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# **Women-owned Sewing Businesses in Lagos-State, Nigeria: A study of the factors influencing their business growth**

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# **Women-owned Sewing Businesses in Lagos-State, Nigeria: A study of the factors influencing their business growth**

## **Abstract**

Statistics show that more than 60% of chronically hungry and deprived people are women, and Africa contributes the highest percentage. Entrepreneurship has been theorised a fundamental means for alleviating hunger, poverty and unemployment level prominent among women. However, global women entrepreneurship monitoring institutions have revealed that business closure among women entrepreneurs has been on a consistent rise from 2012 to date. Thus, the debate about factors influencing the business growth of women-owned businesses has been a topical issue in business management. Recently, scholars have advocated for a focus on women-specific constructs: motherhood, meso-and the macro-environment to advance women's entrepreneurship study. However, existing studies have focused mainly on the negative influence of these women-specific constructs. Therefore, this article investigated how motherhood factor (household/family context), and meso-/macro-environment context positively and negatively influences the business growth of women-owned sewing businesses (WOSBs) in Lagos, Nigeria. This study suggests growth-strategies that will improve the negative influences, and how women entrepreneurs can use the positive influences to exploit growth opportunities. Thus, the outcome of this research is beneficial to women entrepreneurs, scholars and policy-makers.

**Keywords:** Women-owned sewing businesses (WOSBs), Motherhood, Meso-/Macro-environment, Lagos, Nigeria

## Introduction

In the last five years, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitoring Institution (GEM) has revealed that women entrepreneurs have the highest rate of business closures in the world (GEM, 2012; GEM 2017). It is more worrisome for women in Sub-Saharan Africa, primarily as women entrepreneurs in this region record the highest rate (which has risen by an average of 10% per annum from 2012 to 2018) of business closure in the world (GEM, 2012; Gender-GEDI, 2014; GEM, 2017). As business discontinuation is closely associated and linked to the lack of business growth (Storey, 1994; Dobbs and Hamilton, 2003; Golovko and Valentini, 2011), scholars (Phillips and Kirchoff, 1989; Storey, 1994; Golovko and Valentini, 2011) have theorised that resolving the factors influencing business growth will increase the rate of business survival among women entrepreneurs. Extant studies (e.g. Sara and Potter, 1998; Inmyxai and Takahashi 2009; Kothari, 2017) have identified issues such as limited access to finance, lower level of education and experience as factors influencing the business growth of women-owned businesses. Ali (2018), and Welsh, Kaciak and Shamah (2018) described variables such as lack of money and low management experience as general issues affecting the business growth of both women and men alike. However, Brush, de Bruin and Welter (2009), Welsh, Kaciak and Shamah (2018), Swail and Marlow (2018), and Panta and Thapa (2018) have advocated for more focus on women-specific factors in the study of women entrepreneurs and their businesses. According to Brush, de Bruin and Welter (2009), three constructs represent the women-specific factors: motherhood (family institutions), meso-environment (occupational networks and business associations) and the macro-environment (national policies, cultural norms, economic situation and religious belief). The theory of entrepreneurship and context state that all entrepreneurship is embedded in a context (Welter, 2011; Welter and Gartner, 2016); and these contexts explain the behaviours and actions of all entrepreneurs (Welter and Gartner, 2016). For the study of women's entrepreneurship, the contexts in which women entrepreneurs are embedded is motherhood, mesoenvironment and the macroenvironment contexts (Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009; Iakovleva, Solsvik and Trifilova, 2013; Wang, 2018). Many studies (such as Jamali, 2009; Leung, 2011; Carrigan and Duberley, 2013; Iakovleva, Solsvik and Trifilova, 2013; Waterhouse, Hill and Hinde, 2017) have overly focused on the negative influence of these contexts on women and their businesses performance. Azmat and Fujimoto (2016) argued that the motherhood, meso- and macro-environment can also have a positive influence on women's entrepreneurial performance. Little or no effort has been made to study how motherhood, meso-and macro-environment contexts positively influence the business growth of women-owned businesses. As such, the purpose of this conference paper is to study how motherhood, meso- and the macro-environment positively/negatively influence the business growth of **women-owned sewing businesses (WOSBs)** in Lagos state, Nigeria. This study will also suggest strategies, using SWOT matrix, that will assist WOSBs to achieve business growth. The aim of the growth-strategies suggested is to improve negative influences (threats and weaknesses) and to match positive influences with growth opportunities. This research study contributes to women's entrepreneurship literature by suggesting strategies by which WOSBs can grow their businesses.

Globally, women-owned businesses play a significant role in driving the world's economy (GEM, 2015). They contribute more than 30% of Nigeria's GDP and account for more than 40% of the employment generated by the Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SMEs) sector in Nigeria (SMEDAN, 2013). Nigerian women's entrepreneurial activities help to reduce the number of child trafficking, prostitution and crime by more than 23.3% (Ifeanyi and Elehibi,

2011; Olawepo and Fatulu, 2012; Iyiola and Azuh, 2014). However, compared to the West, women's entrepreneurship is yet to receive adequate scholarly attention in Nigeria, Sub-Saharan Africa and developing countries in general (Oke, 2013; Pathak, Goltz and Buche, 2013; Yadav and Unni, 2016). Moreover, scholarly attention is also scarce in the sewing business sector (Andrae and Beckman, 2009; Igbanugo, Uzonwanne and Ezenekwe, 2016). Thus, the Nigerian context and the sewing business sector – a sector primarily dominated by women-entrepreneurs (AFDB, 2016) – provides a fruitful ground to contribute to research in women's entrepreneurship and enrich theory.

The fashion industry (which includes sewing businesses) in Sub-Saharan Africa is estimated to be worth \$31 Billion<sup>1</sup> - with Nigeria contributing the most significant proportion (CNBC, 2015; CNN Style, 2017) –, and this value is estimated to double in the next 10 years (Euromonitor International, 2015; AFDB, 2016). Besides, fashion industry accounts for the second largest number of jobs in Sub-Saharan Africa, following Agriculture (AFDB, 2016). Apart from its significant contribution to employment generation, the Nigerian Fashion Industry contributes 0.47% (₦380 Billion<sup>2</sup>) of Nigerian rebased GDP (Nigerian Observer, 2015). Although, the oil and gas sector contribute more (13.8%), yet with the petrodollars fast diminishing, the Federal Government of Nigeria have recognised that the fashion industry has the potential to diversify the economy, generate more employment and reduce poverty level (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2017). With the ban on sale and importation of second-hand clothing to Nigeria (Aljazeera, 2012) and the movements to buy local (GEM, 2015), the fashion industry is truly ripe. However, owing to the lack of data that plagues the African continent (Szymanski, Badri and Mayosi, 2018), the National Union of Textile Garment and Tailoring Workers of Nigeria (NUTGTWN, 2012) claimed that the Union does not know the number of sewing businesses in Nigeria; let alone the ratio of female to male-owned sewing businesses. Nevertheless, the African Development Bank (AFDB, 2016) estimated that women-owned sewing businesses (WOSBs) primarily dominate the industry; and as such, the Fashion industry is considered a means for improving the living conditions of women and youth in Nigeria (AFDB, 2016). Consequently, in 2015 the Nigerian Bank of Industry launched a ₦1 Billion<sup>3</sup> fashion fund for women entrepreneurs operating in the fashion industry (BOI, 2015). Besides, the richness of the Nigerian fashion industry has attracted other stakeholders ranging from foreign investors (such as African Development Bank) to international celebrities (especially the former US first lady) who have been dressed by a Nigerian WOSB (see Lloyd, 2014; CNN Style, 2015; CNN Style, 2017). With the continuous rise in the number of e-commerce sites selling apparels from Africa to customers in the US, Canada and UK; CNN styles (2017) concluded that the future growth of the fashion industry would be unprecedented. However, scholarly attention is lacking in this industry. Therefore, because women from Sub-Saharan African are concentrated mainly in the fashion industry, one can conclude that empirical evidence in women's entrepreneurship from Sub-Saharan African is inconclusive. Thus, sewing businesses provide a fruitful ground for contributing to existing scholarly work. Moreover, an industry-specific study will reveal contextual issues, which varies from country to country, and industry-to-industry (Welter, 2011; Yadav and Unni, 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> £23,485,600,000 (at \$1.32 US Dollars= £1 Pound as at 23/10/17)

<sup>2</sup> £801,065,503.47 (at ₦474.37 Naira= £1 Pound as at 23/10/17)

<sup>3</sup> £2,107,516.86 (at ₦474.37 Naira= £1 Pound as at 23/10/17)

## **Research Aim, Objectives and Questions**

The overarching research aim of this study is to suggest growth-strategies that will assist female entrepreneurs in growing their **WOSBs** in Lagos-State, Nigeria. These strategies would be developed using SWOT matrix. To achieve the aim of this conference paper, the following objectives would be addressed;

1. To understand how WOSBs perceive business growth in Lagos-State Nigeria
2. To explore how motherhood factor and variables in the meso-/macro-environment positively and negatively influences WOSBS entrepreneurial activities in Lagos, Nigeria.
3. To suggest growth-strategies by which the positive influences (strengths) can be used to improve negative influences, and to exploit growth opportunities.

## **Business Growth**

According to Penrose (1959), growth denotes an increase in amount or an improvement in quality as a result of a process of development. Scholars (Phillips and Kirchhoff, 1989; Storey, 1994; Dobbs and Hamilton, 2003; Golovko and Valentini, 2011) have theorised that the issue of business growth is fundamental for business survival. This means that businesses that grow have a higher chance of survival than that entity that does not grow (Phillips and Kirchhoff, 1989; Dobbs and Hamilton, 2003). Literature (e.g. Kazanijian, 1988; Achtenhagen, Naldi and Melin, 2010; Lacobucci and Rosa, 2010; Leitch, Hill and Neergaard, 2010; Dalborg, 2015) is not unified over which measure or indicator is the most appropriate, causing a fragmented theory base. Therefore, the understanding and measurement of business growth remain a critical issue in women's entrepreneurship. Nonetheless, the section below evaluates the two growth perspectives (quantitative and qualitative), while the growth perception adopted in this research study is explained and justified after that.

### ***Perceptions of Business Growth: Quantitative or Qualitative?***

Cliff (1998), and Achtenhagen, Naldi and Melin (2010) claimed that business growth is a socially constructed phenomenon. As such, Stosic (2016) demonstrated that there are different perceptions of business growth. According to Costin (2012; p.108), growth can be studied from a scholarly perspective or the business-owner perception. Scholars have perceived and studied business growth from two different perspectives: qualitative or quantitative (Achtenhagen, Naldi and Melin, 2010; Lacobucci and Rosa, 2010). The quantitative approach, which is the most adopted by social scientists, measures growth as a progression to a present quantitatively defined state from a lower historical state in the same measurement yardstick (Kazanijian, 1988; Davidsson, Achtenhagen and Naldi, 2006). In other words, Penrose (1959) defined it as an increase in amount or size. The quantitative measure for growth includes indicators such as turnover size, number of assets, and profits (Ongachi and Bwisa, 2013). Apart from being the most common measure (Dobbs and Hamilton, 2007; Kiviluoto, 2013); Achtenhagen, Naldi and Melin (2010) stated that the quantitative growth perspective is considered the simplest and most widely accepted among academic scholars. Also, Dobbs and Hamilton, (2007) stated that quantitative data are easily obtained. However, critics of quantitative perception of business growth (such as Davidsson and Wiklund, 2000; Lacobucci and Rosa, 2010; Leitch, Hill and Neergaard, 2010; Dalborg, Friedrichs and Wincent, 2012), have argued that the quantitative perspective is overly simplistic, hasty and inconsistent with the practitioners' understanding of growth. In the context of women entrepreneurship study especially, Costin (2012) considers the quantitative view of growth less-effective for use in the study of women-owned businesses.

According to Costin (2012), this is because the quantitative perception of growth is associated mainly with the study of male-owned firms; however, women and men-entrepreneurs are not the same (Costin, 2012).

On the other hand, because of the criticisms that beset the quantitative perception of growth, some other scholars (such as: Davidsson and Wiklund, 2000; Collins-Dodd et al., 2004; Leitch, Hill and Neergaard, 2010; Dalborg, Friedrichs and Wincent, 2012) recognised that business growth in women's entrepreneurship should be viewed in qualitative terms. However, apart from being a complex study of growth (McKelvie and Wiklund, 2010), some of its proponent (such as Dalborg, Friedrichs and Wincent, 2012; Dalborg, 2015) noted that the use of this growth-perspective requires the researcher to investigate change over potentially prolonged periods of time. As a result, Dalborg, Friedrichs and Wincent (2012) and Dalborg (2015) bewailed that the qualitative perspective remains relatively underexplored by scholars and policy-makers.

Recent scholars such as Ettl and Welter (2012), Costin (2012) and Stosic (2016), have argued that the ongoing debate about which measure of growth should be adopted in a study is not necessary. Costin (2012) argued that the study of business growth in women entrepreneurship should be studied from women's perspective rather than a scholarly perspective. Kilivuto (2013) and Stosic (2016) have both reiterated that business growth should be studied from the perspective of the business owners rather than from a scholarly perspective. According to Costin (2012); Kilivuto (2013) and Stosic (2016), there is a difference between the growth perspective of scholars/policy-makers, and how female entrepreneurs perceive business growth. For instance, Stosic (2016) studied the self-reported perception of business growth for women entrepreneurs in the Republic of Serbia. Stosic (2016) found that scholars/policy-makers measure/perceive business growth as quantitative components (such as profit and employment growth, personal wealth, and other personal goals), which are lower ranked among Serbian women entrepreneurs. Similarly, in a study of the growth perception of women entrepreneur in Ireland, Costin (2012) observed a contradiction between scholar's perception of growth and that of women entrepreneurs. As such, Ettl and Welter (2012) argued that the conclusion that women entrepreneurs are "growth dis-oriented" may be wrong as scholar's conclusion is based solely on the scholarly perspective of growth. Marlow and McAdam (2013) suggested a focus on the study of business growth from women's perspective of growth instead from a scholarly perspective. According to Marlow and McAdam (2013), a study of business growth from the perspective of women-entrepreneurs would resolve the issue of women's disinterest in growth. Furthermore, Costin (2012) stated that a focus on women's perspective of growth is required since women decide whether to grow their businesses or not. Besides, Paige (2014) and Stosic (2016) identified that a focus on business-owner perspective of growth would assist scholars, policy-makers and other stakeholders in developing relevant, suitable and practical strategies to assist women entrepreneurs in growing their businesses.

### **Factors influencing Business Growth**

Historically, prior studies in women's entrepreneurship have revealed that women-owned businesses are influenced by inadequate access to money (Sara and Potter, 1998; Buttner, 1999; Brush, Carter and Gatewood, 2004; Isaksen and Ljunggren, 2006; Zamberi, Afida and Arif, 2015), low level of education amongst women entrepreneurs (DeTienne and Chadler, 2007; Chea, 2008), industry characteristics (Inmyxai and Takahashi 2009; Hasan and Almubarak,

2016), lower level of prior experience (Huarng, Tur and Yu, 2012; Dhameja and Yadav, 2015), and entrepreneurial goals and motivations (Moses, 2014; Hasan and Almubarak, 2016). However, Ali (2018), and Welsh, Kaciak and Shamah (2018) described variables such as lack of money, and low level of education and experience as general issues affecting the business growth of both female and male entrepreneurs alike. To advance the study of women's entrepreneurship; Brush, de Bruin and Welter (2009), McAdam, Harrison and Leitch (2017); Welsh, Kaciak and Shamah (2018), Swail and Marlow (2018), and Panta and Thapa (2018) have advocated for more focus on women-specific factors influencing women and their businesses. According to Brush, de Bruin and Welter (2009), three constructs represent the women-specific factors: motherhood (family institutions), meso-environment (occupational networks and business associations) and the macro-environment (national policies, cultural norms, economic situation and religious belief).

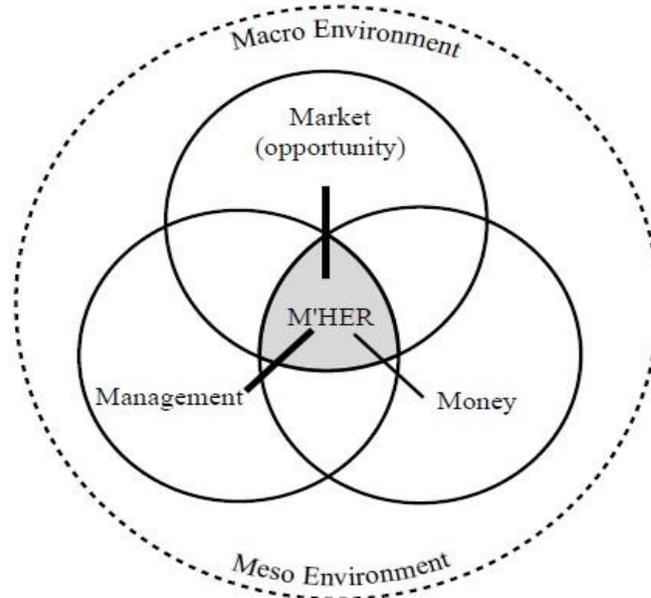
The theory of contextualising entrepreneurship provides theoretical underpinnings for the focus on women-specific constructs. First and foremost, all entrepreneurship is contextually embedded (Minniti, 2009; Bruton and Ahlstrom, 2013; Welter, 2016). According to Welter (2011), the economic behaviours of any entrepreneur can be better understood within its household/family contexts, and the institutional contexts, as these contexts, provide individuals with opportunities and set boundaries for their actions. That is, context can have a positive and negative influence on the nature and extent of entrepreneurship (Welter, 2011; Felicio, Goncalves and Goncalves, 2013; Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017). Furthermore, Welter and Xheneti (2014) added that through individuals' actions to negotiate and re-enact; entrepreneurs can intentionally or inadvertently contribute to changing the contexts to which they are embedded. This means that entrepreneurs are influenced by their contexts, while the context can be influenced by the entrepreneur (Iakovleva, Solsvik and Trifilova, 2013). In women's entrepreneurship literature, according to Brush, de Bruin and Welter (2009), women entrepreneurs are embedded in motherhood context (family/household context), meso-environment contexts (occupational networks and business associations) and the macro-environment contexts (national policies, cultural norms, economic situation and religious belief). As stated by Welter, Brush and de Bruin (2014), and Azmat and Fujimoto (2016), the 3Ms contexts (motherhood and meso/macroenvironment contexts) are antecedents and boundaries for women's entrepreneurial behaviour. According to Azmat and Fujimoto (2016), in women's entrepreneurship literature, past studies mainly focused on the negative influence of motherhood, and meso-/macro-environment. This means that few studies in women's entrepreneurship literature have investigated the positive influence of the motherhood, meso- and macro-environment context on women's entrepreneurial performance (Azmat and Fujimoto, 2016; Cabrera and Mauricio, 2017).

### **Gender-aware theory (Drawn from institutional theory)**

Brush, de Bruin and Welter (2009) gender-aware theoretical model is an extension of the fundamental building blocks (3M – money, market and management) required for launching and growing a business (See Bates, Jackson and Johnson, 2007). To launch an enterprise, an entrepreneur requires money – financial capital (Penrose, 1959), access to markets – opportunity emergence and recognition (Schumpeter, 1934) and management – human resources (Aldrich, 1999). These three variables are fundamental irrespective of the gender of an entrepreneur (Bates, Jackson and Johnson, 2007). However, to guide the study of women's entrepreneurship in its own right; Brush, de Bruin and Welter (2009) – drawing on institutional theory – added motherhood (family institution), meso and the macro-environment institution

as new constructs. The basis for inclusion is that women’s entrepreneurship is socially embedded, and the norms, values and external conditions are critical to obtaining a holistic view of women’s entrepreneurship (Elam 2008; Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009). Therefore, the addition of the motherhood, meso-and macro-environmental constructs are expected to guide the understanding of women’s entrepreneurship and reveal the uniqueness of women entrepreneurs (Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009).

**Figure 1: Gender-Aware framework (as designed by Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009)**



Brush used a Venn diagram (see Figure 1), de Bruin and Welter (2009) to illustrate the relationship between all the elements in the gender-aware model. The use of the Venn diagram is to demonstrate the interconnectedness between each construct. The market is placed at the top to exhibit that an entrepreneur requires money and management to exploit opportunities (Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009). While, motherhood is placed at the centre of the three to demonstrate the importance of the role and position of women in the family, and also to display gender awareness and analysis to the whole framework (Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009). Surrounding the circle is the meso- and macro-environment which are conceptualised as all-encompassing influences (Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009). In the next section, these three new constructs (i.e. motherhood-family/household context; meso-environment-occupational networks and business associations; macro-environment institutions-national policies, cultural norms, economic situation and religious belief) are looked at in turn;

### Motherhood

The term ‘Motherhood’ is a metaphor for representing household/family contexts (Brush and Manolova, 2004; Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009) – that is family composition and size, child and elderly care, family members’ roles and relationships, advice from family members and women’s self-perception (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003). The inclusion of motherhood in women’s entrepreneurship stems from studies which claimed that family/household context might have more effect on women than men (see for example; Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992; Ahl, 2006; Guo and Werner, 2016). Not only does it influence women entrepreneurs, but motherhood can also mediate other factors – such as access to money – influencing women-owned businesses (Chea, 2008; Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009). Besides, the inclusion of the motherhood

context emphasises gender awareness in the theoretical model (Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009). However, there is conflicting evidence in the literature about the relationship between motherhood and women's entrepreneurial performance.

Regarding positive influence, studies such as Jamali (2009), Nel (2010) and Kothari (2017) provided empirical evidence. For instance, Kothari discovered that the attitude of family members towards businesses owned by Indian women was more of helping out, instead of demanding. Jamali (2009) and Nel (2010) observed that help in the form of assistance to obtain loan finance from a bank, child care, emotional support and encouragements. In contrast, other scholars have concluded that women are double-burdened and distracted from their businesses while striving to balance work and household responsibilities (Nwoye, 2007; Naser, Mohammed and Nuseibeh, 2009; Halkias, Nwajiuba, Harkiolakis and Caracatsanis, 2011; Hurley and Choudhary, 2016). For instance, in Naser, Mohammed and Nuseibeh (2009), many Arab women encounter lack of time needed to run their businesses, as they spend a considerable part of their time on household chores and raising children. This lack of time restricts these women from attending training courses, seminars and conferences, and networking events through which they can enhance their performances (Naser, Mohammed and Nuseibeh, 2009). In another study of female petty traders in the Eastern part of Nigeria, Madichie and Nkamnebe (2010) identified that sampled female petty traders suffer from unsupporting and chauvinistic spouses, who feel that their wives' success will threaten their perceived authority as the head of family and breadwinner. As such, Madichie and Nkamnebe (2010) argued that for a female entrepreneur to succeed in a business like her male counterpart, she must be single.

Notwithstanding the divergence in the above empirical conclusions, these conflicting evidence (Jamali, 2009; Nel, 2010; Naser, Mohammed and Nuseibeh, 2009) indirectly acknowledged that motherhood plays an important role (which can be either positive or negative) in women's entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, to date, there is little or no evidence showing how motherhood positively and negatively influences the business growth of WOSBs in Lagos. This gap continues despite that; women dominate the fashion industry with Lagos-State as the hub (AFDB, 2016). Also, these women are more likely to have families since research shows that 12% and 39% of all women in Sub-Saharan Africa are married before the age of 15 and 18 respectively (UNICEF, 2016). This evidence indicates that WOSBs are likely to have many family members acquired by birth and through early marriage. Therefore, the first proposition (grounded in the preliminary findings and prior literature) is set-up to address this gap, and it is presented as follows:

*Proposition 1: Motherhood is an influential factor in the business growth of women-owned businesses in developing nations*

#### Meso-environment context

The meso-environment refers to intermediate contexts and structures linking the macrocontext and micro level context (Granovetter, 1973; Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009). These meso environment contexts include professional networks, business and trade associations (Iakovleva, Solesvik and Trifilova, 2013). They play a crucial role in entrepreneurship (Dodd, Jack and Anderson, 2002; Oke, 2013). Notably, the social network theory considers a cordial relationship between an entrepreneur and meso-level institutions (also known as weak ties) as very beneficial (Staber, 2001; Dodd, Jack and Anderson, 2002). This relationship is essential for identifying and accessing resources (such as money), information and opportunity for growth (Dodd, Jack and Anderson, 2002). Hence, the meso-level institutions largely shape other factors (such as money, management and market) explaining women's entrepreneurship

(Jamali, 2009). However, about the influence of meso-level institutions on women-owned businesses, empirical evidence disagrees. For instance, many empirical studies observed a positive relationship between meso-level institutions and women's entrepreneurial performance (Sorenso and Bringham, 2008; Hampton, Cooper and Mcgown, 2009; Ahmed and Naimet, 2010). For instance, using a questionnaire survey of South African women entrepreneurs, Machirori and Fatoki (2013) found that meso-level institutions (at general, managerial and social networks) have a positive relationship with access to bank loan/trade credit and performance. On the contrary, some other empirical evidence from the developing contexts observed a negative relationship between the African meso-level contexts and the entrepreneurial performance of women-owned businesses (Mama, 1997; Woldie and Adersua, 2004; Madichie, 2011). For example, regarding professional networking, Mama (1997) observed the absence of "real support" from African women leaders for other women. Similarly, Woldie and Adersua (2004) noted that Nigerian women who make it in business do not help other business women, but they do them more harm than good. Thus, some studies concluded that African women consciously or unconsciously do not help their fellow women entrepreneurs (Mama, 1997; Faseke, 2004; Woldie and Adersua, 2004).

Within the sewing business sector, there are two dominant trade union namely the Nigerian Union of Tailors (NUT) and Fashion Designers Association of Nigeria – FADAN (Andrae and Beckman, 2013). Andrae and Beckman (2013) examined the role of these two unions in national political events, while Andrae and Beckman (2011) investigated how these two unions can improve their influence on the governments of Nigeria. However, till date, little or no attempt has been made to investigate how these associations positively and negatively influence the business growth of WOSBs; despite that women dominate the fashion industry (AFDB, 2016). Similarly, the extent to which these union groups influences the business growth of WOSBs is also missing in the literature. Hence, the need for this study to fill this gap. Therefore, the second proposition (grounded in the preliminary findings and prior literature) is:

*Proposition 2: Meso-environmental factor influences the business growth of women-owned businesses in developing countries*

### Macro-environment Issues

From the review of the literature, the macro-environment context captures cultural norms, national level policies, economic situation and religious belief (Jamali, 2009; Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009; Mazonde and Carmichael, 2016). This form of macro-level institutions is exogenous in that women-entrepreneurs by themselves have no or very little control over them (Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009). These institutions act as enablers or barriers to business growth or women's access to money, management and opportunities (Azmat 2013; Mazonde and Carmichael 2016). Where these institutions act as barriers, women entrepreneurs need to work around them to succeed (Mazonde and Carmichael 2016). While, when they act as enablers, women entrepreneurs need the meso-level institutions (weak-ties) or the motherhood/family context (strong ties) to access growth opportunities (Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009; Liu, Beacom and Valente, 2017). Each of these macro-level contexts is discussed hereafter:

### ***Cultural Norms***

Cultural norms can intervene in the decision-making contexts such as choice of entrepreneurial career, banking practices, sociocultural barriers and access to information (Jamali, 2009). For women's entrepreneurship, culture can manifest in the form of gender occupational stereotype, and the label of women as the primary caregiver (Jamali, 2009; Leung, 2011; Mazonde and Carmichael, 2016). Regarding gender occupational stereotype, some cultures, especially those from developing countries, regard entrepreneurship as a male job. For example, entrepreneurship is labelled a man's job in the Arab world (Tlaiss, 2013), hence Arab women's entrepreneurship rates are the lowest in the world (World Economic Forum, 2011). In some other contexts, a woman's interest in entrepreneurship is not only condemned, but her interest in any work other than her primary responsibilities as a caregiver is considered unacceptable. Although, women as peacemakers, would usually bow to these cultural norms; however, Mazonde and Carmichael (2016) recognised that women could work around them. In a culturally diverse nation like Nigeria, with over 300 ethnic groups, the effect of cultural norms on business growth cannot be ignored. Although, studies (e.g. Mordi, Simpson, Singh and Okafor 2010; Yusuf, 2013; Amadu, Aondoseer and Audu, 2015) admitted that cultural norms play a fundamental role in women's entrepreneurship in Nigeria. However, these findings are hinged on aggregated samples obtained across many industry sectors in Nigeria. The implication of this is that such evidence will not reveal the depth and intensity of these cultural norms on women entrepreneurs in each industry sector. A specific industry focus is necessary because Mordi et al. (2010) observed that the level of depths and intensity of cultural beliefs play out differently in the various industry sector. Little or no effort has been made to investigate how or the extent to which cultural norms influence the business growth of WOSBs in Lagos-State. In light of this, the third proposition (which is grounded in the preliminary findings and prior literature) is proposed;

*Proposition 3: Cultural norms influence the business growth of women-owned businesses in developing countries.*

### ***Government Policies/ Support-action***

A relationship exists between government policies/support and entrepreneurial performance (Naser, Mohammed, Nuseibeh, 2009; Rabbana and Chowdry, 2013). For women-owned businesses in developing countries, studies acknowledged that government policy has a significant negative correlation with women's entrepreneurial development in African countries, especially Nigeria (Okafor and Mordi, 2010; Halkias, Nwajiuba, Harkiolakis and Caracatsanis, 2011). Similarly, many of these government policies are regarded gender-blind; thus, these policies do not support women's enterprise development to the extent they support men-owned enterprises (Halkias et al., 2011; Gender-GEDI, 2014). Though these conclusions are hinged on aggregated evidence from many industries; yet, the extent to which government policies influence women-owned businesses in each industry sector will differ. However, evidence assessing the extent to which Nigerian government policies influence each industry sector is missing in the literature. Also, there is limited empirical evidence evaluating industry-specific policies/support-actions in Nigeria. Hence, this study focuses on a specific industry sector, sewing business sector. With the rising interest of the Nigerian government in women's entrepreneurship and the fashion industry, it is essential to assess the extent to which Nigerian government policy influences the business growth of WOSBs. Thus, the fourth proposition (which is grounded in the preliminary findings and prior literature) is introduced;

*Proposition 4: Government policy/support action influences the business growth of women-owned businesses in developing countries.*

### **Religious Issues**

Worldwide, more than eight-in-ten people are religious and relate to a religious group (PEW Research Center, 2012). Hence, it is essential to examine how a person's religious beliefs influence their entrepreneurial activities and performance. Indeed, in women's entrepreneurship, evidence recognised a vital connection between women's entrepreneurial activities and their religious lives (Ojong, 2008; Azam, 2011; Holland, 2017; Modarresi, Arasti, Talebi and Farasatkah, 2016). However, empirical evidence does not converge. For instance, in Holland (2017), American women entrepreneurs claimed that religion played a significant role in their business start-ups and its subsequent success. Specifically, these women asserted that their relationship with God helped them to weather the great recession of 2007-2009 (Holland, 2017). On the contrary, some religious beliefs negatively influenced women's entrepreneurial activities (Azam, 2011; Modarresi et al., 2016). Some of this religious stance restrict women from receiving male customers (Modarresi et al., 2016), from obtaining educational/entrepreneurship training (Azam, 2011) and from active entrepreneurial activities (Igbanugo, Uzonwanne and Ezenekwe, 2016). Moreover, the issue of religion can also moderate other factors (access to money, market and management) influencing women-owned businesses (Igbanugo, Uzonwanne and Ezenekwe, 2016). However, with Nigeria rated as the 9<sup>th</sup> country in the world with the most active religious views (PEW research centre, 2015); there are limited studies that have investigated the influence of religion on Nigerian women-owned businesses. Besides, evidence of the influence of religion on WOSBs is scarce, despite that women mainly make up the fashion industry (AFDB, 2015). Therefore, the fifth proposition; *Proposition 5: Religious belief influences the business growth of women-owned businesses in developing countries.*

### **Theoretical Gap and Contribution of this study**

The conclusion that all entrepreneurship is embedded in a context is well documented in the literature. For women's entrepreneurship literature, women entrepreneurs are embedded in motherhood, and meso-/macroenvironment contexts (Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009; Panta and Thapa, 2018; Welsh, Kaciak, and Shamah, 2018). Azmat and Fujimoto (2016) demonstrated that these contexts have both positive and negative influence on women's entrepreneurial performance. Besides, Iakovleva, Solsvik and Trifilova (2013) stated that female entrepreneurs could also influence the contexts in which they are embedded. Few studies have studied the positive and negative influence of motherhood, meso- and macro-environment contexts on the business growth of women-owned businesses. This study will advance women's entrepreneurship literature by studying how motherhood, meso- and macro-environment contexts positively and negatively influence the business growth of WOSBs in Lagos, Nigeria. Furthermore, this study will propose growth-strategies for women entrepreneurs who own sewing businesses in Lagos, Nigeria. This growth-strategies will be developed using SWOT matrix to match positive influences with the negative influences of the contexts. With these strategies, women entrepreneurs can improve the factors negatively influencing the business growth of their businesses instead of waiting endlessly for help from the government (which may never arrive).

## **Methodology**

Social scientist such as Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) advanced that the choice of a research methodology should be primarily based on that which best addresses the research objectives posed. As such, it is essential to state the research objectives addressed in this study to emphasise its centrality in the methodological choice. The objectives are;

1. To understand how WOSBs perceive business growth in Lagos-State Nigeria
2. To explore how motherhood factor and variables in the meso-/macro-environment positively/negatively influence WOSBS entrepreneurial activities in Lagos, Nigeria.
3. To proffer strategies by which the positive influences (strengths) can be used to reduce the effect of the negative influences (threats and weaknesses).

In this research study, the pragmatist view will be adopted. The pragmatist view is chosen because it fits, better than other research perspectives, with the research questions posed in this study (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998; Johnson and Onwugbuezie, 2004; Creswell, 2007). Equally, this study adopts the mixed-method approach and an abductive form of reasoning. This research study uses the deductive and inductive approach simultaneously, as it developed the initial conceptual framework and tentative connections between variables, from prior literature and evidence from the preliminary investigation (Perry, 1998). The mixed-method approach is adopted because a single qualitative or quantitative method has its inherent weaknesses (Hussey and Hussey, 1997; Johnson and Onwuegbuezie, 2004). However, the combination of both methods offsets their weaknesses and will offer significant benefits to this research study (Farquhar 2012; Creswell, 2014). Although, some social scientists have pointed at the difficulty in combining methods because each method adopts a research paradigm that disagrees with the other (Cambell and Stanley, 1963; Smith, 1983; Guba and Lincoln, 1988). Nevertheless, in this research study, these paradigms are not combined but are used separately and sequentially to generate complete evidence. To achieve this, the research study is divided into 2 phases, and each phase will reflect its distinct paradigm and method. A distinct sequential application of paradigms settles any queries about combining methods (Creswell, 2014).

The study also adopts a sequential research design, which commences with a phase and then builds to other phases (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). Also, each phase will reflect its distinct paradigm and research approach. The rationale for using this stepwise research design is to ensure clarity and focus, as each phase will address specific research objectives and associated research questions. However, the focus of this article is to discuss the findings of phase 1 of this study. This phase 1 addresses research objectives 1, 2 and 3 in this paper.

### **Preliminary Investigation (Phase 1 of Research Study)**

In the first phase of this research study, a purposeful sampling technique is adopted. This technique is selected as it was not the intention of the researcher to make any statistical inferences, at this phase; instead, the purpose was just exploratory (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015). Moreover, a purposeful sampling technique assisted the researcher to identify and select participants that provided abundant information on the themes identified in the literature review section (motherhood and meso /macro-environment contexts). Presently, five women entrepreneurs who own and operate sewing businesses in Lagos State have been interviewed. According to Morse (2000), 5-10 interview participant is sufficient to reach saturation, if the data collected are on target, rich and contain less dross. With the aim of enriching the data, the selected

five women comprise two unmarried women, one married woman with no child, and two married women with children. This selection criterion is adopted to fully explore the issue of motherhood (household/family contexts) from different angles. These women entrepreneurs were recruited through interpersonal relationship, a technique recommended for conducting an investigation in a developing context (Siebers and Kamoche, 2015). The interview questions were generated from the literature review. A 40-60 minutes interview was conducted per participants. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Afterwards, the interview transcripts were sent to the respondents to confirm the data transcription. After that, the data were analysed using thematic analysis to unearth patterns and relationships between the themes identified in the literature (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). The QSR Nvivo software facilitated the storage, organisation, coding and analysis of the transcribed data (Zikmund et al., 2013).

For the development of growth strategies for women-owned sewing businesses, SWOT matrix is adopted. According to David (2016), Strength-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats (SWOT) is a vital matching tool used for developing strategies. To develop effective growth strategies, David (2016) suggested that critical positive influences (strengths and opportunities) should be matched with negative influence (weakness and threats). The strategies developed through SWOT matrix aim to curb/improve negative influences (threats and weaknesses) using the positive influences (Strengths and opportunities). In women's entrepreneurship study, SWOT matrix can be used to improve the internal weaknesses (arising from negative motherhood influences) preventing women entrepreneurs from exploiting business growth opportunities. Furthermore, the SWOT analysis can be used to develop strategies that use its strength (arising from motherhood and meso/macroenvironment) to avoid or reduce the impact of external threats (negative influence of meso/macroenvironment). Additionally, the SWOT matrix proffers strategies that uses internal strengths (arising from motherhood) to exploit opportunities for business growth. To develop growth-strategies using SWOT analysis, David (2016) stated that a researcher should, first, list all the strengths and weaknesses that are internal (in this case within motherhood context). After that, the researcher should state the opportunities and weaknesses that are external (in this case, meso/macroenvironment). Afterwards, the researcher should match internal strengths with threats, internal strengths with external opportunities, and after that record the resultant strategies.

### **Phase 2 (which is not discussed in this paper)**

The output of Phase 2 of this research study is not discussed in this current paper. The focus of phase 2 of this study is to evaluate alternative strategies proffered in phase 1 of this study. As such, Phase 2 will involve the collection of quantitative data using a questionnaire-based survey containing a variety of closed-ended structured questions. This structure of questions is employed because they are easy to answer and require minimal writing as evidence suggests that the research participants are mostly semi-literate (Oke, 2013). Besides, to assess the level of clarity and accuracy of the instrument, the questionnaire will be initially pilot tested with the interviewed respondents. Afterwards, necessary adjustments would be made to the research instrument based on feedback from the participants. Then, for the full-scale study, the adjusted instrument will be distributed, to WOSBs at the Nigerian Union of Tailors (NUT) and Fashion Designers Association of Nigeria (FADAN) meeting which holds fortnightly.

## Findings

The initial findings are based on the preliminary investigations (i.e. phase 1 of this study) which provides answers to the research objectives posed at this stage of this research study. These objectives are disclosed below;

1. To understand how WOSBs perceive business growth in Lagos-State Nigeria
2. To explore how motherhood factor and variables in the meso-/macro-environment positively/negatively influence WOSBS entrepreneurial activities in Lagos, Nigeria.
3. To proffer strategies by which the positive influences (strengths) can be used to reduce the effect of the negative influences (threats and weaknesses).

The initial findings addressed the research objectives stated above. These findings are discussed in the following sub-sections below.

### **Research Objective 1: How do WOSBs perceive Business Growth in Lagos-State?**

According to Costin (2012), women entrepreneurs should be given a central role in defining what growth is. For WOSBs, preliminary finding shows that these women entrepreneurs perceive business growth principally as **obtaining and retaining customers**. A sample of responses from the interviewed participants is contained in Table 1.

**Table 1: WOSBs' perspective of business growth**

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Perspective of Business Growth (direct quotes)</b>
<b>Respondent A3</b>	Married with 4 children	<i>"I see growth as <b><u>profit and increase in the number of customers.</u></b>"</i>
<b>Respondent B3</b>	Married with 3 children	<i>"the <b><u>number of customers</u></b> gained per year and I am <b><u>still retaining the one I started with.</u></b> These are growth index for me."</i>
<b>Respondent C2</b>	Married with no child	<i>"<b><u>Increased customer base and improvements in work.</u></b> Also sometimes we can send out feedback form to our customers to evaluate ourselves. Generally, <b><u>improvement in my work improved customer base and increased income.</u></b>"</i>
<b>Respondent D3</b>	Married with 1 child	<i>"The way I measure business growth in the area of my business is that my financial status, <b><u>the number of clients</u></b> I am able to have. And <b><u>the employees, my income and turnover.</u></b>"</i>
<b>Respondent E1</b>	Single	<i>"Growth shows <b><u>from the number of clients I am able to sew for.</u></b> If for instance, last month, I sew for 30 clients. The next month, my number of clients increases. This for me is growth. <b><u>It can also mean the number of clothes</u></b> I make in a month compared to previous months".</i>

Apart from the above direct quotations, a word frequency query result (with synonyms) reveal that words such as **clients** (which includes similar words such as clients and customers), **clothes** and **improved** (which includes similar words such as better, improved and improvements) appeared more often than other words coded under the theme "**Business Growth**". Apart from words such as staff and income, every other word depicted in Figure 2 – complement, product, clothes, complain, people, improved and sew – can be linked to the number of clients/customers.

*Figure 2: Word cloud for Business Growth*



The above growth indicator (improvement of Client size) is inconsistent with how business growth is discussed and measured by policymakers in Nigeria. For instance, the Nigerian National Policy document defines business growth as an increase in the number of staffs employed or an increase in the value of assets (SMEDAN, 2013). Thus, financial supports, from the Nigerian government, are usually released to entrepreneurs to create more jobs (see for example LSETF, 2017). Similarly, prior studies from Nigeria (such as Abereijo, Adegbite, Siyanbola, Ilori and Aderemi, 2008; Oke, 2013; Balogun 2016) have defined the term business growth using indicators such as asset growth indicators, sales turnover, number of employees and profitability. On the contrary, findings from this study reveal that WOSBs are not interested in the growth measures/indicators adopted by scholars/policy maker. For instance, a sample response from an interviewee was

*“I am **not considering staff strength as part of growth**. In fact, I had to cut down on the number of staffs I work with. To save money, I found out that **quality matters more than quantity** so it is better to have more of those who **are well trained** than those who are not. And also to get more money, as a business I need to bring down costs to do well and survive” (Respondent B3)*

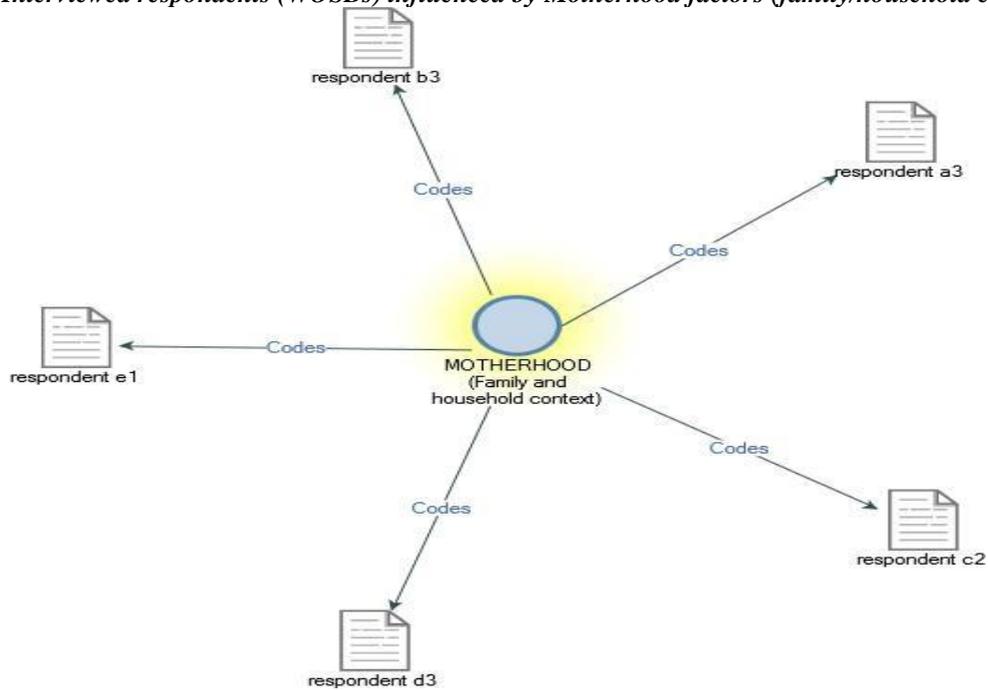
The above comment reveals that WOSBs do not consider staff strength as an indicator of growth/performance. Instead, WOSBs consider the quality of staffs more critical than the number of staffs. Indeed, the quality of staff is critical to ensure that **clients/customers** do not **complain** but **complement** WOSBs about their **clothes/product**. Therefore, in this study, business growth will henceforth be defined as the increase in the number of customers/clients.

**Research Objective 2: In what way does the Motherhood factor positively and negatively influence WOSBs?**

The term ‘Motherhood’ is a metaphor for representing household/family contexts (Brush and Manolova, 2004; Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009) – that is family composition and size, child and elderly care, family members’ roles and relationships, advice from spouse, family, friends and relatives (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003). To fully explore the implication of motherhood, the respondents that are interviewed comprised of 4 married women and one unmarried woman. The number of children was also varied between 1 and 4. Findings from the initial study reveal that motherhood (household/family context) influences the performance of all the WOSBs interviewed (see Figure 3 – as depicted by Nvivo). However, the form by which motherhood

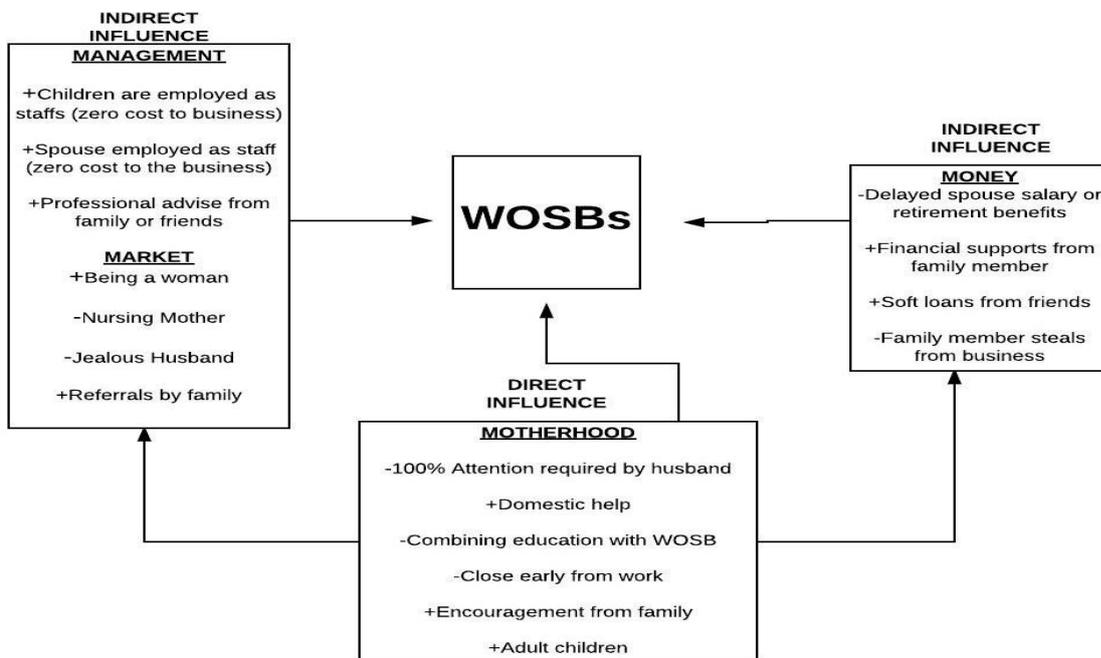
influences each respondent varies. Moreover, Figure 4 below depicts the various forms of motherhood’s influence (positive/negative & direct/indirect) on WOSBs in Lagos.

**Figure 3: Interviewed respondents (WOSBs) influenced by Motherhood factors (family/household context)**



Source: As depicted by Nvivo after coding the interview transcripts

**Figure 4: Various forms of motherhood’s influence on WOSBs in Lagos**



-“is a Negative influence and “+” is for Positive influence

Source: Developed by Authors

Signs: “-

Figure 4 above depicts how motherhood (household/family context) indirectly influence business growth by moderating women’s access to money, opportunities and management.

Besides, quotes from the interview transcripts are also shown in Table 2. These quotes are categorised into positive and negative influences.

*Table 2: Influence of motherhood (family context) on Money, Market, Management and WOSBs performance (Quotes)*

	MOTHERHOOD (FAMILY/HOUSEHOLD CONTEXT)	
	Positive influence	Negative Influences
<b>MONEY (access to money)</b>	<p>"My husband has been very supportive each time and again over the years. There are monies that were loaned and are never paid back" (Respondent B3).  <b>-Supportive Husband</b></p> <p>When I get a huge amount of money from my brother, I buy what I need for my sewing. That is how I get most of my sewing equipment I have today" (Respondent E1).  <b>-Supportive Brother</b></p>	<p>"My mum sometimes wants to give us money, but we do not collect. Myself and my husband decided that we do not want to take anything from them."            (Respondent C2).  <b>-Pride/protect the home against in-laws' influence</b></p>
<b>MARKET (opportunities)</b>	<p>"my brothers, they are like my model from time, I make clothe for them, and they wear, and they refer people to me" (Respondent C2).  <b>-Supportive Brothers</b></p>	<p>"I had the opportunity of getting some large-scale production that I would have loved to do. But I couldn't do it, because I could not stay away from my children for two weeks" (Respondent B3).  <b>-Nursing mother</b></p>
<b>MANAGEMENT (human resources)</b>	<p>"Recently, my son came in, and he is the one maintaining the books as he is a student of accounting. He made some amendments in the accounting system in such a way that the system improved greatly" (Respondent A3).  <b>-Free labour from children</b></p>	<p>"SMEDAN have invited us to so many exhibitions. They took us to China, but I could not go because I am a nursing mother, you know I could not leave my baby" (respondent D3).  <b>-Opportunity for further training/ market</b></p>
<b>BUSINESS PERFORMANCE</b>	<p>"Fashion designing business is a business that is very demanding. When my husband comes back from work, and I have delivery to do which I am unable to do, my husband does this delivery for me."            (Respondent D3).  <b>-Supportive spouse</b></p>	<p>"My husband and I have issues sometimes when I come home late. Now I have to close early before him to avoid any issues. It is not very easy.            Before I got married, I can work until 12 midnight, but I cannot do that now" (Respondent C2).  <b>-Reduced time @ work</b></p>

The quotations in Table 2 show that motherhood (household/family context) positively/negatively influence the performance of WOSBs in Lagos. Apart from the direct influences of motherhood on WOSBs performance; motherhood (household/family context) also moderates, i.e. indirect influence (positively/negatively) other factors – e.g. access to money, management/human resources and market/opportunities – influencing WOSBs in Lagos. This finding is in line with the conclusions of existing studies which shows that motherhood is essential for understanding women’s entrepreneurship (Chea, 2008; Brush de Bruin and Welter, 2009; Kothari, 2017). To further strengthen this conclusion, a word frequency query result shows that ‘family’, ‘husband’ and ‘children’ are among the ten words frequently used in all the interview transcripts (see Figure 5). Therefore, based on this preliminary result, motherhood plays a vital role in WOSBs. This evidence is also in line with

prior studies (see Jamali, 2009; Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009). Nevertheless, this initial study contributes to existing studies by showing the various forms (direct and indirect) by which motherhood influences WOSBs.

**Figure 5: Word Cloud (source: developed from respondents' responses)**



**Research Objective 2: How does the Meso/Macro-environment influence WOSBs?**

**Meso-environment Context**

Meso-environmental context includes intermediate structures/institutions linking macro-level factors and micro-level factors namely professional networks, business and trade associations (Granovetter, 1973; Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009). Based on the results of this preliminary study, the intermediate structures identified are the Nigerian Union of Tailors (NUT), Fashion Design Association of Nigeria (FADAN), and University alumni associations. Findings show that the meso-environment influences the WOSBs that were interviewed (see Figure 6 as depicted by Nvivo).

*Figure 6: Interviewed respondents (WOSBs) influenced by Meso-environment factors*

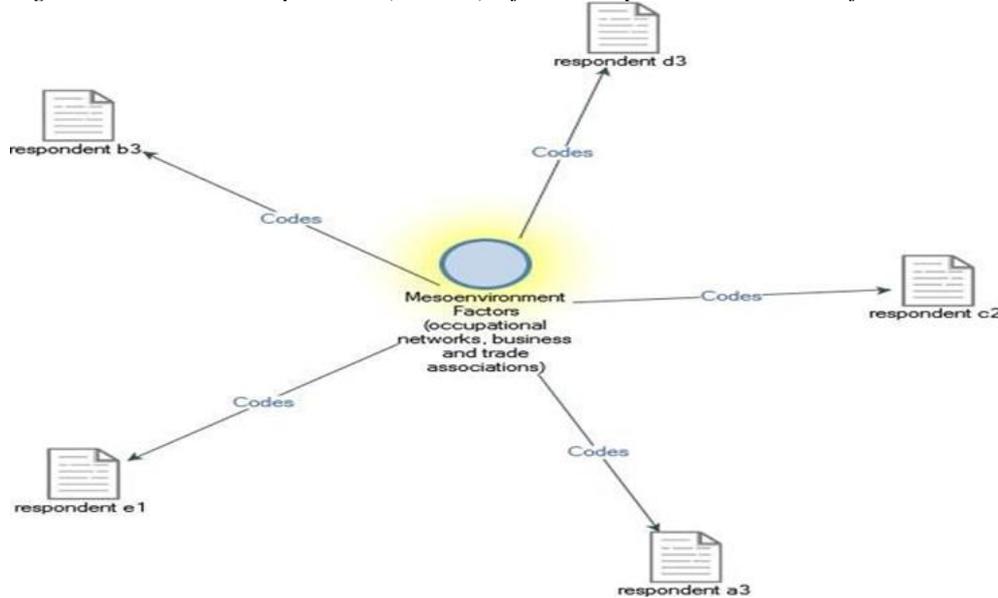
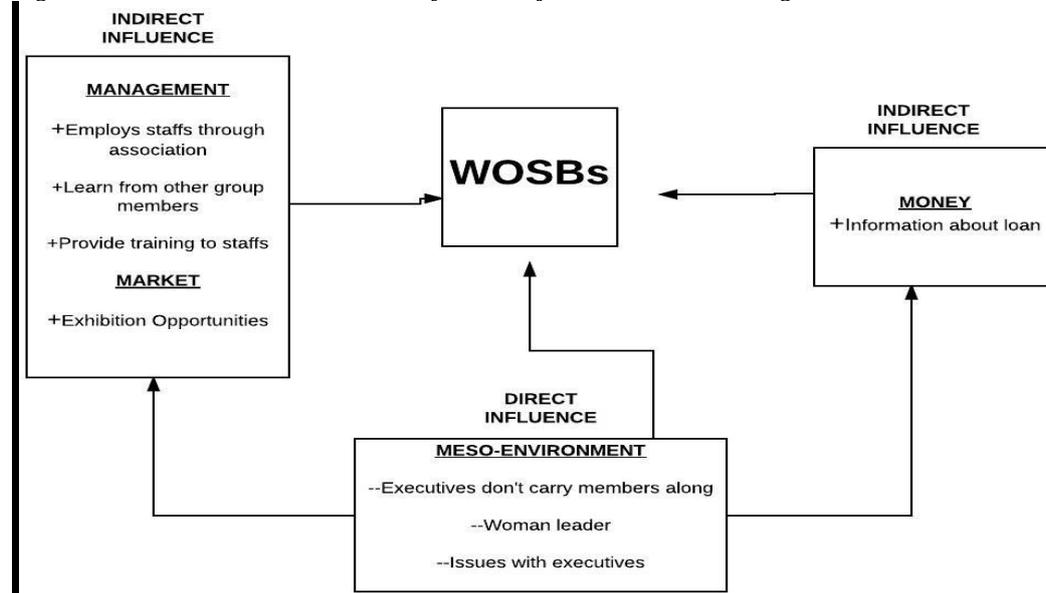


Figure 7 depicts how meso-environmental contexts directly/indirectly influence WOSBs. It also reveals how the meso-environmental factors mediate (indirect influence) other factors (such as money, management and market).

**Figure 7: How the meso-environment factors influence WOSBs in Lagos**



Note: “—” depicts negative influence and “+” depicts positive influence.

A sample of quotes from the interviewed transcripts is included in Table 3. The quotes are classified into positive and negative influence on the business growth of WOSBs.

**Table 3: Meso-environment factors influence money, market, management and WOSBs performance (Quotes).**

	MESOENVIRONMENT	
	Positive Influences	Negative Influences
<b>MONEY (access to money)</b>	"I recently applied for a government loan through information provided by my old university association" (Respondent B3). -Information about loan	
<b>MARKET (opportunities)</b>	"SMEDAN have invited me to so many exhibitions. They recently took us to china (for a trade fair)" - (Respondent D3). -Exhibition Opportunities	"We are actually not gaining anything. We are having issues with the leaders of FADAN. There is no unity but lots of controversies. The executives don't carry their members along. They keep everything for themselves.
<b>MANAGEMENT (human resources)</b>	FADAN links me up to a wider group of people. We learn from each other (Respondent B3). -Learning from other group members "basically sometimes, I employ my staffs through Fashion Designers Association of Nigeria (FADAN) or on my own" (Respondent D3). -Employed staffs through FADAN	One has not benefitted anything from them as much as I am concerning" (Respondent D3) -Issues with executives and female president
<b>BUSINESS PERFORMANCE</b>		

From Table 3, the finding (negative influence) supports the conclusions of Mama (1997), Woldie and Adersua (2004) and Madichie (2011) who posited that African women do not help

their colleagues. While the positive findings support the empirical evidence of Sorenso and Bringham (2008) and Hampton, Cooper and MCGOWN (2009) who evidenced that the mesoenvironment is beneficial for women entrepreneurs. However, this study contributes to the prior literature by showing the various ways by which meso-environment factors directly/indirectly influences WOSBs in Lagos, Nigeria.

**Macro- environment Factors**

Macro-environment issues cover the issue of culture, religious issues and government policies/support actions (Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009; Mazonde and Carmichael, 2016). From the preliminary investigation, Figure 8 reveals that macro-environment factors influence all the interviewed participants.

*Figure 8: Interviewed respondents (WOSBs) influenced by macroenvironment factor*

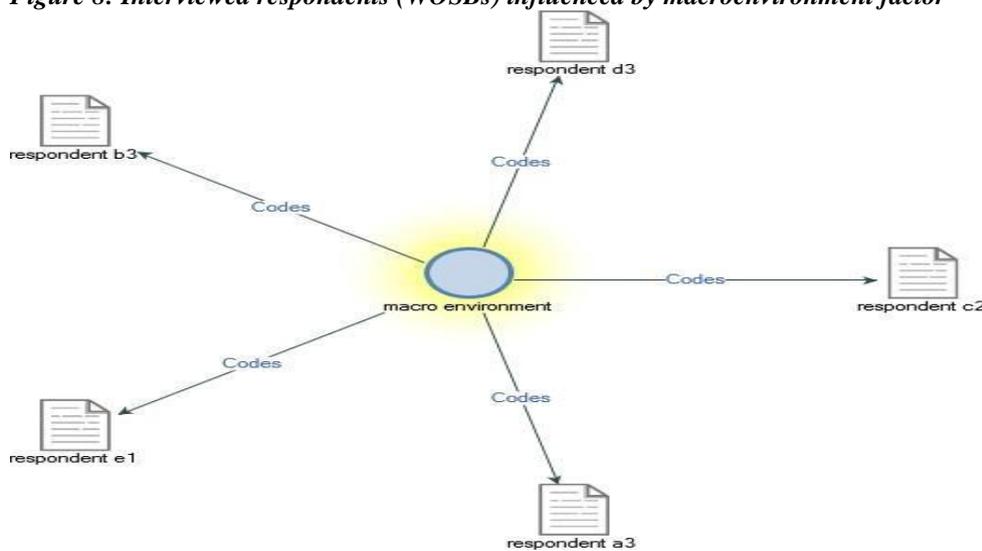
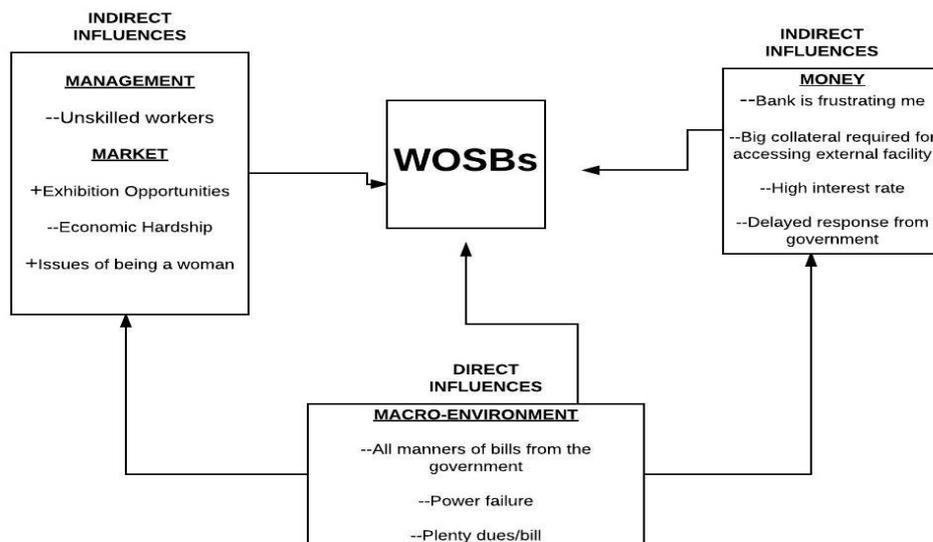


Figure 9 depicts how the macroenvironment influences WOSBs directly and indirectly.

*Figure 9: How the macro-environment (factors) influences WOSBs in Lagos*



Note: “—” depicts negative influence and “+” depicts positive influence.

Furthermore, the result of the preliminary study shows that the macro-environment factors

(culture, religion, government policies/support actions and economy situations) positively and negatively (directly/indirectly) influence WOSBs. Samples of quotations from the interview transcripts are categorised in Table 4 for clarity sake.

*Table 4: Macro-environment factors influencing money, market, management, motherhood and WOSBs performance*

	MACRO ENVIRONMENT	
	Positive Influences	Negative Influences
<b>MONEY (access to money)</b>		<p>"I have tried applying for the Bank of Industry (BOI) funds that they say they are releasing to women entrepreneurs in the fashion industry. We have done what we need to do. I have put all documents together, yet nothing is coming out. I just limit myself to my micro-finance bank that has been assisting me over the year." (Respondent D3).</p> <p><b>-Government support actions ineffective</b></p>
<b>MARKET (opportunities)</b>	<p>"I have more female clients than male clients because some women are restricted by their culture (especially the Northern culture) from having any man, other their husband, touch them" (Respondent D3).</p> <p><b>-Cultural issues that prevent men from touching women</b></p>	<p>"As the bible says we should be modestly dressed and not to expose our body. Sometimes, I have customers who come and say 'make hin show well well (meaning let the dress be very revealing). When such customers come and say I should do this. I usually disagree" (Respondent C2).</p> <p><b>-Religious Beliefs</b></p>
<b>MANAGEMENT (human resources)</b>	<p>"The church I worship at offers human resource training. They do this every year. We are taught how to deal with customers, how to do proper record keeping, marketing and advertising" (Respondent E1).</p> <p><b>-Religious doctrine</b></p>	
<b>MOTHERHOOD</b>		<p>"I wanted a loan, and the bank is frustrating me. I decided to give up until my husband get his retirement benefit which the government are yet to pay" (Respondent A3).</p> <p><b>-Banking issues</b></p>
<b>BUSINESS PERFORMANCE</b>	<p>"It is easier for men to want to do business with me. Men are usually drawn towards women. Although, some men do not believe that women can make clothes for them" (Respondent C2).</p>	<p>"They are disturbing me with plenty dues and bills of all sort. The moment you come out as a business, the government want you to pay that and pay this. They just come and look at your business and give you any bill they think fits your kind of your business. How much am I making?" (Respondent B3)</p> <p><b>-Dues and Bills</b></p>
	<p>"I am not discriminated against because many times when people, especially the opposite sex, know I am sewing, they are always impressed, and the next thing they ask me is can you sew for me? So being a woman makes me have more clients" (Respondent E1).</p> <p><b>-Issues of discrimination</b></p>	

From the quotes in Table 4, findings show that the macroenvironment plays a vital role in accessing money, employment/training for the management team, and identification of business opportunities. Besides, the macroenvironment also moderates the influence of motherhood on WOSBs (see Table 4). This evidence (showing the influence of macroenvironment) is in line with the conclusions of Brush, de Bruin and Welter (2009), Azmat (2013), and Mazonde and Carmichael (2016). However, this preliminary study contributes to existing literature by revealing how the macro-environment of WOSBs positively and negatively influence business growth.

### Research Objective 3: Suggested growth-strategies for WOSBs

To improve the negative influences identified in this investigation, David (2016) recommended the use of SWOT matrix to develop strategies to assist business growth. As such, David (2016) recommended that to develop alternative strategies that improve weaknesses, converts threat and exploit opportunities; the researcher should list the strengths and weaknesses. Secondly, the opportunities and threats should be listed. After that, the strengths and weaknesses should be matched with external opportunities and threats; and record the resultant strategies. A schematic representation of the SWOT matrix is presented below with the resultant growth strategies.

**Table5: Growth strategies for women-owned sewing businesses (WOSBs) in Lagos (SWOT matrix)**

	<b><u>Strengths (Internal: Motherhood contexts)</u></b>	<b><u>Weaknesses (Internal: Motherhood contexts)</u></b>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Access to capital with cheap finance cost and low-risk: Husbands, brothers and parents helped in the area of generating finance for running a business, purchasing sewing machines and other assets for running the sewing businesses (see Table 2).</li> <li>2. Free advertisements and referral opportunities: Family members helped to advertise sewn apparel and refer potential customers for free (see Table 2).</li> <li>3. Low management cost: Family members (such as husbands) do delivery of completed apparels to customers (Table 2).</li> <li>4. Trusted employees and low management cost: It was identified that staffs employed to steal from the business. Women entrepreneurs prefer to employ their children which presents cheap labour cost and also trust-employees (see Table 2).</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The issue of Ego: Some women refused to collect money from family members because of spouses' ego or to insulate against in-law's influence (see table 2).</li> <li>2. Child-care responsibilities: Inability to accept large-scale production because of child-care responsibilities (Table 2).</li> <li>3. Child-rearing and family roles: Inability to attend clothing exhibitions because of child-rearing and family roles (Table 2).</li> <li>4. Limited time spent at work: Limited number of hours spent at work to avoid confrontations with spouse (see Table 2).</li> </ol>
<b>Opportunities (External: Meso/Macro-environment)</b>	<b>SO Strategies</b>	<b>WO Strategies</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Financial support from associations: In this study, women entrepreneurs assessed business loans through associations such as University alumni association (Table 3).</li> <li>2. Apparel exhibitions: There are opportunities provided by sewing business association-FADAN (See Table3).</li> <li>3. Knowledge of others: Women have access to the knowledge of others within the business association they belong to.</li> <li>4. Well-trained Staffs: FADAN provides well-trained people that their members can hire (Table 3).</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Female entrepreneurs should deal with a female client. While the spouses, brothers and sons should deal with men that upheld cross-gender restrictions (S1, S2, O6).</li> <li>2. Ask spouse to obtain a loan on behalf of business from associations he belongs to such as University Alumni (S1, O1).</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Employ well-trained and trust-worthy female staffs (probably recommended by FADAN) to run the business and attend exhibitions when the business-owner is at home attending to child-care responsibilities and family roles. The employment of female staffs will also attract male-clients (W2, W4, O4, O8).</li> <li>2. Suggest to business associations to set-up platforms (such as Whatsapp groups) through which knowledge can be shared among members. This way members do not have to meet regularly before</li> </ol>

5. The government of Nigeria provided £2Million fashion funds for women-entrepreneurs who own sewing businesses.

6. Cultural requirements (such as that of the Hausa's- in the Northern Part of Nigeria) prohibits women clients from associating with men other than their husbands (see Table 4). As such, women clients prefer women to sew for them.

7. Training opportunities: Some religious sect offers training opportunities to their members and non-members.

8. Opposite attraction: Male clients are attracted to female entrepreneurs (Table 4).

knowledge, and relevant information can be shared among members (W2, W4, O3).

**Threats (External: Meso/Macro-environment)**

1. Female leaders (such as that of FADAN) don't carry their fellow female entrepreneurs along (Table 3).
2. Loans provided by the government are difficult to access (See Table 4).
3. Religious beliefs of female entrepreneur conflicts with customer's sewing requirements (see Table 4).
4. Banks are not willing to release credit finance to female entrepreneur.
5. Unstructured bills and dues from government officials (see Table 4). This reduces profit generated drastically.

**ST strategies**

1. Ask husband to apply for a loan on behalf of the business in case the banks prefer men to women entrepreneurs (S1, T4).
2. Ask family members to market sewn apparel in church, mosques and other religious gathering. This way, clients that have similar religious beliefs are referred to the business (S2, T3)

**WT strategies**

1. Arrange business closure at times when bills and dues are being collected (W4, T5)

**Conclusions**

The review of existing studies revealed that prior studies have often identified the negative influence of gender-aware constructs (motherhood, meso-and macro-environment). This conference paper extends women's entrepreneurship study by investigating how motherhood, meso- and macro-environment positively and negatively influence the business growth of women-owned sewing businesses (WOSBs) in Lagos-State, Nigeria. Furthermore, the conference paper suggests, using SWOT matrix, growth-strategies for WOSBs. By using the SWOT matrix, female entrepreneurs can look inwards instead of waiting for support from stakeholders such as the government, which may never arrive.

In conclusion, this conference paper is the first phase of an ongoing research study.

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