

HOW DOES THE PERCEPTION OF ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM AFFECT ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN SAUDI ARABIA?

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship receives a lot of attention from researchers and practitioners because of their critical role in fostering socio-economic development. Despite the existence of numerous studies that examined the factors that affect entrepreneurial intention, most of them have concentrated on examining the impact of personal factors on developing entrepreneurial intention. Following the suggestions of recent studies to examine the environmental factors, this study focuses on examining the impact of entrepreneurial ecosystem factors in predicting entrepreneurial intention among university students in Saudi Arabia. The study adopted a quantitative approach using a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire as the data collection instrument directed to undergraduate business students enrolled at a public university in Saudi Arabia. The hypothesized relationships are tested with data collected from 259 respondents by using the multiple regression analysis. The empirical findings revealed that two factors of entrepreneurial ecosystem, mainly access to physical infrastructure and social factors, have a significant positive predictive relationship with entrepreneurial intention. The results provide empirical evidence to the policy makers in Saudi Arabia recommending that policy makers should examine various combinations of different entrepreneurial ecosystem factors to predict entrepreneurial intention among students. The study proposes that it is not mandatory that the high levels of all entrepreneurial ecosystem factors are important to predict high entrepreneurial intentions, rather in some conditions the low levels of certain factors are obligatory to predict high levels of entrepreneurial intentions.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Ecosystem, Entrepreneurial Intention, Higher Education, Saudi Arabia.

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship, the process that involves venture creation through creativity, innovation, taking risk, discovering opportunities, creating value, and introducing goods and services that satisfy customers' needs (Shane, 2012; Balan & Metcalfe, 2012), is increasingly considered as the engine for socio-economic development in both developing and developed countries for several reasons. The notable role of entrepreneurship has been confirmed by many researchers in recent years, where it is associated with reducing unemployment rates, introducing innovative products and services, creating value, and generating wealth and income (Arshad et al., 2019; Bakar et al., 2017; Molino et al., 2018; Bellò et al., 2018). Influenced by these impressive gains, entrepreneurship has received increasing interest in most of the countries, and

governments strive to promote entrepreneurship in their societies (Miralles et al., 2017; Canever et al., 2017).

Consequently, many researchers have examined the factors that can influence an individual's decision to become an entrepreneur and start a new business. Most of the results confirmed that entrepreneurial intention is the first step in the entrepreneurship process and plays a significant role in an individual's decision to be an entrepreneur (Buli & Yesuf, 2015; Arshad et al., 2019; Liñán & Fayolle, 2015; Ali et al., 2019).

Entrepreneurial intention can be defined as “a self-acknowledged conviction by a person that they intend to set up a new business venture and consciously plan to do so at some point in the future” (Thompson, 2009). Entrepreneurial intention mirrors the person's eagerness, willingness, passion, and propensity to become an entrepreneur and launch a new business (Buli & Yesuf, 2015; Santos & Liguori, 2019). Therefore, understanding the factors that shape entrepreneurial intentions is crucial for developing entrepreneurship (Miralles et al., 2017; Alammari et al., 2019).

According to Ali et al., (2019); Akinwale et al., (2019), most of the entrepreneurial intentions previous studies have concentrated mainly on examining the impact of individuals' personalities and traits on developing entrepreneurial intentions. However, an entrepreneur's personality and traits are not the only factors in shaping entrepreneurial intentions, several external factors as well, have a significant impact on entrepreneurial intentions (Akinwale et al., 2019; Schmutzler et al., 2019).

Enabling and supportive environment of institutional, governmental, social, financial, infrastructural, educational, cultural, political, human, and technological factors are necessary to stimulate entrepreneurs to success (Maroufkhani et al., 2018; Ali et al., 2019). All these factors are the main pillars of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, which is defined as “interacting components of entrepreneurial systems, which foster new firm creation in a specific regional context” (Neck et al., 2004). Although entrepreneurial ecosystem factors are important and have a significant effect on developing entrepreneurial intentions, a limited number of previous studies have examined these factors (Zhang et al., 2014; Canever et al., 2017; Ali et al., 2019).

As mentioned before, many countries, particularly the developed ones, have acknowledged entrepreneurship as a strategy that can be convenient to deal with their social and economic problems, and this also was confirmed in developing countries. However, most of the entrepreneurial ecosystems previous studies have been conducted mainly in the developed countries, with little considerations to the developing ones especially the Middle East countries (Zamberi, 2011; Roundy, 2017; Al Saiqal et al., 2019; Akinwale et al., 2019; Bakar et al., 2017). As stated by Zahra (1993), “there are major differences in the institutional infrastructures between emerging and developed economy countries”. Additionally, Iakovleva et al. (2011) argued that the formation of entrepreneurial intentions in developing countries significantly vary from developed counties.

Thus, there is a need for investigating entrepreneurial ecosystem factors in developing countries, and particularly the Middle East countries to better understand how these factors can influence the development of entrepreneurial intentions in such countries (Roundy, 2017; Akinwale et al., 2019; Gaur, 2014; Singh & Gaur, 2018). This study contributes to the current

entrepreneurship literature regarding the effect of entrepreneurial ecosystem factors on students' entrepreneurial intentions.

Accordingly, this study aims to fill the gap in Saudi Arabia by examining how students' perceptions of entrepreneurial ecosystem factors can influence the development of their entrepreneurial intentions. The results of this study will provide the government, policymakers, and educational institutions with the operating mechanism of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. So, they can formulate customised policies and programs that can facilitate and support the development of entrepreneurship.

The paper is organized as follows. In the next section we provide a literature review of entrepreneurial ecosystem, entrepreneurial intention, and the relationship between them in order to develop the hypotheses and the model of the study. In section 3, we will describe the research methodology. The final section discusses the main findings and implications as well as the limitations and suggestions for future research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Entrepreneurial Intention (EI)

Entrepreneurial intention has been recognised as an interesting topic among researchers and it is considered the best predictor of entrepreneurial behaviour and actions (Bakar et al., 2017; Buli & Yesuf, 2015). Several studies have focused on exploring the factors that influence the creation of entrepreneurial intention, as it is considered the initial stage in the entrepreneurship process and in the absence of the intentionality; any future entrepreneurial actions will not occur (Alammari et al., 2019; Meoli et al., 2020; Solesvik, 2014).

Entrepreneurial intention is related to the desire and propensity of a person to become an entrepreneur and his willingness to plan his new business venture (Buli & Yesuf, 2015; Santos & Liguori, 2019). Several definitions of entrepreneurial intention exist in the literature. For instance, Tkachev & Kolvereid (1999) described it as "one's willingness in undertaking an entrepreneurial activity or in other words becoming self-employed". Similarly, Vidal-Sune & Lopez-Panisello, (2013) described it as individuals' state of mind regarding their desire to engage in or create a new business. In the entrepreneurship literature, several models and theories have been mentioned to understand entrepreneurial intention such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), the Entrepreneurial Event Model (EEM) (Shapero & Sokol, 1982), the Implementing Entrepreneurial Ideas (IEI) model (Bird, 1988), and recently the (LFM) model presented by Lüthje & Franke (2003).

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), is one of the most commonly used intention models. According to TPB, intention can be anticipated based on three main constructs: attitudes (commonly used to refer to the degree to which an individual view the attractiveness of the behaviour in question), subjective Norm (SN) (responding to perceived social pressure to perform behaviour from family, friends, role models, and others), and perceived behavioural control (PBC) (referring to the self-assessment of one's abilities and competencies to perform entrepreneurial actions) (Liñán & Chen, 2009; Molino et al., 2018; Farooq et al., 2018).

In Shapero's Entrepreneurial Event (EEM) model, three components are crucial for entrepreneurial intention: perceived desirability, perceived feasibility, and propensity to act.

Perceived desirability is related to the assessment of the attractiveness of the new business venture, while perceived feasibility is associated with the person's perception of the feasibility to create a new business, and finally, the propensity to perform involves the evaluation of the current opportunities (Canever et al., 2017; Molino et al., 2018). Regarding Bird's IEI model, it was developed based on the TPB, and according to this model, intention starts as a response to the interaction between personal factors (prior knowledge, personality characteristics, capability), and contextual factors (social, political, and economic variables).

The effect of various factors on developing entrepreneurial intention has been explored by many researchers. Ward et al., (2019), Sesen (2013); Arshad et al. (2019) emphasised the important role of entrepreneurs' personalities and traits. While, Zhao et al., (2005), Schmutzler et al. (2019); Şahin et al., (2019) focused on the effect of self-efficacy. Moreover, Zapkau et al. (2017); Estelami, (2020) considered the influence of prior experience. Additionally, the impact of creativity and entrepreneurial passion has been highlighted by (Molino, 2018; Entrialgo & Iglesias, 2020; Shahab et al., 2019). Also, the role of risk preferences has been mentioned by (Barbosa et al., 2007). Beside these factors, other researchers investigated the effect of demographic factors, such as age and gender, on entrepreneurial intention (Shinnar et al., 2018); Gupta et al. (2009); Karimi et al. (2014); Kautonen et al. (2011). Finally, other studies concentrated on the role of environmental factors in shaping entrepreneurial intention (González-Serrano et al. (2018); Ali et al. (2019); Urban and Ratsimanetrimanana, (2019); Luc, (2018); Shi et al., (2019); Kumar & Das, (2019).

Entrepreneurial Ecosystem (EE)

The concept of entrepreneurial ecosystem has recently gained increasing interest and quickly emerged as a promising topic among researchers and practitioners in a relatively short period of time to understand the context surrounding entrepreneurs in a specific territory either country, region, or city (Stam & van de Ven, 2019; Meshram & Rawani, 2019). The phenomena of entrepreneurial ecosystem presented in the 1980s and 1990s intended to create a supportive environment of interacting factors (institutional, governmental, social, cultural, and economic) that could promote the creation and development of new business venture within a specific territory (Meshram & Rawani, 2019; Stam & van de Ven, 2019). Entrepreneurial ecosystem studies presented a shift from the narrow perspective of investigating entrepreneurs' personalities and traits towards a wider perspective that focuses on the context where the entrepreneur operates (Stam & van de Ven, 2019).

According to the institutional standpoint, entrepreneurship performance depends on the interaction between the entrepreneur's attributes and his external environment (Schmutzler et al., 2019; Audretsch & Belitski, 2017; Cavallo et al., 2019), where the individual entrepreneur alone will not be able to control all the requisites needed to create and develop his new business (Nicotra et al., 2018). Thus, the concept of entrepreneurial ecosystem is related to the capacity of a territory to create good conditions that enable productive entrepreneurship (Purbasari et al., 2019).

Till now, there is no widely acknowledged definition of entrepreneurial ecosystem among researchers, each research defined it from a different point of view based on his background and study aim (Malecki, 2018; Meshram & Rawani, 2019). For example, Cohen (2006) defined entrepreneurial ecosystem as “an interconnected group of actors in a local geographic community committed to sustainable development through the support and facilitation of new sustainable ventures”.

Spigel (2017) considered entrepreneurial ecosystem as “combinations of social, political, economic, and cultural elements within a region that support the development and growth of innovative start-ups and encourage nascent entrepreneurs and other actors to take the risks of starting, funding, and otherwise assisting high-risk ventures”. Based on the synthesis of several definitions, we can conclude that an entrepreneurial ecosystem can be viewed as a combination of elements and factors (cultural, social, political, institutional, economic, and human) in a specific region that interact together to create a condition that could either promotes or hinders entrepreneurship activities.

Additionally, developing a framework that indicates the main pillars of the typical entrepreneurial ecosystem has gained the interest of many researchers, practitioners, and organisations as well, such as frameworks developed by Van De Ven (1993); Neck et al. (2004); Cohen (2006); Isenberg (2011); Stam (2015); Spigel (2017); Stam & Van de ven (2019); Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, the World Economic Forum (WEF), and The Global entrepreneurship monitor (GEM).

From all these frameworks, we can conclude that an entrepreneurial ecosystem contains components such as access to finance, availability of human capital, government support, facilitating policies, suitable infrastructure, supportive culture and norms, universities and education, institutional bolster, professional and support services, strong formal and informal networks, strong group of entrepreneurs, the attainability of mentors and advisors, knowledge, access to all types of relevant resources, work talent, leadership, R&D, and venture friendly open market. But according to Ali et al., (2019), the GEM framework is the most commonly used among researchers and practitioners. This framework developed in 1998 by the Babson College, USA, and the London Business School, UK (Manimala et al., 2019), and include the following dimensions: “(1) availability of finance, (2) supportive government policies and regulations, (3) government programs for entrepreneurs, (4)entrepreneurial education and training, (5) supportive culture, (6) social factors, and (7) access to physical infrastructure” (Ali et al., 2019; Nicotra et al., 2018). Therefore, this study will apply GEM previous dimensions to examine the impact students’ perceptions of entrepreneurial ecosystem factors on their entrepreneurial intentions.

Entrepreneurial Ecosystem and Entrepreneurial Intention

Entrepreneurs’ attitudes toward entrepreneurship are significantly influenced by the environmental factors surrounding them (Ali et al., 2019), and several studies have emphasised the imperative role that entrepreneurial ecosystem plays in stimulating shaping entrepreneurial intentions (Hsu et al., 2019; Olutuase et al., 2018). Individuals usually evaluate the factors surrounding them and create a perception of the attractiveness or the repulsiveness of these factors, and these perceptions either enhance or impede their entrepreneurial intentions (Olutuase et al., 2018; Kumar & Das, 2019).

However, most of the previous empirical studies that analysed the effect of entrepreneurial ecosystem on entrepreneurial intention have focused on single or double eco factors (Nicotra et al., 2018). For example, some studies examined the impact of entrepreneurial education and training programs on developing entrepreneurial intention (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015; Nabi et al., 2017; Solesvik et al., 2014; Kalabeke, 2018; Adekiya & Ibrahim, 2016; Aboobaker et al., 2020) and these studies found that entrepreneurial intention is significantly associated with entrepreneurial education and training programs.

Another group of studies emphasised the role of cultural and social factors (Hayton et al., 2002; Solesvik et al., 2014; Ali et al., 2011; Singh et al., 2016; Kalabeke, 2018), these studies also emphasised the significant positive effect of supportive cultural and social factors on entrepreneurial intention. Moreover, the important role of the availability of finance and its impact on promoting entrepreneurial intention was highlighted in other studies (Sesen, 2013; Urban and Ratsimanetrimanana, 2019; Luc, 2018; Cetindamar et al., 2012; Schwarz et al., 2009). Furthermore, some researchers have analysed how entrepreneurial intention can be impacted by institutional infrastructures (Shi et al., 2019; Kumar & Das 2019) and significant positive relationship was emphasised, but these results contradict with Ovaska & Sobel (2005), who argued that government-provided infrastructures have no significant influence.

Finally, according to our knowledge, Ali et al. (2019) was the only study that examined the impact of seven factors of the entrepreneurial ecosystem on entrepreneurial intentions among university female students in Saudi Arabia. They argued some ecosystem factors are significantly associated with entrepreneurial intentions (government policies and regulations, government programs and support, social factors, and entrepreneurship education and training) while the other factors are not significant. Despite the vast research conducted on entrepreneurial ecosystem, there is a need to investigate this phenomenon in more detail in developing countries (Audretsch & Belitski, 2017), where the environmental conditions of these countries may critically influence entrepreneurial intentions in a way that differ from developed countries. Thus, based on the previous arguments we hypothesize that:

H1: Students' perceptions of access to finance are positively associated with the development of their EIs.

H2: Government policies and regulations play a significant role in shaping students' EIs.

H3: Government programs and support have a significant positive effect on students' EIs.

H4: Students' perceptions of access to finance are positively associated with the forming of their EIs.

H5: Social factors have a significant positive impact on constructing students' EIs.

H6: Cultural factors have a significant positive effect on shaping students' EIs.

H7: Entrepreneurship education and training are positively related to the development of students' EIs.

Saudi Arabia Context

Saudi Arabia, the context of this study, is one of the developing countries that enjoy a fast-growing economy, depending on oil at present with strong initiatives to renovate its economy away from natural resources (Alwakid et al., 2020). According to Saudi Arabia General Authority of Statistics, in the first quarter of 2018, the percentage of unemployed Saudi was 12.9 and the number of Saudi looking for a job inflated by 165610 persons in comparison with the first quarter of 2017 (Akinwale et al., 2019).

Thus, the government recognised the critical role that entrepreneurship can play to deal with such economic concerns, and its stimulation has become central to the government's economic plans (Choukir et al., 2019) and this was highlighted in Saudi's Vision 2030.

Among the main premises of Saudi's Vision 2030, is to cut down the unemployment rate through creating more than six million jobs and to expand the contribution of SMEs to the GDP by 15% at the end of the year 2030 (Mahmud et al., 2019; Akinwale et al., 2019). These goals can be considered as an opportunity to promote the culture of entrepreneurship among Saudis to participate in reaching this vision.

Entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia is considered as an increasingly filed of interest and as part of Saudi's vision 2030. The government devoted significant initiatives and investments to encourage citizens to get engaged in entrepreneurship. According to Ashri (2019), the founder of Saudi Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Lab, "the government has injected US\$19.2 billion stimulus package to boost the private sector, an enormous part of which was allocated to different programs and initiatives supporting the SME sector". Moreover, there are more than 50 governmental institutions and not for profit organisations that provide the required support for entrepreneurs. These institutions and organisations offer financial, mentoring, incubating, networking, consulting, and marketing services for entrepreneurs (Ahmed, 2019).

In addition, the education system is recently oriented toward entrepreneurship to create entrepreneurial mindset and culture among students (Syed et al., 2019). Many scholarship, incentives, and prizes are offered to students to motivate them to convert their creative ideas into a real business. Moreover, the government constructed many economic cities and made partnership with specialised companies to facilitate and promote entrepreneurship (Syed et al., 2019).

Based on the data collected from the recent 2019 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor report (GEM), 76.3% of Saudi's adult acknowledges all the governmental initiatives conducted to facilitate the start-up of new business venture and in the next three years above 33% of Saudi's population demonstrates their intention to launch a new business. However, the 2019 GEM report provides a positive view about the current situation of entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia, businesses still face some challenges related to bureaucratic procedures and labour problems (Sharahiley, 2020).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample

The data was collected through online survey directed to undergraduate business students who have taken the entrepreneurial course at the College of Applied Studies and Community service at Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University (a public university in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia). Careful consideration was taken in developing the Arabic version of the questionnaire by using the translation and back-translation process (Saunders et al., 2009). A pilot study was executed using a sample of fifteen students at the university in order to assess the content validity, length, and the clarity of the questions. After making some modifications, it was confirmed that all items are clear and understandable by respondents. A total of 259 valid responses were received with 133 (51.4%) males and 126 (48.6%) females. Because of the type of data collection process used, common method bias may influence the analysis and results. Using Harman's (1976) single-factor test, we tested our data for common method bias (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). The first factor, extracted using principal axis factoring without rotation, accounts for only 19.8% of the overall variance. Since this factor does not account for a majority of the variance, no general factor is apparent and it is therefore unlikely that common method variance

affects the results (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Hence, we conclude that common method variance is not a critical issue for our analysis.

Measures

All construct measures employed in this research were derived from previously validated scales. All the items were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree). Entrepreneurial intention, the dependent variable in this study, was measured by a six-item instrument adapted from Liñán and Chen (2009). This entrepreneurial intention measurement scale is the most commonly used instrument in previous studies. Examples of items are “I am ready to do anything to be an entrepreneur” and “My professional goal is to become an entrepreneur”.

As mentioned before, seven factors of entrepreneurial ecosystem have been used in the current study including access to finance (4-items), government policies and regulations for new and growing firms (4-items), government programs and support for new and growing firms (6-items), access to physical infrastructure (4-items), cultural factors (4-items), social factors (5-items), and education and training factors (6-items). The full-scale items of the study variables have been enclosed in Appendix.

A reliability test was also conducted and measured using Cronbach’s Alpha. As shown in Table 1, an assessment was made separately for each of the eight constructs used in the study. The results show that all α values range between 0.668 and 0.835 indicating that all scale variables meet the acceptable value of 0.6 (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009; Hair et al., 2006; Kaiser, 1974).

RELIABILITY STATISTICS		
Construct	Cronbach’s Alpha	N Of Items
Access to Finance	0.699	4
Government policies and regulations	0.726	4
Government programs and support	0.724	6
Access to physical infrastructure	0.668	4
Cultural factors	0.835	4
Social factors	0.671	5
Education and Training	0.83	6
Entrepreneurial Intention	0.771	5

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Data collected from the questionnaire was coded and analyzed using SPSS version 25.0. The Pearson correlation coefficient test and multiple regression test were used to test the hypotheses. The significant level during the research was considered 0.05.

As shown in Table 2, the Pearson R significance test was used to analyze the significant relationship between entrepreneurial ecosystem factors and entrepreneurial intention. Table 2 shows significant correlations between variables throughout. These findings indicate a

relationship between entrepreneurial ecosystem factors and entrepreneurial intentions.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Access to Finance	1							
2 Government policies and regulations	.377**	1						
3 Government programs and support	.472**	.542**	1					
4 Access to physical infrastructure	.165**	0.032	.390**	1				
5 Cultural factors	.283**	.225**	.396**	.156*	1			
6 Social factors	.225**	.183**	.352**	0.103	.381**	1		
7 Education and Training	.346**	.185**	.489**	.188**	.424**	.354**	1	
8 Entrepreneurial Intention	.161**	0.085	.133*	.237**	.161**	.280**	.124*	1

*P<0.05 (2-tailed) ; **P<0.01 (2-tailed)

Table 3 shows the results of the regression analysis. To assess the extent of multicollinearity, the variance inflation factor (VIF) was computed. The VIFs are below the cut-off value of 5, suggesting that multicollinearity didn't cause problems in the analysis. In Table 3, because the significance level of F Fisher is equal to Sig=0.000, and this value is less than the significance level of 0.05, there are linear relationships among the factors of entrepreneurial ecosystem and entrepreneurial intention. Regarding the hypotheses testing, the results indicate a significant effect for access to physical infrastructure factors ($\beta=0.245$, $P<0.001$) and social factors ($\beta=0.259$, $P<0.001$) on entrepreneurial intentions providing support for hypotheses 4 and 5. However, the results could not support an effect for access to finance ($\beta=0.082$, $P>0.05$), government policies and regulations (0.057 , $P>0.05$), government programs and support (-0.148 , $P>0.05$), cultural factors (0.029 , $P>0.05$) and education and training (-0.003 , $P>0.05$).

Dependent Variable	Entrepreneurial intention				
R	0.372				
R2	0.138				
Adjusted R2	0.114				

SE		0.552				
Analysis of Variance						
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.	
Regression	12.276	7	1.754	5.764	.000b	
Residual	76.37	251	0.304			
Total	88.646	258				
Variables						
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	VIF
Constant	1.799	0.334		5.388	0	
Access to Finance	0.082	0.058	0.098	1.425	0.155	1.37
Government policies and regulations	0.057	0.064	0.066	0.896	0.371	1.571
Government programs and support	-0.148	0.089	-0.151	-1.665	0.097	2.383
Access to physical infrastructure	0.194	0.052	0.245	3.745	0	1.25
Cultural factors	0.029	0.045	0.044	0.635	0.526	1.377
Social factors	0.269	0.069	0.259	3.912	0	1.273
Education and Training	-0.003	0.054	-0.004	-0.057	0.955	1.519

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Unlike preceding studies on entrepreneurial intention that have examined the role of entrepreneurs' personality and traits in developing entrepreneurial intentions, this study tests how students' perceptions of the entrepreneurial ecosystem factors can impact their entrepreneurial intentions. The perception of environmental factors surrounding an individual either motivates or demotivates him or her to start entrepreneurial activities (Brown & Mason, 2017; Audretsch & Belitski, 2017).

By using GEM main entrepreneurial ecosystem model, the results of this study show that both access to physical infrastructure and social factors have a significant positive predictive relationship with entrepreneurial intention among university students in Saudi Arabia, whereas the remaining factors "government policies and regulations access to finance, cultural factors, government programs and support, entrepreneurial education and training" are not significantly associated with entrepreneurial intentions among university students. These results match with Basaffar et al., (2018) verdicts that the government in Saudi Arabia dedicates a lot of efforts to promote entrepreneurship among Saudis.

We believe that this study adds to the literature on entrepreneurship by providing a deeper understanding of how entrepreneurial ecosystem and attention interact in one of the developing countries like Saudi Arabia, where previous studies examined entrepreneurial intentions in developed countries. The characteristics of developing countries differ from those of the developed ones and these characteristics of the developing countries may have a negative impact on entrepreneurial activities. From the practical perspective, the results of this study will help policymakers to formulate customised policies and programs that can facilitate and support the development of entrepreneurship.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has some limitation which could provide directions to future research. The present study examined the direct relationship that entrepreneurial ecosystem factors have on entrepreneurial intention. since it is possible for the relationships to be mediated and moderated by other variables, it is recommended that future studies incorporate these types of variables in order to provide deeper understanding to the current model. The sample was limited to students of business and economics. Future research could assess the model through a larger sample size by incorporating students from different departments and universities. Moreover, a cross-sectional study was used in this study, which is helpful in determining the directional relationships among variables, but it restricts the ability to assert the causal inferences. Future studies could use a longitudinal design to understand the causal linkage among the studied variables.

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