



جامعة الشارقة
UNIVERSITY OF SHARJAH

University of Sharjah Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences

A Refereed Scientific journal



Vol. 23, No. 1
Ramadan 1447 A.H. / March 2026 A.D.

ISSN : 1996-2339

Commercial Diplomacy and SMEs' Internationalization in the United Arab Emirates Economy: A Qualitative Study

Fatima AlSuwaidi⁽¹⁾

Muhammad Raziq⁽²⁾

Uzma Batool⁽³⁾

Mansoor Ahmad⁽⁴⁾

Received on: 05-09-2024

Accepted on: 30-10-2024

Abstract:

Purpose: Despite the established role of commercial diplomats in SMEs internationalization, our understanding of how commercial diplomats' activities facilitate the development of SMEs in international markets remains far from c SMEs owner were SMEs owner were omplete. To fill this lacuna, this study explores the phenomenon of commercial diplomacy within the UAE and its implications for the internationalization efforts of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Method: Two sets of data unveiling unique experiences of commercial diplomats and SMEs owners were drawn using semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis of both the data sets offered unique perspectives.

(1) College of Business Administration - University of Sharjah (Sharjah - U.A.E.)
u19106205@sharjah.ac.ae

(2) College of Business Administration - University of Sharjah (Sharjah - U.A.E.)

(3) College of Business Administration - University of Sharjah (Sharjah - U.A.E.)

(4) College of Business Administration - University of Sharjah (Sharjah - U.A.E.)

Findings: The findings suggest the significance of human, financial, and digital resources in supporting the internationalization efforts of SMEs. Furthermore, understanding SME involvement in commercial diplomacy, experiences with UAE support programs, and tactics for entering overseas markets enhances comprehension of SME behavior during global expansion.

Originality: This study contributes by highlighting the importance of institutional elements in influencing SME internationalization plans and offers significant insights for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers aiming to improve SME competitiveness in the global market. The implications of the results have significant importance for governments, business owners, and commercial diplomats.

Keywords: Commercial diplomacy, small and medium-sized enterprises, SME internationalization, institutional theory, commercial diplomacy activities, United Arab Emirates

Introduction

In recent decades, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), strongly committed to attaining substantial economic growth has experienced a sustained economic expansion. The claim is evident from an IMF survey reporting a noticeable increase of 4.9% in 2022 compared to the earlier rate of 2.2% in 2021. The credit for burgeoning economic growth goes to the role small and medium enterprises (SMEs) played in the economic development of the UAE. As of mid-2020, there were almost 350,000 SMEs in operation, accounting for a noteworthy 60% of the GDP in the UAE and employed 86% of the workers in the private sector (UAE Government, 2020).

The fact that SMEs are essential for economic diversity, creativity, and the creation of job opportunities cannot be denied (Gamidullaeva et al., 2020). UAE has been proactively supporting SME internationalization through diplomatic initiatives and the development of solid global connections. The process by which SMEs go global and expand their commercial activity into foreign markets as well as their home markets is known as “SME internationalization” (Bose, 2016, Ribau et al., 2018). Despite the growth SME internationalization brings, SME internationalization also goes through challenges such as limited financial availability, insufficient resources and expertise, and issues in establishing global networks (Bose, 2016, Naray, 2011).

Moreover, SME exporters in the UAE are on a decline (SME Report, 2019); most SMEs in the GCC Gulf region export, but there are still a lot of undiscovered markets in Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. Despite their attempts at globalization, SMEs in the UAE cannot fully realize their export potential (SME Report, 2019). Notwithstanding government initiatives, high export costs and knowledge gaps in outside markets remain problematic for SMEs in the UAE. Internationalization is a difficult endeavor because of these obstacles, which impact both local

SMEs in the UAE and international SMEs looking to expand in the UAE.

A country's efforts to enhance global interactions and foster a favorable atmosphere for economic growth and progress lie in its commercial diplomacy (CD) (Lop, 2017). This is because the practice of CD has the potential to provide advantages for SMEs in several aspects, which include facilitating the establishment of company operations in previously untapped areas, granting SMEs access to a wider customer base, and mitigating the risks associated with international expansion (Chandra et al., 2020). This is important because CD not only advances but also safeguards a nation's commercial interests, especially those of SMEs using diplomatic strategies and assets (Nurhasdy et al., 2016).

Despite the established role and significance of CD in SMEs internationalization, our understanding of how CD activities facilitate the development of SMEs in international markets remains far from complete (Georgiadou and Hughes, 2017). Thus, to dig deeper and understand how CD facilitates internationalization in the UAE, its influence on SMEs and their internationalization remains largely neglected (Refass et al., 2023). Understanding the role of CD holds value because commercial diplomats (CDs), employed by foreign embassies significantly influence the practice of cross-border business diplomacy Salisbury (2021). Thus, to extend the institutional theory and address the constant calls to explore the impact of the UAE's CD on its global position as well as the development of SMEs locally, we had to dig deeper and engage in critical analysis. This study explores the impact of business diplomacy in the UAE as it clarifies the complex dynamics between formal and informal institutions that influence the impacts of CD on the international expansion of SMEs.

To fill the lacuna, we collected data through semi-structured interviews from both commercial diplomats and SMEs owners to know their unique perspectives. Thematic analysis of both sets of interviews provided novel insights. Findings unveiled the significance of human, financial, and digital

resources to support the internationalization efforts of SMEs. Furthermore, understanding SME involvement in commercial diplomacy, experiences with UAE support programs, and tactics for entering overseas markets enhances comprehension of SME behavior during global expansion. This study highlights the importance of institutional elements in influencing SME internationalization plans and offers significant insights for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers aiming to improve SME competitiveness in the global market.

Based on institutional theory this study offers several theoretical contributions to the literature. First, based on the findings, we developed a framework explaining the process, informing how commercial diplomacy facilitates SME internationalization. Second, the framework developed in this study broadens the scope of institutional theory by providing insights into how institutional dynamics impact the behavior of SMEs in global marketplaces. Third, the study highlights the significance of incorporating temporal and cross-cultural aspects into institutional frameworks, offering solutions for SMEs to effectively traverse institutional obstacles. Fourth, the study emphasizes the significance of players such as CDs as institutional entrepreneurs who can shape institutional frameworks to facilitate the internationalization of SMEs.

From a practical standpoint, this study not only highlights the crucial role of CDs in assisting SMEs but also alerts policymakers about customized support initiatives and acknowledges the relevance of both official and informal institutions in promoting CD. Moreover, the recommendations for boosting SME internationalization efforts via cooperation among stakeholders highlight the economic advantages of exchanging information and coordinating efforts.

Theoretical Background

Commercial Diplomacy, its activities and SME Internationalization

Diplomacy refers to overseeing and regulating interactions between countries through CDs in the home and host countries (Hajdukiewicz, 2018). The CD process substantially impacts diplomats and embassies (Moons and de Boer, 2014), fosters international commerce, and economic collaboration through diplomatic means. CD as a concept represents the dynamic interplay between trade and diplomacy, transcending its previous association with purely commercial or imperialistic motivations (Visser and Ruël, 2014). CD encompasses a range of activities undertaken by stakeholders, including organizations and people engaged in CD (see table 1). These activities can potentially yield advantages for the nation and its business sector.

CD promotes internationalization by increasing supply chain performance, international trade, and industry and government participation (Ratten et al., 2007). Particularly in nations with weak legal systems, CD lessens ambiguity about democracy (Gertz, 2018). In their foreign policy, nations use either sharp power—sanctions and military action—or soft power—diplomacy and international support (Lambert, 2022). However, there is a need to understand CD to handle industrial dislocation, changing markets, new international clients, monopolistic suppliers, and growing global integration in host and home nations (Lundblad and Obstfelder, 2018).

Table 1: CD activities

| Activities | Description |
|----------------------------|---|
| Networking activity | Networking activity is an activity that allows delegates and officials from home country to establish connections and contacts with businesses in other host countries (Visser & Ruël, 2014). |
| Intelligence activity | Intelligence activity includes collecting knowledge and statistics on all relevant issues pertaining to the business climate of the host nation and identifying particular commercial possibilities (Naray, 2012b). |
| Image campaigns | Image campaigns include events that are developed or implemented to boost the reputation of the home country and its businesses in the hopes of attracting foreign investment and exports (Workneh, 2012). |
| Business support activity | Business support activity consists of actions such as preserving intellectual property rights (IPR), supporting in promotion and advertising by enterprises based in the home country, organizing legal action, and fixing small challenges (Naray, 2015; Pitkethly, 2001; Potter, 2004). |
| Promotion of FDIs activity | Promotion of FDIs activity refers to the efforts that promote investments and promotional activities that enhance the image of the host country's potential value (Potter, 2004). |
| Problem solving activity | Problem solving activities involve resolution of conflicts, engage in negotiation, and resolve any challenges that occur between the two countries (Ruël & Visser, 2014). |

Methodology

We adopted an interpretive research philosophy (Eatough and Smith, 2017) and qualitative research method to gather raw subjective data by exploring stakeholders' experiences in promoting business diplomacy between their home and host nations. Moreover, we also explored the experiences of CDs that can guide SMEs to internationalize.

Data collection, sampling and participants' selection

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews to capture the essence of participants' lived experiences. We employed two sets of samples guided by literature as well as required by the research objectives. We conducted 11 interviews with diplomats in Foreign Missions accredited to the UAE and 11 interviews with established SME owners. Moreover, data was collected simultaneously from both groups using different interview protocols tailored to each sample as the questions to be asked from these groups were different. As the study aims to investigate and analyze the phenomena of SMEs and how they may benefit from CD based on the perspectives and experiences of SME owners and CDs purposive sampling was chosen as the sampling strategy. Such methods are commonly used in qualitative research and were appropriate for this study (Bell et al., 2022).

Our purposeful sample followed the predefined selection criteria. The selection criteria for CDs required that they hold diplomatic status by serving in a foreign diplomatic mission accredited by the UAE, have at least one year of experience at their post in the UAE, and be involved in business–government interactions between their home country and the host nation. The selection criteria for CDs were guided by precedents in the diplomacy literature (Clark and Jones, 2019). The criteria ensure they have adequate experience and engagement in CD with the UAE. SME owners were screened to meet the definitional criteria of an SME firm size (SME Agency, 2015).

In addition, the criteria for selecting the sample of SMEs include the company's location in the UAE, its classification as an SME, its presence in the local market for at least three years, and the participant's top management position. More information regarding the participants is presented in the table below. UAE-based CDs and SME owners constituted the study's participants. The rationale behind choosing CDs was that they play a crucial role in facilitating and advancing trade and investment activities

between nations and to comprehend the significance and role of CD in the UAE, their perspectives were crucial. Similarly, the experiences of SME owners were equally important because there was a need to comprehend their viewpoints regarding what support they require through CD and how that support can boost their internationalization. Thus, gaining the perspectives of both stakeholders enabled the researcher to investigate the obstacles encountered by both groups and make sense of the opportunities presented by CDs to SMEs.

Prior studies on diplomacy have also employed a comparable methodology wherein interrogating policymakers and intended beneficiaries as distinct samples (Huang and Wang, 2020, Wang, 2020) permitted the collection of insights regarding both supply and demand. The rationale was not only logical but guided by the literature too. For example, in earlier studies (Johnson et al., 2021) conducted interviews with CDs to discuss the function of CD, as well as their activities and results. Chan et al. (2019) conducted interviews with SME owners to assess the influence of policies on their development and international expansion strategies. Guided by these studies, interviews with CDs and SME owners were conducted. The interviews were in Arabic and English to accommodate the participants' needs. However, Arabic interviews were transcribed into Arabic and later translated into English for the data analysis. Still, the meaning of the Arabic transcripts was preserved throughout the translation process. The participants also gave their consent before the interviews, and they were assured that their anonymity would be maintained.

Table 2: Participants' Profile

| Commercial Diplomats | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Participant | Work Experience | Country Affiliated with | |
| CD1 | Did not specify | Bangladesh | |
| CD2 | 2 years (current role) | Guatemala | |
| CD3 | Did not specify | Austria | |
| CD4 | 6 years | Costa Rica | |
| CD5 | 9 years | Romania | |
| CD6 | 5 years | Indonesia | |
| CD7 | 2 years (current role) | Finland | |
| CD8 | Did not specify | Netherlands | |
| CD9 | 2 years (current role) | Czech Republic | |
| CD10 | 2.5 years (current role) | Argentina | |
| CD11 | Did not specify | New Mexico | |
| SME Owners | | | |
| Participant | SME Age | Sector of SME | SME Size (UAE) |
| SMEO1 | 10 years | Advertising | 10 employees |
| SMEO2 | 6 years | Healthcare | 14 employees |
| SMEO3 | 4 years | Investment | 2 employees |
| SMEO4 | 7 years | Consulting | 7 employees |
| SMEO5 | 8 years | Restaurant | 65 employees |
| SMEO6 | 5 years | Financial Technology | 10 employees |
| SMEO7 | 9 years | Education | 10 employees |
| SMEO8 | 25 years | Electronics | 30 employees |
| SMEO9 | 16 years | Consultancy & Trading | 55 employees |
| SMEO10 | 9 years | Business Consultancy | 2 employees |
| SMEO11 | 2 years | IT | 30 employees |

Note: CD-Commercial Diplomat; SMEO-SME Owner

Findings

Thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo software to analyze the data collected through interviews with CDs and SME owners. By conducting thematic analysis on data collected with two groups, various themes and sub-themes were generated, presented in the sub-sections below. The section below first interprets interviews with Commercial diplomats followed by SMEs owners.

Commercial Diplomats’ Perspectives

Figure 1 shows the results of CDs data analysis.



Figure 1: CDs’ Perspectives

Exploring Perspectives and Practices in Commercial Diplomacy: Bridging Views and Actions

Theme 1 encapsulates sub-themes of CD activities and views on diplomacy.

Views on CD: Some participants believed that CD fosters relationships between nations, whilst others believe that CD nurtures relationships for the mutual benefits of nations’ economies.

“To me Commercial Diplomacy is to build relationships with all potential and actual buyers and assist them to increase or assist trading with businesspeople (CD-01)”

“Commercial diplomacy can be as part of economic diplomacy can be defined as any diplomatic activity that promotes the state’s economic interests. Here we include attractive investments promoting exports mainly (CD_05).”

Delegates also asserted the importance of trade and economic ties in bilateral relations between countries. Successful trade and economic cooperation help both parties to gain from increased trade volumes, GDP growth, and advanced developmental fields. This shows that the partner understands the value of solid economic ties for both nations. Participants view the acts that embody **CD activities**. A few interviewees stated that CD activities, like attending trade shows, give businesses the chance to speak and engage face-to-face with possible clients or partners. As an example of the role trade shows play in providing business exposure and networking opportunities for international presence in other countries, participant CD_02 mentions encouraging businesses from his home country to visit the UAE and showcase their offerings in the regional market. The response from participant CD_02 shows how actively network-building helps to forge relationships, open doors for business, and promote trade contacts.

“I would say the most effective way will be through (fairs) as it allows us to meet and interact with people directly as we always encourage businesses from Guatemala to come to UAE to expose their business in the region market (CD_02).”

Likewise, participant CD_09 makes a passing reference to the value of networking, pointing out that making personal relationships and accepting invitations complete tasks successfully.

“The networking is really important and if you got someone person can invite you to someone, that’s the way. Generally, if you want to make something to be done right, so that’s how I feel. Which generally feel about it (CD_09).”

The response implies that the participant understands the importance of utilizing personal connections and creating networks to complete CD tasks.

Role of Commercial Diplomats

Building networks highlights the role of CDs in building networks as it allows them to increase their contacts, which can further help them in building diplomatic relations between the countries. CDs serve as intermediaries between businesses from different countries, helping SMEs navigate the complexities of foreign markets and establish fruitful connections. For instance, CD-03 emphasizes the proactive nature of the commercial diplomat's role in supporting SMEs.

“So, it's about networking, it's about getting people together, understanding what their expectation is, explaining to them what the reality is (CD_03).”

They describe tasks such as assisting companies in finding suppliers, partners, and customers, underscoring the diplomat's role in actively facilitating networking opportunities.

“Anything generally, you need to know that takes time in this country to make the connections and so on, and you have to be patient and work on the contacts (CD_09).”

CD-09 adds depth to this interpretation by highlighting the importance of patience and perseverance in building connections abroad. This insight underscores the long-term nature of relationship-building in international business contexts, emphasizing that CDs must invest time and effort in cultivating contacts to facilitate SMEs' success.

Assisting SMEs reflects on the role of CDs in collecting information about host countries and providing that information to the SMEs, which is essential for facilitating effective communication, negotiation, and deal-making. CD_03 emphasizes the importance of understanding the cultural nuances and perspectives of the host country and by acknowledging the significance of trust and communication in business interactions, the

participant highlights the diplomat's role in gathering insights into the cultural context of the host country.

“You just have to understand why somebody Trusts them a certain way, and it's very important in communication, in negotiation, in making deals happen to understand the other side, to understand the other culture (CD_03)”.

Collecting information about local customs, business practices, and societal norms is crucial for fostering successful business relationships.

“The role of Commercial Diplomat is to do matchmaking. When we receive any request from the UAE business community including SMEs, we try to provide the necessary information to them. Moreover, we also conduct several seminars and attend several seminars with our businessmen in order to increase relationships and business (CD_01).”

Similarly, CD_11 and CD_01 underscore the importance of knowledge acquisition in conducting business in the host country. While acknowledging the international nature of business processes, CD_11 emphasizes the uniqueness of the UAE market compared to other countries like Mexico, which implies that CDs must gather specific information about the regulatory environment, market trends, and business protocols in the UAE to assist businesses effectively.

Understanding Markets primarily focuses on political aspects, such as rules and regulations. As participants CD_03 and CD_07 outlined, CDs have to navigate the differences and complexities inherent in various systems and regulations.

” Experience in doing business in the UAE, knowledge of the rules and regulations, as well as good relationships across the key stakeholders are all very important and helpful (CD_07)”

“I mean that’s one of our main parts of our job is to help people understand these differences because when you grow up in a certain system, whether it be how the government works, how you know, decisions are made and published and community (CD_03)”

CDs provide insights into how governments function, how decisions are made, and how communities operate within a specific market environment. Accordingly, diplomats empower businesses to navigate these differences effectively and make informed decisions that align with the nuances of the target market. CDs must possess a deep understanding of the market dynamics, including regulatory frameworks, to provide valuable support to businesses. Additionally, maintaining strong relationships with key stakeholders enhances the diplomat’s ability to advocate for the interests of their home country’s businesses.

Increasing bilateral trade: Participant CD_07 emphasizes that the work of CDs facilitates trade relations between government entities and also builds connections among a wide range of stakeholders, including companies, specialists, and investors from both countries. These findings emphasize the different ways CDs can help SMEs with the internationalization process. Diplomats use their networks and ties to assist SMEs in finding and linking up with possible partners, suppliers, distributors, and other important contacts in the desired foreign market.

“Work of the commercial diplomats includes building trade relations, not only between the government entities, but also between any key stakeholders, companies, specialists, and investors of the respective countries. Mainly by organizing bilateral meetings, events and connecting relevant parties to discuss various topics of interest and potential ways of collaboration (CD_07)”

Diplomats provide advice to SMEs on how to handle administrative procedures, licensing, and regulations to successfully set up business in foreign countries. Diplomats facilitate cooperation among stakeholders to help SMEs obtain resources, partners, and chances to establish their presence in the market.

Dynamics of SME Internationalization

This theme regards the considerations for SMEs and the support needed from home and host countries during internationalization.

Considerations for SMEs reflect the multifaceted factors and strategic deliberations involved in the process of SMEs expanding their operations into international markets and it encapsulates the various considerations, challenges, and opportunities that SMEs encounter as they navigate the complexities of global business environments. As outlined by participant CD_10, it can be understood that the value proposition of investing in trade shows stands as a pivotal entry point for SMEs venturing into international markets.

“It’s worth making the investment going to the trade show, trying to find the distribution partner, delivering a first delivery, and then seeing how things develop. So, I would say try to, you know, understand as much as you can. Where you are, what the opportunities are and don’t be Afraid of Telling people that you don’t think there’s potential and you know you always have to have a reason why (CD_10)”.

Here, trade shows emerge not merely as exhibitions of products and services but as opportunities for networking and partnership cultivation. Following the identification of potential partners or clients at trade shows, the participant suggests that SMEs should consider delivering an initial shipment of products or services to initiate business relationships, allowing SMEs to build trust with stakeholders.

Involvement of the home country sheds light on the fact that the home country and its government authorities play a crucial role in supporting the SME internationalization process. CD_04 asserts that diplomatic engagement and official visits from authorities of the home country facilitate the internationalization process. SMEs gain access to valuable networking opportunities and support for business ventures in foreign markets. Similarly, CD_11 emphasizes the role of diplomatic efforts in supporting SME internationalization, showcasing a proactive approach by government officials in promoting economic cooperation.

“I have to see they were happy to not only visit the country but have opportunities to meet high level official starting from the president to business community and experience the essence of Costa Rica and push on signing many deals and explore the coffee industry (CD_04)”.

“Back in Feb. 2022 the minister of economy of Mexico was on an official visit to UAE and one of her main objectives was to focus on supporting SMEs so we in the embassy are focused as well on that by helping Mexican SMEs to establish their business in the UAE (CD_11).”

The official visits by officials from home countries signify a concerted effort by the home country to prioritize SME interests in international trade relations.

Support from the host country. Along with the involvement of the home country, support from the host country (UAE) is equally valuable for internationalization. The participants highlighted various aspects of the UAE’s institutional framework, policies, and networking opportunities that foster an environment conducive to SME growth and expansion. For instance, the emphasis on the efficiency and digitization of formal institutions in the UAE, as CD_01 reflects, indicates that SMEs operating in the country benefit from streamlined processes.

“Yes, the formal institutions of the UAE are giving quick service to the traders. They are more digitalized also (CD_01).”

This streamlined bureaucracy can significantly reduce barriers to entry and operational challenges for SMEs seeking to establish or expand their presence in the UAE market. Overall, responses collectively suggest that the involvement of the UAE is integral to the SME internationalization process.

Resources Needed for SME Internationalization

Resources needed for SME internationalization include human resources, digital technologies, and financial resources.

Human resources indicate that stakeholders are the crucial aspects of the internationalization process. CD_03, reflects on the significance of strategically allocating manpower, time, and expertise is crucial for internationalization, which highlights the importance of proficient staff in leading internationalization endeavors, whether in market analysis, networking, or strategy planning. Whilst *financial resources* outline the need to support SMEs in their internationalization process.

“SMEs, once they start their activity, they can receive funds to develop and Support them going into foreign markets (CD_05)”.

CD_05 highlights the importance of financial resources as another key component. SMEs frequently need financial backing to facilitate their expansion into international markets, which may include obtaining funds for market research, product development, marketing campaigns, or setting up international operations. The participant proposes that SMEs should have access to funding possibilities designed to help their international activities, highlighting the importance of financial support in facilitating SME internationalization.

Participants CD_11 and CD_08 emphasized that *digital technologies* play a crucial role in enabling SME internationalization. CD_11 discusses the use of digital platforms overseen by government entities to help SMEs participate in global marketplaces. This highlights the significance of digital infrastructure in granting SMEs entry to international markets, allowing them to exhibit their products or services and engage with potential partners or clients. CD_08 highlights the simplicity and efficiency of digital platforms, acting as comprehensive resources for SMEs looking to negotiate the intricacies of international trade.

“It acts as a digital platform for SMEs to plug their company information on that site and it’s regulated by the ministry as they approve the admission of the company to ensure its legit business (CD_11)

“The fact that everything is either online or set up in a way that it is a one-stop shop concept is something that really attracts companies here (CD_08)”.

This highlights how digital technologies are enabling SMEs to access global markets, creating fairer competition and improving their competitiveness on a global scale. Diplomats facilitate access to funding, incentives, and investment opportunities provided by government export promotion programs and development banks in both home and host countries.

Strategies for Commercial Diplomats for SME Internationalization

Strategies for CDs that facilitate SME internationalization in a competitive environment are discussed below.

Building connections appears as a cornerstone strategy, as indicated by CD_11, who emphasizes the significance of developing relationships with key UAE players, particularly government officials and the emphasis

is on developing ties with authority bodies reflects the diplomat's role in creating an enabling climate for SMEs.

“So, you know the interaction between accelerators, incubators all these entities that are fostering and developing SMEs and start-ups and entrepreneurs (CD_02)”

“What I will say they need to focus on establishing relations with partners here in UAE and especially government officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Economy as it's very important to have and maintain those relations (CD_11).”

Similarly, CD_02 stresses involvement with entities like accelerators and incubators, recognizing their critical role in developing SMEs and entrepreneurs and emphasizing the significance of building relationships across the business ecosystem.

Effective communication and collaboration stand out as a critical method for CDs, as underlined by CD_03 and CD_07. CD_03 emphasizes the need to establish communication channels between organizations, highlighting the potential ripple impact of successful collaborations. Meanwhile, CD_07 calls for increased engagement between UAE SMEs and foreign counterparts to improve competitiveness and information sharing.

“To build a communication route, because one thing that I am pretty certain of is that companies talk to each other. So, if somebody works with you, it is quite like, and they have a successful experience (CD_03).”

“Increase, encourage and find new ways how the UAE's SME companies can collaborate with International companies and to increase competitiveness via know-how (CD_07)”

These responses highlight the importance of business diplomacy in creating communication and collaborations that help SME internationalization efforts move ahead.

Understanding potential markets has emerged as a strategic necessity, with CD_02 emphasizing the importance of SMEs and startups directly visiting target markets to assess needs and explore chances for innovation. Furthermore, CD_03 emphasizes the need to understand market characteristics such as industry trends and legal environments, highlighting the diplomat's responsibility in offering vital insights to SMEs navigating international markets.

“You need to know which lawyers to recommend. You need to understand which industries are growing, which industries are shrinking and that just takes time. And SMEs, especially usually don't have the luxury of being able to take that time to figure these things out (CD_03)”.

“So, I believe SMEs, start-ups should go and visit their potential markets to see what the needs of those markets are, but also to see what the possibilities are of creating new needs for these people. And this is a way a good way of learning interaction with people and best practices are the best way I would say (CD_02)”.

Hence, CDs play an important role in assisting SMEs to negotiate the hurdles of international expansion and seize global possibilities by employing these strategic tactics.

SME Owners' Perspectives

Based on the analysis of interviews conducted with SME owners, the following themes were generated as represented below.

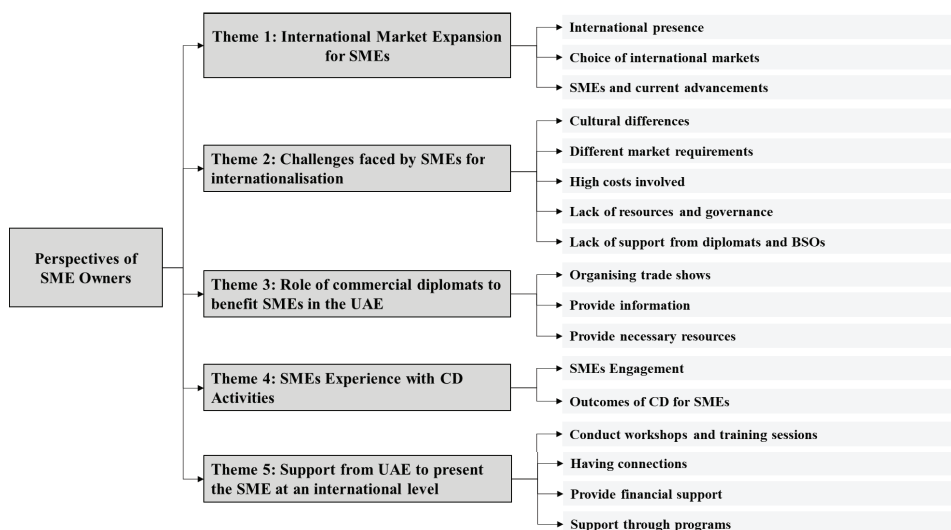


Figure 2: SME Owners' Perspectives

SMEs International Expansion

This theme involves a sub-theme of international presence, choice of international markets and SMEs current advancements.

International presence indicates the current presence of SMEs in the international markets and also outlines a variety of techniques SMEs use to establish themselves in international markets. While some, such as SMEO_07, prioritize online reach to reach foreign clients without the need for physical offices, others, such as SMEO_11, choose a multi-location strategy with headquarters and branch offices in several countries. These different methods show the flexibility and adaptation that SMEs' expansion initiatives require.

“Currently with the online reach that allowed us to reach international customers we do not plan to open physical offices outside the UAE as we reached clients from Britain, USA and South Korea (SMES0_07)”.

“We are operating in UAE. We have our headquarters in Abu Dhabi and then we have a company in Dubai in, in Saudi Arabia, in Oman and in Pakistan also (SMEO_11)”.

The choice of international markets indicates the market choice of SME owners, who were interviewed. When it comes to international markets, SMEs display a comprehensive awareness of market dynamics and client needs. SMEO_01, for example, prioritizes GCC nations due to existing client contacts, aligning its expansion strategy with customer demand. In contrast, SMEO_10 indicates a desire to enter the US market, motivated by the opportunity for business growth in a big and dynamic market environment.

“So, the next markets will enter where we actually have a registered entity as opposed to just employing people there or providing digital services, there are Saudi, India, Kenya and Nigeria and we’re looking at these markets for different reasons. (SMEO_02).”

“Preferably GCC countries like Qatar, KSA, Oman, Kuwait. Most of our existing clients also have business operations in these countries. So, it makes more sense for us to follow our customers’ needs (SMEO_01).”

SMEO_02 takes a systematic strategy for market expansion, targeting nations where it may form registered entities and demonstrating strategic consideration of regulatory frameworks and market conditions.

SMEs and current advancements indicate SMEs awareness regarding the current breakthroughs and industry trends, employing technology innovations and strategic objectives to improve their competitive posture. SMEO_07 emphasizes the importance of digital readiness by showcasing the functioning online platform and operational online learning programs that allowed for business continuity during the pandemic. SMEO_02 emphasizes the significance of continual investment in market research and technical improvements to stay ahead of the competition.

“You know we do continuous like market research; we’re continuously updating the research that we have and trying to understand how we can use these technologies (SMEO_02)”.

“The company’s strategic goals are what differentiate us as they promote establishing smart business that speed the process of business from cutting cost, and better quality. We offer Innovative projects as we always up to date (SMEO_03).”

Furthermore, SMEO_03 emphasizes the importance of strategic goals in creating corporate distinctiveness and competitiveness, with an emphasis on smart business practices that improve efficiency and quality.

Challenges faced by SMEs for internationalization

This theme was derived based on various challenges related to the internationalization of SMEs which consist of sub-themes of cultural differences, market requirements, high prices, limited resources and governance, and a perceived lack of support from diplomats.

Cultural differences indicate the challenges related to cultural differences that SMEs face while expanding in international markets. Cultural differences present a major challenge for SMEs expanding into global markets. SMEO_02 recognizes the need to consider these variations, emphasizing the significance of comprehending and dealing with cultural subtleties to guarantee successful growth endeavors.

“We’re trying to say, you know, we understand that this is a difficult thing for you to talk about or we understand that you think about this in a particular way, and you know, here’s information about it in a way that might be more you know that will hopefully be acceptable to you (SMEO_02)”.

The participant stresses the importance of adapting communication and information distribution strategies to align with the cultural nuances

of specific markets, highlighting the significance of cultural intelligence in navigating varied corporate environments.

Another challenge participants faced was '***Different market requirements***. SMEO_03 has expressed concerns about the lack of information on rules and regulations in target countries, stressing the importance of fully knowing and adhering to foreign legal systems. SMEO_08 highlights the supply chain logistics issues in specific markets such as Saudi Arabia, demonstrating the various market-specific obstacles that SMEs face during their expansion efforts.

"I believe all the safety policies implemented in the UAE helped us in promoting the trade relations since investors seek security and a strong judicial system which are strongly implemented by the UAE government with our businessmen in order to increase relationship and business (SME0_03)".

"It is difficult...Saudi is also very difficult to supply (SME0_08)".

These challenges do not allow SMEs to operate in international markets as they need to be aware of what regulations a country has for SMEs and how that can support or impede their growth.

High costs are involved. The significant expenses linked to worldwide expansion provide a challenging obstacle for SMEs. SMEO_02 underscores the financial risks involved in venturing into new markets, stressing the significant cash commitment needed for expansion endeavors. SMEO_07 highlights the high costs associated with living and conducting business in specific countries, which act as barriers to entering the international market.

"Every time we enter a new market, we potentially put quite a lot of capital at risk; I think challenges of setting up in the UAE specifically have only really been cost related (SME0_02)".

“The main challenges that made us overlook international markets that I mentioned above were the high cost of living on those countries, the high cost and difficulty of opening a business on those countries (SMEO-07)”

The responses highlight the financial challenges that SMEs encounter during international expansion, emphasizing the importance of strategic financial planning and risk management.

Lack of resources and governance: SMEs confront additional obstacles in internationalization due to insufficient resources and governance. SMEO_03 expresses frustration about the lack of knowledge and investment opportunities in foreign nations, which hampers the ability to make educated decisions and allocate resources effectively. SMEO_09 also highlights governance as a crucial concern, citing the lack of legal frameworks and support systems as barriers to SMEs entering global markets.

“As I mentioned before we lack the availability of information and the investment opportunities available in other countries (SMEO_03)”.

“If we are focusing on SME and accessing international markets, I would say the biggest challenge is not having governance (SMEO_09)”.

These participant responses emphasize the significance of strong infrastructure and governance frameworks to support SMEs in their internationalization endeavors.

Lack of support from diplomats: SMEs pursuing internationalization experience additional frustration due to the perceived lack of cooperation from diplomats. SMEO_08 expresses discontent with the help offered by diplomatic channels, pointing out a perceived disparity between initial aid and ongoing involvement, which emphasizes the crucial necessity for dependable and steady support mechanisms for SMEs during the

internationalization process, stressing the importance of improved collaboration and engagement between SMEs and diplomatic bodies. CDs are the most crucial stakeholders that can help SMEs when they are engaging in internationalization.

“You can, but traditionally you will never get the support you need from a business Advocacy group or a country group...No, no, actually this is one of the important like even I met another SME, he said exactly, but with different words that, yes, though they are supporting us, the business support organization and the diplomatic but after the press release, after all this big event, they are nowhere to be found (SME0_08)”.

Role of commercial diplomats to benefit SMEs in the UAE

This theme examines the contribution of CDs to the success of SMEs in the UAE, which consisted of the sub-themes discussed below.

Organizing trade shows: Organizing trade shows was recognized as a vital part of the diplomat’s responsibilities, as emphasized by SMEO_01 and SMEO_09. SMEs appreciate the networking opportunities offered by trade fairs hosted by the national business council, highlighting the significance of these events in linking SMEs with possible partners, consumers, and investors. SMEO-09 stresses the need to arrange roadshows and events to introduce SMEs to global audiences, collect feedback, and spark interest in their products.

“The country’s business council can be more active in the business sector. We benefit from the networking activities they organized (SMEO_01)”.

“Organizing road show of events is best example to expose SMEs to international audience and get their feedback and interest on the topics being offered by these SMEs in the international market (SMEO_09)”.

The responses highlight the diplomat’s role in establishing forums for SMEs to exhibit their products or services, broaden their connections, and investigate potential prospects in international markets.

Provide information: SME owners consider providing information as a crucial role of CDs. SMEO_05 emphasizes the diplomat's function in advancing SME expansion through enabling access to knowledge and resources, which involves delivering information on market dynamics, regulatory requirements, and commercial prospects, as well as assisting in dealing with cross-border trade obstacles.

“When you look at an SME, you are always helping to draw we are a contributor to the Growth of the country. In terms of the staff that you're hiring, what they do, what sort of living they have in terms of supporting trading with the different countries largely (SMEO_05)”.

Diplomats help SMEs by providing them with pertinent information and counsel, enabling them to make educated decisions and capitalize on international economic possibilities.

Provide resources: Furthermore, CDs are seen as suppliers of crucial resources needed for the success of SMEs, as indicated by SMEO_06 and SMEO_07, which led to the identification of a third sub-theme 'Provide resources'. SMEO_06 highlights the initiatives of missions and organizations in facilitating the connection between SMEs and resources to address the obstacles related to international expansion. This may involve access to market research, networking opportunities, finance sources, and other support services customized to meet the specific requirements of SMEs. SMEO_07 emphasizes the significance of providing SMEs with access to valuable resources and financial support to enable them to engage in sustainable international business activities.

SMEs Experience with Commercial Diplomacy Activities

This theme emerged based on the experiences of SME owners who engaged in diplomacy activities, which emerged from the codes represented below.

SMEs' involvement in CD activities is demonstrated by the responses from participants, showcasing the extent and intensity of their engagement. SMEO_10's connection with AICEP from Portugal and Sharjah Chamber, together with supporting organizations like AIMMP **from Portugal, demonstrates a strong network of collaborations developed through CD** activities. This engagement emphasizes the importance of CDs in enabling connections between SMEs and relevant organizations, promoting collaboration, and creating chances for growth and expansion. SMEO_04 excellent experience with the Dubai Chamber highlights the usefulness of Chamber Diplomacy in facilitating smooth and effortless interactions, improving SMEs' capacity to navigate business environments more easily and efficiently.

“I do have, I do work with organization as AICEP from Portugal as well as Sharjah Chamber etc.... and also, we support organizations as AIMMP from Portugal and others (SMEO_10)

“Have the most amazing experience working with Dubai Chamber and their commercial diplomacy was. I mean it was so seamless, so effortless (SMEO_04)”.

Outcome of CD for SMEs: SMEO_06 highlights how CD may significantly affect SME growth and internationalization by providing access to new markets, increasing exports, and acquiring expertise and resources. Furthermore, referencing trade agreements and involvement in trade fairs highlights the crucial function of CD in enabling market entry and enhancing SME exposure internationally. SMEO_10 focuses on increased flexibility and efficiency in everyday operations through collaboration with government sectors demonstrating the broader influence of CD in enhancing business processes and regulatory compliance.

“Access to new markets, increased exports, access to new knowledge, technologies and resources; soften the risks and costs of expanding; trade agreements and trade shows that help them expand their market and reach (SMEO_06).”

There will be more flexibility in doing business and more efficiency in daily operations of engaging with government sectors (SMEO_10).”

Collaboration between SMEs and government bodies through CD programs improves the business environment, helping SMEs handle regulations more easily and efficiently.

Support from the UAE to present the SME at an international level

This theme includes the facilitation of seminars, the provision of connections, the provision of financial assistance, and the development of programs to facilitate SME global expansion.

SMEO_04 emphasizes the importance of **conducting networking sessions** for SMEs to engage with like-minded individuals and discover potential opportunities through discussions. SMEO_09 emphasizes the need to conduct awareness workshops and training programs to provide SMEs with the essential skills and information needed for success in the global market.

“We have a networking session; you get to ask questions. so, and then you meet people who are like minded, who have similar interests and then you know from there with conversations you can think of more opportunities. Meeting face to face and getting that information shared will definitely help (SMEO_04).”

“Conduct awareness workshops and training programs to enable them to be ready and fit for the international market. There are a lot of prep work needs to be done and there are lots of practices need to be conduct while doing business internationally (SMEO_09)”.

The initiatives demonstrate the UAE’s dedication to offering educational and developmental assistance to SMEs, helping them navigate global markets successfully.

This highlights the *importance of connections and networks* that can support SMEs in their internationalization process. SMEO_11 stresses the significance of a network in enabling business and free trade, underscoring the relevance of expressing one’s argument to pertinent parties. SMEO_07 also highlights involvement in international events and exhibitions organized by the Emirates Publishers Association, which helps SMEs stay informed about opportunities and promotes their company.

“A network of more because you know about good commerce and free trade is really about having a fair chance to present your case to somebody and then letting them design their own options (SMEO_11)”.

“We participate in international events and exhibitions due to my position as a member in Emirates Publishers Association as they keep us informed about those types of opportunities and advocate for our business (SMEO_07)”.

The linkages offer SMEs important prospects for visibility, cooperation, and market entry, highlighting the UAE’s leadership in promoting networking opportunities for SMEs globally.

SMEO_10 proposes that government *financial assistance* will benefit SMEs in expanding internationally by emphasizing the significance of funding access in overcoming obstacles and capitalizing on possibilities in global markets. SMEO_09 advocates for government incentives to support

SMEs worldwide, highlighting the importance of financial aid in helping SMEs grow and enhance their competitiveness internationally.

"I think that could help if we have financial support from the government for internationalization (SMEO_10)."

"UAE government to offer incentives for SME to promote them to go global (SMEO_09)."

The responses highlight the significance of financial resources in aiding SMEs' efforts to expand internationally and improve their worldwide presence.

Providing support: SMEO_01 proposes arranging roadshows in surrounding countries to motivate SMEs to investigate potential opportunities in adjacent markets. SMEO_05 also supports increased promotional efforts to attract investment and operate as a central center for connecting enterprises with profitable markets.

"Encourage SMEs to take the UAE as a central hub of the region and explore the potential opportunities in nearby countries by organizing road shows to different markets with SMEs on board (SMEO_01)".

"To do more activity to promote even also attract investment and to be like the connecting dots between like maybe some attractive business you are not aware some like market that you can benefit from instead of going to different like countries (SMEO_05)".

The programs showcase the UAE's proactive efforts to promote SME growth and support their integration into regional and global markets, establishing the government as a strategic partner and facilitator for SMEs' international activities.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to explore how the UAE government strategically implements commercial diplomacy to help SMEs thrive internationally. Data collected through semi-structured interviews from both CDs and SMEs, were analyzed using thematic analysis. The study contributes to the theory and practice in many ways. First, we present a framework to understand how commercial diplomacy facilitates SME internationalization. Second, the study contributes to extending institutional theory by unfolding how SMEs engage with and maneuver through institutional contexts, especially in the realm of international expansion. Institutional theory suggests that businesses are impacted by larger societal institutions, including laws, regulations, norms, and cultures, which influence their behavior and decision-making procedures. Third, the study finds that institutional variables influence the international growth efforts of SMEs by exploring themes and subthemes such as difficulties, support mechanisms, and tactics linked to SME internationalization.

Moreover, the study unveils the institutional structure in which SMEs operate and the techniques they use to adapt and succeed in various international markets by examining the role of CDs, government support efforts, and market dynamics. We also shed light on how SMEs react to institutional pressures and constraints, including cultural differences, regulatory requirements, financial barriers, and resource limitations. Doing so, the study sheds light on various challenges international SMEs entering the UAE market face such as market research, regulatory issues, administrative requirements, and resource readiness.

Our finding support the established literature that CDs help SMEs reach key markets (Naray, 2012). We found that CDs facilitate cultural flexibility, local relationships, and global opportunities, as Ackermann and Wuschka (2024) indicated. However, previous studies have mainly emphasized the

UAE's foreign policy and reliance on international commerce (MOFA, 2022) (Busschers and Ruël, 2012). Additionally, diplomats stressed the importance of connections with government and private entities for SME expansion. This finding closely resonates with extant research (Valdez-Juárez and Castillo-Vergara, 2021, Visser and Ruël, 2014) asserting the significance of these networks for knowledge exchange and business opportunities.

As the results suggest CDs play a crucial role in facilitating the establishment of new businesses by SME owners in foreign markets such as the UAE. SME owners often seek help from their home country's diplomats to establish contacts with important figures in the local community. CDs can utilize their connections and expertise to connect SMEs with government officials, chambers of commerce, accelerators, incubators, dealers, and other pertinent stakeholders.

We assert that engaging in trade missions, workshops, and seminars holds significant value in facilitating SME internationalization. Literature also states that activities to facilitate internationalization enhance possibilities for networking, exchanging expertise, and exploring the industry (Valdez-Juárez and Castillo-Vergara, 2021). The establishment of effective communication and cooperation mechanisms is vital for SMEs that want to extend their operations on an international scale. In the context of a multinational corporate environment, the techniques above have been identified by Georgiadou and Hughes (2017) as effective means of surmounting challenges and cultivating a sense of shared comprehension and confidence.

As indicated in this study's findings and literature, SMEs that want to expand internationally must do thorough market research to tailor their products or services, accommodate local tastes, and manage any risks (Kostecki and Naray, 2007). It is essential to prioritize improving the local business climate in host nations like the UAE to assist SMEs in

effectively managing regulatory obstacles and enhancing their operational effectiveness. According to Hajdukiewicz (2018), implementing diplomatic initiatives can optimize bureaucratic processes and mitigate barriers, hence facilitating the attraction of foreign investments and the cultivation of international collaborations. Also, according to Bose (2016) this support aids SMEs in overcoming obstacles related to their entry into international markets. Adopting digital platforms and procedures is essential for the internationalization of SMEs, especially in technologically advanced nations such as the UAE (Bagheri et al., 2019).

Based on the above discussion, the following framework was developed.

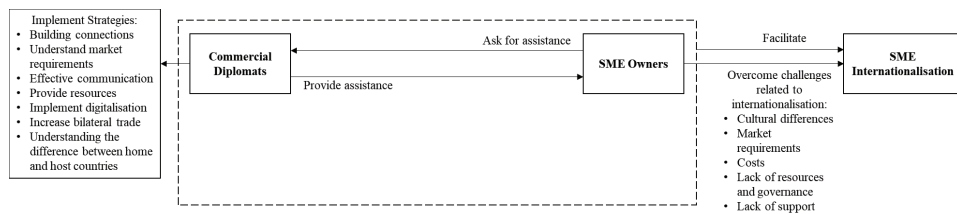


Figure 3: Framework to Understand how Commercial Diplomacy Facilitates SME Internationalization

Limitations and Future Recommendations

This research offers significant contributions to understanding the interdependent connection between CD and the international expansion of SMEs in the UAE. However, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations associated with the qualitative methodology such as limited sample size, the generalizability of findings (Bell et al., 2022), and temporal constraints in the study. Due to the qualitative nature of the study and its specific context, the UAE, it is important to note that the results may not be immediately generalizable to other areas or nations characterized by distinct diplomatic institutions, economic situations, and cultural norms. Also, the focus was only on collecting and analyzing subjective opinions,

limiting the scope of empirical research (Bell et al., 2022). The analysis was limited to a certain time since economic circumstances, diplomatic goals, and SME dynamics are subject to change over time.

Our study provides practical implications for researchers, CDs as well as policymakers. Researchers should emphasize cross-country comparative research to understand how CD affects SMEs' internationalization in different regions and nations. Researchers should also conduct in-depth research in certain sectors, gather unbiased data, assess the impact of strategies on SMEs, and examine CD policy and crisis management. CDs should engage with SMEs, build strong networks, give relevant market intelligence, and advocate for legislation that supports SMEs. SMEs should also pursue strategic partnerships with CDs to boost internationalization. Practically, studying the ways SMEs deal with these institutional obstacles can help researchers and policymakers create specific interventions and support systems to promote SME expansion into foreign markets and improve their competitiveness globally.

Moreover, policymakers must coordinate CD efforts, allocate resources to diplomat training, address SMEs' challenges, and promote innovation and technical assistance. Simplifying administrative procedures and creating SME support centers at diplomatic postings may improve the environment for SME growth and internationalization. The above recommendations attempt to employ CD to boost SMEs and the UAE economy.

References

- Ackermann, T. and Wuschka, S. (2024), "International Humanitarian Law and International Investment Law: Mapping a Developing Relationship", *Yearbook of International Humanitarian Law*, Volume 25 (2022) International Humanitarian Law and Neighbouring Frameworks, pp. 41-69. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6265-619-2_2
- Bell, E., Bryman, A. and Harley, B. (2022), *Business research methods*, Oxford university press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hebz/9780198869443.001.0001>
- Bose, T. K. (2016), "Critical success factors of SME internationalization", *Journal of Small Business Strategy (archive only)*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 87-109.
- Busschers, S. and Ruël, H. (2012), "The value of commercial diplomacy from an international entrepreneurs perspective", in *Commercial diplomacy and international business: A conceptual and empirical exploration*, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp. 71-103. [https://doi.org/10.1108/S1877-6361\(2012\)0000009007](https://doi.org/10.1108/S1877-6361(2012)0000009007)
- Chan, C. M., Teoh, S. Y., Yeow, A. and Pan, G. (2019), "Agility in responding to disruptive digital innovation: Case study of an SME", *Information Systems Journal*, Vol. 29 No. 2, pp. 436-455. <https://doi.org/10.1111/isj.12215>
- Chandra, A. A., Paul, J. and Chavan, M. (2020), "Internationalization challenges for SMEs: evidence and theoretical extension", *European Business Review*, Vol. 33 No. 2, pp. 316-344. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EBR-08-2019-0164>
- Clark, J. and Jones, A. (2019), "Geopolitical teleconnections: Diplomacy, events, and foreign policy", *Political Geography*, Vol. 75, pp. 102049. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2019.102049>
- Eatough, V. and Smith, J. A. (2017), "Interpretative phenomenological analysis", *The Sage handbook of qualitative research in psychology*, pp. 193-209. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526405555.n12>
- Gamidullaeva, L. A., Vasin, S. M. and Wise, N. (2020), "Increasing small-and medium-enterprise contribution to local and regional economic growth by assessing the institutional environment", *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, Vol. 27 No. 2, pp. 259-280. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSBED-07-2019-0219>
- Georgiadou, E. and Hughes, M. (2017), "Theorising family firm internationalisation-Socioemotional wealth: A luxury?".
- Gertz, G. (2018), "Commercial diplomacy and political risk", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 62 No. 1, pp. 94-107. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqx079>
- Hajdukiewicz, A. (2018), "The role of commercial diplomacy in promoting and facilitating international business", *www.ciet.oss.unist.hr*, pp. 107.

- Huang, Z. A. and Wang, R. (2020), "Panda engagement in China's digital public diplomacy", *Asian Journal of Communication*, Vol. 30 No. 2, pp. 118-140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01292986.2020.1725075>
- Johnson, S. S., Grossman, R., Miller, J. P., Christfort, K., Traylor, A. M., Schweissing, E., Bonaventura, C. D., Salas, E., Kremer, L. and Stock, G. (2021), "Knowing well, being well: Well-being born of understanding: The science of teamwork". SAGE Publications Sage CA: Los Angeles, CA. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08901171211007955>
- Kostecki, M. and Naray, O. (2007), "Discussion papers in diplomacy", *Commercial Diplomacy and International Business*, Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael.
- Lambert, M. J. (2022), *Shaping the Message: An Analysis of US National Security Strategy Message Framing by the Government and Media*, Robert Morris University.
- Lop, G. V. (2017), "Commercial diplomacy in a globalized world", *Przegląd Strategiczny*, Vol. 7 No. 10, pp. 367-382. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ps.2017.1.20>
- Lundblad, L. and Obstfelder, J. (2018), "Swedish Commercial Diplomacy in China. A comparative case study of two Swedish organisations".
- Moons, S. and De Boer, R. (2014), "Economic diplomacy, product characteristics and the level of development", *Product Characteristics and the Level of Development* (September 2, 2014). <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2544592>
- Naray, O. (2011), "Commercial diplomats in the context of international business", in *Economic Diplomacy*, Brill Nijhoff, pp. 121-148. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004209619_008
- Naray, O. (2012), "Commercial diplomacy: an integrative framework", *International Journal of Diplomacy and Economy*, Vol. 1 No. 2, pp. 119-133. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJDIPE.2012.051684>
- Nurhasdy, R., Nurika, R. R. and Yekti, S. N. (2016), "The Relevance of Bandung Spirit in the Contemporary Global Trade Order", *Sospol: Jurnal Sosial Politik*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 137-155. <https://doi.org/10.22219/sospol.v2i1.4762>
- Ratten, V., Dana, L.-P., Han, M. and Welpe, I. (2007), "Internationalisation of SMEs: European comparative studies", *International journal of entrepreneurship and small business*, Vol. 4 No. 3, pp. 361-379. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJESB.2007.013257>
- Refass, S., Lillywhite, J., Salem, F., Akrouf, Z., Shaer, S. and Shibl, E. (2023), "The Future of SMEs in the UAE", *Digital Economy series*.
- Ribau, C. P., Moreira, A. C. and Raposo, M. (2018), "Categorising the internationalisation of SMEs with social network analysis", *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business*, Vol. 35 No. 1, pp. 57-80. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJESB.2018.094264>

- Valdez-Juárez, L. E. and Castillo-Vergara, M. (2021), “Technological capabilities, open innovation, and eco-innovation: Dynamic capabilities to increase corporate performance of SMEs”, *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 8. <https://doi.org/10.3390/joitmc7010008>
- Visser, R. and Ruël, H. J. (2014), “Innovation of international business support: a research agenda for commercial diplomacy”, *International Journal of Diplomacy and Economy* 39, Vol. 2 No. 3, pp. 238-257. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJDIPE.2014.064802>
- Wang, L. (2020), “Religion in China’s public diplomacy: Transition and institutionalization”, *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, Vol. 6 No. 04, pp. 371-387. <https://doi.org/10.1142/S2377740020500219>

الدبلوماسية التجارية وتدويل الشركات الصغيرة والمتوسطة في اقتصاد دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة: دراسة نوعية

فاطمه السويدي⁽¹⁾

محمد رازق⁽²⁾

أزما باتول⁽³⁾

منصور أحمد⁽⁴⁾

ملخص البحث:

على الرغم من الدور الراسخ الذي يؤديه الدبلوماسيون التجاريون في تدويل الشركات الصغيرة والمتوسطة، فإن فهمنا لآلية عمل الدبلوماسيين التجاريين في تسهيل دخول الشركات الصغيرة والمتوسطة في الأسواق الدولية لا يزال بعيداً عن الاكتمال. تستكشف هذه الدراسة ظاهرة الدبلوماسية التجارية في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة وجهودها في تدويل الشركات الصغيرة والمتوسطة الحجم. وقد تم رسم مجموعتين من البيانات تكشفان عن تجارب فريدة للدبلوماسيين التجاريين وأصحاب الشركات الصغيرة والمتوسطة الحجم باستخدام مقابلات شبه منظمة. وقد قدم التحليل الموضوعي لمجموعتي البيانات وجهات نظر فريدة. وتشير النتائج إلى أهمية الموارد البشرية والمالية والرقمية في دعم جهود تدويل الشركات الصغيرة والمتوسطة. وعلاوة على ذلك، فإن فهم مشاركة الشركات الصغيرة والمتوسطة في الدبلوماسية التجارية، والخبرات مع برامج دعم الإمارات العربية المتحدة، والتكتيكات لدخول الأسواق الخارجية يعزز فهم سلوك الشركات الصغيرة والمتوسطة أثناء التوسع العالمي. تسهم هذه الدراسة من خلال تسليط الضوء على أهمية العناصر المؤسسية في التأثير على خطط تدويل الشركات الصغيرة والمتوسطة وتقدم رؤى مهمة لصناع السياسات والباحثين بهدف تحسين القدرة التنافسية للشركات الصغيرة والمتوسطة في السوق العالمية.

الكلمات الدالة: الدبلوماسية التجارية، المؤسسات الصغيرة والمتوسطة، تدويل المؤسسات الصغيرة والمتوسطة، النظرية المؤسسية، أنشطة الدبلوماسية التجارية، الإمارات العربية المتحدة.

(1) كلية إدارة الأعمال - جامعة الشارقة (الشارقة - الإمارات العربية المتحدة)
u19106205@sharjah.ac.ae

(2) كلية إدارة الأعمال - جامعة الشارقة (الشارقة - الإمارات العربية المتحدة)

(3) كلية إدارة الأعمال - جامعة الشارقة (الشارقة - الإمارات العربية المتحدة)

(4) كلية إدارة الأعمال - جامعة الشارقة (الشارقة - الإمارات العربية المتحدة)