

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES FOR SAUDI COMPANIES ENTERING
MALAYSIAN MARKETS

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OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES FOR SAUDI COMPANIES ENTERING
MALAYSIAN MARKETS

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DEDICATION

I am dedicating this project to my beloved family, who have meant and continue to mean so much to me. First and foremost, to my parents, especially my father whose love for me knew no bounds and taught me the value of hard work. I want to thank him for believing in me and supporting me during difficult times. Next, my beloved wife “Maymonah”, who was supportive and patient with me throughout this project, may Allah keep you safe for our little family and me. Last but not least, I am dedicating this project to my Jewels, my blissful children Dalia, Eyad, and Lana, who filled my life with joy, blessing and laughter. May Allah protect you and keep you safe.

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ABSTRACT

The Saudi Commercial Attaché in Kuala Lumpur aiming to provide a set of services and commercial programs for Saudi companies to export their product to the World and Asian Markets. Although Malaysia is a country with a high potential to consume and accept Saudi exports, Saudi companies are reluctant to enter the Malaysian market. Many factors contributing to this issue; among them knowledge challenges, resource challenges, procedure challenges and external challenges. The aim of this project is to examine the key factors causing low numbers of Saudi companies penetrating the Malaysian market. The study uses action research methodology to establish interventions to improve the Saudi companies in penetrating the Malaysian market. The action research was done on two cycles, the first done using mixed research methodology using a survey with 46 managers from Saudi companies and interviews with two of the economic officers in the attaché. The result of the first action research cycle indicated that procedure is the most significant and frequently mentioned challenge. The second cycle including the intervention include making a booklet documenting the exporting procedures and an orientation session with 26 of Saudi companies operating in food and beverages sector. The result of t-test indicated significant difference between pre and post intervention, the participants described the booklet and the intervention as helpful. The intervention was successful as 17 of the companies signed up for follow up on the exportation procedure with the Saudi Commercial Attaché

ABSTRAK

Atase Komersial Saudi Di Kuala Lumpur bertujuan menyediakan satu set perkhidmatan dan program komersial untuk syarikat Saudi mengeksport produk mereka ke Pasaran Dunia dan Asia. Walaupun Malaysia adalah sebuah negara yang berpotensi tinggi untuk menggunakan dan menerima eksport Saudi, syarikat Saudi keberatan untuk memasuki pasaran Malaysia. Banyak faktor yang menyumbang kepada isu ini; antaranya cabaran pengetahuan, cabaran sumber, cabaran prosedur dan cabaran luaran. Matlamat projek ini adalah untuk mengkaji faktor utama yang menyebabkan bilangan syarikat Saudi yang rendah menembusi pasaran Malaysia. Kajian ini menggunakan metodologi kajian tindakan untuk mewujudkan intervensi bagi menambah baik syarikat Saudi dalam menembusi pasaran Malaysia. Kajian tindakan dilakukan pada dua kitaran, yang pertama menggunakan metodologi penyelidikan campuran menggunakan tinjauan dengan 46 pengurus dari syarikat Saudi dan temu bual dengan dua pegawai ekonomi di atase. Hasil daripada kitaran kajian tindakan pertama menunjukkan bahawa prosedur adalah cabaran yang paling penting dan sering disebut. Kitaran kedua termasuk campur tangan termasuk membuat buku kecil yang mendokumentasikan prosedur pengeksportan dan sesi orientasi dengan 26 syarikat Arab Saudi yang beroperasi dalam sektor makanan dan minuman. Keputusan ujian-t menunjukkan perbezaan yang signifikan antara intervensi pra dan pasca, peserta menggambarkan buku kecil dan intervensi sebagai membantu. Campur tangan itu berjaya apabila 17 syarikat mendaftar untuk susulan prosedur pengeksportan dengan Atase Komersial Saudi

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has a free market, and in a relatively short period of time, the economy has undergone extraordinary changes. It has grown from a society based on providing its most basic daily needs to an enormous and contemporary economic one. It has grown fast and become a distinguishing mark both in the region and the global world. Saudi Arabia is one of the G20 countries, a group of countries with 80% of the world's GDP (Vestergaard & Wade, 2012). Saudi Arabia became the first Arab nation to assume the presidency of the G20.

Saudi Arabia joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in December 2005. It is an important development that gives Saudi exporters wide and easy access to global markets, creates job opportunities, and attracts foreign investment (Idris, 2007). Oil and petroleum products are an essential part of the country's economy. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the largest producer and exporter of oil in the world (Alkhatlan, 2013). In the latest decades, the Kingdom remains eager to draft away from heavily relying on oil exports, and it now produces and exports a variety of industrial goods all over the world. (Albassam, 2015). The big supporter of this change, who plays a fundamental role in industrial and economic development, is the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Plans have been put by the Ministry of Economic and Planning and have formulated economic and social development to set a long-term economic goal.

The private sector is playing an increasingly bigger role in the economy of Saudi Arabia. It has planned that the private sector will lead the economic growth in the Kingdom; as the government confirmed, it will significantly support the Private Sector to lead economic growth (Euchi *et al.*, 2018).

In 2016 Saudi Arabia launched Saudi Vision 2030. The vision's main objective is to diversify its economy away from oil and grow its economy through trade by exporting minerals and food products while expanding tourism and developing real estate. (Guendouz & Fund, 2020). One of the main economic objectives of direct relevance to this study is to increase the share of non-oil exports in non-oil GDP from 16% to 50% and increase non-oil government revenues from \$ 45 billion to \$ 267 billion (VISION, 2016). If achieved, these goals will significantly impact the economy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and its rank will jump from the nineteenth to the fifteenth place among the world's top economies. (Guendouz & Fund, 2020).

In Kuala Lumpur, the Commercial Attaché is one of several Saudi commercials' attachés worldwide, aiming to provide a set of services and commercial programs for Saudi companies to export their product to the World and Asian Markets. The Commercial Attaché is an active part of the Ministry of Trade and Investment in Saudi Arabia. It works in direct coordination with many partners, such as the Saudi Export Development Authority, to activate national enterprises' participation in international exhibitions in Asia and encourage national exports to reach international markets. The Commercial Attaché is one of the most important partners in order to arrange meetings and visits to the counterpart of businessmen, inside and outside the Kingdom in direct coordination with the Ministry of Investment in order to attract businessmen and foreign investors to the Saudi market by introducing investment opportunities in the Kingdom and bringing investments with added value to the national economy (Commerce, 2020). The Commercial Attaché in Kuala Lumpur covers the ASEAN countries. Its goals are to help make bilateral trade agreements, monitor commercial laws and regulations abroad, and attract foreign capital for investment in Saudi Arabia and maximize Saudi exports in the hosting country. Several experts in economics and marketing in the attaché study the ASEAN markets, finding trade parties, and looking for new and promising opportunities for Saudi products to enter the Asian markets.

Economic growth in Southeast Asian countries has been growing rapidly since 1965. Investors have tried to understand the Southeast Asian market. The markets of Southeast Asia need reliable data. The markets are considered as a high risk for most investors; therefore, the investment levels remain low. Cultural differences, restrictions on foreign investors, legal

regulation are among factors that were considered of importance to the local and international investor (Chin et al., 2006).

The aim of this action research is to examine the key factors causing low numbers of Saudi companies penetrating the Malaysian market and provide a planned intervention to facilitate Saudi companies to enter the Malaysian market.

1.1.1 Culture Barriers

In economic interactions between countries, cultural differences play an important role (Felbermayr & Toubal, 2010). In this context, cultural differences are seen as a costly barrier and create a suspicious case in the bilateral trade environment between the two countries. The difference between cultures significantly affects the trade, as bilateral trade decreases by 20% if the two countries have different cultures. (Gokmen, 2013). Having different dominant religions negatively affects trade relations. When two countries have different ethnicities, their import flows are approximately 38% less than the two countries having the same ethnicity (Gokmen, 2013). If two countries have different languages, they experience a 46% drop in trade (Gokmen, 2013).

1.1.2 Regulations and Legal Barriers

There are many barriers to bilateral trade. Slow and impractical customs procedures and inspections, arbitrary decisions, and poor coordination are tangible barriers to trade within ASEAN. Customs procedures and inspection-related barriers, time-consuming documentation requirements, burdensome inspection requirements, lack of border crossing coordination, and Inefficient inbound clearance process are all considered significant barriers to foreign investment and exports (Gupta *et al.*, 2011).

Local participation in managing global companies operating in the country is a system followed in most ASEAN countries. In Malaysia, regulations require about 30% local

ownership. In some exceptional cases, it may allow companies to own 100% of their capital. Such policies remain unstable and are subject to change at any time. (Gupta et al., 2011).

1.1.3 FTA

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is the largest economic group in the Middle East region and ranks at number 17th globally (Ab Rahman & Abu-Hussin, 2009a). Aside from having the same religion, both Malaysia and GCC countries have more extensive economic relations. Malaysia's and GCCs economic ties have been extraordinary, particularly on trade, oil sources, and Malaysia's investment opportunities. GCC countries invest and participate in Malaysia's economy, adding value to some extent to the economy's growth. However, the trade between the two bodies is relatively small compared to the much bigger, old trade relations. (Ab Rahman & Abu-Hussin, 2009).

The European Union is now negotiating with the GCC to develop free trade agreement called GCC-EU FTA (*GCC-EU Relations and Trade Integration Patterns*, n.d.). As a customs union, both GCC and EU must deal as a group rather than make an individual agreement. As a result, GCC is expected to have greater access to fuel market distribution in the EU and a new market for textiles and light machinery (*GCC-EU Relations and Trade Integration Patterns*, n.d.). In this context, Both the GCC and the ASEAN regions are looking forward to strengthening their relationships in various aspects, including political and economic (Ab Rahman & Abu-Hussin, 2009b). In the broad historical view, Singapore is the major trading partner to the GCC in the South East of Asia, where is the total export to Singapore is almost doubled compared to other ASIEN countries.

There is no formal conversation between the GCC countries and ASEAN regarding economic enhancement despite increasing trade volume between them. Therefore, and looking at the ongoing trade growth between the two entities, it might now be a chance to open a new era of an economic relationship between them (Ab Rahman & Abu-Hussin, 2009a). As has been proposed by (Dar & Presley, 2001), GCC countries' trade is positively connected with developing countries, and considering the trade volume, it might be a beneficial idea to suggest that the GCC countries seek a more extensive collaboration in trade with ASEAN countries.

Saudi Arabia considers Malaysia one of the new business destinations as the country has introduced a "new age of Arab-Asian cooperation." (Woertz and Markaz al-Khal,2007). from this perspective, it can be said that both GCC and Malaysia have an enormous opportunity to enhance their relationship in many aspects, especially the economic side. Malaysia wants to have a strong bilateral trade with GCC countries and discuss more having a free trade agreement with them. (Bernama, 2007).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

1.2.1 Problematic Situation

Malaysia is a country with a high potential to consume and accept Saudi exports. The common culture, religion between the two countries, and the familiarity with Saudi goods by Malaysian visitors of Makkah and Madinah play an important role in how the Malaysian consumer accepts the Saudi product. However, The General authority of statistics in KSA indicate that Saudi non-oil exports to Malaysia are at an index of 50% of total exports (General authority of statistics, 2020). Most of these exports are of chemical and petroleum products. As for exports of other goods like food and beverage (F&B) products that they have a high potential of exporting, they are at a low level and do not rise to the level or size of the relationship between the two countries. The data obtained by the (General authority of statistics, 2020) indicates a high potential for exporting F&B products such as dairy goods and other products such as packaging products and spare parts products for heavy equipment (General authority of statistics, 2020). One of the Saudi Commercial Attaché in Kuala Lumpur's goals is to maximize Saudi exports to Malaysia and to achieve economic gains for the two countries by studying the markets and providing information and advice to Saudi companies wishing to enter the Malaysian market or to Malaysian companies wanting to invest in the Saudi market. However, there are some obstacles that the office faces in achieving that goal.

Saudi companies are reluctant to enter the Malaysian market. Few can have the stamina and desire to continue the long and complicated way and enter the market. The volume of Saudi Arabia's non-oil exports to Malaysia constitutes nearly a third of exports' total volume. There

is no effect of the Saudi companies' involvement in the total export, despite their products' capability, quality, and good demand from consumers in the countries. Many factors contributing to this issue; among them are logistical factors, economic issues, the lack of marketing, and cultural issues.

There are several factors of the weakness of the presence of Saudi companies in Malaysia. Some of those factors are direct ones like economic factors that contribute to this issue. For example, the unavailability of the free trade agreement (FTA) between Saudi Arabia and Malaysia or ASEAN countries makes the end price higher than other competitive products. On the other hand, there are undirect factors that play a role in the weakness of Saudi companies' presence in those markets. For instance, the habit of the consumption of dates is widely differing between the two cultures. In Arab culture, consumers buy a great number of dates every year in the form of a big package. In contrast, Asian consumers usually buy the dates in a small package only on specific occasions.

1.2.2 Problem Statement

Saudi companies are facing several challenges when entering Malaysian market. This led to decrease number of Saudi companies present in Malaysia the challenges can be attributed to several factors including high competition in international market, or the companies lack the necessary market competencies. It can also be contributed to complexity of the procedures required to enter Malaysia. The aim of this research is to investigate these challenges, and find the solution that will help Saudi companies' presence in Malaysia. The study is also action research that involve implementation of a designed intervention that will help solve this problem.

1.3 Research Questions

- What are the key factors causing low numbers of Saudi companies penetrating the Malaysian market?

- What are the key factors that will facilitate Saudi companies to enter the Malaysian market?
- What interventions can be implemented to improve the number of Saudi companies penetrating the Malaysian market?

1.4 Research Objective

This Study's main objective is to determine the success factors that can help Saudi companies enter the Malaysian markets.

- To examine the key factors causing low numbers of Saudi companies penetrating the Malaysian market.
- To examine the key factors that will facilitate Saudi companies to enter the Malaysian market.
- To establish interventions to improve the Saudi companies in penetrating the Malaysian market.

1.5 Rationale, Relevance and Significance of the study

1.5.1 Rationale of the Study

The reason for conducting this research is to help the Commercial Saudi attaché reach its goal in helping Saudi companies entering Malaysian market by offering help and guidance.

1.5.2 Relevance of the Study

The relevance of this research lies on the need for Saudi companies to understand the producers regarding exportation to Malaysia due to the difference in culture and countries regulations which may be viewed as complex if not well outlined and understood. The study will provide a practical approach the help Saudi companies that aim to enter the Malaysian market and it will also contribute to the role of the Commercial Saudi attaché in this regard.

1.5.3 Significance of the Study

Saudi Arabia has been very keen to maximize its exports and bring investments as it is one of its vision's goals sat by the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Many practical steps have been taken. One of those steps is to enhance Saudi companies' presence in other countries, leading to achieving the kingdom's vision goals. However, in Malaysia, the Saudi companies' presence does not level up to what it should be according to the initial interview with one of the Saudi commercial officers. This research aims to study the factors that limit the presence of Saudi companies in Malaysia. However, that can be caused by various factors. Therefore, the research examines the key factors affecting Saudi companies' presence in the Malaysian market.

1.6 Nature of Study

The study is applied research that uses action research methodology to deal with the problem facing both the Saudi attaché in KL preventing is from achieving its goal is helping Saudi companies to enter the Malaysian market. The action research methodology is also directed to Saudi companies that aim to enter the Malaysian market or are already in the market to understand the challenges they face. Through understanding the factors influencing the Saudi companies against barriers of entry to the Malaysian market a proposed intervention is implemented, monitored, and evaluated in these companies.

1.7 Definition of the term

To ensure that major terminologies of this research are defined in the context of this Study and easily understood, this section defines some of the major terms that are central to this Study.

FTA: A Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is an international agreement between two or more countries to reduce or remove trade barriers and bring closer economic integration (White, 2005)

GDP: The final value of the goods and services produced within the geographic boundaries of a country during a specified period, normally a year. GDP growth rate is an important indicator of the economic performance of a country.

G20: The G20 was born in 1999 as a consultation forum between finance ministers and central bank governors of the world's major economies. Following the 2008 economic crisis, it became a forum between Heads of State and Government to improve coordination on the leading global issues.

Knowledge barriers(Market competencies) : Export information barriers are described by researchers as a lack of understanding of the specifications and dimensions of export operation (Aharoni, 2015). Alrashidi (2019) described lack of information on trade negotiations and lack of business intelligence, among other things, as obstacles to non-oil export production in a study of Saudi-Arabian exporters (Alrashidi, 2019).

Resource barriers: Resource barriers refers to firms' both tangible and intangible resources that help or hinder its exportation process (Kathuria, 2018; B. Wang, 2018). Internal resource limits, according to Kahiya (2018), apply to the need for a company to provide a set of capital in order to begin exporting. Internal resource obstacles include a shortage of financial capital, which makes it impossible to start or support export operations (Alrashidi, 2019; Kahiya, 2018; Kaihao & Xuefang, 2020; Lukason & Laitinen, 2018; Paul et al., 2017; Wijayarathne & Perera, 2018).

Procedure barriers refers to the several bureaucratic barriers that the company faces when exporting to other country (Kathuria, 2018). Procedural challenges can be classified into two categories: controllable, which can be quickly overcome with the correct expertise, and not controllable, which necessitates case-by-case judgments irrespective of the routine that has been gained through experience (Kahiya, 2017). Bureaucracy, or red tape, as well as paperwork and import tariffs (such as FTA) are among the bureaucratic obstacles to export (Al-ahdal et al., 2020; Paul et al., 2017; Sinkovics et al., 2018). Non-tariff barriers, such as the establishment of various quality control and inspection systems (Al-ahdal et al., 2020; Sinkovics et al., 2018)

External barriers : refer to the unpredictability of international markets, and are mainly due to the behavior of other market players such as competitors, foreign governments, supply, and demand (Tavassoli, 2018). These barriers refer to the external factors that will affect company's exportation to other international markets. This indicates that this type of factor is outside the exporting business's control (Singh et al., 2018).

1.8 Assumptions and Limitations

In this research, the assumption includes that Knowledge challenges which is also known as Market competencies is a significant Challenges facing Saudi companies when entering Malaysian market. Additional assumptions include other challenges including resource challenges (Competition in the international markets), procedure challenges (Governance and coordination) and external challenges

This study was carried out with the help of the Saudi Commercial Attaché in Kuala Lumpur and a few Saudi enterprises who indicated an interest in exporting to Malaysia. The survey has a sample size of 46 respondents, and two commercial officers which is considered a small sample size. Because the sample does not reflect the whole population, the findings may be limited to a certain group. Although the nature of action research necessitates more participation from the research side, particularly during the implementation of the intervention, this will make the action research cycle easier to complete. Furthermore, since the data is obtained using both qualitative and quantitative analysis, the data's reliability is maintained using interviews, which supplement and corroborate the survey's conclusions.

1.9 Organization of the project

This project is divided into seven chapters

The first chapter include background of the study, problem statement, research questions, objectives significance, nature of the study and assumption and limitations.

The second chapter is related to the case diagnosis, it also includes the previous and contemporary studies, theories, and conceptual framework. The chapter also include the process of hypothesis development, planning the intervention.

The third chapter discuss the methodology of the research which include research philosophy, design, and describe of action research cycles. The research design described the unit of analysis, population of the study and sampling. The chapter also include the research instrument both qualitative and qualitative and a detailed description of the data collection and analysis procedure.

Chapter four include analysis of the collected data and chapter five provide interpretation of the findings in relation to the research objectives. The chapter also include description of the proposed intervention. Chapter six involved the results of implementation of the intervention and chapter seven include an overview of the whole action research cycle.

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