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ANALYSIS OF INNOVATION TRIGGERS IN THE HANDICRAFT INDUSTRY OF SAUDI ARABIA

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ABSTRACT

Saudi Arabia is a country with a wide variety of cultures, since each region has its own customs and traditions. Handicraft is one of the preferred industries for Saudi entrepreneurs, as handicrafts represent a significant part of Saudi heritage. They are also important for tourism and for the creation of job opportunities for Saudi citizens. However, modern production and manufacturing methods make it harder for handicraft makers to survive. Thus, this work was done to analyze innovation triggers in the Saudi Arabia handicraft industry. This work was conducted based on qualitative method. For this work, the sample populations were female entrepreneurs in the handicraft industry and the sample size was 8. Data collection was done from interviews with participants. The key findings of this work have shown that most of the entrepreneurs were in business for less than 7 years. The findings of this work have shown that the main trigger for innovation was the sense of originality that were demonstrated by the handicraft products. This has enabled the products to be classified as unique and it has attracted consumers. The ability to apply customization to products is another trigger. The trust they gain from their families and their customers is a very important driver that keeps entrepreneurs motivated.

Additional Keywords and Phrases: Innovation; triggers; handicraft; art; industry; Saudi Arabia

INTRODUCTION

Innovation is a very broad term that does not have a fixed, accurate definition for all instances. Scholars have stated that innovation is the generation, acceptance and implementation of new ideas, processes of products or services [1]. In addition, innovation is an effective application of new processes and products to the organization and is designed to benefit both the organization and its stakeholders [2].

Innovation is characterized by a dual nature that encompasses the process of innovation and the result of innovation. De Massis et al. [3] indicated that the process of innovation consists of two solid phases: the stage at which ideas are created and the stage at which ideas are implemented. Visnjic et al. [4] stated

that creativity leads to innovation, and that innovation leads to entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship focuses on finding solutions to challenges through innovation. Innovation is not only required at the pre-launch stage, but is needed at all stages of the business cycle [5]. Innovation is essential to the sustainability and survival of organizations, particularly in the various rapidly expanding industries around the world. Likewise, Roberts et al. [6] stated that in order for an innovative idea to be implemented by a business department, it must first fulfill two conditions: it must meet the objectives and priorities of the organization and it must lead to the desired result.

Handicrafts are a type of innovation. Handicrafts are products made entirely by hand or with the help of primitive tools [7]. They are produced using local and natural raw resources and without the use of modern machines [7]. The history and nature of the region determine the types of craft that the region produces. In other words, crafts reflect the nature and history of the region [7]. Arab countries are famous for their rich cultures. Saudi Arabia is producing a wide range of handicrafts. There are some specific craft in which Saudi Arabia excels and spreads across the country.

Many of the cities of Saudi Arabia are known for pottery [8]. The town of Al-Hasa is considered to be the center of pottery in Saudi Arabia. Pottery jars are made in a variety of shapes and sizes. Pottery jars have long been used for measurements in the Arabian Peninsula. Pottery is also used to make vases, incense burners and sculptures [9]. Some cities in Saudi Arabia are rich in fertile agricultural land. The southern region enjoys rain all year round. As a result, many trees that supply wood are growing in these regions [10]. This makes carpentry one of the major craftsmen in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia is famous for its forged handicrafts. Forging products and handicrafts in Saudi Arabia differs from one city to another depending on the needs of each city [11]. In agricultural land, for example, agricultural tools such as sickles are the main focus. Axes and pots are essential forged products. Swords and daggers have also been forged in the past. There's a whole street in Al-Hasa, which is called Blacksmiths Street [11].

Saudi Arabia is considered to be Bisht's original home. Bisht is made of a variety of textiles, such as camel's hair and sheep's wool [12]. In the past, it was the source of much of the wealth of the people of Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, almost every city in Saudi Arabia has a large local jewelry market [13]. Jewelry is made from minerals such as gold and silver, as well as other organic and inorganic materials. Organic materials include natural pearls and coral, whereas inorganic components usually refer to gemstones. Some of the gemstones found in Saudi Arabia are rubies, diamonds, emeralds and turquoise [13].

Handicraft is one of the preferred industries for Saudi entrepreneurs, as handicrafts represent a significant part of Saudi heritage [14]. They are also important for tourism and for the creation of job opportunities for Saudi citizens. Handicrafts are also an expression of originality and cultural identity. However, modern production and manufacturing methods make it harder for handicraft manufacturers to survive. Handicraft entrepreneurs need support to become innovative enough to survive and compete with mass-produced goods. Furthermore, there is not enough research done on the handicraft industry in general and Saudi Arabia in particular. Therefore, this work was done to analyze to identify innovation triggers in the handicrafts industry in Saudi Arabia.

METHODOLOGY

This work was carried out using the qualitative research method, which involved interview methods for data collection. This research was conducted on Saudi entrepreneurs who own start-ups in the Saudi handicraft industry. For this work, the sample population were 8 female entrepreneurs. The nature of the handicraft businesses varied. The details of the entrepreneurs are shown in Table 1. Primary data were collected from interviews with participants while secondary data were collected from older articles and literature review publications. The data was collected through interviews instead of surveys on the basis of detailed open-ended questions. The presentation of the data was carried out in the form of tables to summarize the data. Short descriptive text was elaborated on the data in the tables where necessary.

Table 1: Details of respondents

Name	Business Name	Nature of the handicraft business
Halah	Aroma store	Handmade sewn items
Wafaa	Meagh 99	Decorative beaded items
Tagreed	Tzayany	Prayer garment & Subhas
Abeer	Mshqoolat	Beading & making accessories
Afnan	Al.mihrab	Carpentry (Wooden reading units)
Ashwaq Kojah	Orkida18	Pottery
Lina	Linas handmade	Stationary & decorative items
Ghadah	Ghadah mominah	Making soap and salts with oriental aroma

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Analysis

Table 2 displays the number of years each entrepreneur has been in the market. Based on Table 2, some of the entrepreneurs have been in business for 7 years and the minimum number of years in business has been 1 year. Thus, majority of the entrepreneurs have a vast years of experience in business.

Table 2: Years in business

Entrepreneur	Years in Business
Halah	1.5 years
Wafaa	7
Tagreed	3
Abeer	5
Afnan	1
Ashwaq Kojah	7
Lina	2
Ghadah	3

Table 3 shows how many of the businesses in the research sample were family owned. Based on Table 3, the majority of the business is not family owned.

Table 3: Ownership

Entrepreneur	Ownership
Halah	Self owned
Wafaa	Family owned
Tagreed	Self owned
Abeer	Family owned
Afnan	Not family owned
Ashwaq Kojah	Not family owned
Lina	Not family owned
Ghadah	Not family owned

Interview Question Analysis

As craftsmen, there are many alternatives to the products they offer. Participants were asked what products could replace their products on the market. Table 4 lists the answers to this question.

Table 4: Product substitutes

Entrepreneur	Product substitutes
Halah	Purses, pillows (throws), table runners, baby bags, cooling bags
Wafaa	Manufactured home decor items
Tagreed	Prayer garments in the market with lower quality and prices
Abeer	All kinds of accessories
Afnan	Standard bookshelves
Ashwaq Kojah	Cheap adulterated Chinese porcelain
Lina	Stationary products
Ghadah	Soaps made with commercial materials

With regard to the handmade products produced by the participants, three questions have been asked to gather information on the features, benefits and uses of their creation. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Handmade product features, benefits and uses

Entrepreneur	Feature	Benefits	Uses
Halah	Personal style	Easy to use	Personal use
	High quality of raw materials and work	For daily uses Compatible with most tastes	Gifts Baby use House decor
Wafaa	Personal touch	Not available in the market	Women Jewelry
	Customization Affordable prices	Ability to customize colors, materials, and styles	Kitchen accessories Gifts Home decor
Tagreed	High quality raw materials	For prayer & hijab uses.	Salah Hijab
	Two-year guarantee Customization	Gifts for different ages	Reading Quran Tasbeeh (subha)
Abeer	High quality of raw materials Reasonable prices	Spread the spirit of originality in modern products	Decorative
Afnan	Customization	Personalization	Promote reading
	The use of Islamic art	Solving issues that readers face.	Easy access to books Book storage
Ashwaq Kojah	Quality of raw materials	Lead-free products	Food Décor
	Excellence precision & neatness	Safe for human use Isolate food from moisture to keep it longer from rotting.	Gifts
Lina	All handmade Customized	Offering special & customized products	Stationary Decorative items
	Affordable Introducing new products regularly	Targets students Payment upon delivery in Jeddah Discounts for regular customers	Gifts
Ghadah	Hygiene High quality raw materials	100% natural raw materials	To perfume, clean and relax

Mainly, in addition to other industries, all the companies of the respondents fall below the handicraft industry. Table 6 shows whether the entrepreneurs believe that their products may or may not be adopted by other industries. The table also presents, if any, those industries.

Table 6: Product can be adopted by other industry

Entrepreneur	Can be adopted?	Industry
Halah	Yes	Home decor industry, gifts, education industry, tourism
Wafaa	Yes	Talented or trained people in any industry
Tagreed	No	-
Abeer	Yes	Tourism, trade, labor
Afnan	Yes	-
Ashwaq Kojah	Yes	Furniture, Islamic art, educational industry, décor industries
Lina	Possible	-
Ghadah	No	-

Since all products produced by entrepreneurs in this research are handmade, there are many alternatives on the market that can replace their products or serve the same purpose. Entrepreneurs were asked whether their products could eliminate the need for these existing alternatives, and they responded as shown in Table 7 follows.

Table 7: Products could eliminate the need for these existing alternatives

Entrepreneur	Alternatives/Substitutes
Halah	Yes
Wafaa	No
Tagreed	No
Abeer	No
Afnan	No
Ashwaq Kojah	Yes
Lina	No
Ghadah	No

In an even more detailed question, the entrepreneurs were asked about the raw materials involved in the production of their products. Table 8 shows the responses.

Table 8: Raw materials

Entrepreneur	Alternatives/Substitutes
Halah	Fabrics, Sewing supplies (needle, thread, etc.)
Wafaa	Gemstones, beads, pearls, wires and metals, glass

Tagreed	Fabrics, crochet yarn, Quran (covered with designs), beads and gems.
Abeer Afnan	Beads, threads, buttons Wood, acrylic, fabrics, ceramic, steel
Ashwaq Kojah	Lead-free Italian natural clay, ceramics natural colors.
Lina Ghadah	Papers and fabrics, colors Oils, herbs, perfumes, all types of salts

Continuous improvement is a requirement for business owners to survive and remain competitive. The participant was asked how many times they were able to successfully modify their products and what they had changed. The response is shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Modification to products

Entrepreneur	Modification to products
Halah	Products are customized. So, each time, different patterns and colors are used.
Wafaa	New ideas, new items, raw materials, prices.
Tagreed	Used longer zipper. Attached a scarf to prayer garments Used satin ribbons to make roses instead of crochet.
Abeer	Develop new shapes and ways to make products
Afnan	Replaced raw materials with a higher quality.
Ashwaq Kojah	Proficiency and design renovation
Lina Ghadah	Methods and outputs Remove perfumes from some products for causing skin allergy. Adding oils and herbs.

As a follow-up question, they were asked to state the reasons behind the modification of their products. The answers are shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Reason for modification

Entrepreneur	Reason for modification
Halah	Market demand
Wafaa	Market demand, suppliers, time for raw material to arrive, quality and pricing

Tagreed	Suppliers, time for raw material to arrive, quality and pricing
Abeer	Market demand, cost of raw materials, quality, pricing.
Afnan	Suppliers, quality and pricing.
Ashwaq Kojah	Market demand, cost of raw materials, suppliers, time for raw material to arrive, quality and pricing
Lina Ghadah	Quality Market demand, cost of raw materials, quality and pricing

Finally, a question was asked of the participant to determine what their best selling products were. The Table 11 shows the best selling products of each entrepreneur in the sample, and the reason they believe is the best selling.

Table 11: Best selling product

Entrepreneur	Best selling product	Reason
Halah	Alphabets pillows Quran covers	Originality and Uniqueness Example, the Quran covers are removable and washable, unlike similar products in the market.
Wafaa	Home accessories	Customization
Tagreed	Subha Prayer garments	Authenticity Durability Quality Prices Aesthetics
Abeer	Key medals Bracelets	Originality Integrating products to the modern taste
Afnan	The portable Quran stands	Customization (people can write their names) Functionality (Portable and not heavy) The season (Was launched in Ramadan)
Ashwaq Kojah	Medals	Originality

	Wall art pieces	Quality & excellence (Uniqueness)
Lina	Deco items	Unique design
Ghadah	Soap	Originality

Overall Discussion

The key findings presented the experience of eight Saudi female entrepreneurs operating handicraft businesses. Their answers to the interview questions revealed valuable information that would help answer the research questions. The first question was, "What is the nature of your craft business?". The eight entrepreneurs worked in different crafts such as sewing, beading, pottery, carpentry, soap making, and paper crafts. This diversity indicates that Saudi Arabia embraces valuable talents that need to be discovered and supported. The second question was, "How many years have you been in business for?" This research focused mainly on new start-ups. As a result, none of the participants had been in business for more than seven years. On the third question, it was found that out of eight businesses, four were not family-owned. On the other hand, two were family owned and managed, and two were self-employed without the involvement of family members. Moving on to questions about the products, Question Four asked the contractors what products they believe can replace their handmade products on the market. They all mentioned the version they were producing of their product. They agreed, however, that their handmade items are more valuable and original, which lowers the price and quality of the substitutes. In addition, they were asked to provide information on their products, including their features, benefits and uses. Five out of eight entrepreneurs believe that they choose high quality raw materials. Another thing that was most emphasized was the customization and customization of their products. Originality, affordability, high quality and the presence of a personal touch were common features of the products. In terms of product acceptability, the entrepreneurs agreed that their handicraft should be adapted by the education sector in schools, institutes, etc. Other industries mentioned were home decor and the tourism industry. Handmade goods are the most attractive souvenirs for tourists in the tourism industry. According to Gumus et al. [15] handmade handicrafts not only remind tourists of the places they visited, but also of the special occasions when they received them. Thus, most tourists are motivated to purchase these kinds of handicrafts.

Entrepreneurs were asked, "Does the product eliminate the need for other products on the market?". The result showed that six out of eight said "No". Thus it is deduced that, although they value and admire the handicrafts they make, they still believe that these creations target specific people and do not eliminate the need for their manufactured versions. Entrepreneurs have stated that they have made a lot of modifications to their products. Modifications were mostly made on raw materials. Other changes included prices, methods and the introduction of new products. Finally, each entrepreneur was asked to name her best selling product. They then agreed that the main reason they were best selling their products was originality, then customization. The work of Darwish et al. [16] has confirmed that most people are looking for handicrafts that have originality and it is a main selling factor

CONCLUSION

The aim of this work was to identify the innovation triggers for handicrafts in Saudi Arabia. This was needed to enable handicraft entrepreneurs to develop their businesses and survive in the near future, especially when their products are at risk of being replaced by manufactured products. A number of innovation triggers have therefore been identified. The main trigger was the sense of originality that entrepreneurs are keen on. This sense makes them feel unique and enables them to satisfy their customers and attract new customers at a rapid pace. Another trigger is the ability to apply customization to products. The trust they gain from their families and their customers is a very important trigger that keeps entrepreneurs motivated. In order to further enhance the development of these entrepreneurs, the authors suggest the establishment of associations that bring together handicraft entrepreneurs to allow them to create partnerships or other forms of cooperation for further development.

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