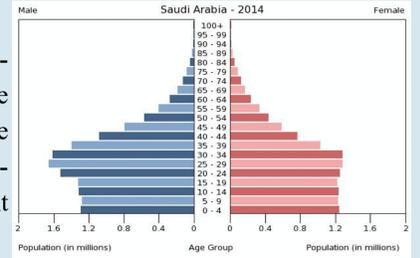


## Introduction

The twenty-first century has seen an unprecedented rise in global entrepreneurship, with 126 million women starting their own businesses and 98 million running businesses in 2012 (Kelley et al., 2012). Furthermore, during this time, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has seen a remarkable growth in women within the entrepreneurship sector. In KSA, there is a new political emphasis on developing the entrepreneurship sector, and the commitment from the Saudi government to support women is greater than ever before (Lavelle & Al Sheikh, 2013). While there have been some studies into the mechanisms and pathways established for women to rise to this position within KSA, the question remains as to what factors are present within the business ecosystem of KSA that motivates women in this society toward entrepreneurial roles?

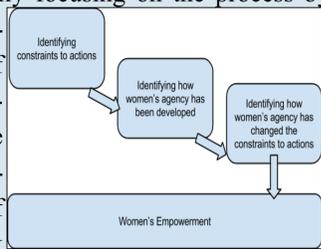


## Definitions

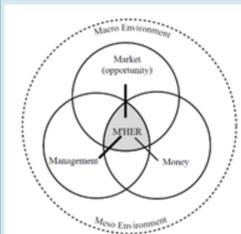
- A **business ecosystem** is the network of organizations, including the manufacturers, distributors, suppliers, and consumers, involved in the delivery of a product or service.
- **Entrepreneurship** requires an individual to raise capital, develop a unique selling point, and assume the risks of a given venture.
- **Empowerment** is defined as providing someone with the capability to be in control of his or her own destiny and habits. It is centred on the notion that individuals should hold the skills, resources, authority, and opportunity to complete their own objectives within business. Nabil Ayad, Director of the Diplomatic Academy of London, discussed the need to explore the gender differences with relation to leadership values in order to empower women toward leadership roles, such as entrepreneurship (Ayad, 2004).

## Related Work

This research reviewed literature on theoretical frameworks surrounding women's empowerment, specifically focusing on the process by which women become empowered. Instrumental to this literature was that of Mosedale (2005), who inspired the author's illustrative framework (figure below) recognising the pathway toward women's empowerment as part of a national scheme. This framework matches Kabeer's three prongs of empowerment: recognising resources, agencies, and achievements (1999). However, a thorough reading of the literature forces the author to conclude that developed frameworks for the empowerment of women vary greatly based on the national resources and sociopolitical environment (Mosedale, 2014). Focusing on KSA, this highlights the need for encouraging national change so that women could be recognised as an influence of empowerment on social infrastructure.



Discussions of business ecosystems are relatively new in terms of academic discourse (Mäkinen & Dedehayir, 2012). This evolving definition encompasses a group of firms or organizations that "center their collective efforts on a product, service, or technology, and which transcends a single industry" (*ibid.*). Business ecosystems create a value for individual participants, in our example, the entrepreneurs, by providing them a community presence of experience and guidance (*ibid.*; Clarysse *et al.*, 2014). This research has explored the ecosystem of support available for female entrepreneurs within KSA and how this ecosystem has impacted the motivation for women to be empowered into entrepreneurial roles.



## Results/ Conclusion

At present, the analysis of the research has identified factors that empowered women into entrepreneurial roles, including family, fiscal opportunities, educational experiences, and personal goals. For most of the women who completed the interviews, access to education contributed greatly to their success as an entrepreneur; they were able to gain appropriate background knowledge to further explore their career opportunities. Furthermore, the ecosystem of strong family and cultural links encouraged women through the culture of promoting strong role models and self-motivated individuals. Finally, a number of the participants discussed their mechanisms for overcoming the challenges of financial capital to begin an enterprise. Much of the capital for the initial stages of the enterprise were from the personal wealth of family and friends; however, government loans and experienced entrepreneurial associations contributed to the financial successes. However, for these stages, there is a requirement for the women to be educated regarding the access of such funds.

It is expected that the results of this research can be used to assist in creating a socio-political conversation so that women in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia may feel more empowered toward entrepreneurial roles so that KSA can further develop its capital.

## Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature review, the researcher constructed a conceptual framework that encompasses the key theorists in terms of ecosystems that motivate and empower women toward entrepreneurial systems. This diagram has the three factors as concentric circles. The outer, green circle represents the ecosystem, which encompasses the need for strategic planning and industry knowledge to handle a competitive market. The ecosystem, as a complex entity, requires all components to function together; an individual without industry knowledge or the ability to understand her long-term planning or competition would not thrive (Moore, 1996).



Table 1 Conceptual Framework based on Fallatah (2012)

	Positive	Negative
<b>Push Factors</b>	Entrepreneurship had always been a dream Seeking self-fulfilment	Requires Flexible Working Hours Lack of Job Opportunities Needing to Support Family
<b>Pull Factors</b>	←Family Support→ ←Government Support→ ←Professionalism→ ←Partnership→	

The second circle, in red, represents the elements of empowerment. Based on the 5M theory (Brush *et al.*, 2012), being empowered requires a balance of familial factors, taking advantage of opportunities, such as education, and the ability to manage both their organisations and their time. The final element, represented by the blue arrows, are the 'push-pull' elements, taken from Fallatah (2012). It is crucial for women to understand both what motivate them into entrepreneurial roles and what may be a detriment to their success in this field.

## Methods

The author examined factors that encouraged women toward entrepreneurial roles in KSA through a series of interviews with Saudi female entrepreneurs. Using opportunity sampling, the author recruited volunteers through professional email addresses. Interviews with Saudi female entrepreneurs began in August 2015 and were completed in October; twelve women from a range of backgrounds, geographic regions, and fields of business volunteered to complete this stage of the research process. These in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out in either English or Arabic, based on the individual participant's preference, and translated into English for the purpose of analysis. Many of the questions from the interviews were based on similar questions within the literature review; this guided the researcher's analysis of the results.



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