



Oman SMEs' Innovation and Entrepreneurship: It's Role in Supporting Oman's Economy

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Abstract

This research discussed a range of theories, frameworks, methods and models of innovation management for entrepreneurs and SMEs in Oman and highlighted the importance of economic theory of entrepreneurship in enhancing the role of SMEs. The researcher used both of primary data source such as doing an interview with Omani female entrepreneur and the secondary data sources such as academic article through researchgate and academia websites. Moreover, there were recommendations focusing on supporting SMEs in the country to establish more restricted rules and regulations to help SMEs establishing their business easily such as providing online services to register SMEs business and get immediate licensing without any delay. All necessary documents should be submitted in one platform for efficient result and it should not take more than 3 days for approval. Furthermore, the government should provide the service of clearing the transaction of entrepreneurs from their homes, so that an employee from government who is also an entrepreneur can complete all the necessary procedures from home.

Keywords: SMEs' entrepreneurship and innovation, entrepreneurship and innovation, innovation, Oman entrepreneurship, KSF, key success factors

Introduction

The objectives of this research are to discuss a range of theories, frameworks, methods and models of innovation management for entrepreneurs and SMEs in Oman; to identify the contributions of SMEs during the pandemic in boosting Oman economy and recovery, and to highlight the importance of economic theory of entrepreneurship in enhancing the role of SMEs and the government support to SMEs during pandemic. Notable traits of successful entrepreneur will also be covered.

During the pandemic period of COVID '19. more than 7000 SMEs have been set in Oman after March 2020 and almost 52,524 SMEs operating in the country by 2021. SMEs contributes in

creating digital solutions for clinics in order to reduce the chances of potential spread of infection and reduce crowding. Offered shops that needed to shut down an online space to continue their business operations. Moreover, for those require urgent medical care surgical prosthetics was manufactured in Oman.

SMEs very significant contributions to Oman economy are as follows:

- **Job Creation:** SMEs contributes in creating more jobs and solving the issue of unemployment. SMEs play significant positive role in boosting Oman economy through employment creation, entrepreneurship, innovation and economic growth. 44,139 new businesses have been registered with the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprise Development at the end of April 2020. Furthermore, most job demanded in post covid-19 are related to healthcare, skills in cutting-edge technology, automation, cybersecurity, data-based services, artificial intelligence and jobs related to self-sufficiency and economic resilience (Mondal *et al.*, 2021).
- **Contributing on GDP:** SMEs contribute in Oman GDP for the year of 2020 is 15% (Alqassabi, 2020). In At the end of March 2022 Muscat had the largest number of SMEs which is 24,977 followed by 11,464 establishment in North Al Batinah and at the third place Al Dakhiliyah with 8,534 according to the latest statistic issued by the National Center for Statistic and Information (NCSI).

Prominent SMEs Innovations During Covid-19

- Van Auken *et al.* (2021) stated that during the pandemic of covid-19 SMEs in Oman shifted to digitalization and created digital innovation. Online platforms played crucial role during the crises in connecting resources, suppliers, users with new markets. In order to overcome disruptions in supply chains and to remain on business during the lockdown firms moved their operation online. Using digital technologies and with smart working solutions reduced the negative impact of disappearance of face-to-face and onsite business activities. It helps in controlling the operations remotely as well as creating competitive advantages.

- SMEs invested during the pandemic in transportations and logistics to provide smooth transportations, facilitate movement, provide smart parking and reduce congestions. Great example is using ITS system by Mwasalat, which includes electronic tickets, cargo and passengers details, mobile app, drivers and buses monitoring system and reservation system. Furthermore, launching Baladiyeti mobile app, which concerns with e-payment of parking violations, providing parking reservations services and providing smart parking (Van Auken *et al.*, 2021).

The Impact of SMEs Innovation to SMEs Sustainability

According to Malesios *et al.* (2018), economic aspects such as customer relationship, supplier relationship and business, processes have positive impact to SEMs sustainability and growth. Social aspects such as health and safety practices has also positive impact to SEMs sustainability and growth. Alqassabi (2020) demonstrated that investing in new technology as coping up with market changes has helped SEMs to sustain its expansion of services and productivity.

Table 1: *Structure & Growth of SMEs in Oman:*

Characteristics	n	%
Sector of the business		
Commercial business	198	50.77
Manufacturing	773	18.97
Services	70	17.95
Tourism	34	8.91
Others	15	4.10
Level of the entrepreneur's business		
Start-up	85	21.8
Survival	128	32.8
Expand	94	24.1
Maturity	22	5.6
Exit	18	4.6
Unsure	43	11.0
Reasons of losing businesses		
Financial related issues	65	16.7
Production related issues	7	1.8
Personnel related issues	8	2.1
Marketing related issues	67	17.2
Legislation and complexity related issues	99	25.4
Others	20	5.1
Not applicable	124	31.8

Note: Adopted from “Insights on sustainability of small and medium enterprises in Oman: a conceptual framework,” by Alqassabi. M. A, 2020, *International Journal of Economics and Financial Issues*, 10(1), 209-218 (<https://doi.org/10.32479/ijefi.9063>).

As shown in Table 1, 17.95% of SEMs sector is operating in services, 18.97% in manufacturing, while the largest sector goes for commercial business by 50.8%. However, only 8.91% operating in tourism sector (Alqassabi. 2020).

Table 2: *Sustainability Indicators of SMEs in Oman:*

Parameters	Declined	No. growth	<10%	10-25%	>25%	Chi-square	P-value
Sales/turnover	6.7	19.0	25.1	31.8	17.4	68.41	0.000
Profit	9.5	20.0	31.0	23.8	15.6	51.85	0.000
Capital	8.5	32.6	24.4	18.5	16.2	63.80	0.000
Employment (no)	0	7.4	14.6	33.3	44.6	135.81	0.000
Over all	6.2	19.7	23.8	26.8	23.4	51.79	0.000

Note: Adopted from “Insights on sustainability of small and medium enterprises in Oman: a conceptual framework,” by Alqassabi. M. A, 2020, *International Journal of Economics and Financial Issues*, 10(1), 209-218 (<https://doi.org/10.32479/ijefi.9063>).

Table 2 illustrates sustainability indicators of SMEs in Oman as the owners of SMEs took it for the last 4 years. The overall performance of the SMEs during the last 4 years can be described as moderated growth. 45% of SEMs indicated a growth exceeding 25% for employment. On the other hand, 41.1% of SMEs showed negative growth in capital. While 31% of SEMs revealed a growth <10 for profit. Hence, 32% of SEMs witnessed a growth between 10% and 25% for sales/turnover (Alqassabi. 2020).

Table 3: *Impact of External Innovation on SMEs in Oman:*

Challenges	Level of impact					Chi-square	P-value
	None	Low	Medium	Big	Very big		
Competition	3.8	4.6	18.5	24.4	48.7	262.03	0.000
Technology changes	7.9	8.2	23.3	32.8	27.7	101.2	0.000
Lack of financial access	6.4	4.6	16.4	30.5	42.1	201.1	0.000
Lack of skilled workforce	8.7	6.4	15.9	32.1	36.9	148.3	0.000
Rules and regulations	2.8	5.6	12.8	27.7	51.0	307.1	0.000
Customer interaction and association	5.6	6.9	28.2	31.8	27.4	125.6	0.000
Dealing with the suppliers	8.2	11.8	26.9	34.4	18.7	90.1	0.000

Note: Adopted from “Insights on sustainability of small and medium enterprises in Oman: a conceptual framework,” by Alqassabi. M. A, 2020, *International Journal of Economics and Financial Issues*, 10(1), 209-218 (<https://doi.org/10.32479/ijefi.9063>).

Table 3 indicates the impact of external factors impact SMEs in Oman. For example, 53.1% of the owner of SMEs revealed that dealing with suppliers has the least impact on SMEs performance comparing with competition, which has the greatest impact on SMEs performance by 73.1%. 69.2% for customer interaction and association, rules and regulation scored 78.7%. While 69.0% goes for lack of skilled workforce, 72.6% for lack of financial access and 60.5% for technology changes (Alqassabi. 2020).

Importance of Economic Theory of Entrepreneurship

- **Richard Cantillon Theory:** it is one of the classical economics theories of entrepreneurship. His theory focuses on taking risk through buying at certain prices and selling them at uncertain prices. Buying with low price and sell it at higher price. The relationship between the supplier and the consumer. He emphasizes on the role of entrepreneur as key player to boost economy and achieving market equilibrium through the production of goods and services and exchange them. Cantillon on his theory focused specifically on the economic features of human action. His theory highlights the concept of risk, profit and loss (Smith & Chimucheka, 2014).
- **Innovation Theory by Schumpeter:** Joseph Schumpeter proposed this theory. The theory outlines that an entrepreneur through introducing successful innovation can earn economic profits. The focus is on developing new products and technologies that can bring competitive advantages into the business. For Schumpeter innovation mean as an entrepreneur the goal is increase the demand for his products such as opening or emerging of new market, new design of a product, finding new sources of raw materials and introducing new quality of goods. Moreover, innovation involves reducing the overall cost of production such as introducing new machinery, introducing new products, method or techniques (Smith & Chimucheka, 2014).

Karadag (2016) revealed that through the innovation theory, it enhance the role of SMEs in Oman where it provides SMEs better access to global markets at competitive cost and strength SMEs contributions.

According to Al Bulushi (2017), the Omani labour law that involves Omanisation law it helps in supporting and developing SMEs activities in Oman. This law gives the opportunity for SMEs to reach until 100% of Omanisation. Omanisation contributes in

solving employment issue in Oman through replacing expat workers with trained Omani.

Factors Key to Successful Innovation

- **Constant Improvement**

Storey *et al.* (2016) revealed that constant improvement could be maintained for SMEs for all sectors. Through having, periodic analysis and using tools such as SWOT analysis tools to evaluate the strength and weaknesses of functional areas of the business, which is looking at the internal side of the business. This includes HR, Marketing, Finance, Operations, Productions, Quality control, etc. On the other hand, evaluating the opportunities and threats at the external side of the business such as looking at new trend in the market, new technology, and social aspects like life style of people, government regulations such as Omanisation law and legal aspect. Those aspects covers the PESTLE analysis tool. SMEs can ensure constant improvement by using SWOT, PESTEL and Value Chain. Value chain is looking internally into the business for example coming up with new set of goals for the second quarter, setting up the KPI for the second quarter to get the annual target.

- **Create Value for Your Customer**

This can be done through market research and getting feedback from customer, doing online survey, maintaining research and development (R&D), maintain market research group. To know the real need of customer and address them. Create products based on customer need. Moreover, SMEs needs to keep the right balance between customer's feedback and the entrepreneur's vision as well as maintaining the alignment to the company's vision (Storey *et al.*, 2016).

- **Implement The Lean Startup Model**

This model was designed to address market risk fast. A technique emphasizes the urgency, speed in idea search and execution. It reflects creating a prototype of the business product. This method helps SMEs to save huge time and resources. For example producing small item at small quantity then put it on the market and assess customer

feedback regarding the product. Consider customer feedback if they like the product then produce it at large quantity. This involve having incremental idea or innovation where it reflects on keeping improving the existing product or having disruptive idea or innovation which reflect introducing something new in the market that was not there before (Storey *et al.*, 2016). The Lean Startup Model helps SMEs to assess customer demand fast with using the least amount of resources possible.

- **Allocate Resources Properly to Support Your Strategy**

Storey *et al.* (2016) outlines that it is so crucial for SMEs success to have resources. The availability and allocating the right resources to support business strategy and for business operation. Bothe human and financial resources are valuable and considered as an assets for SMEs.

- **Create an Innovation Company Culture**

In order to create an innovation company culture for SMEs two factors must be taken under considerations. The willingness of an entrepreneur to share his own idea and openness to other people's idea. Those factors to boost innovation culture at business. People in innovative culture see failure as an opportunity to learn and improve (Storey *et al.*, 2016).

- **Stay Focused**

SMEs can stay focused of their business by monitoring and keep assessing their product and services, doing review about it, tackle what is need to make improvement again (Storey *et al.*, 2016).

Support Provided by Oman Government to SMEs During Pandemic Crisis

- **Tax:** to reduce the effect of the Covid-19 crisis government in Oman during the pandemic grant tax exemption for some sectors that have been among the hardest hit by the pandemic. Moreover, the government reduced the rate of turnover tax

from 3% to 1% for SMEs. Furthermore, exemption from tourism taxes for tourism sector during the pandemic period (Mahi & Thani, 2019).

- **Loan Assistance:** the government of Oman announced a series of measures to overcome the difficulties presented by Covid-19 in order to reduce the cost of borrowing and increase liquidity, to help SMEs the Central Bank of Oman required from banks and financial institutions to postpone the repayment of loans for a period of six month to support recovery.
- **Additional Package:** the government introduced the availability of an additional package of subsidies to boost SMEs business. The package includes payment of overdue fees by entrepreneur and a number of subsidies. For entrepreneurs who are Riyada Card Holders are eligible for waivers from fees payable and fines against delays in loans to the lender portfolio (Mahi & Thani, 2019).
- **Capacity Building & Research development:** government led capacity building program play great role in modeling SEMs. Through capacity building program such as linkages with academic institutions, mentorship, trainings and organizations offering support to develop business. Furthermore, when government support and fund research that can boost the growth of SMEs.
- **Improvement of Infrastructure:** the taxes and fees that the government collect it from business are used to improve and develop infrastructure. Resulting in improving and developing SMEs through providing all the necessary of facilities for ease of doing business. These include maintain airports, energy transmission lines, roads, transportations, seaports, bridges, telecommunication systems, etc.
- Exempting SMEs from registrations fees in the Isnad system of the Tender Board. In addition, Exempting SMEs from land fees usufruct and postponing the payment of arrears (Mahi & Thani, 2019).

Importance of Innovation Theory of Entrepreneurship

According to Pauceanu (2016), innovation theory is part of economic theories of entrepreneurship presented by Schumpeter. The theory outlines the concept of introducing something new in the business such as new method, new technology, new market strategy, new product or services. It is about coming up with new creative ideas and implement it successfully through decision making and using strategic planning. It can be either creating new idea or improving on exciting methodologies, processes or products.

- **Innovation helps in taking advantage of new technology**

Investing on new technologies such as using artificial intelligence helps SMEs business and tourism industry to prompt their activities and products. Providing efficient services, focusing on process innovation will result in optimizing tourism business and gain competitive advantages against its competitors (Alyahya'ei *et al.*, 2020).

- **Innovation helps to stay ahead of the competition**

It helps tourism sector to attract customers, fulfill customer's needs and gain customer satisfaction. It helps to maintain competitiveness in the market locally or globally (Alyahya'ei *et al.*, 2020).

- **Innovation boosts the growth of tourism business**

It contributes in increase sales and profits of the business, introduce way for improvement through R&D. Adding value to the business. It helps solving employment issue by creating jobs and promotes economic growth (Alyahya'ei *et al.*, 2020).

Success Story of One Omani Entrepreneur

The researcher has selected an Omani female entrepreneur Ms. Alaa Al Siyabi for this discussion. Ms. Alaa Al Siyabi she is the founder and owner of the brand Alaa Al Siyabi. She is an Omani fashion designer of traditional women dresses, which can be worn on various occasions related to Omani women, including engagement and henna occasions. She started her business on 2006 and after 10 years, she managed to open her own boutique in Muscat.

She reflects her view and pride in the Omani dress in her design. She combines traditional dress with modernity at the same time. Ms. Alaa innovation involves production innovation and it is incremental innovation. Ms. Alaa used to produce only traditional dresses for women. However, during Covid-19 Ms. Alaa introduces different line of production where she started do design elegant Women's abaya, creating her own perfumes and bakhour which carry her name and brand. She started to introduce packaging of different design and label her brand with design of her own. She produced her own fabrics called wail with exclusive special patterns of her own design through collaborating with Oman Textile Mills. Currently she announced of producing traditional dresses for little girls from age 2 – 5 years.

Success of the Company

Ms. Alaa brought huge success to her brand especially during the pandemic where she increases the sales of her company by 35%, attract new customer segment, and achieved customer loyalty and customer satisfaction. During covid-19, women were sitting at home due to the lockdown and restrictions from the government. Ms. Alaa designed simple clothes that can be worn at home on daily basis with unique and simple embroidery on the sleeves, made of several fabrics sold in the market such as cotton and silks. It is suitable for home sitting as well as elegant. Ms. Alaa increased her production due to the high demand for those cloths. She even supply it to GCC countries and across Middle East Countries. The awareness and popularity of the brand increased as well where all Omani women wants to wear from this brand. Moreover, she invested in marketing were she collaborate with foreign models to model her designs and traveled to the UK to show her design there. She even received Creative Award 2020 by the United Nations for Arts Organization (UNARTS) on the totality of her unique creations in the field of international fashion from UK. The certificate is presented to creative people in the Arab World.

Notable Entrepreneurial Traits of Ms. Alaa Al Siyabi

a. Persistence

According to Caliendo *et al.* (2020) persistence of entrepreneurial is to continue positive maintenance of entrepreneurial motivation with and constantly be part of active engagement

in new business venture regardless of attractive alternatives. It is an important factor for entrepreneurs that helps them in realizing potential economic benefits and gains as well as it helps them in exploiting and pursuing their business opportunities.

Ms. Alaa Al Siyabi consider one of the Omani entrepreneur who has very high persistence in doing her business. She will always find a way to overcome her challenges she faces on her business and never give up easily. She faced the crisis of Covid-19 with her strong persistence personality to survive her business. She will always have alternative plans when she faces major difficulties in order to achieve her desired goals. For example, she considered as extremely persistent problem solver, when the lockdown happened in Oman due to the pandemic of covid-19 her store was shutdown therefor she never hesitate to shift immediately online to continue providing the society with her products in no time. She is very realistic about what she can and cannot do as well as.

b. Self-Confidence

Garaika *et al.* (2019) stated that self-confidence is the security that an individual possesses as a capability that helps in identifying opportunities and develops business successfully with the help of available resources. It influences productivity as it is considered a positive psychological capital of self-esteem. Entrepreneurs with self-confidence are more likely to be success.

Self-confidence clearly reflects the traits of Ms. Alaa. She always believe on herself, and believe on what she is doing. This reflects on her business since she is managing and running her own business by herself. She is the owner of her business without having any partners. She have the confidence to turn her ideas and thoughts into reality even when others do not believe on her idea and do not support her. She stick with her decisions and believes that she will do a very good job. Her self-confidence motivates her to introduce new products in the market and come up with new things.

c. Opportunity Seeker

According to Chen *et al.* (2020) Opportunity seeking is the process of discovering new ideas and searching for different options and see how it will work in the marketplace. Entrepreneurs seek always to improve their operational capabilities through introducing new technologies

into their business. Moreover, opportunity seeking for entrepreneurs means expanding their business into new market.

Based on Ms. Alaa experience she is so good in opportunity seeking and the reason for this that she always visit new markets locally, internationally to see what is new in the market, and what is market trends in order to introduce new product and services into her business. Since she is a designer and on fashion field she keep travelling to the UK and attending fashion shows there to see all that is new in this field, then she apply it into her business. She always tries new things and different from what she have done before to attract new customer to her business. She seeks to introduce Omani traditional dress for women globally.

d. Risk Taker

Antoncic *et al.* (2018) define risk taking as person's orientation to take risk. It involves entrepreneurs accepting different types of risk when creating new firms; these might include financial risk, psychological and social risk. For entrepreneurs taking risk is necessary in order for the business to be succeed. They see risk as the cost of innovation and opportunity.

Based on Ms. Alaa experience she is an optimistic risk taker. She will not avoid failure by avoiding taking risk, She always look at failure as an opportunity to learn and improve for business growth. For example, even during covid-19 global restriction she didn't hesitate to travel to UK and Dubai to get the stocks she need for her business along with adhering to all necessary procedures during the pandemic.

e. Demand for Quality and Efficiency

According to Szerb *et al.* (2019), the demand for quality and efficiency is doing things faster and in better way in order to ensures outstanding compliance with standards. Taking requirements and processes under consideration to meet and exceed expectations within the company. An entrepreneur always seeks to do things in excellent way and with less cost through competing with others.

Reflecting Ms. Alaa personality, she is the type of entrepreneur that pays grate attention on demand for quality and efficiency. She even sometimes carry out her work at home. She produce very high quality traditional dresses for women as it is purchased quickly as soon as

it comes out without taking any more time. She gets her own materials globally dealing with international suppliers, materials that is hard to get it and is not available locally in order to produce high quality dresses.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, this research discussed the crucial role of SMEs in Oman as they contributes in boosting Oman economy and its growth. The researcher have found that SMEs contributes highly in solving employment issues in Oman and with it is rapidly growth employment issue can come to end. Moreover, SMEs sustainability relays on many aspects, the most important aspect is SMEs innovation, internal and external innovation, incremental or disruptive innovation in order to survive in local and global market competition. In addition, the researcher investigated the important role of government support in SMEs growth and success. Without the help from government and ease of procedures, SMEs cannot survive in the market.

The researcher would like to recommend to Oman government to support SMEs in the country to establish more restricted rules and regulations to help SMEs establishing their business easily such as providing online services to register SMEs business and get immediate licensing without any delay. All necessary documents should be submit it in one platform for efficient result and it should not take more than 3 days for approval like in Dubai. Furthermore, the government should provide the service of clearing the transaction of entrepreneurs from their homes, so that an employee from government comes to complete all the necessary procedures from the home of the entrepreneur to make it easy for him.

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