

A Study Of Instagram As A Technological Enabler For Saudi Women Entrepreneurs

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Abstract:

Saudi female entrepreneurs face certain challenges, various researchers have produced literature that discusses such challenges and their hindrance of female entrepreneurship. Although the Saudi Arabian government has made a significant effort toward improving the status of Saudi women by taking actions that enable them to operate in different areas, such as the economic and social fields, and by eliminating all forms of discrimination against them, female participation in entrepreneurship is limited. SO, this study aimed to prove the theory that Instagram helps Saudi women entrepreneurs establish E-businesses and overcome the barriers and obstacles they face when running a new business.

This research adopted the deductive approach and sought to collect quantitative data by using an online survey. The questionnaire was piloted with five Saudi women. The questionnaire link was sent to 500 businesswomen, yet only 156 responses were received. This research found that confirmatory evidence that the Instagram platform succeeds in helping Saudi businesswomen overcome possible barriers they faced when running a new business. It also provides a variety of facilities that enable them to become independent businesswomen.

Keywords: business women, Instagram, entrepreneurs, Saudi women.



ملخص البحث

تواجه رائدات الأعمال السعوديات بعض التحديات ، وقد أنتج العديد من الباحثين مؤلفات تناقش هذه التحديات والعوائق أمام ريادة الأعمال النسائية. على الرغم من أن حكومة المملكة العربية السعودية قد بذلت جهوداً كبيرة لتحسين وضع المرأة السعودية من خلال اتخاذ إجراءات تمكنها من العمل في مجالات مختلفة ، مثل المجالات الاقتصادية والاجتماعية ، ومن خلال القضاء على جميع أشكال التمييز ضدها ، فإن مشاركة المرأة ريادة الأعمال محدودة. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى إثبات النظرية القائلة بأن Instagram يساعد رائدات الأعمال السعوديات على إنشاء أعمال إلكترونية والتغلب على الحواجز والعقبات التي يواجهنها عند إدارة مشروع جديد.

اعتمد هذا البحث النهج الاستنتاجي وسعى إلى جمع البيانات الكمية باستخدام استطلاع عبر الإنترنت. تم تجريب الاستبيان مع خمس سعوديات. تم إرسال رابط الاستبيان إلى 500 سيدة أعمال ، ولم يتم استلام سوى 156 رداً. وجد هذا البحث دليلاً مؤكداً على نجاح منصة Instagram في مساعدة سيدات الأعمال السعوديات على التغلب على العوائق المحتملة التي واجهنها عند إدارة عمل جديد. كما يوفر مجموعة متنوعة من التسهيلات التي تمكنهن من أن يصبحن سيدات أعمال مستقلات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: سيدات أعمال ، انستغرام ، رائدات أعمال ، سعوديات.

1. Introduction:

Despite efforts at the international, regional and local level for women involvement, Saudi women are still facing a lot of challenges and constraints. The status of women will not positively and practically change unless there is a major change in social structures, where the family's hierarchy is part of a society's hierarchy and the status of women is not understood in isolation from the overall cultural societal context (Makki, 2004). According to (Alshemari, 2005), the number of Saudi businesswomen in 2005 was 23,000 (Sadi and Al-Ghazali, 2010). (AlMunajjid, 2010) points out that “some Saudi women manage their own business investments and enterprises, 97% of which are in wholesale and retail trade, finance and business services, and construction”. Furthermore, the percentage of enterprises that are owned by Saudi women is 12% including 16% of large manufacturing companies in the Kingdom (The World Bank, 2007 & AlMunajjid, 2010).

In recent years, the issue of activating Saudi women's participation in economic development occupied a prominent position on the ladder of priorities of national strategies and development plans. Although some decisions that support female entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia and their economic empowerment have been issued, they are still limited and disabled. The presence of female Saudi entrepreneurs is still very limited (Badir, 2013). Due to the revolution of social media and technology, starting a new business nowadays is not impossible when it is based upon good knowledge about what the customers' needs are. Many business owners have emerged and have achieved remarkable successes through this fertile business environment and the facilities it offers for both merchants and their customers.

A mobile-based application called Instagram was created in 2010 and has attracted many people all around the world with more than 300 million active users by the end of 2014 (Systrom, 2015). The Instagram users share moments, photos and videos with their friends and family.

Yet in Saudi Arabia, this application has opened the door for Saudi women to establish tele businesses far from the obstacles and challenges that they otherwise face. All they need to do is create an Instagram account and use it for promotion, advertising and sharing products or services. So the research aims to investigate the barriers which the Instagram help in reduces their impact on the Saudi businesswomen.

2. Significance of the research:

The importance of this research is to highlight the positive side of technology, specifically social networking applications such as Instagram and how this platform has been employed to serve the interests of Saudi women and helps them overcome the barriers surrounding them that have limited their participation in entrepreneurship. In addition to this, this research serves to educate and increase awareness within society about the importance of women participation in the nations development and economy.

3. Research question

The research is going to answer the following question:

What is the effect of Instagram for solving obstacles in establishing new projects: A study by businesswomen in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia?

4. Research aim and objectives:

In order to answer the research questions, the researcher will cover the following objectives:

1. Determine the challenges that women face in the field of business (Middle East, Saudi Arabia)
2. Determine the challenges that Saudi women face in the field of business
3. Determine the effect of Instagram in getting rid of the challenges that Saudi women face in the field of business

5. Literature reviews:

5.1 Challenges that women face in business in the Middle East

A study conducted by Dechant and AL Lamky (2005) states that one of the Challenges that women face in the field of business in Middle East, which is the lack of government support. Although the Governments of Bahrain and Oman pay attention to women in terms of owning and managing small enterprises, arbitrarily laws, procedures and requirements increase the burden upon business owners, especially those who are inexperienced in this field.

Moreover, network and professional support is another obstacle in the Dechant and AL Lamky (2005) study. Chambers of Commerce in different cities in Bahrain and Oman are responsible for supporting the private sectors and encouraging business owner to join them. In reality, these Chambers failed to support and help female entrepreneurs. Instead, female business owners receive consultations and advice from their families and friends.

Another issue associated with tradition and religion is the interaction between men and women in the work place. Often, women and men work together in the same physical place. However, the lack of female departments in the private and public sectors deprive women of privacy (Itani et al., 2011). Although society in the UAE is modern, the concept of women working outside the home is still new and deprecated, with some conservative families denying women the opportunity to engage in entrepreneurship (Preiss & McCrohan, 2006 as cited in Goby & Eroglu, 2011). Additionally, these customs and traditions prevent them from proving their talents and ability in entrepreneurship.

In a study done recently in Oman by Belwal, S., Belwal, R., & Al Saidi (2014), it was discovered that a scarcity in education, training, a lack of seriousness in mastering the work, repression against women and the norms and customs of Middle Eastern societies has had a negative impact on the participation of women in business.

On the other hand, in the Al-sadi, Belwal and Al-Badi (2011). study it is stated that Omani society is male-dominated, Omani businesswomen are not supported by their families in their business and the issue of owning a business by women is not taken seriously and neglected by men.

5.2 Challenges that Saudi women face in the field of business

5.2.1 Socio-cultural and Religious Issues

Cultural, social, traditional, and family norms constitute restrictions that surround Saudi female entrepreneurs and play a major role in influencing them (Al Sheikh & Lavelle, 2013). Some of these cultural beliefs are listed below.

1. The Women Role

in Saudi Arabia there are some who believe that the main role of the woman is to be a mother and wife (AlMunajjid, 2010). Sadi and Al Ghazali (2010) add that the Saudi female role is limited to a maternal role revolving around family responsibilities. This belief is limiting Saudi female participation in entrepreneurship and restricting it to public sectors, such as education and medical fields, which are deemed to be more appropriate for her nature.

2. Working Hours

Across the globe, women hope to reduce their number of working hours in order to have the opportunity to spend more time with their children and families (Orhan & Scott, 2001 as cited in Shmailan, 2014). Similarly, this is a critical issue in Saudi society as the customs, traditions and norms do not favor women spending long hours outside the home.

3. Al Mahram (Male Guardian)

Muslim women in general, and Saudi women specifically, need a mahram's (male guardian) presence and permission for national and international travel. This guardian must be her immediate male relative such as her father, brother or husband (AlMunajjid, 2010; Welsh et al., 2012; Troemel & Strait, 2013; Alhabidi, 2013; Shmailan, 2014).



5.2.2 Governmental Issues

1. Government Procedures

Saudi businesswomen need a Wakeel, which means they need to be accompanied by a male relative to validate official procedures (AlMunajjid, 2010; Alturki & Braswell, 2010; Ahmad, 2011; Welsh et al., 2012; Al Sheikh & Lavelle, 2013). Moreover, the signature of Saudi women on any official documents without her mahram's signature is not acceptable and this can cause a delay in procedures progressing (Shmailan, 2014).

2. Lack of Public Facilities

Childcare centers constitute extra expenses that are added to the Saudi female entrepreneur budget. Businesswomen need to specify a monthly budget for childcare centers, which are very expensive and drain the budget and constitute an obstacle (Al-Abdullah, 2013). Some women get support from their families, who take care of their children and help with home responsibilities (Metcalf, 2008). The limited number of governmental and private day-care centers cause Saudi businesswoman to hesitate when starting their own business (Troemel & Strain, 2013; Al Sheikh & Lavelle, 2013).

5.2.3 Consequences

1. Lack of Business Knowledge

Women's lack of required entrepreneurship skills and experience limits their participation (Cliff, 1998). Fischer (1993) and AlMunajjid (2010) argue that this lack of experience may be due to the fact that they have not yet practiced or worked in the field in which they are going to run a business. Oakley (2000) adds that there are not enough female training opportunities and those existing are inappropriate, as also highlighted by Sadi and Al-Ghazali (2010) and Alhabidi (2013).

2. Lack of Self-Confidence

Al Sheikh and Lavelle (2013) claim that Saudi businesswomen are trying to show their strength and confidence while in reality they suffer from lack of self-confidence. This is clearly shown when they hesitate in decision-making, delay action taking and avoid commitment. This is all due to a lack of training and coaching.

3. Lack of Capital

Running a business needs sufficient capital and it is considered the greatest challenge for any entrepreneur generally and for women specifically (Shmailan, 2014; Alhabidi, 2013). Watson (2003) claims that “female owned enterprises are more likely to be undercapitalized in a variety of forms from the outset, located in crowded sectors and so underperform over time”.

6. Methodology

This research adopted the deductive approach by referring to previous studies, research, master's and doctoral theses related to the subject of study.

An experiment approach was also used and sought to collect quantitative data using an online survey. The questionnaire tool was distributed to the research sample.

6.1 Population and Sample

The research population consisted of Saudi businesswomen, and a sample of 500 businesswomen using the questionnaire link was sent, yet only 156 responses were received.

6.2 Research Method (Data Collection)

Since this research is classified as deductive and it seeks to collect quantitative data, it is a quantitative research. Therefore, the appropriate method of collecting data from the sample of Saudi female entrepreneurs on Instagram is a survey. The research aims to examine how Instagram helps Saudi female entrepreneurs to overcome the obstacles that they face when they run a new business. To do so, the chosen method is a self-administered questionnaire. The online questionnaire is prepared and distributed to Saudi female entrepreneurs using Instagram.

6.3 Data Analysis

The collected data is analyzed by using the “Statistical Package for the Social Sciences”

(SPSS) package and Microsoft Office Excel. Such software is commonly used for data

analyses in social science researches. SPSS software offers a wide range of analyzing methods and techniques. In this research the following two analysis methods are used: Descriptive Analysis for quantitative data and Coding for open-ended questions.

Results and Findings

This section presents the results and findings collected from the questionnaires. The researcher posted questionnaire links to 500 Saudi businesswomen who use Instagram for their businesses, yet only 156 responses were received. The first section shows the demographics distribution of the participants, followed by Likert Five Scale analyses.

Part one: personal data tables for the research sample

The sample was female only, but was demographically distributed based on age, region, and educational level. The following graphs represent all proportions of respondents for each variable.

A- Age Variable

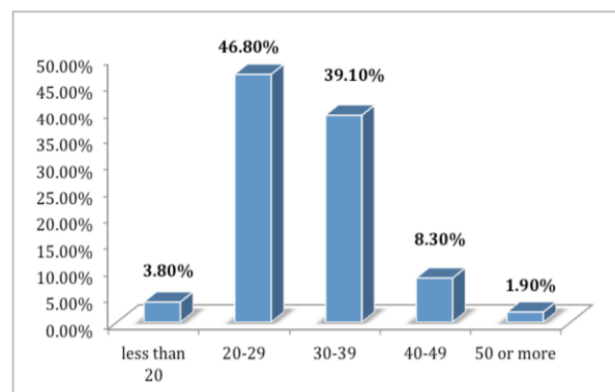


Figure 1: Distribution Of Participants According To Their Age

the Instagram-based businesswomen are in their youth, with 46.8% of the total responses being in the age group of 20-29 and 39.1% in the age group of 30-39. These two percentages may indicate that young people are able to deal with modern technology and employ it in a way that will benefit them.

B- Region Variable

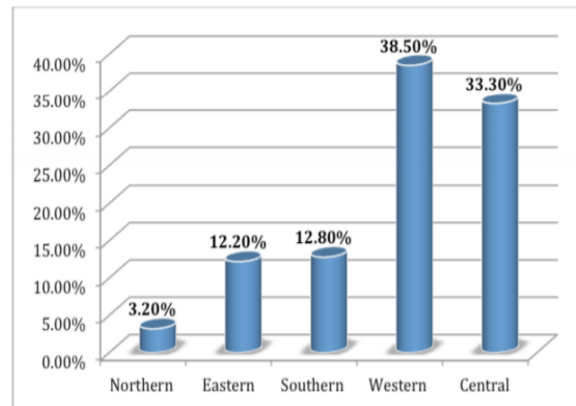


Figure 2: Distribution Of Participants According To the Region

Based on the figure, the highest percentages of Instagram businesswomen are in the Western and Central regions, at 38.5% and 33.30% respectively. While the lowest percentage of businesswomen are in the Northern region at 3.2%. These percentages suggest that modern communities accept women participation in society and industry.

C- Education Level

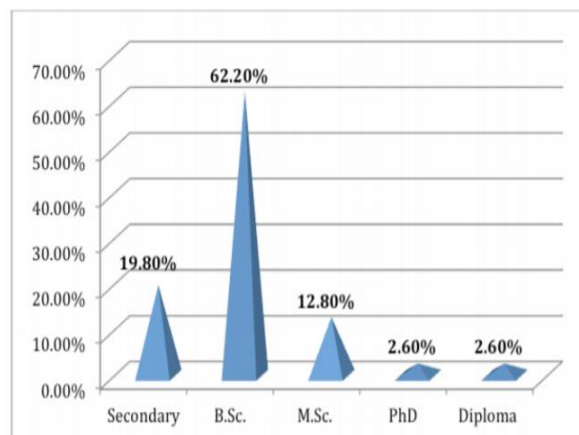


Figure 3: Distributions Of Participants According To the Education Level



The most of the Instagram businesswomen hold Bachelor Degrees at a percentage of 62.2%, which proves they are qualified enough to run and manage businesses. Following in second place, businesswomen with secondary degrees are at a percentage of 19.8%. With regard to postgraduate businesswomen, 12.8% of the participants have Masters Degrees and 2.6% have PhD's.

This is because most of the graduates receive scholarships, meaning they have a fixed monthly income. Second, graduate students do not have time to manage and manage a new project.

Part two: Study Axes in Likert Scale Style

This part is composed of four main axes and under each axis are several statements. To know the level of agreement on each statement under one axis, the frequencies, percentages, weighted Mean and standard deviation of the responses are calculated, while the level of agreement on the axes as a whole is determined by calculating the whole mean (Mean of Means).

The Rank of Stamens Under Each Axis

Axis 1: Cultural and religious obstacles

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Axis 1: Cultural and religious obstacles

Table 1: Participants' Level of Agreements on the Cultural and Religious Obstacles Ranked in Descending Order Based on Means

Q	Statement	F	Agreement					Weighted Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
		%	S. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	S. Agree			
3	Work life balance	F	5	4	14	66	67	4.19	0.937	.1
		%	3.2	2.6	9	42.3	42.9			
1	Al Mahram (Male guardian)	F	11	11	25	32	77	3.98	1.257	.2
		%	7.1	7.1	16	20.5	49.4			
2	Problems of men and women working in the same physical space	F	17	11	16	35	77	3.92	1.365	.3
		%	10.9	7.1	10.3	22.4	49.4			
4	Women main role is to be mother and wife.	F	13	18	27	36	62	3.74	1.314	.4
		%	8.3	11.5	17.3	23.1	39.7			
Whole Mean			3.95							

1. Statement (3) "Work life balance" ranks first in terms of the agreement of participants with a Mean of 4.19 out of 5.00. It seems that Saudi businesswomen are under worklife conflict pressure and Instagram helps them to achieve a balance.
2. Statement (1) "Al Mahram (male guardian)" ranks second in terms of the agreement of participants with a Mean of 3.98 out of 5.00. This result shows that the male guardian constitutes a barrier for Saudi businesswomen and, as a solution, they adopt Instagram as a platform to set up their businesses.
3. Statement (2) "Problems of men and women working in the same physical space" ranks third in terms of the agreement of participants with a Mean of 3.92 out of 5.00. The data shows that Instagram provides Saudi businesswomen with privacy and allows them to run their businesses in isolation from men.



4. Statement (4) "Women main role is to be mother and wife" comes at the Fourth rank in terms of agreement of the participants with Mean (3.74 out of 5.00). The data suggest that the Instagram assists the businesswomen to improve the commonly shared concept of women role in Saudi society.

Axis 2: Governmental Procedures

Table 2: Participants' Level of Agreements on the Governmental Procedures Obstacles Ranked in Descending Order Based on Means

Q	Statement	F	Agreement					Weighted Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
		%	S. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	S. Agree			
8	Difficulties in finding a suitable place to start business	F	5	3	9	44	95	4.41	0.929	.1
		%	3.2	1.9	5.8	28.2	60.9			
7	Difficulties in accessing Government services	F	7	6	20	41	82	4.18	1.088	.2
		%	4.5	3.8	12.8	26.3	52.6			
6	The need to be accompanied by male relative to validate official procedures	F	15	8	7	38	88	4.12	1.293	.3
		%	9.6	5.1	4.5	24.4	56.4			
5	Complexities in issuing business license	F	10	5	24	46	71	4.04	1.149	.4
		%	6.4	3.2	15.4	29.5	45.5			
Whole Mean		4.19								

- Statement (8) "Difficulties in finding a suitable place to start business" ranks first in terms of the agreement of participants with a Mean of 4.41 out of 5.00. It seems that finding a suitable place for business is the main concern for Saudi businesswomen, which no longer exists with the use of Instagram to run businesses. They have agreed on the following three statements under the Governmental Procedures category:
- Statement (7) "Difficulties in accessing Government services" ranks second in terms of the agreement of participants with a Mean of 4.18 out of 5.00.



3. Statement (6) "The need to be accompanied by a male relative to validate official procedures" ranks third in terms of the agreement of participants with a Mean of 4.12 out of 5.00.
4. Statement (5) "Complexities in issuing business licenses" ranks fourth in terms of the agreement of participants with a Mean of 4.04 out of 5.00. These findings illustrate that running a new business through the Instagram application does not require any governmental procedures, and this is what makes Instagram popular among Saudi businesswomen.

Axis 3: Educational and Business Knowledge Obstacles

Table 3: Participants' Level of Agreements on the Educational and Business Knowledge Obstacles Ranked in Descending Order Based on Means

Q	Statement	F	Agreement					Weighted Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
		%	S. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	S. Agree			
10	Lack of business experience	F	3	11	19	73	50	4.00	0.950	.1
		%	1.9	7.1	12.2	46.8	32.1			
9	Lack of training	F	5	10	26	54	61	4.00	1.05	.2
		%	3.2	6.4	16.7	34.6	39.1			
12	Need for specific qualifications	F	23	19	27	37	50	3.46	1.42	.3
		%	%	14.7	12.2	17.3	23.7			
11	Lack of self confidence	F	18	25	38	41	34	3.31	1.29	.4
		%	11.5	16.0	24.4	26.3	21.8			
Whole Mean			3.69							

1. Statement (10) "A lack of business experience" ranks first in terms of the agreement of participants with a mean of 4.00 out of 5.00.
2. Statement (9) "A lack of training" ranks second in terms of the agreement of participants with a mean of 4.00 out of 5.00.
3. Statement (11) "A lack of self-confidence" ranks fourth in terms of the agreement of participants with a Mean of 3.31 out of 5.00.



4. Statement (12) "The need for specific qualifications" ranks third in terms of the agreement of participants with a Mean of 3.46 out of 5.00.

Axis 4: Financial Obstacles

Table 4: Participants' Level of Agreements on the Financial Obstacles
Ranked in Descending Order Based on Means

Q	Statement	F	Agreement					Weighted Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
		%	S. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	S. Agree			
15	Daycare costs	F	10	6	10	38	92	4.25	1.152	.1
		%	6.4	3.8	6.4	24.4	59			
14	Transportation costs	F	5	6	21	51	73	4.16	1.012	.2
		%	3.2	3.8	13.5	32.7	46.8			
13	Lack of capital	F	7	10	22	47	70	4.04	1.120	.3
		%	4.5	6.4	14.1	30.1	44.9			
Whole Mean		4.15								

1. Statement (15) "Daycare costs" ranks first in terms of the agreement of participants with a Mean of 4.25 out of 5.00. As can be inferred from the results, nurseries are very costly in Saudi Arabia and Instagram is an ideal solution for Saudi businesswomen, allowing them to overcome this issue.
2. Statement (14) "Transportation costs" ranks second in terms of the agreement of participants with a Mean of 4.16 out of 5.00.
3. Statement (13) "Lack of capital" ranks third in terms of the agreement of participants with a Mean of 4.04 out of 5.00.

Conclusion:

In order to answer the research question, a quantitative research was implemented, and an electronic questionnaire was designed by using Google Form and the form was sent to the participants. The literature regarding challenges faced by businesswomen worldwide, in the Middle East and then in Saudi Arabia, was reviewed before preparing the questionnaire questions. As the Methodology Chapter discussed, the adopted study approach was a deductive approach. The data were analyzed via the SPSS tool, and graphs were generated with the Excel tool.

The researcher set the sample size to 200, yet only 156 responses were received. Most of the respondents ranged from 20–39 years of age. More than half (62.2%) of the respondents held a bachelor's degree. The top two regions where the businesswomen lived were the Western region (38.50%), followed by the Central region (33.30%).

The results and discussion carried out earlier provided confirmatory evidence that the Instagram platform succeeds in helping Saudi women overcome certain barriers when they run new business. Additionally, it provides them with a variety of facilities that enable them to become independent businesswomen; therefore, the study theory is supported.

Additionally, businesswomen use social media platforms such as Whatsapp, Keek and email, along with Instagram, to process orders and communicate with customers. This is another advantage for Saudi women because social media reduces the number of direct dealings with men as either customers or suppliers.

The results also showed that businesswomen had overcome educational and business knowledge barriers. Currently, everyone can set up a business through the Instagram platform. It does not matter what qualifications, experience or training someone has as long as the business meets the customers' needs.

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