COUNTRY REPORT ON JORDAN: ADVANCING ICT LEADERSHIP ACROSS MENA

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a country report, based on extensive qualitative research interviews, about Jordan and how its ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) sector has become a leader within the MENA region. The paper ties in key elements of the regionalization, nation branding and knowledge literature, in order to elucidate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that the country's ICT sector has faced and leveraged. It provides key insights into how other emerging markets can engage in successful international business development using Jordan's example.

Keywords: Jordan, emerging markets, regionalization, nation branding

1.   INTRODUCTION

Jordan occupies a critically important location within the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, and is directly bordered by some of the turbulent countries in the Middle East. Yet, it has been an enviable bastion of stability and peace for decades, and boasts among the most educated populations in the world. It is also the leader in ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) development within the Arabic-speaking world, with the vast majority of Arabic language internet originating in Jordan. This exploratory country case study, using an inductive approach, is based on my Fulbright Scholar award placement in Jordan, in order to research Jordan's ICT sector through the academic lens of regionalization.

Jordan's ICT (information and communication technology) sector, in fact, has been favored by government since 2000, but policy initiatives have only successfully been implemented more recently (eg. 0% sales tax and export, 5% income tax, 5% interest rates). Total sector revenue has been growing; however, while the sector has a higher growth rate, the overall size is still small relative to Jordan's overall economy. The World Bank's MENA Economic Monitor (Arezki, et al, 2018) projects the "new economy" – the digital economy - to be critical to the region going forward. With a highly educated and youthful workforce, there are simply not enough opportunities in the "old" economy. Given very active youth entrepreneurship and strong digital access, there is clear opportunity to "leapfrog" over established and mature markets. Thus the need for primary research arises.

2.   METHODOLOGY

A series of in-depth were interviews undertaken with founders/CEOs of companies within the IT sector in Jordan. Companies ranged from small start-ups to mid-sized to old, established firms. Most recent year revenues ranged from USD 100K to USD 70M. Employees numbered from 5 to 400, and were primarily B2B companies (limited B2C). All were privately owned. By Western (EC) standards, all but one would be classified as SMEs (small and medium sized enterprises), but locally, definition may need to be revisited – since there is relativity by country/industry sector as identified by the Jordanian government's own assessment. Interviews had a standardized template to begin with with a list of finite questions. However, the interviewee was allowed to veer of the questions as asked, and develop discussion on what areas he/she deemed most important. Interviewees were informed that there responses would only be reported in the aggregate, and that the study was purely for academic purposes. No identifying information would be releases so as to protect their anonymity and encourage honest self-reporting. The information gleaned from the interviews was also compared to information in published company reports so as to ensure consistency. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to 1.5 hours, and the respondents were forewarned of the time commitment necessary for gathering insightful information. Pre-printed note taking forms were used to record information.