

Transformative Networks: How Support Organizations are Reshaping Women's Entrepreneurship in Oman and the GCC

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Abstract: The ascendance of women's entrepreneurship constitutes a fundamental catalyst for economic diversification and social innovation within Oman and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). This investigation explores the function of supportive organizations in reformulating the entrepreneurial ecosystem for women by confronting obstacles such as restricted access to financial resources, cultural impediments, and challenges associated with market penetration. Through initiatives encompassing mentorship, educational programs, and professional networking, female entrepreneurs have achieved notable advancements in fields such as financial services, digital commerce, and sustainable agricultural practices. Prominent individuals, including Omani entrepreneurs Shamsa Al Salami and Laila Al Harthi, in conjunction with GCC leaders such as Mona Ataya, Fatima Al Khulaifi, and Princess Reema bint Bandar, have pioneered transformative enterprises that not only create employment opportunities but also establish global standards. Notwithstanding these accomplishments, persistent challenges including regulatory barriers and market resistance remain, thereby underscoring the necessity for more robust policies and ongoing support. This study enriches the dialogue surrounding gender-inclusive economic development, providing valuable perspectives for policymakers and stakeholders aimed at enhancing resilience and fostering innovation through enterprises led by women.

Keywords: Women entrepreneurship, GCC, economic diversification, support organizations, socioeconomic impact.

Introduction

In the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, the ascent of women's entrepreneurship serves as a potent catalyst for both economic diversification and societal advancement, thereby aligning with the objectives of national strategic frameworks such as Oman's Vision 2040 and Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. Data shows that female involvement in entrepreneurship within the MENA area is only at 6%, trailing behind the global figure of 11%, as detailed in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor's report from 2021. Despite this evident gap, there have been commendable strides in progress. In the Emirates, the female ownership rate in private enterprises nears 10%, and in Saudi Arabia, the number of businesses owned by women has shown a striking increase of 112% from 2015 to 2021 (PwC, 2022). Women entrepreneurs in this locality persist in facing numerous obstacles, which encompass limited financial support, scarcity of mentorship, and systemic barriers, including strict regulatory conditions. The World Bank (2020) reveals that only 5% of bank loans in MENA countries are designated for women-led enterprises, thereby highlighting a significant gender disparity in financial accessibility. Furthermore, a substantial 64% of women in the MENA region acknowledge financial access as a primary obstacle (World Bank, 2020). Cultural barriers and a lack of networking opportunities further exacerbate the entrepreneurial landscape for women, as they often face constraints related to mobility and decision-making power (IFC, 2021).

Transformative networks and support organizations are essential for aiding women in navigating various challenges. Programs focused on mentorship, along with initiatives championed by government agencies and professional associations, are fundamental in offering vital resources and opportunities for the achievement of women entrepreneurs. Empirical evidence suggests that women engaged in structured support programs are 37% more likely to achieve success in their entrepreneurial ventures (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2021), while mentorship networks can augment the survival rate of women-led enterprises by 60% (ILO, 2022). Notable women entrepreneurs such as Laila Al Harthi from Oman and Mona Ataya from the UAE exemplify the substantial impact of these support mechanisms. Laila's fintech initiatives have stimulated innovation within Oman's burgeoning sectors, whereas Mona's Mumzworld, which serves over 2.5 million clients across the Gulf Cooperation Council, has revolutionized the e-commerce landscape (Forbes Middle East, 2021). These success stories underscore the vital importance of mentorship, financial support, and policy advocacy in empowering women to surmount barriers and thrive in competitive markets. This study aims to investigate the processes through which these support organizations mitigate systemic challenges and foster an environment conducive to inclusive growth and gender equity within the region. The data indicates a significant 112% growth in women-operated enterprises in Saudi Arabia from 2015 to 2021 (PwC, 2022), revealing a pressing need to enhance these

networks to completely leverage the talents of women entrepreneurs in the GCC and contribute to the larger economic development of the area.

Objectives

1. To examine the influence of support networks and organizations, encompassing mentorship and financial aid, in promoting the progression of female entrepreneurs in Oman and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).
2. To analyze case studies of female entrepreneurs in Oman and the GCC, emphasizing the way support systems have enabled their entrepreneurial achievements.
3. To assess the socioeconomic impact of women-led businesses in Oman and the GCC, focusing on community development and economic diversification.

Methodology: This research method consists of a detailed exploration of earlier studies, showcasing a thorough assessment of the literature and an exhaustive analysis of pertinent case studies, aimed at revealing how support organizations influence the progression of women's entrepreneurship in Oman and the GCC. By emphasizing the transformative practices that are influencing the trajectories of women entrepreneurs, this approach elucidates critical insights into contemporary frameworks.

1. Literature Review

- **Purpose:** The goal is to investigate the ways in which support networks assist women entrepreneurs in Oman and the Gulf Cooperation Council.
- **Process:** Conduct a comprehensive review of existing literature, governmental publications, and scholarly articles pertaining to women's entrepreneurship within the GCC, with a particular emphasis on Oman. Investigate into the numerous support mechanisms, encompassing mentorship, business development centers, governmental schemes, financial aid, and networking. Analyze the evolution of these support structures and their subsequent impact on women entrepreneurs.
- **Outcome:** Provide a synthesis of the present landscape of women's entrepreneurship in the GCC, pinpoint areas lacking research, and underscore critical issues such as accessibility to resources, prevailing challenges, and the significance of gender-specific support programs. This will inform the subsequent phases of the investigation.

2. Case Study Analysis

- **Purpose:** The aim is to clarify how support systems influence women entrepreneurs in Oman and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).
- **Process:** Choose 3-5 successful women entrepreneurs from Oman and the GCC who have benefited from support networks. These may include:
 - **Government initiatives:** Such as Oman's Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) support or the GCC Women's Entrepreneurship Program.
 - **Private sector assistance:** Including mentorship, financial support, and business incubators specifically tailored for women.
 - **Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) initiatives:** Community-oriented programs aimed at empowering women in business endeavors. Incorporate diverse sectors (e.g., technology, retail, social enterprises) to provide a comprehensive range of insights.
- **Outcome:** Examine how these entrepreneurs leveraged support systems to surmount obstacles and expand their enterprises. The objective is to furnish concrete examples of the operational efficacy of these support networks and underscore their significance within the GCC context.

Scope of the Study: The focus of this inquiry is the important role of support organizations in enhancing women's entrepreneurial opportunities in Oman and the GCC region. The investigation delves into the comprehensive spectrum of assistance provided by these organizations, which encompasses advisory services, financial resources, skill enhancement initiatives, and networking opportunities, all designed to mitigate the challenges encountered by female entrepreneurs. The research meticulously analyzes both regional and country-specific programs, employing case studies from Oman and other GCC nations to identify exemplary practices and effective strategies. Furthermore, it explores the consequential socio-economic effects associated with the empowerment of women entrepreneurs, in alignment with national economic diversification agendas, including Oman's Vision 2040 and Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

- i. Geographical Scope:**
 - a. The study focuses primarily on Oman and the broader GCC region, including countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait. The focus will be on Oman with comparisons drawn to other GCC nations.
- ii. Target Group:**
 - a. The research focusses on women entrepreneurs who have established and grown businesses in the GCC region. This includes both early-stage and established women-led businesses across various sectors, such as technology, retail, manufacturing, and social enterprises.
- iii. Support Networks and Organizations:**
 - a. The study examines support networks and organizations that assist women entrepreneurs, including:
 - i. **Government programs** (e.g., Oman's SME support initiatives, GCC Women's Entrepreneurship Program).
 - ii. **Private sector organizations** (e.g., mentorship programs, incubators, funding platforms for women-led startups).
 - iii. **Non-profit and NGO initiatives** supporting women in business.
- iv. Time Frame:**
 - a. The study will consider recent developments in the entrepreneurial ecosystem (within the last 5-10 years) to capture the most relevant and contemporary trends, initiatives, and challenges.
- v. Key Areas of Focus:**
 - a. The impact of mentorship, financial support, business incubators, and networking opportunities on the growth and success of women entrepreneurs.
 - b. The role of cultural and policy factors in shaping the effectiveness of support networks.
 - c. Challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in accessing and utilizing these support systems, such as gender bias, financial barriers, and societal perceptions.
- vi. Methodology Focus:**
 - a. The study adopts qualitative research methods, primarily focusing on literature review and case studies.
- vii. Limitations:**
 - This study does not include an exhaustive survey of all GCC countries. Instead, it focuses on Oman and select nations where support systems for women entrepreneurs are actively evolving.
 - The study does not address quantitative data related to business performance metrics due to the qualitative nature of the research.

Literature Review

A rising collection of academic investigations into women's entrepreneurship emphasizes its significant impact on encouraging economic variety and societal development, notably in emerging markets like Oman and the GCC region. The body of research available underscores the specific difficulties that women entrepreneurs' encounter, which involve cultural biases, limited resource access, and systemic barriers, while also revealing the supportive frameworks that aid in their development. This literature review synthesizes significant research concerning the impacts of mentorship programs, funding initiatives, policy frameworks, and entrepreneurial networks, with a focus on their transformative effects in enhancing women's empowerment. Through a comprehensive analysis of previous studies, the review establishes a foundational understanding of how supportive organizations substantially affect the reconfiguration of the entrepreneurial ecosystem for women in the region.

Reducing Barriers to Female Entrepreneurship in Oman: Does Family Matter? Published in the Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in The Global Economy in 2022, this scholarly investigation conducted by Fatma Abd El Basset, Robin Reginald Bell, and Buthaina Al Kharusi examines the influence of familial dynamics on the entrepreneurial challenges faced by women in Oman. Employing a cross-sectional survey methodology with data sourced from 123 female respondents, the findings challenge prevailing academic narratives by indicating that familial characteristics do not act as determinants of entrepreneurial challenges. The research underscores the imperative for extensive investigation within the Omani context, recognizing that the limited sample size restricts the generalizability of the findings.

Understanding Barriers to Development and Growth in Women, Ethnic, and Minority Entrepreneurship In their 2024 publication in the South Asian Journal of Social Studies and Economics, Haji Musa Mnasi, Begarving Arthur, and Habibu Omari examine the elements influencing both the achievements and obstacles faced by women and minority entrepreneurs. Employing a mixed-methodological approach that integrates positivist and interpretivist philosophies, the investigation amalgamates descriptive surveys with detailed

interviews involving 30 participants to elucidate motivations, opportunity frameworks, and customer relationship dynamics as pivotal success determinants. The research also delineates barriers such as socio-cultural impediments, financial limitations, and market accessibility, thereby underscoring the imperative for specialized strategies focused on minority and transitional entrepreneurial ventures.

Social Networking and Future Work: Professions, Jobs in Oman Raed Awashreh's 2023 article in the Russian Law Journal scrutinizes the influence of social media on professional opportunities and employment generation among the youth in Oman. Drawing on secondary data and facilitated interviews, the study elucidates the substantial role of social networks in fostering businesses and professions tailored to individual requisites. Nonetheless, the research highlights an insufficiency in examining how educational institutions can adjust to these evolving professional demands, advocating for a more profound engagement with the integration of social media's potential into educational and employment development strategies.

Entrepreneurship Ecosystem: An Appraisal of Oman Using the Ease of Doing Business Index In this 2023 article for the Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies, Vibha Bhandari and Vikram Mansing Mohite evaluate the regulatory and institutional architecture of Oman's entrepreneurial ecosystem through the lens of the Ease of Doing Business Index. Their findings reveal a slight enhancement in Oman's index score from 66.79 to 67.19, indicative of progress in business initiation while identifying persistent challenges in credit acquisition and insolvency resolution. The study highlights the deterioration in the ranking for insolvency resolution and the absence of quantifiable labor market regulations, advocating for targeted measures to strengthen the ecosystem.

Socialization of the Introduction of the Halal Concept and the Legality of Womenpreneurs Products Ifahda Pratama Hapsari, Vembri Aulia Rahmi, and Hardian Iskandar published this 2023 article in Kontribusia to investigate the ramifications of the introduction of halal concepts and product legality for women entrepreneurs. Through educational lectures and training sessions focusing on media and artistic materials, the research enhanced participants' comprehension of halal products and their associated legal stipulations. While it evidences an improvement in community welfare, the study identifies deficiencies in the analysis of product legality processes and the incorporation of indigenous technological wisdom into entrepreneurial practices.

A Multivariate Dataset on Profiling Personality Traits, Social, and Cognitive Determinants of Omani Students' Entrepreneurial Intention Published in 2023 in Data in Brief, this scholarly work by Imran Saleem and Imran Anwar delineates the personality traits exhibited by Omani students while systematically examining the social and cognitive determinants influencing their entrepreneurial intentions. Employing multivariate dataset analysis, the investigation substantiates the considerable impact of personality traits and cognitive-social factors on entrepreneurial aspirations. The research offers significant insights; nevertheless, it underscores the necessity for further inquiry to establish more generalized conclusions.

In the 2022 academic paper featured in the journal Sustainability, Ghada Talat Alhothali and Haya Al-Dajani explore how emotions influence resilience in Saudi women who are part of the digital entrepreneurship sector during the COVID-19 crisis. By employing a qualitative longitudinal research framework that includes semi-structured interviews with eight women-led digital microenterprises, the analysis shows that uplifting emotional experiences significantly contributed to the sustainability of six of these enterprises amid the pandemic challenge. Nonetheless, the research underscores the necessity for an exhaustive investigation of the gendered dimensions and resilience frameworks within the context of entrepreneurial studies.

Factors Determining Business Growth of Women Entrepreneurship Le Nguyen Doan Khoi's 2021 article in the International Journal of Research conducts a thorough review of theories and determinants that influence the business growth of female entrepreneurs. The discourse encompasses factors such as individual characteristics, business attributes, and environmental influences, thereby emphasizing the significance of these elements in shaping the entrepreneurial achievements of women. It identifies a dearth of empirical understanding regarding the entrepreneurial processes pertinent to women and advocates for a more profound comprehension of socio-economic factors that affect business growth.

The Influential Factors of Business Development among SMEs in the Food Industry of the GCC Region This 2020 investigation by Bandar Fahad Alharbi and Ahmed Al-Ashaab scrutinizes the determinants propelling business development among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within the food sector of the GCC region. By integrating a literature review with empirical field studies and questionnaires distributed to 36 companies, the study elucidates the critical role of effective business models and identifies eleven pivotal factors influencing decision-making processes. The research advocates for the enhancement of business model canvases' effectiveness and further exploration of challenges related to product-market fit within this industry.

How Women in the UAE Cultivate Entrepreneurial Identities to Establish Legitimacy The 2021 scholarly article authored by Helen Thompson-Whiteside, Sarah Turnbull, and Judith Fletcher-Brown, published in the International Small Business Journal, examines the strategies utilized by female entrepreneurs in the UAE for the construction of their identities in the quest for legitimacy. Through a combination of netnographic and

thematic analyses of media interviews, the findings of the research indicate that entrepreneurial identity is shaped by a confluence of individual and external variables, with media narratives serving a pivotal function in influencing societal perceptions. The investigation underscores a notable deficiency in the comprehension of identity construction mechanisms and advocates for an expanded inquiry into the role of media in legitimizing entrepreneurial endeavors.

The literature review conducts an examination of various determinants affecting entrepreneurship among women and ethnic minorities, with a particular emphasis on the Gulf region. Research studies have assessed familial influences, regulatory frameworks, cultural and financial obstacles, together with the implications of emotional and social factors on entrepreneurial objectives. Methodological approaches encompass quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and secondary data analyses, employing diverse sample sizes and sampling methodologies. Findings highlight barriers such as market entry, financial constraints, and societal challenges, alongside success determinants including motivational factors and opportunity structures. Nevertheless, significant research gaps remain, notably the necessity for robust, context-specific investigations in Oman, a thorough examination of gendered flexibility within digital entrepreneurship, empirical inquiries into the processes of female entrepreneurship, and insights into how women in the UAE utilize media for legitimacy. Additionally, there is a significant shortfall in attention regarding tailored business strategies for smaller entrepreneurs and the role of socio-economic factors in the expansion of women's enterprises.

Successful Omani women entrepreneurs' cases in Oman and the GCC

The entrepreneurial climate in Oman and the wider Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region has undergone an extraordinary growth in the tales of women who have launched prosperous ventures despite dealing with cultural, social, and economic difficulties. These extraordinary women highlight the values of resilience, innovation, and leadership, becoming influential figures in areas like technology, fashion, education, and sustainable development. Their achievements highlight the crucial role of supportive entities, including governmental programs, accelerators, and professional networks, in promoting their progress. This section examines notable cases of accomplished female entrepreneurs from Oman and the GCC, shedding light on their strategies, challenges, and contributions to regional socio-economic advancement. These narratives not only provide a source of motivation but also yield important insights into the transformative impact of support ecosystems within the region.

Table 1.1 Oman

Entrepreneur	Business	Year Established	Struggles	Support Institutions	Government Support	Achievements
Shamsa Al Salami	Zumr	2022	Breaking into the fintech sector, cultural perceptions	Central Bank of Oman, Oman Chamber of Commerce	Fintech Accelerator program, Vision 2040 support	Recognized in Visa's 'She's Next' award, expanding fintech in Oman .
Anwaar Al Hinai	SERB	2020	Establishing drone tech in a traditional market	Oman Chamber of Commerce, private investors	Investment support, Vision 2040 initiatives	First UTM platform in Oman, growing GCC presence
Laila Al Harthi	Waqf Dawam	2019	Overcoming resistance to gig economy models, scaling platform	Oman Development Bank, Shell Intilaqaqah	SME funding, Vision 2040 women's economic inclusion	Pioneer in Oman's online gig economy, facilitating local employment
Afrah Al Balushi	Al Safa Olive Oil Company	2017	Building market presence for a niche product, funding	Oman Chamber of Commerce, Women's Association	SME support, financial grants for agriculture-based businesses	Promoting Omani olive oil internationally, expanding exports

The table showcases the success stories of four Omani women entrepreneurs who have made significant strides in their industries. Shamsa Al Salami, founder of Zumr, broke into the fintech sector in 2022, earning recognition from Visa's 'She's Next' award. Anwaar Al Hinai introduced SERB, Oman's first UTM drone platform, in 2020, and has expanded its presence across the GCC. Laila Al Harthi pioneered Waqt Dawam, a gig economy platform launched in 2019, supporting local employment. Finally, Afrah Al Balushi, who founded Al Safa Olive Oil Company in 2017, has promoted Omani olive oil internationally. Each of these entrepreneurs has benefitted from government and private sector support, contributing to Oman's Vision 2040 goals of economic diversification and women's empowerment.

Table 1.2 Qatar

Entrepreneur	Business	Year Established	Struggles	Support Institutions	Government Support	Achievements
Fatima Al Khulaifi	Green Dreams	2018	Initial capital and promoting sustainable agriculture	QDB, Bedaya Center	Agritech funding and agricultural innovation programs	Launched Qatar's first successful urban farm, received sustainability awards
Maryam Al Suwaidi	Tawafuq Consulting	2019	Navigating the competitive consulting industry	Qatari Businesswomen Association	Business consultancy and SME support schemes	Established a reputable consultancy firm working with major corporations

Table 1.3 Kuwait

Entrepreneur	Business	Year Established	Struggles	Support Institutions	Government Support	Achievements
Shaikha Al Bahar	FinFirst Capital	2018	Creating a fintech startup in a highly regulated market	National Fund for SME Development	Financial tech regulations and innovation grants	Developed Kuwait's first fintech-focused loan aggregator platform

Dana Aljouder	Grain Boutique	2020	Raising awareness for healthy lifestyle brands	Kuwait Women's Voluntary Association	Health and wellness startup incentives	Expanded to international markets, known for premium organic products
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Table 1.4 Saudi Arabia

Entrepreneur	Business	Year Established	Struggles	Support Institutions	Government Support	Achievements
Princess Reema bint Bandar	Alf Khair	2017	Advocating for social enterprises	General Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises (Monshaat)	Vision 2030 initiatives and women's empowerment	Created a successful social impact company, advanced female economic participation
Muna AbuSulayman	Muna Ventures	2018	Attracting investors in a nascent venture market	Women's Business Council	Startup investment incentives, training programs	Became a key player in sustainable investments, global speaker

Table 1.5 UAE

Entrepreneur	Business	Year Established	Struggles	Support Institutions	Government Support	Achievements
Huda Kattan	Huda Beauty	2018 (Rebranding)	Competing in the global beauty market	Dubai Design and Fashion Council	Grants for cosmetic businesses, export support	Ranked among top beauty influencers, multimillion-dollar brand valuation
Mona Ataya	Mumzworld	2017 (Expansion)	Scaling e-commerce amidst global competitors	Dubai Chamber, Women Entrepreneurs Network	E-commerce support, Vision 2021 goals	Largest online marketplace for mothers in MENA, won e-commerce awards

Table 1.6 Bahrain

Entrepreneur	Business	Year Established	Struggles	Support Institutions	Government Support	Achievements
Yasmeen Sharaf	Green Bar Inc.	2018	Competing in the international organic market	Bahrain Economic Development Board (EDB)	Grants for organic and sustainable businesses	Expanded product line to global markets, sustainability accolades
Lulwa Al Awadhi	Lulwa Jewelry	2019	Establishing a brand in a crowded luxury market	Bahrain Businesswomen's Society	Support for artisans, business development loans	Featured in top jewelry exhibitions worldwide, notable media coverage

Across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), female entrepreneurs have achieved remarkable progress across a multitude of sectors. In Qatar, Fatima Al Khulaifi established Green Dreams in 2018, thereby innovating in sustainable agriculture with the backing of the Qatar Development Bank (QDB) and the Bedaya

Center, while Maryam Al Suwaidi's Tawafuq Consulting developed a robust consultancy in 2019, leveraging support from the Qatari Businesswomen Association. In Kuwait, Shaikha Al Bahar's FinFirst Capital (2018) pioneered the first fintech loan aggregation platform, successfully navigating regulatory obstacles with assistance from the National Fund for SME Development, whereas Dana Aljouder expanded Grain Boutique on an international scale, thereby promoting a healthier lifestyle. Saudi Arabia witnessed Princess Reema bint Bandar inaugurate Alf Khair (2017), thereby advancing social enterprises with the endorsement of Vision 2030, and Muna AbuSulayman established Muna Ventures (2018) with a focus on sustainable investment opportunities. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Huda Kattan rebranded Huda Beauty in 2018, transforming it into a global beauty powerhouse, with support from the Dubai Design and Fashion Council, whereas Mona Ataya expanded Mumzworld in 2017, establishing it as the premier online marketplace for mothers within the MENA region. Bahrain showcased Yasmeen Sharaf's Green Bar Inc. (2018), a prominent global player in organic products, alongside Lulwa Al Awadhi's Lulwa Jewelry (2019), which successfully carved out a niche in the luxury jewelry sector. These entrepreneurs have surmounted various challenges with institutional backing and governmental initiatives, thereby significantly contributing to their nations' economic development and the empowerment of women.

The socioeconomic impact of women-led businesses in Oman and the GCC.

Women-led enterprises within Oman and the GCC have exerted a profound influence on economic diversification, community enhancement, and societal advancement. Presented below are pivotal aspects of their socioeconomic influence:

Driving Innovation in Emerging Sectors

In Oman, Shamsa Al Salami (Zumr) has spearheaded advancements in fintech, garnering accolades through initiatives such as Visa's She's Next award. Laila Al Harthi has revolutionized the gig economy with her platform Waqt Dawam, generating flexible employment opportunities and modernizing local labor markets.

Promoting Sustainability and Social Impact

In Qatar, Fatima Al Khulaifi's Green Dreams has advanced sustainable agricultural methodologies, thereby bolstering food security and promoting environmental stewardship. In Saudi Arabia, Alf Khair, under the leadership of Princess Reema bint Bandar, has emerged as a paragon for empowering women through social entrepreneurship and advocating for enhanced female participation in the workforce.

Elevating Regional and Global Standards

Mona Ataya (Mumzworld) from the UAE has transformed e-commerce tailored for mothers, while Huda Kattan (Huda Beauty) has established global benchmarks within the beauty industry, thereby reinforcing the GCC's stature on the international business landscape. In Bahrain, Yasmeen Sharaf's Green Bar Inc. has heightened environmental awareness, while Lulwa Al Awadhi's jewelry enterprise has enhanced the profile of Bahrain's luxury market.

Fostering Economic Diversification

These enterprises are significantly contributing to the region's transformation from economies reliant on oil towards frameworks that prioritize knowledge and innovation, consistent with national strategic initiatives such as Oman's Vision 2040 and Saudi Vision 2030.

Creating Employment Opportunities

Women-led businesses are facilitating job creation across a multitude of sectors, encompassing technology, agriculture, retail, and creative industries, thereby fostering a more inclusive workforce.

Nurturing Resilience and a Culture of Excellence

In spite of obstacles such as regulatory impediments and market resistance, these entrepreneurs demonstrate remarkable resilience and serve as an inspiration to the region's aspiring businesswomen. Their narratives of success promote increased investment in female entrepreneurship, underscoring the imperative for robust support systems to sustain their progress.

Women-led businesses in the GCC not only represent innovation and advancement but also act as catalysts for enduring socioeconomic transformation. With ongoing support and policy refinement, these enterprises are well-positioned to effectuate even greater impacts throughout the region.

Findings

I. Core competencies of Omani women entrepreneurs include

Adaptability and Resilience: Omani women entrepreneurs have exhibited an extraordinary ability to maneuver through and adapt to cultural and economic challenges, thereby dismantling obstacles within traditional sectors such as finance, agriculture, and technology.

Innovative Thinking: A multitude of Omani women entrepreneurs act as pioneers in emerging markets, particularly in fintech and drone technology, by presenting innovative ideas that contest established norms and offer novel solutions to the economic landscape.

Community-Centric Leadership: These entrepreneurs emphasize initiatives that not only promote business success but also enhance community well-being and social impact, thereby fostering employment opportunities and sustainable practices.

Strategic Utilization of Support Programs: Omani women entrepreneurs skillfully leverage governmental initiatives such as Vision 2040, fintech accelerators, and SME funding, thereby optimizing available resources to scale their enterprises.

Market Awareness and Cultural Sensitivity: They exhibit a profound understanding of the local market and cultural dynamics, which enables them to create products and services that resonate with the Omani populace while concurrently exploring prospects in international markets.

Networking and Collaboration: Omani women are adept at forging strong networks and collaborating with local institutions, including the Oman Chamber of Commerce and development banks, thereby enhancing their business opportunities and fostering economic partnerships.

Sustainability and Ethical Business Practices: A considerable number of women entrepreneurs emphasize the significance of eco-friendly and sustainable business models, aligning their practices with global trends and contributing to lasting economic and environmental benefits for Oman.

II. Core competencies of women entrepreneurs from other GCC countries include:

Global Market Penetration: Female entrepreneurs in nations such as the UAE and Bahrain have adeptly broadened their business operations on an international scale, exemplifying exceptional proficiency in global marketing strategies and brand positioning. For example, Huda Kattan's Huda Beauty has evolved into a formidable entity within the global beauty industry.

Sustainability and Innovation: Women in the GCC are at the forefront of advocating for sustainable business methodologies. In Qatar, Fatima Al Khulaifi's Green Dreams advances urban agriculture and environmental stewardship, signifying a steadfast commitment to pioneering eco-friendly initiatives.

Tech-Savviness and Digital Transformation: Entrepreneurs within the GCC, including Mona Ataya of Mumzworld in the UAE, have effectively harnessed the digital economy by establishing comprehensive e-commerce platforms and employing technology to enhance the scalability of their enterprises.

Social Entrepreneurship and Impact-Driven Leadership: In Saudi Arabia, entrepreneurs like Princess Reema bint Bandar have established social enterprises aimed at promoting women's rights and economic engagement, exemplifying a commitment to utilizing business as a mechanism for societal advancement.

Mastery of Luxury and Niche Markets: Women entrepreneurs in Bahrain and Kuwait demonstrate exceptional prowess in luxury and niche sectors, as evidenced by Lulwa Al Awadhi's upscale jewelry brand in Bahrain and Dana Aljouder's Grain Boutique in Kuwait, reflecting a deep understanding of catering to affluent and discerning clientele.

Effective Utilization of Institutional Support: Across the GCC, female entrepreneurs strategically leverage governmental and private sector support initiatives, such as agrotech financing in Qatar and innovation grants in Kuwait, to enhance their enterprises and maintain a competitive edge.

Resilience in Navigating Regulatory Environments: Women entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, such as Shaikha Al Bahar of FinFirst Capital, exhibit resilience and strategic insight in overcoming regulatory challenges while fostering innovations in fintech and investment.

Brand Building and Influence: Numerous women, exemplified by Huda Kattan in the UAE, have emerged as influential brand ambassadors and thought leaders within their respective industries, effectively leveraging personal branding and social media to elevate their business profiles.

III. Areas necessitating enhancement for Omani entrepreneurs to attain competitiveness within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region and in the broader global marketplace.

Access to Funding and Investment: The expansion of access to venture capital, angel investors, and international funding sources is of paramount importance. The enhancement of financial support mechanisms, particularly through equity-based financing alternatives, would empower Omani entrepreneurs to scale their enterprises with greater efficacy.

Digital Transformation and Technology Adoption: Promoting the integration of sophisticated technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and e-commerce platforms is instrumental in enabling entrepreneurs to enhance operational efficiency, access broader markets, and compete effectively with technologically adept firms within the GCC.

Market Diversification and Export Readiness: Omani entrepreneurs must formulate comprehensive strategies aimed at penetrating and competing within international markets. This necessitates the cultivation of export readiness, the acquisition of requisite certifications, and a thorough comprehension of global trade regulations to extend their operational reach beyond local and GCC markets.

Innovation and Research & Development (R&D): Allocating resources toward research and development while nurturing an innovative culture will empower Omani enterprises to devise distinctive products and services. Furthermore, fostering collaboration between academic institutions and industry can catalyze advancements and boost the global competitiveness of Omani businesses.

Entrepreneurial Education and Skills Development: Reinforcing the entrepreneurial training landscape is of utmost importance, especially in areas like digital marketing, financial stewardship, and international trade practices. The enhancement of educational curricula to incorporate business acumen and innovation competencies would better equip the future workforce.

Networking and Collaboration: The facilitation of opportunities for entrepreneurs to engage with GCC and international business communities can yield strategic alliances and knowledge transfer. The establishment of robust networks within the GCC region can assist Omani enterprises in accessing novel markets and resources.

Regulatory Reforms and Ease of Doing Business: By refining business registration processes, easing regulatory structures, and strengthening legal systems for startups and small to medium enterprises, we can cultivate a more conducive setting for business endeavors. Additionally, addressing challenges related to labor market flexibility and intellectual property protection is of significant relevance.

Branding and International Marketing: The augmentation of branding strategies and the utilization of digital marketing tools can significantly aid Omani entrepreneurs in promoting their offerings on a global platform. Engaging in international trade fairs and exhibitions would further enhance visibility and brand reputation.

Sustainability and Social Responsibility: The development of sustainable business methodologies and alignment with global sustainability paradigms will augment the appeal of Omani enterprises in international markets. This encompasses the adoption of environmentally sustainable practices and a focus on social impact.

Mentorship and Advisory Services: The establishment of structured mentorship initiatives that connect entrepreneurs with seasoned business leaders from the GCC and beyond can provide invaluable guidance, strategic insights, and avenues for growth.

By focusing on these critical domains, Omani entrepreneurs can enhance their competitive standing, foster innovation, and ensure sustainable success in the challenging environments of the GCC and international markets.

Conclusion

Omani entrepreneurs currently stand at a crucial crossroads, marked by substantial opportunities for augmenting their influence and competing more effectively within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) as well as on an international scale. The entrepreneurial spirit in Oman is robust; nevertheless, to genuinely enhance and sustain this momentum, there exists an imperative need to focus on several strategic areas. Expanded access to diverse financial sources will foster business expansion and facilitate penetration into new markets, while the use of progressive digital technologies will optimize operational performance and extend their competitive leverage. Furthermore, investment in innovation and research and development (R&D) is crucial for fostering unique product offerings and remaining abreast of the rapid advancements observed in neighboring countries. A pronounced emphasis on market diversification and export readiness has the potential to unlock international opportunities, thereby positioning Omani businesses as significant contributors on the global stage. Equally vital is the enhancement of entrepreneurial education and skill development, which will equip both aspiring and established business leaders with the necessary expertise to navigate complex global markets and assimilate international best practices.

Networking and strategic alliances within the GCC and beyond will prove indispensable, as such collaborations can yield invaluable insights, resources, and pathways to success. The simplification of regulatory frameworks and the enhancement of the overall business environment will also establish a foundation for more agile and resilient enterprises. Additionally, a focused initiative on brand recognition and advertising will empower Omani business owners to successfully showcase their offerings and services globally, while a dedication to eco-friendliness and corporate social responsibility can improve their worldwide appeal and positively impact community welfare. Ultimately, with the appropriate amalgamation of innovation, strategic support, and a conducive ecosystem, Omani entrepreneurs possess the capability to transform their businesses into internationally recognized entities. This transformative journey necessitates a comprehensive approach, wherein government institutions, private sectors, and entrepreneurs collaborate synergistically to cultivate a robust and progressive environment. As Oman continues to embrace transformative changes and invest in its entrepreneurial landscape, it harbors the potential to emerge as a beacon of innovation and economic prosperity, engendering a lasting impact on both regional and global economies.

Scope for further research

Future investigations could concentrate on elucidating the ramifications of digital transformation on enterprises led by women in Oman and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), examining efficacious educational and training paradigms for entrepreneurs, and scrutinizing the long-term resilience strategies they employ to traverse economic adversities. Comparative analyses regarding cultural determinants, gender-specific impediments, and the efficacy of supportive institutions could yield valuable insights for the enhancement of policy frameworks. Furthermore, an exploration of the expansive social and economic ramifications of these enterprises, the significance of sustainability practices, and innovative funding mechanisms would furnish a holistic perspective on how to more effectively bolster and expand women-led ventures within the region.

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