

Qatar SMEs urged to utilise social media, e-commerce

By Peter Alagos
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Maximising the use of social media platforms and digital technology will not only help Qatar's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) reach a wide range of clients but it will also promote growth in the country's non-hydrocarbon sector, according to industry sources.

Citing global statistics, Amro Ahmed, commercial excellence manager LC SME at Qatar Shell, said the average person spends at least one to two hours daily on his or her mobile phone.

He said this is "a great indicator" for investors, entrepreneurs, and SMEs, as well as suppliers to utilise social media and smartphones as a tool to reach clients and to promote and access products online.

"Electronic trading, e-Commerce, and social media are very powerful and effective tools that we cannot ignore. Either we move with technology or utilise it in a very practical way or else we will be



Ahmed and Seetharaman: Digitising the economy. PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil

left behind," Ahmed said in a panel discussion at a recently held conference on SMEs.

He said the practice by "old school businessmen" of posting their products on traditional websites "is dying," and stressed that there are "newer social media platforms that are more effective and efficient for business."

Ahmed said Qatar Shell has invested in digitising its operations, particularly in procurement of

goods and services. He noted that Qatar Shell's suppliers are encouraged to upload their products online or to create an app and market their company to a larger client network.

"For some small-sized companies outside the oil and gas industry like those in cosmetics or in the mobile accessories business, what they do is upload photos of their products on Instagram or any tool so people can view, rate, or comment. That is a free market-

ing exercise because it is the public that does it for the company," he explained.

Also speaking at the panel, Doha Bank CEO Dr R Seetharaman stressed that "e-Solutions are not options...every country has to recognise that digital divide is going to make or break the sustainability of the economy."

Citing recommendations from a G20 Summit, Seetharaman said to attain sustainable economics, SMEs "are the single most solution" for sustainable development in growing economies, "whether it is growth, employment, or innovation."

"E-commerce will be the way to promote Qatar's SME sector," said Seetharaman, adding that Qatar has already embarked on putting in place the right infrastructure, telecommunications, and technology, as well as access to finance.

He added, "We have to use digital transformation and digital trade, as well as breaking barriers and automating every possible documentation and direct access to global markets."