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NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES OF CREATIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP: INSIGHTS FROM SMES OF KAZAKHSTAN

Creative entrepreneurship is an emerging field that has gained increasing attention in recent years. Kazakhstan has seen a surge in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating in the creative sector. However, these businesses face numerous challenges that hinder their growth and sustainability. In this paper, we will explore the creative entrepreneurship landscape in Kazakhstan and identify common challenges creative SMEs face. We will also discuss strategies for overcoming these obstacles and achieving success in creative entrepreneurship. Through insights from SMEs in Kazakhstan, we hope to provide valuable guidance for aspiring entrepreneurs and contribute to developing the creative industry in the region. To investigate the challenges entrepreneurs face in Kazakhstan's creative industries, we obtained data from a sample of 70 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating in the sector. Our study aimed to gain insights into the problems encountered by these SMEs to inform policies and strategies for supporting the growth and development of the creative economy in Kazakhstan.

Key words: creative industries, entrepreneurship, business, management.

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Шығармашылық кәсіпкерліктің қиындықтарын анықтау: Қазақстанның шағын және орта бизнесінің көзқарасы

Шығармашылық кәсіпкерлік – соңғы жылдары көбірек назар аударылып келе жатқан жаңа сала. Қазақстанда шығармашылық секторда жұмыс істейтін шағын және орта кәсіпорындар (ШОБ) санының өсуі байқалды. Дегенмен бұл кәсіпорындар толыққанды өсуі мен тұрақты дамуына кедергі келтіретін көптеген қиындықтарға тап болады. Бұл мақала Қазақстандағы креативті кәсіпкерліктің жалпы көрінісі мен деңгейін талдап қарастырамыз және шығармашылық ШОБ шағын және орта кәсіпкерліктің дамуына кедергі келтіретін ортақ қиындықтарды анықтаймыз. Біз сондай-ақ осы кедергілерді еңсеру мүмкіндіктерді мен жолдарын қарастырып және шығармашылық кәсіпкерлікте табысқа жету стратегияларын талқылаймыз. Қазақстандағы ШОБ субъектілері туралы ақпараттарды талдау арқылы біз болашақ кәсіпкерлерге құнды бағыт-бағдар беріп, аймақтағы креативті индустрияның дамуына үлес қосамыз деп үміттенеміз. Қазақстандағы креативті салалардағы кәсіпкерлердің алдында тұрған қиындықтарды зерттеу үшін біз осы секторда жұмыс істейтін 70 шағын және орта кәсіпорын (ШОБ) іріктемесінің деректерін жинадық. Біздің зерттеуіміз Қазақстандағы креативті экономиканың өсуі мен дамуын қолдау жөніндегі саясат пен стратегияларды негіздеу үшін осы ШОБ субъектілерінің қиындықтары туралы ақпарат алуды мақсат етті. Осылайша, шығармашылық кәсіпкерліктің дамуының стратегиясын жүзеге асырудың нақты тетіктерін ұсынуға болады.

Түйін сөздер: шығармашылық салалар, кәсіпкерлік, бизнес, менеджмент.

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Вызовы креативного предпринимательства: взгляды малых и средних предприятий Казахстана

Креативное предпринимательство – это перспективная, развивающаяся сфера деятельности, которая в последние годы привлекает всё большее внимание. В Казахстане наблюдается заметное увеличение количества малых и средних бизнесов (МСБ), работающих в креативном секторе. Однако эти предприятия сталкиваются со множеством проблем, которые препятствуют

их росту и устойчивости. В этой статье мы исследуем среду креативного предпринимательства в Казахстане и выявим общие проблемы, с которыми сталкиваются МСБ в креативном секторе. Мы также обсудим стратегии по преодолению этих препятствий и достижению успеха в креативном предпринимательстве. Исследуя опыт МСБ в Казахстане, мы надеемся предоставить ценные рекомендации для начинающих предпринимателей и внести свой вклад в развитие креативной индустрии в регионе. Для изучения проблем, с которыми сталкиваются предприниматели в креативных отраслях Казахстана, мы получили данные от выборки из 70 малых и средних бизнесов (МСБ), работающих в этом секторе. Наше исследование направлено на получение информации о проблемах, с которыми сталкиваются эти МСБ, чтобы предоставить рекомендации по разработке стратегий, направленных на поддержку роста и развития креативной экономики в Казахстане.

Ключевые слова: креативные индустрии, предпринимательство, бизнес, управление.

Introduction

Kazakhstan's development of the creative industries is of great significance for the country's economic, cultural, and social development. With an economy heavily reliant on extractive industries, diversification is essential, and the creative industries have shown great potential in this regard (WIPO, 2019). According to the World Intellectual Property Organization, the creative industries contributed 1.4% of Kazakhstan's GDP in 2017, and the government aims to create 300,000 jobs in the sector by 2025 (The Astana Times, 2019). The creative industries also have the potential to preserve and promote Kazakhstan's rich cultural heritage. The cultural sector contributed 1.7% of Kazakhstan's GDP in 2017, according to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2019). Additionally, the development of a strong creative sector can attract international recognition, promote innovation and entrepreneurship, and create new business opportunities (British Council, 2019; WIPO, 2019).

In today's dynamic global economy, the role of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is undeniably crucial, driving innovation, economic growth, and job creation. Within the realm of creative industries, SMEs play a particularly significant role as they bring forth unique and imaginative ideas, transforming them into tangible products and services that captivate audiences around the world. However, despite their invaluable contributions, many entrepreneurs in the creative field face significant challenges, often stemming from a lack of business knowledge and the need for appropriate support systems. Creative entrepreneurs possess remarkable talent and a distinct passion for their craft, whether it be in visual arts, design, music, fashion, or other creative disciplines. Their ability to envision and create captivating works is unparalleled, driving the cultural and artistic

landscape of Kazakhstan and beyond. Yet, when it comes to the intricate aspects of running a business, many of these talented individuals find themselves in uncharted territory, lacking the necessary expertise to navigate the entrepreneurial landscape effectively.

By recognizing the crucial role SMEs play in the creative economy and addressing the knowledge gaps that hinder their growth, we can pave the way for a vibrant and sustainable ecosystem that fosters the development of creative entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan. With the right support, guidance, and collaboration, these entrepreneurs can unleash their full potential, transforming their artistic visions into thriving businesses that not only contribute to economic growth but also enrich the cultural fabric of the nation.

Theoretical background

Entrepreneurship has been recognized as a key driver of economic growth, with Audretsch and Thurik's (2001) seminal paper distinguishing between managed economies and entrepreneurial economies and highlighting the importance of entrepreneurship in economic development. While not specifically focused on creative entrepreneurship, this theoretical framework provides an important foundation for understanding the role of entrepreneurship in economic development.

In addition to traditional entrepreneurship, the concept of social entrepreneurship has emerged as a way to create positive social change, with Dees' (1998) paper introducing this concept and highlighting the importance of social entrepreneurs. The broader discourses of entrepreneurship have also been explored, with Hjorth and Steyaert's (2004) paper is highlighting the importance of understanding the cultural and institutional context of entrepreneurship.

The social construction of entrepreneurial opportunity has been explored by Jones and Tilley

(2003), who emphasize the importance of broader social, cultural, and historical factors. O'Connor's (2010) paper proposes a conceptual framework for entrepreneurship education policy that takes into account both government and economic purposes, highlighting the importance of education in developing the skills and knowledge necessary for successful entrepreneurship.

Within the context of creative entrepreneurship, Parhankangas and Renko's (2017) systematic literature review identifies several key themes in the literature, including the importance of creativity, innovation, and risk-taking in entrepreneurial ventures. However, they also note a lack of consensus on the definition of creative entrepreneurship and a need for further empirical research. Peredo and McLean's (2006) critical review of social entrepreneurship highlights the importance of understanding the social and environmental context in which entrepreneurial ventures operate.

There is significance of entrepreneurial activity in fostering job creation, technological advancements, and overall regional prosperity, underscoring the need for supportive policies and frameworks to encourage and sustain entrepreneurial ecosystems (Szerb & Acs, 2013).

The development of entrepreneurial activity is influenced by a multitude of factors, and different perspectives suggest various key determinants. Some argue that regional location plays a crucial role, as it can provide access to resources, networks, and market opportunities that facilitate business growth (Szerb & Acs, 2013). Others believe that the education system plays a significant role, as it shapes the entrepreneurial mindset and provides relevant knowledge and skills for aspiring entrepreneurs (Anjum, 2020).

Furthermore, international markets and digital technologies are recognized as important factors affecting business innovation and expansion, allowing entrepreneurs to reach wider audiences, explore new markets, and leverage technology for competitive advantage (Dana et al., 2022). Additionally, researchers as Henry C. (2009) have explored the relationship between the appeal of the creative industries and the progression of women within the sector, recognizing the need to address gender disparities and create an inclusive entrepreneurial environment. Overall, the development of entrepreneurial activity is a complex interplay of various factors, including regional location, the education system, international markets, digital technologies, and considerations

of gender diversity. Understanding and addressing these factors can contribute to fostering a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem that supports innovation, growth, and inclusivity within the creative sector and beyond.

While these papers provide a foundation for understanding the broader context of entrepreneurship and creative entrepreneurship, there is still a need for further empirical research to better understand the challenges faced by companies, especially SMEs. In this study, we build on existing theory to analyze the specific challenges faced by 70 SMEs in the creative industries in Kazakhstan. Through our own analysis, we aim to contribute to the growing body of literature on creative entrepreneurship and provide insights for policymakers and practitioners in the field.

Entrepreneurship has been praised for its potential to contribute to economic growth and development, as well as to promote innovation and creativity in various industries. In Kazakhstan, the creative entrepreneurship landscape appears to be growing, with an increasing number of young entrepreneurs engaging in creative industries such as design, fashion, and art. According to a recent study by Zhuparova et al. (2022), creative entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan is seen as a way to promote economic diversification and reduce the country's dependence on natural resources. The study also revealed that the Kazakh government has been supportive of creative entrepreneurship, with various initiatives and programs aimed at promoting entrepreneurship and innovation. However, the study also found that there are several challenges facing creative entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan, such as a lack of access to financing and support services. Despite these challenges, the study suggests that creative entrepreneurship has the potential to contribute significantly to Kazakhstan's economic and social development.

According to Dikhanbayeva et al. (2021), creative SMEs in Kazakhstan encounter multiple challenges that hinder their growth and development. One of the primary difficulties faced by these SMEs is the lack of financial resources, which limits their capacity to invest in innovative technologies and expand their operations. Additionally, the authors note that creative SMEs in Kazakhstan struggle with limited access to markets and networks, which restricts their ability to reach new customers and partners. Furthermore, the authors highlight the limited availability of skilled labor in the creative industries, which makes it challenging for SMEs to find and retain qualified employees. These challenges are

further compounded by the absence of a supportive regulatory environment, which places additional burdens on SMEs and stifles their growth potential. Overall, it is clear that creative SMEs in Kazakhstan face a range of complex and interconnected challenges that require comprehensive solutions and support from policymakers and other stakeholders.

Entrepreneurship is a challenging field that requires a lot of creativity and innovation to succeed. However, creative entrepreneurs often face many obstacles and challenges that can prevent them from achieving their goals. Thus, it is essential to develop effective strategies for overcoming these obstacles and achieving success. According to Chen et al. (2017), one of the most important strategies for creative entrepreneurs is to develop a growth mindset. This mindset involves embracing challenges as opportunities for growth and learning from failures. Additionally, creative entrepreneurs should also focus on building strong networks and partnerships with other entrepreneurs and industry experts. By working together, entrepreneurs can share knowledge, resources, and support each other through difficult times. Another key strategy is to prioritize customer feedback and use it to improve products and services continually. This feedback can help entrepreneurs identify areas for improvement and create products that better meet customer needs. Finally, creative entrepreneurs should also stay up to date with the latest trends and technologies in their industry. By staying ahead of the curve, they can anticipate changes and adapt quickly to new opportunities. Overall, these strategies can help creative entrepreneurs overcome obstacles and achieve success in a highly competitive and dynamic industry (Chen et al., 2017).

Entrepreneurship is a popular career option for many creative professionals due to its potential for financial rewards, freedom from the corporate world, and opportunities to build one's own vision (Booyens, 2012). It is a way to express creativity and gain more control over one's own career. It also encourages a sense of independence and self-reliance. However, despite these potential advantages, entrepreneurship also presents unique challenges. According to Booyens (2012), entrepreneurial professionals must develop a business skillset, such as understanding financial management and marketing, in order to be successful. Additionally, they must be able to manage their own time and develop effective communication and networking strategies. Entrepreneurship also requires a certain level of risk-taking and resilience in order

to survive in the business world. In short, while entrepreneurship provides creative professionals with the opportunity to pursue their own vision, it also comes with its own set of challenges that must be considered before taking the leap.

Innovative strategies are essential for creative industry entrepreneurs to achieve success. This is because these strategies can equip entrepreneurs with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the business world and make informed decisions that will lead to success. According to Okpara in his journal article "The Role of Small Businesses in Economic Development" published in the *Journal of Asia Entrepreneurship and Sustainability* in 2007, "Innovative strategies are essential for any business to succeed in the modern economy" (Okpara, 2007). He goes on to explain that these strategies can include the use of technology, developing new products and services, and finding unique ways to market the business. These strategies can help entrepreneurs stay ahead of the competition and create new opportunities for success. Additionally, entrepreneurs should also focus on creating a sustainable business model that can be maintained over the long-term. This may involve incorporating environmental sustainability and social responsibility into the business operations. By implementing innovative strategies and creating a sustainable business model, creative industry entrepreneurs can have the best chance of achieving success.

Mentorship is an invaluable tool for entrepreneurs in the creative industry. According to a study conducted by Radojevich-Kelley et al. (2012), mentorship provides entrepreneurs with the guidance and support necessary to succeed. With mentorship, entrepreneurs are better equipped to identify and capitalize on opportunities, develop the necessary skills, and confidently make the right decisions. The study found that mentors provide valuable advice and insight on a wide range of topics, such as finance, operations, marketing, and strategy. Additionally, mentors can provide emotional support and guidance, enabling entrepreneurs to draw on their confidence and resilience to overcome any challenges they may face. Moreover, mentors can help foster relationships with other entrepreneurs, investors, and industry contacts, potentially providing access to financial resources and other business opportunities. Ultimately, the study concluded that mentorship plays a pivotal role in helping creative industry entrepreneurs succeed.

Successful entrepreneurs with creative industry

backgrounds can be found in many parts of the world. These successful individuals often have unique visions for the companies that they create and use their creative ideas to propel their businesses towards success. Whether it be through creative marketing tactics or creative product designs, these entrepreneurs aim to make an impact with their businesses and help shape the world. Creative industry backgrounds can give entrepreneurs the insight and inspiration to create something entirely unique and allow them to think beyond traditional practices. With the combination of creative and business savvy, entrepreneurs with creative backgrounds can have a lasting and meaningful impact on the world.

Entrepreneurs from creative industries require an array of skills to be successful. Chief amongst these are analytical thinking, effective communication, and adaptability. Analytical thinking enables entrepreneurs to understand how to analyze data and trends to make informed decisions about business strategies. Effective communication is essential in order to articulate ideas and visions to employees, partners, and customers. Adaptability is also key in order to quickly adjust to changing market conditions and customer demands.

Analytical thinking is a critical business skill for any organization today. According to Davenport, Harris and other authors in their 2001 paper from the *California Management Review*, understanding how to analyze data and trends is key to making informed decisions about business strategies. The authors explain that companies need to be able to “identify the factors that drive and constrain organizational performance” and to “evaluate the effectiveness of existing strategies.” They go on to emphasize the importance of having a thorough understanding of the “competing forces” that affect businesses and how to develop strategies to address them. Furthermore, they suggest that organizations should recognize the potential of data analysis to improve their decision-making processes. By understanding how to properly analyze data and trends, companies can gain valuable insights into their performance and how to best optimize their strategies. In conclusion, analytical thinking is an essential skill for any organization to develop in order to make informed decisions about business strategies.

Effective communication is a key factor in the success of any business. Mitchell and C Bruckner Coles, in their 2004 article published in the *Journal of Business Strategy*, emphasize the importance of being able to communicate ideas and visions to

employees, partners, and customers. They argue that clear, effective communication is essential in order to ensure that everyone is on the same page and that ideas are being communicated in an efficient and effective manner. Additionally, they posit that when employees and partners have a clear understanding of the company’s goals, objectives, and strategies, they will be better equipped to carry out those goals and strategies. Furthermore, they contend that customers will be more likely to respond positively when they are properly informed about the company’s products and services. Thus, effective communication is an important factor in the success of any business, as it allows for better understanding, greater efficiency, and improved customer relations.

Adaptability is an essential quality for businesses to remain competitive in an ever-changing market. Katayama and Bennett highlight this in their 1999 article in the *International Journal of Production Economics*, discussing how companies must be able to adjust according to customer demands and market conditions. They emphasize that a business must be able to anticipate and react quickly to changes in the market, as well as potential customer needs. Companies must also possess the ability to implement new strategies and processes in order to remain competitive. This can be difficult for businesses that are used to the status quo, as it requires a certain level of agility and flexibility. However, those that are able to successfully adapt have a much better chance of success in the long run. Katayama and Bennett’s study (1999) is a testament to this, as it highlights the importance of adaptability in the current business environment.

Methodology

To gather data on the challenges facing SMEs in the creative industries of Kazakhstan, we conducted a survey of 70 representative companies. The survey was designed to collect information on the challenges these companies face in terms of funding, competition, market access, and other factors that may be inhibiting their growth.

Data Collection: We utilized a cross-sectional research design to collect data. The survey was developed based on a comprehensive literature review and expert consultations in the field of creative entrepreneurship and SMEs. We distributed the survey through online platforms and email invitations, targeting SMEs from a variety of creative industries such as design, arts and crafts, media, and advertising.

The survey comprised of both open-ended and close-ended questions, allowing participants to provide qualitative as well as quantitative responses. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section was designed to collect information on the demographic characteristics of the participating SMEs. The second section asked questions about the challenges faced by the SMEs in their daily operations, while the third section focused on the growth and development strategies used by the SMEs.

Data Analysis: We analyzed the data collected through the survey using descriptive statistics to identify the most common challenges faced by SMEs in the creative industries of Kazakhstan. The responses were coded and analyzed using statistical software to generate frequencies and percentages.

Methodological Advantages: The use of a survey allowed us to collect data from a relatively large sample of SMEs in the creative industries of Kazakhstan. The survey design enabled us to gather data on a range of challenges faced by SMEs,

providing a comprehensive understanding of the issues affecting their growth and development. The use of both open-ended and close-ended questions allowed for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, which provided a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by SMEs in this sector.

In summary, our methodology involved conducting a cross-sectional survey of 70 representative SMEs in the creative industries of Kazakhstan. The survey was developed based on a comprehensive literature review and expert consultations and comprised of open-ended and close-ended questions. We used descriptive statistics to analyze the data and identify the most common challenges faced by SMEs in this sector.

Findings and Discussion.

Our analysis of the survey data revealed several key challenges faced by SMEs in the creative industries of Kazakhstan.

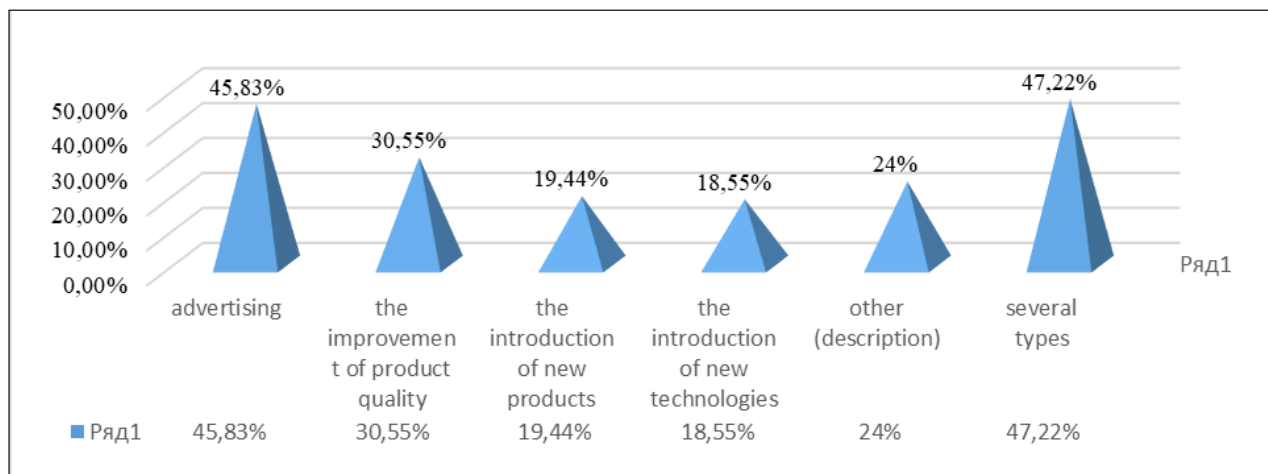


Figure 1 – Factors that influenced the increase in sales
 Note: Compiled by the authors based on the conducted survey sources

In addition to the challenges faced by SMEs in the creative industries of Kazakhstan, we also analyzed factors that influence sales growth among these companies. The survey results revealed that advertising was the most frequently cited factor, with 45.83% of the respondents identifying it as a key driver of sales growth. Improving product quality was the second most commonly cited factor, with 30.55% of the respondents indicating that it had a significant impact on sales growth. Developing

new products and using new technologies were also identified as important factors, with 19.44% and 18.55% of the respondents, respectively, reporting that they had a positive impact on sales growth.

These findings suggest that SMEs in the creative industries of Kazakhstan may benefit from investing in advertising and improving the quality of their products, as well as exploring opportunities to develop new products and technologies. The results also highlight the

importance of staying up-to-date with emerging technologies and trends in the creative industries, in order to remain competitive and meet the evolving needs of customers. The results showed

that 77% of the SMEs surveyed do not conduct a SWOT analysis, which could be hindering their ability to identify and address their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Table 1 – Respondent Data Table

Have you experienced an increase in sales?	Yes	No
	82,6%	17,93%
Do you have higher education?	Yes	No
	84,72%	15,27%
Are you a specialist in the field of business that you own?	Yes	No
	79%	19%
Do you know your competitors (local)?	Yes	No
	42%	58%
Do you know your competitors (foreign)?	Yes	No
	85%	15%
Do you use a SWOT analysis	Yes	No
	33%	77%
Gender	Female 31,65%	Male 68,85%
Note: Compiled by the authors based on the conducted survey sources		

Overall, our analysis of the survey data provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities facing SMEs in the creative industries of Kazakhstan, and can serve as a basis for policymakers and stakeholders to develop effective strategies for supporting the growth and development of these companies. Moreover, lack of marketing was identified as a common challenge by 65% of the respondents. This finding suggests that SMEs in the creative industries of Kazakhstan may need to invest more in marketing strategies to increase their visibility and reach potential customers. Additionally, 53% of the respondents reported a lack of knowledge in business administration, which may be hampering their ability to effectively manage their businesses. This finding highlights the need for SMEs to improve their management skills or hire personnel with a background in business administration.

Interestingly, our findings suggest that most entrepreneurs in the creative industries of Kazakhstan have a background in their respective fields rather than formal education in business administration.

This finding implies that SMEs in this sector may benefit from additional training and education in business management and administration.

Furthermore, the survey results indicated that the SMEs in the creative industries of Kazakhstan face similar challenges as SMEs in other industries, such as difficulties in accessing funding and competing with larger firms. However, the creative industries may have unique challenges related to intellectual property rights, copyright infringement, and protecting creative assets.

Overall, our findings suggest that SMEs in the creative industries of Kazakhstan face several challenges related to marketing, business administration, and access to resources. These findings provide valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders interested in supporting the development of the creative industries in Kazakhstan.

Conclusion

In conclusion, creative entrepreneurship is a challenging yet rewarding path that requires

a combination of creativity, innovation, and business acumen. The insights shared by SMEs in Kazakhstan shed light on the various challenges that creative entrepreneurs face, such as limited access to funding, lack of supportive policies, and the need to constantly innovate. Nonetheless, these entrepreneurs have also demonstrated resilience, perseverance, and a willingness to collaborate and learn from others. By leveraging their unique talents and skills, they have managed to create successful businesses that contribute to Kazakhstan's creative economy's growth and development. Aspiring creative entrepreneurs can learn from their experiences and insights to navigate the challenges of this dynamic field and turn their dreams into reality. While our survey provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities facing SMEs in Kazakhstan's creative industries, several areas still

require further study. For example, conducting more research on the relationship between education level, knowledge, and success in the creative industries would be valuable. Additionally, exploring the experiences of successful SMEs in the creative industries could shed light on effective strategies for growth and development in this sector.

Further studies could also examine the impact of government policies and support programs on the growth and success of SMEs in the creative industries and identify areas where additional support may be needed. By building on our current findings and exploring these areas in more detail, we can continue to develop a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing SMEs in the creative industries of Kazakhstan and work towards creating a supportive and thriving ecosystem for these businesses.

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