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Entrepreneurial Characteristics, Motives, and Business Challenges: Exploratory Study of Small- and Medium-Sized Hotel Businesses

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to gather information about the determinants and characteristics of the owners/managers of small- and medium-sized hotels (SMSHs) and identify various issues in starting up and operating businesses in the United Arab Emirates. The results of this study reveal that the majority of the owners/managers of SMSHs in the United Arab Emirates are male, young and middle age, and relatively new to the tourism industry. The motivations for the business ventures of the entrepreneurs include wanting to be financially independent, become one's own boss, involvement in family business and the opportunities of the hotel business. Among the key business challenges highlighted by the owners/managers of SMSHs are stiff competition in the hotel industry, increased operating costs, reduced demand, and lack of skilled employees. Several key strategies have been employed to face these challenges. These include offering competitive pricing, improving the marketing and channels of promotion, enhancing the quality of service and providing superior customer service.

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Business challenges; entrepreneurship; hospitality and tourism; motivation; small and medium-sized hotel business; United Arab Emirates

Introduction

Tourism is the most important sector within the service industry, both by the number of people employed and by its far-reaching effects on the social and economic development of regions (Fayos, 1996; Holjevac, 2003; Zhao & Getz, 2008; Morrison, 2010). Within the Middle East, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has emerged as the forerunner in the effort to build a tourism infrastructure and market its attractions (Economist Intelligence Unit, 1993; Sharpley, 2002). The UAE has been making continuous efforts to promote tourism in order to attain the declared objective of economic diversification and growth. Tourism has been positioned at the center of the diversification program alongside construction, telecommunications,

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media, real estate, and financial trading. The government of the UAE has placed the tourism industry at the core of its economic development plans to diversify and strengthen the economy with the concomitant decrease in the dependency on the fluctuating oil prices (Davis, 2006; Ross, 2001; The National, 2013). Indeed, as reported by the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness 2011 Report, the country is ranked first in the Middle East for having the most advanced travel and tourism sector (World Economic Forum, 2011). Tourism development is officially overseen by the former crown prince, who is also in charge of the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM). The DTCM was established in 1989 and is responsible for tourism planning, development and marketing (Henderson, 2006). Since the 1990s, the tourism industry has become an important segment of the economy of the UAE. The total income from tourism activities has risen dramatically in recent years.

The UAE tourism industry has been reported as having employed 294,000 individuals in 2006, which is expected to reach 376,000 by 2016 (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2013). The aggressive promotional campaigns launched by the government of the UAE and its related agencies to market itself as a tourist destination over the past several years have paid dividends. For instance, in 2011, 8.2 million overseas visitors sought out the UAE as a holiday destination, and a recent study by the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry reveals that a 6.5% annual growth is predicted for the tourism sector between 2011 and 2021. A review of the economic indicators of the UAE shows that the total contribution of travel and tourism to the gross domestic product (GDP) in the UAE was US\$47.64 billion in 2011, equivalent to 13.5% of the GDP. The figure is expected to grow steadily to US\$49.77 billion by the end of 2012, and is then forecast to rise by 4.3% per annum to US\$75.63 billion by 2022, or 14.6% of the GDP (The National, 2012).

The occupancy rate for hotels is also higher because of the increasing number of tourists arriving annually. As reported by Reuters in Dubai, hotel guests stay for an average of 3.76 nights; hotel revenue was US\$5.13 billion in 2012 (Smith, 2013). This can explain why businesses related to tourism such as luxury hotels, small- and medium-sized hotels (SMs), service apartments, hotel apartment flats, and guesthouses are flourishing in the urban centers. Although Dubai has traditionally been known for its five-star hotels, more budget hotels have been built in the last few years to appeal to a wider tourist base (Smith, 2013). This development is also supported by the rich sources of tourism-related products and facilities such as those promoting culture and heritage, sports tourism, event tourism, eco-tourism, leisure tourism, theme parks, and shopping. These places of attraction have provided opportunities for SMs to flourish. Research suggests that the tourism industry can be an area of high growth during

economic transition, due to the low requirements of human capital needed to gain entry (Szivas & Riley, 1999). Moreover, tourism offers a particularly attractive opportunity to develop new service-industry enterprises and to create regional employment (Butler & Greene, 1997) as there are relatively low entry barriers—no large outlays and no highly specialized and sophisticated skills are required—and relatively few restrictions or regulations exist (Barry & Robins, 2001; Dwyer & Kim, 2001; Rath & Kloosterman, 2000). The tourism industry also provides favorable conditions for the creation of small businesses by people seeking autonomy and independent work conditions (Braun & Hollick, 2005).

Despite the status of the tourism industry as one of the most significant pillars of the overall economic development in the UAE, within the literature of hospitality and tourism there is a conspicuous paucity of research into entrepreneurship and SMSHs. Roberts and Hall (2001) and Li (2008) noted that the number of studies on the behavior of small tourism and hospitality firms is insufficient, and studies investigating the behavior of SMSH owners/managers in the UAE, whose emerging economy is among the most prominent in the world, are almost nonexistent. The entrepreneurship in the tourism industry in the Middle East, particularly in oil-dependent *rentier* states,¹ remains underresearched—arguably a notable omission given the political economic structures in such countries. Until recently, hospitality and tourism research had largely overlooked small enterprises or treated them as simplified versions of larger firms (Morrison & Thomas, 1999). Friel (1999) stated a similar point, claiming that tourism and hospitality literature has wrongly taken the view that small firms are reduced versions of larger firms, and thus their business activities, development, and challenges should follow the examples set by larger organizations. Although there is a growing interest in SMSHs (Hwang & Lockwood, 2006; Jaafar, Abdul-Aziz., Maideen, & Mohd., 2011; Morrison, 2006; Rogerson, 2005), few, if any, studies regarding the entrepreneurial characteristics of SMSHs and the business challenges in the UAE could be found in the current research stream. The existing literature on this topic is rather limited in scope, predominantly to the developed countries. These studies concerning SMSHs were conducted in different states and tourism sectors, which provides the gap for research to be conducted in the Middle East. This article attempts to redress this situation by examining the nature of the entrepreneurial activity for tourism in the SMSHs in this context. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to shed light on the determinants and characteristics of the entrepreneurs, motives, and business management practices of the SMSHs, and to relate these findings to the existing theories on the success and failure of small businesses in the hospitality and tourism sector. The UAE was chosen for the study because of its economic

growth through the development of its hospitality and tourism industry. The objectives are as follows: (a) to identify the personality and entrepreneurial characteristics of the owners/managers of SMSHs operating within the UAE and (b) to identify the issues and business challenges facing the owners/managers of SMSHs. This study directly addresses existing research gaps in understanding small- and medium-sized business owners/managers in developing countries, specifically, in this case, the United Arab Emirates.

Small- and Medium-sized Hotel Enterprises in the Hotel Industry

Interestingly, according to Middleton (1998), the tourism industry is dominated by small- to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and it has been estimated that 99% of the enterprises employed fewer than 250 people. There is no universally accepted definition of the term “small firms” in the hospitality and tourism industry (Morrison & Thomas, 1999). Scholars normally define the size of a hotel in terms of the number of rooms and full-time employees. According to Buhalis (1995), Main (1994), Moutinho (1990), and Wong (1991), SMSHs have less than 50 rooms, employ fewer than 10 people, operate in the lower reaches of the market and are often situated in tertiary locations. Ingram, Jamieson, Lynch, and Bent (2000) gave a more precise definition—a small-sized hotel enterprise is one that has up to 50 rooms, a medium-sized hotel enterprise provides 51–100 rooms, and a large hotel has over 100 rooms. Similarly, Wong (1999) defined hotel enterprises by the number of employees; hotel enterprises are considered to be small scale with 9 or fewer people engaged in their operations, whereas medium-sized hotel enterprises have between 10 and 99 employees. Table 1 illustrates this by highlighting a range of definitions used by a sample of recent contributors. Hence, at this stage, there is no greater congruence among the definitions used for studies specific to the tourism industry than elsewhere. Atkins and Lowe (1997) noted that as many as 40 different definitions of SMEs have been reported in the literature, and generally there appears to be very little consistency in the criteria used to define these enterprises. The criteria are many, such as the number of employees, annual sales revenue, value of fixed assets/plant and machinery, and the management structure.

In the context of the UAE, SMEs are defined based on the thresholds of employee headcount and turnover, as applicable to the industry group to which it belongs (i.e., trading, manufacturing, or services). Specifically, in the service sector, a small business enterprise is defined as any enterprise with less than or equal to 100 employees and a turnover of less than or equal to AED 25 million (US\$6.81 million). A medium business is any enterprise with less than or equal to 250 employees and a turnover of less

Table 1. A Selection of Definitions Recently Used in the Study of Small- and Medium-Sized Tourism Businesses.

Scholar(s)	Sector(s)	Definition
Chan and Quah (2012)	Accommodation	Fewer than 25 rooms Fewer than 20 employees
Beeton and Graetz (2001)	Hotels	Fewer than 20 employees
World Tourism Organisation (1999)	Accommodation	Fewer than 50 rooms Fewer than 10 employees
Ingram et al. (2000)	Hotels	Small sized: 50 rooms Medium sized: 51–100 rooms Large sized: >100 rooms
Wong (1999)	Hotels	Fewer than 9 employees
Morrison (1998)	Hotels	Directly managed. Financed by an individual or small group. Perceived to be small.
Middleton (1998)	Hotels	Micro enterprise: <10 employees Small enterprise: 10–49 employees Medium enterprise: 50–250 employees
Sundgaard, Rosenberg, and Johns (1998)	Hotels	Fewer than 25 rooms
Rowson and Lucas (1998)	Hotels	Fewer than 25 employees
Halcro, Buick, and Lynch (1998)	Hotels	Fewer than 15 rooms
Thomas et al. (1997)	Travel agents, visitor attractions, accommodation, pubs/bars, restaurants, takeaways	Fewer than 50 employees

than or equal to AED 150 million (US\$40.84 million). In the tourism sector, there is no specific definition of the use of the term SMSHs, and it varies within the Emirates. However, in the Emirates of Abu Dhabi, the Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority (ADTCA) states that these hotels are classified under the “star” categories (1–5 star; see Table 2 for classification) and that the hotel apartment classification rating is

Table 2. The Criteria for the Classification of Small- and Medium-Sized Hotels in the UAE.

Star rating	Criteria
Three stars	Hotels with more spacious public areas and bedrooms, a high standard of cleanliness, equipped and comfortable accommodation, higher quality and standards of services and facilities, more formal style of service, friendly and helpful staff. These hotels are required to meet the basic mandatory standards and the relevant criteria rating for this level of hotel. Higher standard of restaurant/eating area open for breakfast and dinner, room service of continental breakfast for a limited number of hours per day and higher quality of food.
Two stars	High standard of cleanliness, comfortable and simple accommodation, straightforward range of services with a more personal touch. These hotels are required to meet the basic mandatory standards and the relevant criteria rating for this level of hotel. Employees are friendly and helpful. Higher standard of restaurant/eating area open for breakfast and dinner.
One star	Hotels in this category are basic, yet provide the important comforts. These hotels are required to meet the basic mandatory standards and the relevant criteria rating for this level of hotel. They are clean and well maintained offering a limited range of facilities and services. Employees are friendly and helpful. Their restaurant/eating area is open for breakfast and dinner.

Note. Adapted from “Hotel Classification System Manual,” by Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority, 2013, <http://tcaabudhabi.ae/en/tourism/Pages/classification.aspx>

Table 3. The Criteria of the Hotel Apartment Classification in the UAE.

Classification	Criteria
Standard	Hotel apartments in this category are basic, yet provide the necessary comforts mandated by the mandatory and rating criteria. They have friendly and helpful staff, are clean, well maintained, and meet all the legal requirements of all official agencies. However, they offer a limited range of facilities and services.
Superior	Hotel apartments that have more spacious public areas and guest apartments. They offer comfortable accommodations with a high standard of cleanliness, higher quality and standard of service and facilities; a more formal style of service; friendly and helpful staff; with a higher standard of restaurant/eating area open for breakfast, dinner and room service of continental breakfast with a higher food quality.
Deluxe	Larger hotel apartments with even more spacious public areas and guest apartments. Luxurious and special surroundings offering the highest quality of accommodation and standard of cleanliness. All guest apartments are luxurious and spacious. A more formal style of service with professional, attentive, and highly trained staff. A higher standard of restaurant/eating area open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner; room service for all meals and drinks and snacks available 24 hours, 7 days a week, with a higher quality of food and outlets.

Note. Adapted from "Hotel Classification System Manual," by Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority, 2013, <http://tcaabudhabi.ae/en/tourism/Pages/classification.aspx>

determined by its points and the corresponding scores the hotels earn (i.e., standard, superior, and deluxe) (see Table 3), which are based on the standard of cleanliness and hygiene, building safety, guest security, facilities, services, bedroom requirements, food standards, and staff (ADTCA, 2013). Generally, a hotel can be defined as a SMSH if it receives a 3-star rating and below. Accordingly, attempts to restrict and limit the definition of SMSHs in the tourism industry may lead to more difficulties than when a more general definition is used. Therefore, for the purpose of this article, the broad and basic definition of SMSHs—having up to 100 rooms and employing fewer than 250 employees—devised by Ingram et al. (2000) is adopted.

Literature Review

Entrepreneurial Characteristics and Motivations for Business Start-Up in the Tourism Industry

Although research on the individual antecedents of individual entrepreneurship in tourism has appeared in some scholarly journals (Echtner, 1995; Morrison & Thomas, 1999; Shaw & Williams, 2002), little academic attention has been given to the entrepreneurs themselves, especially to their characteristics and the business challenges in the SMSH tourism sector. Researchers have acknowledged the importance of investigating the characteristics of entrepreneurs and other structural factors in the study of small business enterprises (Buera, 2009; Jaimovich, 2010; Mesnard & Ravallion, 2006). In the tourism industry, the type of involvement by the entrepreneur

in the business enterprise is, in itself, dependent on the characteristics of the entrepreneur (Russell & Faulkner, 2004). Given that the tourism industry represents an economy with rather low entry barriers (Harrison, 2003; Rath & Kloosterman, 2002), Pechlaner, Bò, and Volgger (2012) described the attractiveness of tourism entrepreneurship as an early entrance for new minorities to become entrepreneurs. New minorities provide the low-cost labor force often needed in tourism, while at the same time they are increasingly entering the tourism sector as SME entrepreneurs (Simon, 1993; Ward & Jenkins, 1984). In relation to the characteristics of entrepreneurs, the literature considers different factors such as age (Mondragón-Vélez, 2009), status (Correll, 2004), gender (Ahmad, 2011; Minniti & Nardone, 2007), race (Fairlie & Robb, 2007; Robinson, Blockson, & Robinson, 2007), type of education (Backes-Gellner & Werner, 2007; Colombo & Grilli, 2005), and working experience (Lafuente & Rabetino, 2011). Some evidence shows a positive relationship between the characteristics of the entrepreneur and business growth. For instance, entrepreneurs with more years of education seem to identify more with business opportunities and success (Ucbasaran, Westhead, & Wright, 2008). The type of education is also important—when entrepreneurs have a higher degree, firms grow faster; having a postgraduate degree also may determine growth (Almus & Nerlinger, 1999). This evidence shows that there are a growing number of researchers who are demonstrating that a theoretical framework based on the human capital theory (Becker, 1975) may be appropriate for the study of entrepreneurial growth and development. Entrepreneurs constitute a unique resource embedded in their human capital (Alvarez & Busenitz, 2001; Bowman & Swart, 2007). Human capital (knowledge, abilities, and capabilities) provided by the entrepreneurs constitutes a key determinant for ensuring business success (Chandler & Jansen, 1992; Cooper, Gimeno-Gascon, & Woo, 1994; Honig, 2001). Therefore, and especially for SMEs, the role played by the entrepreneur is critical for the strategic design of the business (Birley & Westhead, 1990). Researchers have come to the conclusion that the characteristics of small business owners or entrepreneurs are important and are often seen as a good indicator of their likely success in the tourism industry (Bowman & Swart, 2007; Morrison & Thomas, 1999; Reijonen, 2008). However, whilst many characteristics of entrepreneurs can be shown to contribute to growth in one or more empirical studies, no single factor appears to make a dominant contribution:

[The] search for an identikit picture of the successful entrepreneur has not proved fruitful and although relevant, the characteristics of business founders appear to have only a modest effect on the success of small businesses in terms of their growth performance. (Smallbone & Wyer, 2000, p. 14)

There are certain cognitive properties of individuals that can affect entrepreneurship and small business set-up. The most studied cognitive property is that of motivation. This property can be defined as the set of reasons that causes individuals to engage in a particular behavior, for instance, to initialize the start-up of a new business (Shane, Locke, & Collins, 2003). The type and strength of entrepreneurial motivation may determine the goals and aspirations for the firm, leading to various business outcomes (Hessels, Van Gelderen, & Thurik, 2008; Liñán, Santos, & Fernández, 2011). It is suggested that Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of human needs is actually a reasonable classical model to summarize the reasons an individual starts their own business venture. For some individuals, starting a new business is a way of satisfying the lower level human needs through achieving economic and financial security (Abbey, 2002; Ahmad, Abdul-Rani, & Mohd-Kassim, 2010) and family security (Chan & Quah, 2012), while for others it is a way of satisfying the medium- to higher-level human needs such as prestige or the high social status associated with operating a business and being one's own boss, a desirable lifestyle (e.g., living in the right environment, interacting with interesting people, doing what one likes to do), a sense of belonging (e.g., working with those one likes to work with), or a sense of achievement (Abbey, 2002; Getz & Carlsen, 2000; Walker & Brown, 2004).

Motivation in tourism can be classified into certain categories. One relevant classification differentiates between the "pull" and "push" motivation (Dann, 1977, 1981). These two broad categories of push and pull factors are not mutually exclusive, and it would be more accurate to say that there are often multiple motivations as to why people start their own businesses. The push factor is allied to the negative desire to pursue one's business ideas, while the pull factor is attributed to the positive developments to start a business venture. Thus, the pull motivations tend to be more concerned with the external, situational, and cognitive aspects as compared to the push motivations, which are more intrinsic and related to the internal or emotional aspects. Unemployment, underemployment, unsatisfactory working conditions, family support, recognition, and prospects are among the examples of push factors; while the pull factors for a business start-up include the desire to be one's own boss, self-actualization, financial benefits, the need for approval, wanting autonomy, to use existing experience and knowledge, and the desire to achieve a more comfortable balance between family and work responsibilities. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are not mutually exclusive; one can be motivated by both to perform an entrepreneurial act (Elfving, 2008). Dann (1977) proposed that chronologically, push factors precede pull factors in the decision-making process. These factors are important in influencing the decision to start a business. Related studies illustrated

that, due to the socioeconomic factors, the impact of the pull/push factors vary between developed and emerging economies (Alsos & Ljunggren, 1998). For instance, in a study of new business start-ups in 11 countries, Scheinberg and Macmillan (1988) reveal six motives leading people to become entrepreneurs. They include the need for approval, the perceived wealth, the degree for communitarianism, the need for personnel development, and the need for independence. The findings also reveal that the motivations for business ownership differ from one country to another. American entrepreneurs rate the need for independence and financial motives as the most important reason for starting a business (Abbey, 2002). Italian business owners rank communitarianism high on the list of motivators. Entrepreneurs in Australia and the United Kingdom, however, cite money as the reason for becoming business owners. The Scandinavians rate this same factor the least significant. Nevertheless, a complication arises in explaining the motivation for business start-up in developing economies due to the different environments combined with the different perceptions, genders, needs, and attitudes of the entrepreneurs (Swierczek & Ha, 2003; Zhao & Getz, 2008). In addition, the motivating factors may differ across countries due to differences in the economic, political, social, and cultural environment in which the entrepreneurs operate (Ahmad, Jabeen, & Khan, 2014). The priority that hospitality and tourism entrepreneurs in different economies give to satisfy their needs might vary significantly. Whether the motivation to start a new venture is prompted primarily by a positive or negative impulse, and whether or not expectations are reinforced by experience, are key factors in determining the likelihood of ongoing success: positive motivations appear more likely to lead to success in the medium to longer term (Robertson, Collins, Medira, & Slater, 2003). Nevertheless, this view should be treated with caution when trying to understand the tourism and hospitality owners/managers in developing economies. As already noted, the priority that hospitality and tourism entrepreneurs in different economies give to satisfying their needs might vary greatly. However, because of the scant literature in this area, the current study is unable to make a comparison on these grounds; instead, this article examines one of the dynamic emerging markets, the UAE, to reveal the motives of the SMSH owners/managers, and, thereby, enrich the relevant literature.

Business Challenges in the SMSH Industry

Barsley and Kleiner (1990) claimed that 80% of small businesses tend to fail within the first 5 years, whilst Lauzen (1985) suggested that 65% will do so. Keasey and Watson (1991) reported that “some 10%–15% of the

existing stock of small firms fail per year.” Although there are many reasons for business failure, in the case of small enterprises, especially those under 3 years old, finance, demand forecasting, management, and marketing strategy and planning are among the more common issues (Beaver, 2003; Morrison & Teixeira, 2004). Reynolds, Savage, and Williams (1994) claimed that 73% of small businesses in the tourism industry in Australia close within the first 5 years of operation. Many potential reasons have been proposed for the failure of business performance in the small and medium-sized tourism sector. Morrison and Teixeira (2004) linked failure to the internal and external factors of business operations such as managerial incapability, failure to manage quality, and insufficient resources. In relation to this, some of these failures strongly correlate with the performance of entrepreneurial leadership (Gagnon, Sicotte, & Posada, 2000). Hoy and Vaught (1980) claimed that small business owners are envied as individuals in control of their own destiny; however, the reality can be very different. For example, the problems of a financial, marketing, administrative, economic, technical, or employee-related nature, as well as government regulations and interventions, are beyond the control of owners (Hoy and Vaught, 1980) and can easily lead to the failure of businesses. In Finland, Komppula and Reijonen (2006) found several performance determinants in small tourism businesses, such as emphasizing the importance of customer orientation, good skills in leadership, internal marketing, and a good reputation of the firm and the product. According to Brotherton (2004), among the critical success factors in the UK budget hotel operations are hygiene and cleanliness, consistent accommodation standards, and consistent service standards. As part of the strategic issue, it has been argued that the role of the government is also crucial in creating an environment that is conducive to the success of the smaller tourism businesses. For instance, many hotel operators in Canada complain that a lack of tourism promotion and tourism funding from the government and financial institutions limits their business growth (Lu & Chiang, 2003). A similar issue was also found by small tourism entrepreneurs in Ghana in which government support in terms of funding was limited and insufficient (Mensah & Kojo, 2010). Consistent with this, it has been argued that government assistance, although important, should not be seen as the sole remedy for reducing the rate of business failure (Lerner & Haber, 2001), as there are other important factors that small tourism businesses must attend to in order to ensure continued prosperity. Accordingly, scholars such as Stokes and Lomax (2002) suggested focusing on the strategy of the business owner as the unit of analysis in predicting business success in SMEs in tourism.

Research Methodology

An Overview of the Study Site

Within the Middle East, the UAE has emerged as the forerunner in its efforts to build a tourism infrastructure and market its attractions (Economist Intelligence Unit, 1993). The UAE was initially established in 1971 as a loose federation of six states, namely, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Fujairah, Umm Al-Qaiwain, and Ajman, with Ras Al-Khaimah joining in 1972. Abu Dhabi, the largest and richest emirate, is the capital of the UAE and contributes some 80% of the federal budget. Tourism organizations in the individual Emirates have been taking steps to promote their own events and attractions. However, tourism in the UAE, as a whole, is particularly centered on three emirates: Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Fujairah. For instance, Dubai is popularly perceived as a visitors' haven with clean beaches, entertainment places, elegant hotels, exciting shopping malls, and traditional souks. Dubai is expected to receive 15 million tourists from all over the world by 2015 (Albawaba Business, 2013). Abu Dhabi, on the other hand, offers visitors a wide array of options including green parks, theme park attractions, clean beaches, a range of marine and other sports, adventures in the desert, and the delight of shopping. Tourists can also visit the oasis city of Al Ain and undertake a sightseeing tour to archaeological sites, including, most notably, Al Hili Fun City, Ain Al Faydha Resort, Al Jahili Fort, and the National Museum (Anwar & Sohail, 2004). The Emirate of Fujairah lies to the eastern end of the UAE, along the Gulf of Oman, and draws tourists through its clean beaches and the numerous water sports such as water surfing, yachting, swimming, and deep-sea fishing. Fujairah has some of the best snorkeling and scuba diving in the UAE, and there are other water sports such as yachting, swimming, water surfing, and deep-sea fishing that also attract tourists throughout the year. Although, Sharjah was the first (in the 1980s) emirate to realize its tourism potential, a ban on the sale of alcoholic beverages towards the end of the decade severely reduced hotel occupancy and effectively ended the growth in what was emerging as a thriving tourism sector. Two of the smaller emirates, Umm Al-Qaiwan and Ajman, offer limited air connections, limited shopping mall facilities, and are gradually becoming major tourism players compared to the rest of the Emirates. Generally, the increase in tourist arrivals from all over the world in the UAE over the last few years has brought a pressing demand for hotel accommodation. This has stimulated the rapid growth of SMSHs in the country.

Data Collection

This study utilized the multimethod approach for the data collection process to avoid any bias associated with specific methods (Dahlstrom, Nygaard, & Crosno, 2008; Stavros & Westberg, 2009). The major benefit of incorporating

both approaches into the research methodology is that the weakness of one approach is compensated for by the strengths of the other (Sekaran, 2003). The advantages of the questionnaire technique are that it allows information to be collected from a large number of respondents and that the findings and analysis can be expressed in numerical terms, while the interview method will help the researcher explore more in-depth information on certain issues (Coviello & Jones, 2004). Questionnaires and interviews are strongly correlated, allowing researchers to have more confidence in the quality of the collected data (Sekaran, 2003). This approach is also consistent with other similar studies of small businesses in the hospitality and tourism sector. For instance, a study by Ahmad et al. (2014) used a multimethod research approach to collect data on the small and medium accommodation industry in Peninsular Malaysia. A similar approach was also utilized by Reijonen (2008) to investigate the craft and rural tourism industry in North Karelia, Eastern Finland.

Sampling Procedure

The population of this study comprised entrepreneurs of SMSHs in three main cities of the UAE: Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Fujairah. Although there are new hotel developments in other parts of the Emirates such as in Sharjah, Ajman, and Ras Al-Khaimah, the former three cities were selected because of the availability of many SMSHs and tourism sites and because most of the tourists visiting the UAE undertake tours in these cities. The lists of SMSHs operating in the UAE were gathered from various sources such as the Internet; the Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Fujairah tourism authority websites; the Abu Dhabi and Dubai Chamber of Commerce; the UAE National Council for Tourism and Antiques; pamphlets; business directory; and observations made by the researcher while conducting the field survey. From these sources of information, an initial sample of 95 SMSHs was gathered. Owners/managers and their SMSHs had to meet three criteria to be included in the study: firstly, the business had to be independently owned; secondly, it had to be classified as a SMSH business (having up to 100 bedrooms and employing fewer than 250 employees bedrooms); and, finally, it had to be privately owned and not part of a corporate group or government-owned. By applying these criteria, potential respondents were identified. However, some of them were not available to participate in this study. The snowball sampling method was also adopted in this study. Snowball samples are nonprobability samples in which additional respondents are selected based on referrals from initial subjects. Snowball sampling is an approach for locating information-rich key informants. The total number of responses analyzed was 115 SMSH owners/managers. It was made clear to the respondents that the purpose of this study was purely for research, and

that it did not represent any interests of the government or any other nongovernment agency. The respondents were also assured that their individual responses would remain confidential and only accessible to the researcher

Questionnaire Design

This study utilized a questionnaire developed by the authors, which consisted of 49 items relating to the profile and characteristics of the entrepreneurs along with strategic aspects of the business operations, issues, and challenges of the hotel business in the UAE. The questionnaire was designed in two versions, English and Arabic. The English version was translated into Arabic by a professional translator to allow academics who do not speak English to participate. The translation then was translated back into English. Comparing the two English versions revealed minimal differences, which made it an authentic translation process. Native Arabic speakers who also speak English were given the choice of completing an English or Arabic version. To avoid discarding the important criteria that has proven to be relevant to SMSHs, studies from the Western and Eastern contexts were also referred to in developing the survey instrument. Parts of the scales were taken or adapted from various studies on SMSHs and SMEs motivation and business challenges (e.g., Robichaud, McGraw, & Roger, 2001; Szivas, 2001; Holmengen, 2007; Morrison & Conway, 2007; Chan & Quah, 2008; Benzing, Chu, & Kara, 2009; Jaafar et al., 2011; Chan & Quah, 2012; and Ahmad et al., 2014). Given that the characteristics, motivations, operation issues, and business challenges of SMEs in the hotel industry have been little studied, there was no single scale that could be adopted in its entirety. Therefore, each of the scales used items from multiple sources. Wherever possible, items were made relevant to the UAE context. Each item was randomly placed on the questionnaire to encourage respondents to consider each question individually. The questions used a 5-point rating scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Prior to distributing the questionnaire to the whole sample, a pilot test was conducted to collect feedback about the clarity of the wording and the timing required to respond. This pilot test resulted in the rewording of some of the questions to reduce the allocated timeframe. The reliability of the survey instrument was deemed satisfactory since the Cronbach's alpha scores were found to range from 0.815–0.935, satisfying the minimum 0.70 recommended by Nunnally (1978).

Survey questionnaire

The owners/managers of the sample hotels were approached to participate in this study. The intention was to self-administer the questionnaire to increase

the validity and reliability of the data collected (Hussey & Hussey, 1997). However, most of the selected respondents, 85% of the sample size ($N = 115$), preferred to respond at their own convenience while 15% were self-administered through face-to-face interviews. The data collected through the survey were analyzed descriptively using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.

Semistructured face-to-face interviews

In-depth face-to-face interviews were held with 19 owners/managers of SMSHs at their hotel/business premises. Respondents were selected from the survey. The questions for the interview guide were structured based on the answers given in the questionnaire survey. To ensure the reliability and validity of the interview guide, a pilot test was performed before the data collection. Two hotel owners in Dubai and one in Abu Dhabi helped to screen the interview guide. The in-depth interviews were conducted using the interview guide approach with a combination of open-ended and semistructured formats. All the respondents were very cooperative and open, as the researcher had clearly explained the aims of the research. Each interview lasted, on average, from about 45 minutes to 1.5 hours. During the interviews, detailed notes were taken. This format allowed for certain sequences of questions to be structured to enable comparability (Robson, 2002), while allowing for unexpected lines of enquiry (Grix, 2004). The purpose of the in-depth interviews was to gather information pertaining to the perceptions of the owners/managers of SMSHs regarding their personality and characteristics, business challenges and their opinions about the required resources, skills and capabilities of an entrepreneur in this particular industry. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed based on the context.

Analysis

Determinants of SMSH Entrepreneurs in the Tourism Sector

The profile summary of the respondents in this study is presented in Table 4. As shown, the majority of the respondents were hotel owners or general managers (58.3%), and hotel managers or executives (33%). The results reveal that the majority of these owners/managers (84.3%) of SMSHs were men, which is not surprising given the cultural norms regarding the gender role in the Arab region. The uneven distribution of business ownership between males and females could also be attributed to cultural perspectives (Itani, Sidani, & Baalbaki, 2009) and entry barriers experienced by females—in particular, insufficient access to finance and credit facilities among women entrepreneurs (Haan, 2004). This finding is consistent with the results of a

Table 4. Profile of the Respondents on Small- and Medium-Sized Hotels in the UAE ($N = 115$).

Description	Criteria	<i>n</i>	%
Position of respondent	Hotel owner/general manager	67	58.3
	Hotel manager/executive	38	33.0
	Others	10	8.7
Gender	Male	97	84.3
	Female	18	15.7
Age	Less than 25	—	—
	26–35	37	32.2
	36–45	42	36.5
	46–55	25	21.7
	More than 56	11	9.6
Level of education	Primary school	13	11.3
	Secondary school	59	51.3
	Certificate/diploma	15	13.1
	Undergraduate degree	19	16.5
	Postgraduate degree	2	1.7
	Others	7	6.1
Area of specialization	Management/business administration	24	20.9
	Technical/engineering	5	4.3
	Tourism/hospitality	7	6.1
	Others/not related	79	68.7
Working experience	Tourism/hotel management	23	20.0
	Restaurant management	5	4.3
	Management/administration	76	66.1
	Others	11	9.6
Source of capital (start-up phase)	Personal/family saving	59	51.3
	Bank loan	36	31.3
	Private loan	5	4.4
	Government grant	9	7.8
	Other	6	5.2
Number of years in small- to medium-sized hotel	Less than 3	7	6.1
	4–6	38	33.0
	7–9	44	38.3
	More than 10	26	22.6
Attending any hotel management training/course(s) after starting business	No	97	84.3
	Yes	18	15.7
Motive for starting tourism business	I wanted to be financially independent	57	49.6
	I wanted to be my own boss	54	47.0
	I wanted to be continuously involved in the family business	45	39.1
	I saw good business opportunities	43	37.4
	I saw tourism as a profitable industry	40	34.8
	I wanted to establish my own business	35	30.4
	I wanted to meet new and interesting people	31	27.0
	I wanted to have self-recognition	29	25.2
	I wanted to gain a higher social status	24	20.9
	I have good business skills and utilize them in tourism		

report made by the UAE's Ministry of Economy (2013), which states that approximately 70% of small businesses in the UAE are owned by men. However, even in a male-dominated society like the Arab region, there were exceptions, particularly in the case of the minority of females who

were identified as having played an important role as supporters (Omair, 2008). In terms of age, the average age of the entrepreneurs of SMSHs was between 26 and 45 years old. This may be a reflection of the relatively young age of the UAE itself (which was founded in 1971) and the demographics of the country in which the median age for men is estimated at 32.1 years of age (CIA, 2013). This significant shift to a younger age may be explained by the increased ease of registering new businesses owing to changes in the legislation in the mid-2000s.

With regards to the formal educational level, the majority (51.3%) completed their secondary level of education, and 34 (29.6%) have received certificates/diplomas and first degrees. It is vital to note that education in the related or similar line of business is important for the owners/managers of SMSHs to be able to participate in the knowledge-based tourism industry, and it enables the entrepreneurs to manage their businesses properly (Morrison & Teixeira, 2004). This finding supports that of other studies in Australia (Getz & Carlsen, 2000), Tanzania (Sharma & Upneja, 2005), and Turkey (Avcikurt, Altay, & Ilban, 2011). However, it is interesting to highlight that 93.9% of the respondents or SMSHs in the UAE did not have any specialization in hotel, tourism, or hospitality management. The respondents perceive tourism as a sector in which practical experience is more relevant than formal education. This finding supports the study by Sharma and Upneja (2005), who claimed that most respondents in this sector do not have specific specialization related to the industry. In acquiring those skills and knowledge, Jaafar et al. (2011) found that entrepreneurs in this sector acquired related skills by learning from experience, family members, or by teaching themselves.

In terms of the previous working experience of the entrepreneurs, it was found that the majority (76, or 66.1%) had working experience in the area of management and administration. The statistics indicate that although they do not have tourism industry experience, this does not prevent them from venturing into this sector. A similar study supports this data (Szivas, 2001). However, this is not in line with the findings of the study by Zhao and Getz (2008), which revealed that the decision to become a small business entrepreneur may be affected by the previous work experience of the individual. In terms of the source of capital for business start-up, the majority (51.3%) of the owners/managers of SMSHs raised their start-up capital through personal/family savings, followed by a bank loan (31.3%), government grant (7.8%), and private loan (4.4%). One of the hotel owners in Fujairah claimed the "sale of land, assets and other properties, income from another business, investments, etc. constitute the sources of our own capital for business start-up." This finding is paralleled in the international context in which the results of a study by Sharma and Upneja (2005) found that most small-scale hotels and restaurants in

Tanzania preferred raising working capital from internal funds and that fewer than 2% of businesses used bank loans due to the perception of greater risk.

The majority (89, or 77.4%) are still relatively new to the industry with less than 10 years of business operation. This result indicates that the industry is still a newly emerging industry in the UAE. It is interesting to note that 84.3% of the respondents claimed that they had not attended any training or courses in hotel management after starting the business. Despite this, most of the surveyed entrepreneurs were in favor of training to help to improve the growth and success their business. However, budget constraints and limited allocation for training restricted their chances. Several respondents claimed, “although attending the training/course is important as it may enhance my knowledge and business skills in this industry; however, income generation from the business limits us.” One of the medium-sized hotel owners/managers realized the importance of training and responded, “proper training is essential in this industry. Although it does not guarantee the success of my business, but at least I know how to handle and manage my business accordingly.” A similar point of view was also made by one of the hotel owners in Abu Dhabi, who reported, “knowledge about the sector is crucial and has a positive influence on the operations of the business.”

The respondents gave a variety of reasons when asked about their motive for starting an SMSH business. Many of the respondents (49.6%) expressed financial independence and desire to be their own bosses (47%)—to work without somebody in authority over them—as the main reasons for their involvement in the business. Other important reasons were to be challenged, to be continuously involved in the family business, good business opportunities, viewing tourism as a profitable industry, wanting to establish my own business, and to meet new and interesting people. The responses are different between the respondents who managed SMSHs in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. One of the interviewees from Dubai stated, “Dubai is the center of business in the UAE and one of the centers for tourist attractions. I decided to venture into this business as I see the business opportunity in this industry.” However, one respondent who ran a 30-room SMSH in Abu Dhabi asserted that, “My father is the one who started this hotel business. We have many other businesses, such as real estate and trading. However, I need to run this business as this is a requirement given by my family.” Most of these wide-ranging motivational factors such as market potential and opportunity of accommodation business, personal attitude, and strategic location correspond with those found in other studies (i.e., Sharma & Upneja, 2005; Chan & Baum, 2007; Jaafar et al., 2011; and Chan & Quah, 2012).

Issues, Challenges, and Strategies of SMSH Entrepreneurs in the Tourism Sector

As shown by the mean scores in Table 5, the five most critical issues and challenges faced by the owners/managers of the SMSHs are competition among other operators of SMSHs (4.81), increasing operational costs (4.67), reduction in demand (4.58), lack of skilled employees (4.45), and lack of an enterprising culture (4.32). These findings reflect the conclusions of the study by Szivas (2001) concerning small tourism businesses in the United Kingdom. Interestingly, the finding from this study reveals that those SMSHs in the UAE do not appear to be as constrained by financial capital as entrepreneurs of small businesses in other countries. Apart from this, the respondents also stressed that a lack of skilled employees in handling customers is a challenging issue that needs to be addressed. According to one of the hotel owners operating in Dubai, “successful small hotel businesses are customer-driven. Customer satisfaction and loyalty are very important for the continuation of the business and therefore, good employees are critical in this respect.” Enhancing employee and customer relations is critical in SMSHs. This is in line with the study by Avcikurt et al. (2011), which pointed out that in an increasingly competitive business, such as the hotel industry, high priority should be given to human resource issues including the education and training of the owners/managers as well as the staff.

Table 6 shows the problems faced by the entrepreneurs of SMSHs in relation to the government. Most of the respondents agreed that the government was less helpful in assisting the progress and development of the owners/managers of the SMSHs in the country. Among the issues highlighted was a lack of plans for the training of SMSH operators (4.56), lack of financial support for this industry (4.34), and lack of tourism activities planned by the government (4.26). Along similar lines, many

Table 5. Issues and Challenges Faced by the Owners/Managers of Small- and Medium-Sized Hotels in the UAE.

Issues and challenges	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Competition among other hotels operators	4.81	1.76
Increasing operational costs	4.67	1.72
Reduction in demand	4.58	1.68
Lack of skilled employees	4.45	1.70
Lack of an enterprising culture	4.32	1.65
Higher staff turnover	4.25	1.65
Funding constraints	4.18	1.57
Insufficient working capital	4.03	1.59
Inadequate capital for expansion	3.89	1.63
Others (i.e., low value added, nonconductive government policies and requirements)	3.74	1.57

Note. All items used a 5-point rating scale, where 5 = *extremely agree*, 4 = *agree*, 3 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, and 1 = *strongly disagree*.

Table 6. Government-Related Problems Encountered by the Owners/Managers of Small- and Medium-Sized Hotels in the UAE.

Problems	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Lack of plans for the training of SMSH entrepreneurs by the government	4.56	1.58
Lack of financial support from the government to SMSH businesses	4.34	1.54
Lack of tourism activities planned by the government	4.26	1.52
Lack of marketing assistance from the government	4.17	1.53
Frequent changes of government policies and frameworks	3.84	1.49

Note. All items used a 5-point rating scale, where 5 = *extremely agree*, 4 = *agree*, 3 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, and 1 = *strongly disagree*.

empirical studies have revealed that a training policy positively correlates with organizational performance in the hotel sector and should be properly aligned (see Ubeda-García, Marco-Lajara, Sabater-Sempere, & García-Lillo, 2013). According to one of the interviewees, “to support government initiatives to attract tourists and the industry, the government should provide training to the workers in order to produce skilled employees.” Similarly, another respondent stressed that, “there is a significant increase in the number of tourists visiting the country. However, the government not only needs to promote the UAE better but also to include SMSHs in the national marketing plan.” In terms of financial support, one of the respondents who has similar businesses in both Dubai and Abu Dhabi claimed, “Although we are in the UAE, each state applies different support, procedures and guidelines in applying financial assistance.” Another respondent admitted, “It’s hard to apply for a government grant, unless you have good networking or a connection with them.” The barrier of funding is defined as one of the perennial problems for the SMSH operators and is related to the difficulty of access to credit (Jaafar et al., 2011; Lu & Chiang, 2003). In addition, some respondents also agreed that the frequent changes of government policies and frameworks affect their business, such as visa restrictions to some foreign workers, the changing pattern of some requirements for new applications or renewal of hotel licenses, enforcing contracts, and other related issues.

Table 7 explains the strategies employed by SMSH operators to manage the business challenges. The majority of the owners/managers strongly agreed that offer competitive pricing ($M = 4.45$), improve marketing and promotion strategies ($M = 4.32$), enhance quality of services ($M = 4.12$), and provide superior customer service ($M = 4.08$) are among the methods to compete in the market. One of the hotel owners who has run their business for more than 5 years mentioned, “Offering competitive pricing with a high standard of services is an equally important factor in retaining customers.” However, according to some respondents, improving other related elements is also important to their business strategy. This finding is similar to that of McCleary, Weaver, and Lan (1994) and Lockyer (2003),

Table 7. Strategies Employed by the Owners/Managers of Small- and Medium-Sized Hotels to Manage the Business Challenges.

Strategies employed	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Offer competitive pricing	4.45	1.66
Improve marketing and promotion strategies	4.32	1.70
Enhance quality of services	4.12	1.69
Provide superior customer service	4.08	1.64
Improve cleanliness of the hotel	4.03	1.55
Improve service delivery (i.e., reservation, friendly staff, timely service)	3.92	1.57
Improve hotel image (i.e., selection beverage, reception, housekeeping, appearance of staff)	3.84	1.65
Maintain good customer relationship	3.79	1.54
Retain customers by developing some form of loyalty schemes	3.61	1.58
Use information technology to add value (i.e., offer Wi-Fi Internet at the hotel)	3.42	1.55

Note. All items used a 5-point rating scale, where 5 = *extremely agree*, 4 = *agree*, 3 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, and 1 = *strongly disagree*.

who mentioned that some facilities-related attributes are also important elements of a hotel for customers' choice decision.

Conclusion

Prompted by a decline in its oil production, the UAE has led the way in rebalancing its economy from hydrocarbons to the tourism sector. SMEs in the tourism sector have become an important new source of revenue and play an important role as the key drivers of employment and economic growth in the country. The country has seen rapid growth in the number of hotels, which has raised the question of what are the characteristics of the owners/managers of SMSHs, underlying start-up motives, business challenges, and strategies of hotel businesses. This article provides empirical evidence of these subjects and attempts to fill the gaps in the knowledge and understanding about entrepreneurship in the tourism sector. The main conclusions drawn from the findings are discussed next.

The findings are pertinent to the understanding of the entrepreneurship in the tourism sector. First, the exploratory study offers an initial step in uncovering the personality, profile, characteristics, and motivational factors in relation to the business start-up of SMSH entrepreneurs in the UAE. Comparing the key demographic values (i.e., age, gender, level of education, working experience, etc.) in this study with those in the general literature, as summarized in Ahmad et al. (2014), Chen and Elston (2013), and Jaafar et al. (2011), the study found consistent patterns in that the SMSHs in the UAE are dominated by married and middle-age entrepreneurs. This study, however, had a relatively higher percentage of male respondents (97%), which should not be considered to be coincidental but rather as a reflection of the dominance of the traditional gender roles in the Arab culture and society, in which financial matters are still deemed to be primarily the responsibility of the adult male. Second, it provides

valuable information concerning the factors that hinder the success of SMSHs. Overall, the findings in this study are similar to those from developing and developed countries, as reported by Ahmad et al. (2010), Zimmerer, Scarborough, and Wilson (2008), and Hodgetts and Kuratko (2004), which indicate that many SMEs, if not properly managed, will tend to fail within 5 to 10 years of business operations. Several issues and business challenges related to the internal and external factors of running SMSH businesses in the UAE are also highlighted. The findings from the present study show a consistent pattern with the findings from Morrison and Teixeira (2004) in highlighting impediments of the small tourism industry in the city of Glasgow. Finally, the study provides evidence of several strategies employed by the SMSH entrepreneurs in order to sustain their hotel business in the competitive business environment. Operating in a distinctive niche market requires entrepreneurs in the tourism sector to design a proper business strategies such as offering competitive pricing, improving marketing and promotional techniques, enhancing service quality, and providing superior customer service in order to compete successfully. These studies reveal that if firms are to respond to the changing competitive business conditions, they need to change their ways of thinking about organizations and their structures. These arguments also appear to support the findings in some cross-cultural studies (Law & Ng, 2011; Yolal, Emeksiz, & Cetinel, 2009), which have stated that to remain competitive, entrepreneurs of SMSHs must adopt various marketing practices and strategies.

In light of the relative dearth of research relating to entrepreneurs of SMSHs in the tourism industry, this study aims to provide a greater understanding of the characteristics and business strategies of the operators SMSHs in the Middle East region, particularly in the UAE. This study makes a broader contribution to the literature on the entrepreneurship and business development of SMEs in the tourism sector. It does so by highlighting the most important characteristics required of the owners/managers in this sector and exploring the perceptions of the entrepreneurs with respect to some issues about the business challenges of the operators of SMSHs in this context. While studies in entrepreneurship have increasingly focused on how entrepreneurs think and act (Mitchell et al., 2007), this does not appear to be the case in entrepreneurship research carried out in the Arab world (Schnell & Sofer, 2003). Given the dearth of the formal assessment of entrepreneurs of SMSHs in the tourism sector in the Arab region, this article makes important contributions for future researchers, planners, public institutions, supporting organizations, and the current government to develop and formulate policy in order to create the right conditions, which are imperative for the prosperity of the SMEs in the tourism sector.

Implications

These research findings have implications for development program, financial assistance, and education in development of UAE's SMSHs industry. As the study shows, the majority of current business owners/managers had an educational level of secondary school or less. Most had never been formally trained in hotel management before starting the business venture, which may contribute in part to failure and limit potential growth of the business. In response, UAE government and its related agencies could establish a continuing educational program to equip those potential entrepreneurs by designing training and development opportunities to successfully manage and develop and sustain their businesses. Another important area that could be emphasized is financial assistance. While 51.3% of respondents claimed they used their personal/family savings for business start-up costs, they still need assistance and financial support from related institutions for the expansion process. The availability of financial support would likely stimulate the business start-up and growth of the hotel industry in the UAE.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study adds new and useful information to the scarce literature on hospitality and tourism entrepreneurship in developing economies, particularly in the Arab region, and provides a foundation for cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary studies, it is also exploratory. The article concludes that while the sample has a certain level of representativeness, there is, as usual, the need for caution when generalizing the results of this study. In addition, the sample in this study only comprised SMSHs operating in three Emirates, namely Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Fujairah; SMSHs in other Emirates were not covered. Business practices, issues, and challenges may vary across countries. Future comparative work in a similar context in different locations and countries would prove beneficial for the validation of these current findings, and could be a valuable tool for both policy makers and industry practitioners as well as an important analytical research approach. Given the lack of reliable published data and information on entrepreneurial activity in developing countries, particularly in the Arab region, comparative analysis can provide invaluable insights into the development and growth status of such businesses. In addition, the sample is not a representation of the entire small- and medium-sized business sector in the UAE; therefore, the results cannot be generalized to SME businesses that were not part of this study. No claim can be made of the findings beyond these contexts. Finally, longitudinal research or case studies of individual SMSH businesses through

their life cycle would also be highly useful and beneficial, especially to shed light on how individual entrepreneurs respond to environmental and internal changes, make and implement decisions, and plan for succession or disposition. Overall, since studies on entrepreneurs in the hospitality and tourism industry in emerging economies like the UAE remain scarce, it is the hope of this article that this study will promote greater attention to and discussion of this area.

Notes

1. Rentier refers to states which directly receive substantial income or “rent” for their natural resources (usually oil) from overseas businesses or governments, a particular characteristic being that the generation and distribution of this rent or wealth is controlled by an elite or ruling minority (Beblawi & Luciani, 1987).

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