses around the world started innovative ways to market their products. For example, fashion brands have chosen innovative ways to sell their products by mass production of cloth masks which showcase their unique brand.

According to a news article by Kharouf and Pillai (2020), the increasing impact of covid-19 had led to a lowering in oil prices, and an exodus of the highly skilled expatriate population, thus, posing various challenges to the country's economic conditions. The new article also provides us with statistical comparisons of condition pre and post covid economic conditions in Oman. Current research shows that the rate of the expatriate population has dropped by 6.8% in recent years which has greatly affected the economy. Khan (2023), states that Oman has recorded a strong recovery of the economy from the impact of covid in terms of an improved economy, elevated oil prices, increase in GDP, high hydrocarbon production, and removal of pandemic restrictions which has led to a boost in the overall economy of the country (Deelishya, 2022).

#### Impact of COVID-19 on Business Sustainability

The pandemic has focused enterprises and SMEs to change their business model and venture into innovative ways to market their products and ultimately sustain their business. This has led to the implementation of digital technologies, the use of IoT devices, and better E-commerce and M-commerce strategies. One of the biggest problems that the businesses faced were managing their financial crises, without which they could simply just collapse (Gregurec et al., 2021). Some other challenges that the business environment had to face were supply chain management, cash flow management, satisfying the employees and the customers, and

the production of a quality product with brand standards. According to Bansal et al. (2021), the pandemic has greatly affected the sustainability of a business causing a temporary shutdown of the production cycle and operational system. This harms the employee's organizational experience and mental health. Loss of trust in the global corporation is a major concern in corporate sectors due to news of scandals, fraud, and emissions cheating (Alqassabi, 2019).

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### Impact of COVID-19 on Automotive Industry

Covid-19 has led to an increase in concern for the automobile industry. Factors like the reduction of the global supply chain of automobile parts, related types of equipment, reused cars, and global shortage of semiconductor chips. This has caused a great disruption in the overall sector (Fasiuddin, 2022). The introduction of VAT has worsened the situation altogether. China is the major supplier of automobile products around the world, but the pandemic has affected the import and export sectors resulting in a reduction in the supply of the products. According to a report by The Arabian Stories (2020), covid-19 has greatly affected the manufacture and supply of automobile products globally resulting in the loss or even shutting down of many factories and car brands.

The automobile industry has faced a hard break during the covid-19 pandemic which led to a sharp drop in their production and sales globally. The pandemic led to the closure of many automobile showrooms and car dealers, causing a total collapse in the industry (Deloitte, 2020). Though there was a physical restriction of going and purchasing vehicles from the showrooms and viewing the vehicles in person, there were a few innovative ways in which the business managed to sustain itself during the covid. For example the use of the online mode of communication, availability of virtual 360 views of the cars for buying, online payment for delivery of vehicles, and availability of websites of the car showrooms and brands (Quarterly, 2021).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

### Research Design

The study aims at the perspective of the managers and employees on how the pandemic affected the company's business sustainability. The research design used in this study is a hybrid approach, with both quantitative and qualitative data collected by utilizing hypothesis testing of data collection methods, i.e., both primary and secondary sources.

### Population of the Study

The population of the study comprises a particular group of people regardless of their participation or exemption in a study related to the group (Definitions, 2019). Employees at Dhofar Automotive are regarded as a population, ranging from cashiers to team leaders, managers, technicians, mechanics, and cleaners, as these individuals play a significant part in the organization's day-to-day operations. The managers will be interviewed whereas the employees will be given a survey to complete. The individuals involved in Dhofar Automotive's business operations would be the target audience. The study sample will comprise two managers from the top level, i.e., the general manager, and the national service manager. As these professionals are in charge of the day-to-day operations of the firm, their opinions, attitudes, and concepts are very important when it comes to the study that is on business sustainability.

### Sampling Techniques

Shafi (2022), defines the sampling method or technique as the statistical tactics used on a certain group of the population to gather data samples required for study purposes. The sampling technique used for the study is non-probability sampling. Under

non-probability sampling, convenient and purposive sampling is the chosen technique for this study. This technique will be adopted by distributing questionnaires to the convenient targeted group of employees in the company. The answers collected from the survey will be analyzed and evaluated thoroughly for the study.

#### Sample Size

The number of participants in any experiments conducted for study purposes is known as the sample size (Byju's, 2022). As required for the study, 10% of the population of Dhofar Automotive will be questioned regarding the study. The company has 200 employees, and the questionnaire will be distributed among 20 employees working at the operational level of the company.

#### Research Instruments

The tools used to gather and analyze data for research are known as research instruments. Questionnaires, interviews, online surveys, social media tracking, and so on are some examples of tools and instruments used for research (Study Smarter, n.d.). The primary information will be gathered through interviews with Dhofar Automotive's General Manager, and National Service Manager. Also, an online questionnaire will be distributed among the employees at the operational level of the company. Secondary information on the financial reports and other rates related to the topic will be gathered through official publications, stock market reports, newspaper articles, academic papers, books, and so on. Both qualitative and quantitative analysis approach is selected for the completion of this project. The quality research approach will enable this project to enhance the existing literature on the topics related to this study. This approach is done by doing a live project, i.e., choosing a real-life organization as the subject of this study. Also, the quantitative research approach will be applied, by analyzing and evaluating the company's financial reports, and rates of growth and economy to answer the study objectives.

#### Research Validity & Reliability Testing

**Table 1: Validity Testing**



<i><b>Sl. No.</b></i>	<i><b>Questions</b></i>	<i><b>Testing</b></i>
<i><b>1.</b></i>	<i>What was the effect of the three-year pandemic on the company?</i>	<i>0.76</i>
<i><b>2.</b></i>	<i>How did the company sustain itself during the COVID-19 pandemic?</i>	<i>0.8</i>
<i><b>3.</b></i>	<i>What are the MICRO and MACRO factors that affected the company during the pandemic?</i>	<i>0.76</i>
<i><b>4.</b></i>	<i>Which year was the most productive year for the company, among the three years of the pandemic, and how?</i>	<i>0.8</i>
<i><b>5.</b></i>	<i>How did the company implement technology to overcome the pandemic?</i>	<i>0.72</i>
<i><b>6.</b></i>	<i>How can the company enhance its sustenance during uncertain events in the future using Information Technology?</i>	<i>0.8</i>

The questions in research are valid if the validity test is equal to or higher than 0.7 (Khalil, et al., 2022). To verify the reliability and validity of the questions of this study a pilot survey was conducted. The survey was sent to professional researchers to check whether the questions are valid and reliable or not. After the collection of the responses, the calculation was done in the range of - 1, 0 & 1. Table 3.4.2.1 shows the validity scores of each question. The questions of this study have a validity rating of more than 0.7. This shows that the research questions are valid and reliable for this study.

#### Data Collection Techniques

The primary data collection technique used for data collection is interviews and questionnaires. The primary data regarding the important aspects of business sustainability will be collected by interviewing three managers from the top level. Also, an online questionnaire will be circulated among 10% of the total employees at the operating level of the company. The secondary collection technique used for data collection is the financial reports from the Muscat Stock Exchange Market, and other financial records from newspaper articles, journal articles, and books.

#### Data Analysis Technique

Although a conclusion may review the main points of the paper, do not replicate the abstract as the conclusion. A conclusion might elaborate on the importance of the work or suggest applications and extensions. Authors are strongly encouraged not to call out multiple figures or tables in the conclusion—these should be referenced in the body of the paper.

### **Data Analysis**

#### Qualitative Analysis: Thematic Analysis

**Table 2: Interview questions & answers from General Manager, & National Service Manager**

GENERAL MANAGER	NATIONAL SERVICE MANAGER
a) How did the company sustain itself during the COVID-19 pandemic?	

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The employees were open and communicated well, for which the work environment was good. They were taught the health cautious instructions. Measures to prevent the spread of viruses within the organization were taken, like complete sanitization of the vehicles, and installation of sanitizers in every corner of the infrastructure. Customers were also given instructions to follow the health precautions.

The salary of the employees was reduced due to the increase in expenses. The employees also understood the shortcomings of the company due to the pandemic and agreed to the reduction of salaries. The employees were also open and followed proper communication among themselves and remained together in the hard times of COVID. They were happy that the company didn't terminate them.

The unnecessary expenditure was minimized to obtain a strict and smart cost reduction policy.

The employees were given flexible working hours thinking about the bad times of the pandemic. The work-life balance of the personnel was taken into consideration.

Being under the Zubair Group, Dhofar Automotive was under protection from the huge crisis.

The manpower of the company was trained and expected to work harder during the bad time of the corona pandemic. Due to their better communication, things got easier. Some of the personnel were sent on leave to maintain the balance of employees during the extra measure of COVID-19 taken like proper sanitization, preventive measures, mandatory masks, and other necessary precautions.

The salary of all the employees during the pandemic was deducted by 25%. As there was low income and high expenses it was difficult for the company to pay the entire amount. With the employees' agreement as well the company reduced the salaries, to maintain the sustenance of their business. The top and the strategic management level made sure to retain the employees and not dismiss them by offering a reduction in salaries, temporary lay-offs, etc.

The expenses like the marketing and advertising expenses were reduced to avoid unnecessary costs.

Dhofar Automotive is a company in the automobile industry under the renowned Zubair Group. The Zubair Group is a reputed company in Oman and has a long history of success. Dhofar Automotive got lifeline support for being under such a reputed and established group and making it through the pandemic.

b) What was the effect of the three-year pandemic on the company?	
<p>The stakeholders' interests were affected highly and there was a change in the shareholding market of the automotive industry.</p> <p>The supply of vehicles and spare parts was affected due to the long-term and repeated curfews. The cargo ships couldn't arrive on time due to the closure of the borders and government regulations. The supply chain was broken as there were disruptions in the supply of the orders due to which the production was also affected.</p>	<p>Due to COVID-19 concerns of the shareholders and the shareholding market of the automotive industry was adversely affected.</p> <p>The supply and demand deteriorated during the lockdowns and closure of businesses. Delays in the shipment of the goods of the company caused a drastic decline in the supply within the economy even though there was demand.</p>
c) Which year was the most productive year for the company, among the three years of the pandemic, how?	
<p>The most productive year among the three years of COVID was 2021. By the end of the year, the company as well as the economy started recovering. The company tried enhancing its sales, finishing the outdated stocks, and bringing in new stocks.</p>	<p>The year 2020, was a huge loss for the company. The first half of 2021 was in losses as the COVID cases increased and lockdowns were imposed more strictly and for a longer period. The second half of 2021, was the most productive year as that was the time when the COVID pandemic started deteriorating and companies started to recover. In 2023, the company started to gain high profits.</p>
d) What are the MICRO and MACRO factors that affected the company during the pandemic?	
MICRO (SWOT) analysis of the company:	
<p>The strength of the company is that the employees are loyal and committed to the company and their job. The financial crisis during the time of the pandemic was a weakness of the company. The positive vibe in the environment of the entity and the positivity of the employees were an opportunity for the company to do better in the future. There could also be a chance of a rise in the demand for cars after the pandemic when the economy recovers. This was also seen as an opportunity to boost the company's revenue. The uncertain events might rise again which was a threat to the company.</p>	<p>The strength of the company is the dedicated personnel and that it has a strong backbone Zubair group. The weakness of the company is that it went under financial risks and losses due to uncertain events. The opportunity of the company is that they believed that after COVID the sales will go high after the economy recovered. The threats to the company are uncertain events that can occur at any time.</p>
MACRO (PESTEL) analysis of the company:	
<p>The government decree ordering the closure of showrooms and workshops, as well as restrictions on the number of employees permitted in a given location, were the political issues influencing the organization. The country's economy suffered as no projects or infrastructure was approved, thus leading to the decline of</p>	<p>The degree issued by the ministry asking for the closure of showrooms, and workshops were the political factor affecting the company. The economy of the country decreased as no projects, nor infrastructures were accepted, which in turn affected the company's growth. The social factors were that the public was scared to interact</p>

businesses. The population was afraid to engage and stayed inside their houses due to societal concerns. The technology advancements like online orders, the Zubair app, CRM, and so on help in the easy flow. The COVID pandemic was an environmental crisis. The legislation said that orders must be delivered within 15-20 days of placing the purchase, and the ships were unable to arrive on time, creating the corporation's legal troubles.	and remained inside their homes. The technology positively impacted the company. The airborne disease caused an environmental threat to the company and its stakeholders. The law stated that the orders must be supplied within 15-20 days of placing the order, and the ships couldn't arrive on time which delayed the delivery of the products causing the company legal issues. A fire occurred in China due to which the chips couldn't reach on time.
<b>e) How can the company enhance its sustenance during uncertain events in the future using Information Technology?</b>	
Customer Relation Management (CRM), can be developed to communicate in a better way and avoid situations of distress. 3D printers can be used to print the chipsets. VR and AR are some of the Artificial intelligence systems that can be implemented for better productivity.	The company can implement proper online tools to ease the communication channel between the customers and the suppliers to avoid stress. Artificial Intelligence can be introduced to reduce labor work. Automated vehicles can be implemented to reduce accidents.

**Table 3: Illustrating Themes & Codes**

No.	Themes	Codes
f)	Business sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good communication</li> <li>• Health &amp; safety of the employees</li> <li>• Work-life balance</li> <li>• Flexible working hours</li> <li>• Employee training and retention</li> <li>• Employee motivation</li> <li>• Cost reduction policies</li> </ul>
g)	Pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interests of stakeholders</li> <li>• Share market</li> <li>• Lockdowns</li> <li>• Closure of businesses</li> <li>• Delay in shipments</li> <li>• Effects on supply chains</li> </ul>
h)	Productivity in 3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2020- least productivity</li> <li>• 2021- most productivity</li> <li>• 2022- stable productivity</li> </ul>

i)	MICRO factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Strengths</b>- loyal &amp; committed employees</li> <li>• <b>Weaknesses</b>- financial crisis</li> <li>• <b>Opportunities</b>- to perform better in the future</li> <li>• <b>Threats</b>- uncertain situation due to Covid-19</li> </ul>
j)	MACRO factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Political</b>- government regulations</li> <li>• <b>Economic</b>- no projects &amp; infrastructure were approved</li> <li>• <b>Social</b>- the public was scared to interact</li> <li>• <b>Technological</b>- technological advancement</li> <li>• <b>Environmental</b>- pandemic</li> <li>• <b>Legal</b>- law regarding customer rights</li> </ul>
k)	Usage of IT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CRM customer relation management</li> <li>• 3D printers</li> <li>• Artificial intelligence systems- VR &amp; AR</li> </ul>

1. Business sustainability is the key motive of every business enterprise. The impact of covid-19 on businesses around the globe was both positive and negative. The virus spread like wildfire leading to global concerns, the closing down of borders, reduction in the economy while costing thousands of deaths on the other side (Harper et al., 2020). Oman's economy has seen a quick but steady rise after the covid-19 pandemic hinting at a strong and stable business and cooperative sustainability process (Alqassabi, 2019). As stated by the OECD (2021) management, cooperation, investment, innovation, and future planning are some of the key aspects that kept many businesses still running after the pandemic. For Dhofar Automotive company, business during the pandemic times was sustained by focusing on good communication, health & safety of the employees, work-life balance, flexible working hours, cost reduction through reduced salary, employee training, retention, and employee motivation. Both the interviewees, the general manager, and the national service manager have highlighted that the Zubair Group is a reputed company in Oman and has a long history of success. Dhofar Automotive got lifelong support for being under such a reputed and established group which helped the company to make it through the pandemic.
2. The effect of the three-year (2020, 2021, and 2022) pandemic on the company was adverse as the stakeholders' interests were affected highly and there was a change in the shareholding market of the automotive industry. The supply of vehicles and spare parts was affected due to the long-term and repeated curfews. The cargo ships could not arrive on time due to the closure of the borders and government regulations as stated in table 2 in the political factors. Moreover, the legal factors in table 2 highlight that the supply chain was broken as there were disruptions in the supply of the orders due to which production was also affected. Thus, Dhofar Automotive was affected by the covid-19 pandemic in all three years.
3. The year 2020, was a huge loss for the company. The first half of 2021 was in losses as the COVID cases increased and lockdowns were imposed more strictly and for a longer period. The second half of 2021 was the most productive year as that was the time when the COVID pandemic started deteriorating and companies started to recover. In table 2, the national service manager has highlighted that in 2023, the company started to gain high profits. Therefore, the year 2021 was the most productive year for the company, among the three years of the pandemic.
4. Emet (2017) stated that a SWOT analysis is done to analyze the MICRO factors of any company. Similarly, Dhofar Automotive has its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The strength of the company is that the employees are loyal and

committed to the company and their job. The financial crisis during the time of the pandemic was a weakness of the company. The positive vibe in the environment of the entity and the positivity of the employees were an opportunity for the company to do better in the future. There could also be a chance of a rise in the demand for cars after the pandemic when the economy recovers. This was also seen as an opportunity to boost the company's revenue. The uncertain events might rise again which was a threat to the company as highlighted in table 2.

5. MACRO factors include the PESTEL factors such as political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal (Peterdy, 2022). Both interviewees highlighted that the government decree ordering the closure of showrooms and workshops, as well as restrictions on the number of employees permitted in each location, were the political issues influencing the organization. The country's economy suffered as no projects or infrastructure was approved, thus leading to the decline of businesses and the economy of Oman. The population was afraid to engage and stayed inside their houses due to societal concerns. Technological advancements like online orders, the Zubair app, CRM, zoom meet-ups of the personnel of the company, and so on help in the easy flow. The COVID pandemic was an environmental crisis. The legislation said that orders must be delivered within 15-20 days of placing the purchase, and the ships were unable to arrive on time, creating the corporation's legal troubles as stated in 2 in the legal factors.
6. According to the researchers Usha & Devakumar (2018), the long-term growth and sustainability of any enterprise depend on its capacity to foster an environment where innovation and technology may flourish from the bottom or roots of the company. During the pandemic, the usage of technology helped Dhofar Automotive to sustain the business by implementing Customer Relation Management (CRM), which can be developed to communicate in a better way and avoid situations of distress. 3D printers can be used to print chipsets. As the delay of shipments causes disturbance in the business operations of the company, they can implement measures to manufacture these chipsets in Oman itself. VR and AR are some of the Artificial intelligence systems that can be implemented for better productivity. Moreover, in table 2 in the technological factors, it is mentioned that the company developed a Zubair App to connect customers through online mode during working hours. By doing so, the trust of the customers was gained, and customer loyalty increased according to the National Service Manager of the company. Therefore, it can be said that the company can ensure its sustenance during uncertain events in the future using Information Technology.

## Quantitative Data Analysis

### SPSS Analysis

SPSS stands for Statistical Package for Social Sciences. It is powerful software that can be used for analyzing different business data that is taken from the market. IBM is the developer of this software, and it was developed using the java programming language (TechTarget, 2018).

**Table 4: The timestamp on 'Work Experience'**

Work Experience	N	%
Less than 1	2	10.0 %
1 – 5	9	45.0 %
6 – 10	6	30.0 %
More than 10	3	15.0 %

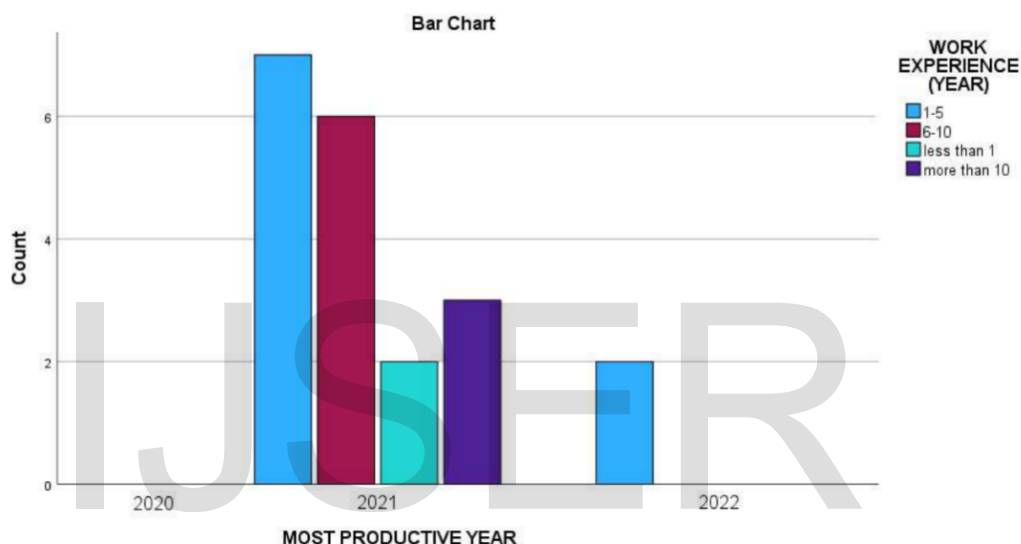
**Table 5: The timestamp on 'The effect of the 3-year pandemic on the company'**

Effects	N	%
High	3	15.0 %
Low	1	5.0 %
Medium	16	80.0 %

**Table 6: The timestamp on 'The most productive year during the pandemic'**

Most Productive Year	N	%
2020	0	0 %
2021	18	90.0 %
2022	2	10.0 %

**Figure 4: SPSS Analysis – Vertical Bar Graph**



### Descriptive Analysis

Tables 4, 5 & 6 show the timestamps by the experienced employees on the effect of the COVID pandemic and the most productive year of the company during the pandemic. The graph in figure 4 illustrates that 2021 was the most productive year during the pandemic. The employees working for a long period have also voted for 2021. Additionally, table 2 in the thematic analysis shows that both managers also confirmed that 2021 was the recovery and the most productive year during the pandemic.

In 2020, the economy of Oman was devastated by a combined shock of the widespread pandemic and the drastic reduction in oil prices. However, the economy of Oman started recovering slowly as the businesses in every sector started improving ranging from the oil & gas industry, automotive industry, manufacturing industries, service sectors, agriculture, fisheries, and so on (Dileeshiya, 2022). In the first half of 2021, Oman's economy recovered by 10%, and the GDP enhanced by 12.7% during the mid of 2021. By the third quarter of 2021, the economic growth of Oman recorded an increase of 12.7% (Khan, 2021).



#### Microsoft Excel Analysis

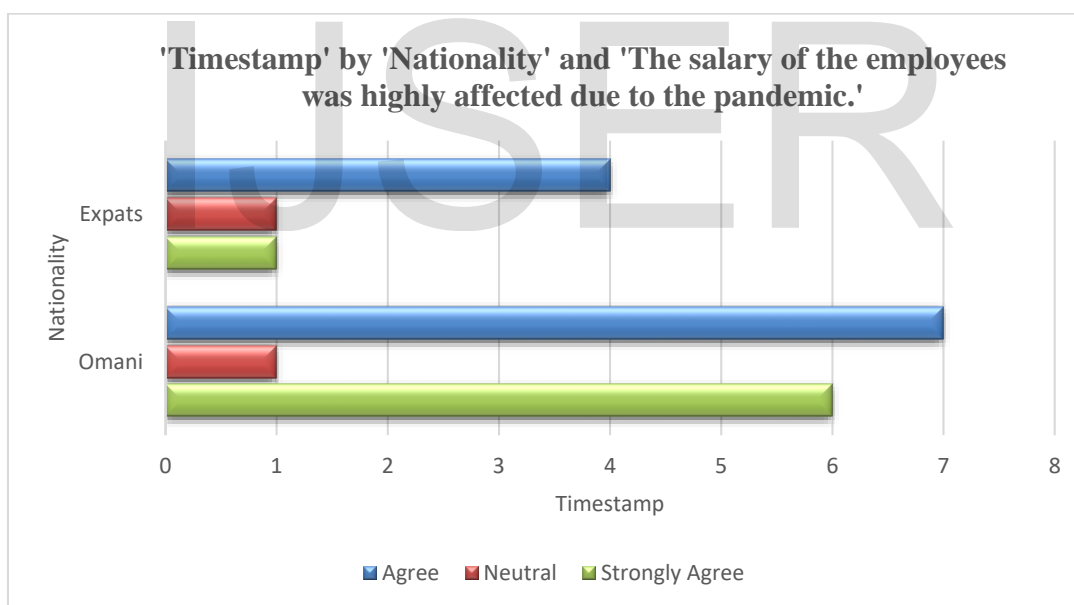
MS Excel is an electronic spreadsheet that is used for data analysis and the creation of professional graphs. It consists of various build tools for data interpretation and analysis (Gupta, 2022).

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**Table 7: 'Timestamp' by 'Nationality' and 'The salary of the employees was affected due to the pandemic.'**

Count of Timestamp	The salary of the employees was affected due to the pandemic.					
Nationality	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Expats	1	4	1	0	0	6
Omani	6	7	1	0	0	14
Total	7	11	2	0	0	20

**Figure 5: Microsoft Analysis – MS Excel - Horizontal Bar Graph**



### Descriptive Analysis

Table 7 shows the data and figure shows the representation of the agreement of the employees working in Dhofar Automotive, on the statement that “the salary of the employees was affected due to the pandemic”. The figure illustrates that there are a total of 20 employees in the sample size. 70% of the total sample size is consisting of Omanis i.e., 14 Omanis and the remaining 30% is the expatriates, i.e., 6 non-Omanis. Of the Omani participants of this study, 6 individuals strongly agree, 7 individuals agree, and 1 is neutral on the statement of the salary remaining unaffected. Of the 6 expatriates 1 strongly agrees that the salary was not affected by the pandemic whereas 4 of them agree and 1 is unsure about it. Considering that none of the employees disagreed with the statement that the salary was not affected it can be concluded that the salary was not highly affected due to the pandemic.

Table 2 shows that both the managers, General Manager and National Service Manager also approve that the salary during the pandemic was not highly impacted. Only 25% of the salary was deducted with the agreement of both the management team and

the operating team. Many companies in the automotive industries, as well as other sectors in Oman, terminated employees on a huge scale. A lot of individuals had to leave Oman due to this policy, whereas Dhofar Automotive didn't terminate any employees and tried retaining them by providing them with a minimal deduction salary at least. According to a newspaper report by Amir (2020), in Gulf news, due to the government's Omanization policy, the population of expatriates will be reduced drastically in 2020. The Bangladeshi community declined 13.9 percent to 450,471 whereas the Indian community declined from 542,091 in July to 517,702 in August. Over the same period, Pakistanis declined 15.7 percent to 176,550, while Filipinos fell 8.2 percent to 45,038. Meanwhile, the Egyptian population in Oman declined 8.2 percent to 31,511 persons, while the Ugandan number fell by nearly half to 14,099. However, the company kept in mind the feeling of its employees and tried its best to not terminate any employees and retain them if possible. Along with the reduction of salaries, some of the employees were given temporary layoffs to sustain the business operations and reduce expenses. Since the lay-off was temporary, the company brought the employees back on track once they fully recovered.

## Conclusion

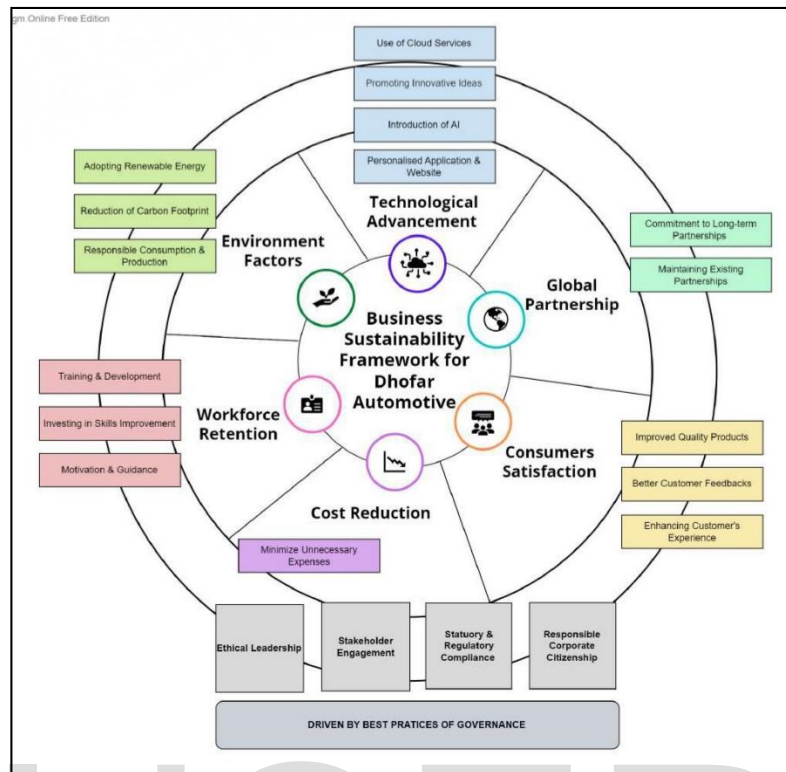
The research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the company's sustainability highlights the massive negative effect that is caused on the continuity of the company by uncertain events like pandemics and calamities. The entity had a vastly negative impact of the pandemic on the sustainability of its operations during the three phases. However, the entity could easily overcome the challenges of the deadly pandemic and sustain itself in the industry as it is under an established group in Oman, i.e., Zubair Automotive Group, and it is partnered with international brands like Chrysler, Dodge, Jeep, etc. The research investigated the company's strategies to implement Information Technology (IT) approaches for continuing their business operations even during the lockdown phases of the pandemic. Dhofar Automotive was swift in implementing technological approaches to sustain the business and continue its operations even during the closure.

The study's goal is to investigate the influence of the coronavirus pandemic on Dhofar Automotive's business sustainability and the ways the firm used to keep operating at that time. Analyzing the business operations of the company, Dhofar Automotive during the three years to find out the most productive year during the pandemic is also one of the objectives of the study. This research also focuses on analyzing the MICRO & MACRO factors affecting the business environment of the company. This study additionally tries to provide information technology innovations to help the firm survive the impending unforeseeable events. The research objectives are oriented to the research questions of this study.

## Recommendations

Business sustainability can be achieved in many ways as per the nature of the business. In the case of Dhofar Automotive, a business sustainability framework is recommended for the enhancement of sustainability in the post-pandemic period. The proposed framework is illustrated in below figure 6:

***Figure 6: Recommended Business Sustainability Framework for Dhofar Automotive***



The main six elements that may aid in the business sustainability of Dhofar Automotive are technological advancements, global sustainable partnerships, consumer satisfaction, cost reduction, workforce retention, and environmental factors.

- Technological advancement may be achieved using cloud services, promoting innovative ideas, the introduction of Artificial Intelligence such as Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR), and the use of personalized applications and websites. To minimize human errors, robots can be implemented in various business operations.
- Global sustainable partnerships may be achieved by commitment to long-term partnerships and maintaining existing partnerships. As the company lacks automated vehicles, the company may build further relations with international brands that possess innovations like automated vehicles. These vehicles can be put into auto-pilot mode allowing the drivers to rest.
- Improved consumer satisfaction to sustain a business may be attained by providing high-quality products, better customer service, and by enhancing customer experience.
- Cost reduction is important for business sustainability and can be accomplished by minimizing unnecessary expenses.
- Workforce retention is another important element and can be achieved by investing in training and development, skills improvement, motivation, and guidance.
- Environmental factors such as adopting renewable energy (solar panels), reduction of carbon footprint, and responsible consumption and production may aid in the sustainability of the business.
- Business sustainability can be attained by the elements mentioned above, but to make it more successful, all the elements must be driven by the best practices of governance in terms of ethical leadership, stakeholder engagement, statutory and regulatory compliance, and responsible corporate citizenship.
- Dhofar Automotive may also implement strategies such as opening new branches all over Oman to increase profits and market share.

## Limitations

The completion of this project was a roller coaster ride. The limitations of the study include: The project concentrates on only one automotive company, that is, Dhofar Automotive Oman as it was difficult to find data and due to the non-availability of time comparative study could not be performed. One of the major limitations was that due to limited research on the impact of covid-19 on business sustainability in the automobile industry, the study could not provide strong literature on the mentioned topic.

The study focuses only on three business sustainability frameworks to base the recommendations while various other models need to be considered to understand the drivers of sustainability in a better way. The financial reports of Dhofar Automotive were not available on the Muscat Stock Exchange which is why the quantitative analysis of the financial data of the company could not be presented.

### Future Research Directions

Future researchers may gain deep insights from the study regarding the impact of covid-19 on business sustainability. Detailed analysis of the effect of covid-19 on the three years 2020, 2021, and 2022 were studied to emphasize how Dhofar Automotive company sustained during the pandemic and ran smoothly in the post-pandemic period. New automotive companies may use this study and refer to the developed framework to understand business sustainability and its key drivers. The project can be utilized by other researchers to conduct a comparability study to learn the different viewpoints of other automotive companies around Oman and the globe. Existing automotive organizations may gain useful insights from the study and can implement the recommended model of business sustainability in their companies.

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