Female Entrepreneurship in Russia: Women Wanted!

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Abstract

Female entrepreneurship, as a subject of the academic research, has gained a lot of popularity in the recent years. A considerable amount of attention to this field has been caused by the growing recognition that female entrepreneurship has a profound impact on the economic development. Nevertheless, the potential of female entrepreneurs is far from being fully realized in many economies. Having chosen Russia as the area of investigation, the researchers intend to examine female entrepreneurship and discover specific obstacles contained in it. Therefore, this study aims at discovering preventing factors that dissuade Russian women from stepping into entrepreneurship.

For the purposes of this work, qualitative research approach is followed, with the actors view and qualitative content analysis being applied. Case studies and interviews are used to collect data about female entrepreneurs' opinion on the general state of female entrepreneurship in Russia, their attitudes toward it and assumptions about existing barriers.

The results of the research demonstrate that distinguished and described barriers of female entrepreneurship hold different level of influence. The researchers also emphasize that actual barriers do not fully comply with those that are generally perceived by Russians and broadly described by scholars. From the study it is revealed that the most influential barriers are the following: managerial incompetence together with financial illiteracy, mistrust to the government and the myth of female entrepreneurship, with corruption and social prejudices being of less significance.

The conclusion can also be drawn that the revealed myth of female entrepreneurship influences women's attitude towards entrepreneurship in Russia to much more extent than other obstacles. Some recommendations regarding possible alterations to current state of female entrepreneurship in Russia as well as suggestions to future female entrepreneurs, such as improving entrepreneurial environment, educational toolkit for female entrepreneurs, the importance of telling inspirational stories, are presented.

Keyword(s):

Entrepreneurship, Female Entrepreneur, Female Entrepreneurship, Female Entrepreneurship in Russia, Female Entrepreneurship Barriers, High Potential Female Entrepreneurship.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Today, entrepreneurial activity and its development are crucial factors for an economy of any country on both macro and micro levels. It is considered one of the driving forces of the national economy as well as one of the indicators of economic health. This kind of economic activity is quite recent in Russia and has its own remarkable history. Russia’s ideology in the communist period did not favor entrepreneurial development, it was even hostile to it. Almost all the firms during this period belonged to the government. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, a new political entity – Russia – began to exist on the world political arena. Among all other transitions, the main one happened in the economy: planned economy where the market and private property did not exist, was replaced by the market economy. It gave people lots of new opportunities, and entrepreneurship was one of them.

As for women's role, their involvement was insufficient due to common attitude towards women's roles and obligations in the society. What is more, the norms, formed within the historical development of the country and reinforced during the Soviet period, still continue to determine the role of a woman in Russia. During that time women could work only in certain positions, such as teachers, doctors, social workers and so on – the idea that women could participate in business did not exist at all (Sätre, 2016). Still, most of the Russian women prefer to be ‘happily married’ housewives and mothers, rather than taking the path of struggling in the man-dominated business environment and pursuing the career goals. Possibly, this is a matter of habit, hardened by generations and culture. There is no shared vision why the majority of women in Russia do not go into entrepreneurship: whether this is because of cultural issues, poor economic conditions, fear of risks, or everything together. This is what we: Aleksandra and Nataliya, the authors of this thesis, would like to find out what prevents women from starting their entrepreneurial journey in Russia.
1.2 The issue of female entrepreneurship

During our initial research we found out plenty of facts that prove that the present state of female leadership and entrepreneurship in Russia is far from being perfect. A 2015 report from Ward Howell found out that Russian women account for just 1% of CEOs in the country’s top 160 firms in comparison with 4.4% in the Fortune 500 in the US. And they make up only 8% of company board members according to Credit Suisse (and less than 5%, according to the ILO), compared to a global average of 12%. Among other reasons, this may be explained by a rather high level of gender inequality. According to the Global Gender Gap Report (2016), compiled by the World Economic Forum, Russia is ranked 75 out of 144 countries in terms of having a gender gap. The state of entrepreneurship complies with these data: it is widely represented by men (77%), while the number of female entrepreneurs is only 23% according to the latest research of the Ministry of the Economy of the Russian Federation.

Female participation in entrepreneurship in other countries remains relatively stable or is on the rise. The USA is ranked the first on the list as the best place for female entrepreneurship due to its favorable business environment and women's job mobility in the private sector, with 40% of new entrepreneurs being women in 2016 (Bouraoui, 2018). The Australian Bureau of Statistics indicates that in 2016 women comprise 34% of all small business owners, which is a 46% increase during the past two decades (Waters, 2017). In the EU in general women also constitute 34.4% of self-employed and 30% of start-up entrepreneurs, where the leaders are Sweden, Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands, according to the Institute of Entrepreneurship Development. The number of self-employed women in the United Kingdom, in accordance with OECD (The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) survey on Inclusive Entrepreneurship Policies (2016), is almost half of self-employed men, with women being also half as likely to be involved in setting up and managing new businesses.

The current state of the female entrepreneurship in Russia is also reflected in the position of Russia in the Female Entrepreneurship Index. To evaluate the state of female entrepreneurship in different countries, Female Entrepreneurship Index (FEI), developed by Global Entrepreneurship and Development Institute (GEDI), can be used. Three indicators are used to calculate this index: the state of entrepreneurial environment, the state of entrepreneurial ecosystem and entrepreneurial aspirations. The leading positions out of 77 that are participating in this calculation are the USA, Australia, the UK, Denmark, the Netherlands, France, Iceland,
Sweden, Finland and Norway (the scores are represented in Figure 1), while Russia is only 56th in this list with the result of 35.6 (out of maximum 100) according to the latest publication. The average gap between the first placed countries and Russia is about 35 points. This serves as a proof to the fact that the state of female entrepreneurship in Russia is far from ideal, and this is reasonable to study the reasons of these dismal outcomes in order to find a path that may lead to the improvements.

Figure 1 *The FEI index of top ten countries in comparison with Russia*

[Graph showing FEI index of top ten countries with Russia highlighted at 35.6]


Thus, in comparison with the leading countries in this sphere it is obvious that Russia, with only 23% of female owned businesses, significantly falls behind. Women constitute an important part of the labor force, but they remain underrepresented in the entrepreneurship sphere there. However, some positive outlooks can be witnessed. According to the WBI survey, 73% of Russian women have a positive attitude to women entrepreneurship: 38% percent would like to start a business and are potentially prepared for it, while 14% plan to do so in the near future or have already started a company (Ernst & Young, 2017). Though prospects may seem optimistic, there
is still plenty of room for improvement. We hope that we will be able to find out the reasons of backlog in female entrepreneurship in our country and contribute our findings to its development.

1.3 Theoretical problematizing

Before ultimately defining the topic of our thesis we looked through the previous studies conducted on this or quite close topics to use them as a point of departure for our work. Hereunder are the two articles that we find the most relevant and theoretically sound and that, at the same time, are two good examples to illustrate why it is important to continue the research on female entrepreneurship in Russia.

The article which inspired us is “Women’s entrepreneurship in Russia: impacts from the Soviet system” by Ann-Mari Sätre (2016). As the heading of the article suggests, it represents the study of how the social role of a woman has altered after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and how the norms, formed during this period and before, still continue to determine the role of a woman in modern Russia. The author states that the social norms have not been prone to significant changes and, as a result, women are forced to take the reality as it is and reject the idea of becoming entrepreneurs. Though the article is very precise at describing how the norms continue to influence possible female entrepreneurs, it does not highlight other possible problems that are being faced. Therefore, our next step is to go further and reveal other factors in other spheres as well that hinder female entrepreneurship in Russia.

The second article which aroused our interest is “Women’s Entrepreneurship Development in Russia Today” by Tatiyana Korsun (2016). This research focuses more on the current situation of female entrepreneurship in common as well as gives very important numbers on the topic. Here the author analyzes the key factors that influence women to become entrepreneurs such as motivation, social status, education and so on. Following men, women try to occupy strong positions in the business community. The author manages to describe the current situation; however, she describes only positive aspects of the topic, neglecting the negative side. In our work, we try to view critically and mention the factors, that prevent women from becoming entrepreneurs.

The articles, reports and studies, relevant to this subject, are of undeniable significance, however, they provide insufficient knowledge about the context of female entrepreneurship in Russia. This literature describes only a part of a big puzzle we would like to look into. Moreover,
the number of studies that analyze the factors that prevent women in Russia from becoming entrepreneurs is rather low. That is why we believe that our intention to study and develop the topic in question will not be vain and will prove to be valuable.

It is also worth emphasizing that in the beginning of our process of writing this thesis we were fully aware of the unpredictability of the future results. We did not exclude the possibility that barriers that are holding women back might be of a less scale than we presume or even might be not where we expect them to be. That is why we did our utmost not to fall victim to our own beliefs and hypotheses and not to interpret information in a biased way. Consequently, we stayed open-minded and were eager to face the outcomes that perhaps may be quite different from the previous studies within this academic field.

1.4 Research question and research purpose

To address the issue ‘Why the number of female entrepreneurs in Russia is much lower compared to men?’ there are billions of ways that one can choose to go in order to search for the answers. There a lot of factors that influence the present state of female entrepreneurship in Russia to be considered: history, social changes, demographical indicators, economic development, cultural issues and so on: this list is almost endless. As a result, it becomes evident that it is almost impossible to study all the factors and their influences within the framework of this thesis, thus we prefer to create empirical knowledge with depth rather than width. That is why the primary object of this research is to answer the following research question: ‘What prevents women from becoming entrepreneurs in Russia?’ We explored the existing literature on this subject, defined the possible barriers that could hinder female entrepreneurship in Russia and investigated what the female entrepreneurs think about the circumstances.

We believe that this particular study is important in terms of the facts that, firstly, the gap between male and female entrepreneurs is rather large and needs to be narrowed to ensure stable economic growth which, we think, is possible only in terms of equality. Secondly, we have personal interest in this study, as we share the feelings of women in Russia when it comes to social inequality and want to improve the situation as we are going to live in this context and maybe become entrepreneurs someday. As Mahatma Gandhi said once: “Be the change you want to see in the world”. So, we want to see some changes in our country and want to be a part of this change by having something done. We hope that this research will be helpful for women who are
hesitating or thinking over the idea of becoming entrepreneurs in Russia as well as for social and economic organizations that are interested in this subject. It would be significantly appreciated if we could see women starting their entrepreneurial challenge with the encouragement from our research.

1.5 Research journey

While entrepreneurship holds broad macroeconomic and social significance, it is about people, their patterns of behavior, relationships, as well as the common presumptions dominating in the society and affecting people's conduct. That is why in order to understand the present state of female entrepreneurship in Russia, this human dimension should be examined. Therefore, we intended to look into the experiences of female entrepreneurs and the ways they navigated the business environment. From here, it then becomes possible to examine the patterns and problems of the development of this sphere in Russia. To achieve this, we could not manage that without relevant literature reflected in our literature review as well as methodology review that guided our way throughout the writing and research process.

After that we present the core of our research: we interviewed a number of candidates using our networks of relatives and friends. After gathering and analyzing the information received from the interviews and case studies we present the data with the usage of a beautiful story line that reflects all the facts in a colourful way. In the end, we give our opinions and recommendations on how the situation can be improved from the perspectives that emerged during our research to make our contribution to the research topic.
2. Layout of the tower: Methodology

One day a decision to erect a tower in a city was made. A lot of architects were invited to decide on how it would be build. As a result, there were a lot of suggestions, all with their own advantages and disadvantages as well. All of them seemed to be right, however, the main task before starting the construction works was to find the best approaches that would suit the city and the society and serve their purposes in the end. This is how methodology is perceived by us: it is a guideline, that helps the authors to decide on how they are going to build their scientific research, which techniques suit their research purposes and which do not, and which scientific material to use while creating the thesis and working out a plan. As a result, a methodology chapter provides a reader with the approaches and techniques that are used to build our scientific tower called “Thesis” to answer our research question.

2.1 Methodological views: the actors view

The choice of methodological view for an academic work in terms of the knowledge creation process is recognized to be highly essential (Arbnor & Bjerke 2009). Providing brief outlook on three existing approaches, we will select the most suitable one for our research study and clarify the choice we made.

The analytical view implies that reality is comprised of independent and describable variables. That is why, the researcher, aiming at detecting cause-effect relations, forms hypotheses that can be verified or falsified during observation of reality. (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009). However, it fails to take into account complexities and dynamics within reality and interdependencies between parameters. Besides, it disregards the researcher's subjectivity that has a huge impact on study results.

The systems view, on the other hand, perceives reality as a system where components are interdependent and cannot be studied in isolation. System, in this case, contains both objective and subjective facts that are subject to researcher’s analysis. However, focusing on whole systems and interdependencies, this approach ignores single components or individuals (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009).

Finally, the actors view regards reality as socially constructed and subjectively perceived by the researcher. The researcher's frame of reference, pre-understanding and creation of meaning
are crucial since they enable one to actually construct “reality” throughout the research process. This approach also considers complexities and dynamics and views every situation as unique in its special context.

From the existing methodological views, our choice fell on the actors view since it considers reality to be a social construction, with participants being an integral part of it. We are convinced that humans and reality are interconnected, that they “stand in a mutual, dialectic relation to each other”, influencing each other, and that “we create reality at the same time as reality creates us” (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009, p. 75). Given that our perceptions of reality are shaped by our personal experiences, social influences, and basic assumptions, reality itself is highly subjective and, therefore, cannot be generalized or seen as something separate “out there”. Being writers of this thesis, we act as knowledge creators and play an active part in constructing a certain understanding of a topic. We also perform not only as narrators or, metaphorically speaking, directors of the “play”, but also main characters in it, being actively involved in the research process and interacting with the participants. Consequently, it may be firmly stated that the produced knowledge will have a personal character.

2.2 Qualitative Approach

Qualitative and quantitative methods are the major kinds of approaches to conduct a research. The quantitative method focuses mostly on verifying the existing affirmation by extracting necessary information from the given data and transferring it to numbers, tables, graphs and models to conduct analysis and calculations (Creswell, 2009). The researchers that use this kind of approach have a clear vision of what they want to do and what they want to verify or confute. This leads to the strongly result-oriented process. (Patton, 2015)

There is never right or wrong research approach. A researcher chooses methods that suit the purposes of the research better (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). We select and build on our research mostly with the help of the qualitative approach. Qualitative approach is used to get a better understanding of a phenomenon or to describe a situation, which is often obtained by in-depth interviews along with other data gathering methods (Fisher, 2007). The researchers that use this kind of approach often do not have a clear idea about the final outcomes. As a result, they actively participate in the research process and contribute their subjective perspectives (Patton, 2015). This approach provides an opportunity for the researchers to step beyond the sphere of the known and
enter the world of the participants and see the world from their perspective (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), as this method is aimed at answering the ‘whys’ and ‘hows’ of the human behaviors, opinions, ideas and experiences – the information which is difficult to receive through more quantitatively-oriented methods of the data collection (Creswell, 2007). As the collected information is more natural because of its different facets, it can build the ground for a better understanding of people’s meaning.

In his book Patton (2015) also describes seven qualitative approach contributions to knowledge-generating: using this method one can illuminate meaning, study how things work, capture stories to understand people’s perspectives and experiences, elucidate how systems function and the consequences for people’s lives, understand context: how and why it matters, identify unanticipated outcomes and make case comparisons to discover important patterns and themes across cases. Considering the topic of our thesis, these contributions are relevant for our study, as we will try to make the same contributions: for instance, we need to study how the entrepreneurial system works in Russia, we set our topic in a particular context and study why it matters, as well identify the consequences of our studies and their influence and importance for other people. That is why we apply qualitative approach to gather the necessary information and to describe the phenomenon of our research topic.

### 2.3 Research design

Within the framework of the qualitative approach, we conduct empirical studies. The most frequently used types of data collection are observations and interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), but not only these. For our empirical study to be carried out, we use two empirical research approaches: case studies through the collection of secondary information and primary data collection through one-on-one interviews with the chosen female entrepreneurs. Further we will proceed with describing each of the chosen method.

After the information is gathered, we should process and systematize, and further analyze the information we received. We do it with the help of content analysis method.
2.3.1 Case study

Case study are referred to the primary as well as secondary data collection – data which has already been used (Hox & Boeije, 2005). Due to the fact that we could not communicate with some female entrepreneurs in order to enrich our study we include the case studies of successful women based on the secondary information collection. Secondary sources consist of the information that has been gathered and often interpreted by other researchers and recorded in books, articles and other publications. Secondary sources, while still highly useful, were written by someone else after an event or about a document or a person and can therefore only serve for the purpose of furthering an argument if the source has credibility in the given field (Nordquist, 2017). A secondary source may include even more information and details about more aspects and issues of the event or a person than a primary source did (Sproull, 2002).

Case study is a method of analyzing a given situation, and with the findings from this analysis to enforce this or that research argument (Yin, 2009). A case usually includes the detailed description of the situation and the previous events. The main goal of this method is to gather information for further analysis (Tranfield & Starkey, 1998). The context is highly crucial for this method, as all the events and their outcomes could have happened only in the given context, and sometimes, it can only be applicable for this one case only. That is why a researcher should always keep the context in mind while doing a research (Stake, 2005). The object of this study can vary: it could be a company, a working place, a person or an event. The results gained using this method can create a basis for a new theory to emerge (Eisenhardt, 1989).

The method of case study is wise to use when there is a need to analyze real situations and problems, which are hard to solve and structure, and where context is highly important (Tranfield & Starkey, 1998). It works well for a small-scale research such as within a master thesis, for instance, as it can be performed by one researcher, is not very time or money consuming (Yin, 2009). Of course, this method like any other has its own drawbacks. There may be lots of information on the needed topic, and sometimes it very hard to choose and find relevant data. What is more, these data may be subjective, and it is can be impossible to prove the verity of the information. This method requires elaborate handling and regimentation of the collected data (Eisenhardt, 1989). Being aware of these drawbacks, we will use this method carefully, as it is a source of interesting and unique data needed for our research.
There are also two reasons why we chose to use the method of case study. The first one is that we are strictly limited in time, as a result, we are not able to communicate with all of the representatives of the female entrepreneurial community as we would like to, so we had to limit the number of our interviewees. The second reason is connected with the potential interviewees. Sometimes, they are very reluctant to spend time and be interviewed by students for several reasons: they think it is a waste of their time, they do not want to share their stories for some private reasons, an interview for a master thesis seem very strange to them as this kind of study is very rarely used by students in Russia for academic purposes, or they see themselves as ‘superstars’ and are arrogant in a way to communicate with just students (Strekalova, 2014). But the most common reason is that some of the candidates are very busy and simply cannot find extra time for a range of interviews, as we are interested in more than one occasional interview. That is why we include relevant case studies of Russian companies, founded by females to enrich our research.

There are several criteria of our choice of this or that company of the female entrepreneur. The companies chosen for the case study, are to be mature and successful so that they could provide us with qualified information about starting-up process and conditions it involves. The female entrepreneurs should furnish society with the stories of their success and provide financial information about their companies such as annual reports, cash flow statements and so on, so we could analyze them and make necessary conclusions. We chose the candidates from different segments with different scale of business in order to represent industrial variety, and as a result, to have a larger variety of barriers that the chosen female entrepreneurs faced or continue facing. We collected necessary data from biographies, journal articles, website publications with the view of making an empirical analysis about Russian female entrepreneurs.

After careful study of the market and eliminating the irrelevant options, we decided on two most suitable variants from various industries: fitness and IT. These companies are respectfully the following: World Class and InfoWatch Group as they are the examples of successful female entrepreneurship in Russia, rather sustainable in the market and are famous within the Russian society which results in great variety of data to study and consider. We decided to have only two examples of case studies, as we think it is a better idea to focus more on the primary data collection and to get information from the first source, as there is a possibility that the information given in the articles and interviews could be tampered.

We start with Olga Slutsker, the founder of World Class. World Class is a fitness company founded in 1990 in Moscow. Today it is operating 40 own and 43 franchised premium segment
fitness clubs in 32 cities in four countries. The fitness clubs of this chain are considered the best in Russia, and the most expensive ones.

Then we will proceed with the story of success of famous Russian IT entrepreneur, President of the “InfoWatch” Group of companies and co-founder and ex-CEO of antivirus security software company ‘Kaspersky Lab, as well as one of the wealthiest women in Russia and one of the most influential figures in the Russian IT industry, Natalya Kasperskaya.

After presenting our case studies we proceed with the stories of our interviewees.

2.3.2 Interviews

Primary data can be defined as information collected firsthand from such sources as experiments surveys and interviews. This is basic and original material to provide a researcher with raw evidence (Nordquist, 2017). There are several reasons why researches are looking for primary data: the information needed is unavailable or hidden or has never been gathered before, so they have to do it themselves (O'Hair, 2001). Interviews provide a researcher with raw data and new facts that after further analysis can be used to support, for instance, the research claim (Booth et al., 2008).

It goes without saying that this method has some disadvantages. The major ones are connected with trustworthiness, as the data collected from the human sources are subject to a number of distortions because of such factors as selective recall, selective perceptions, and purposeful or unintentional omission or addition of the information. Therefore, the data from the primary sources are not necessarily accurate data even though they come from firsthand sources (Sproull, 2002). Besides, this method is very time consuming, as the researches spend much time on preparations and communicating itself with people and processing and analyzing the acquired information. What is more, the meetings or talks may happen more than once or twice, so the researches should plan their time wisely, especially if they need to complete their research on time if they are working within the time frames. Taking into account all these factors we try to make a stable timetable of interviews to have extra time to work with the received information and to draw necessary conclusions.

As far as the interviews are concerned, they are one of the major sources of primary data. The main goal of an interview is to collect ideas, visions and opinions of individuals (Hox & Boeije, 2005). Depending on the purposes of an interview, it can be structured, semi-structured
and even unstructured at all (Edwards & Holland, 2013). In case of a structured interview, an interviewer conducts a questionnaire before the interview and asks the questions strictly in accordance with the list and in the given order (Kvale & Brinkman, 2008). While structured interviews have a rigorous list of questions which does not allow one to divert, semi-structured interviews are more open, giving an opportunity for new ideas to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the interviewee says (Kvale & Brinkman, 2008). In our research we use semi-structured interviews as they allow to have a basis of prepared questions in order not to forget to ask about things which are of significant importance for our research, and at the same time provide freedom to ask extra questions which emerged in the process of the interview.

The types of question can be different starting from closed simple yes/no questions and proceeding with more open types of questions which give an interviewee more freedom to answer and, as a result, tell an interviewer more (Edwards & Holland, 2013). We include questions of various types both in our list and during the interviews when new interesting topics for discussion emerged to have a more vivid dialogue and give our interviewees an opportunity to tell us a story, rich with interesting facts. All interviews were held in the presence of both authors of the thesis so that to have different views and impressions and later discuss and analyze from two perspectives.

Speaking about the more practical part, we make use of our personal networks to find potential interviewees. We had several criteria for our search so that the future interviewee could fit our research target group. We interview two kinds of candidates. First are those who tried to enter the market creating their own businesses, but for whatever reasons failed to succeed in their journey and left the market no more than 5 years ago to have a better practical and fresh insight to the real obstacles female entrepreneurs face in Russia. Second type includes female entrepreneurs who are currently running their businesses successfully to learn what is needed to overcome the barriers and to use their stories as inspiration for future female entrepreneurs. By ‘successfully’ we mean the assessment of the economic indicators which define the success of the company such as profits, presence and being no less than 5 years in the market and so on. We believe that having the opinions of female entrepreneurs from various industries enrich our research. Our interviews operated or are operating in such industries as beauty services, fashion, e-commerce, education, legal services, food preparing, marketing and advertisement, IT solutions and accounting.

To start our communication with all of the interviewees, our first step was to reach them through various kinds of social networks: via chats in Instagram, Facebook or via e-mails and to find out whether they were eager to participate in such kind of activity. After receiving a number of positive replies, taking into consideration their and our time limits, we started to schedule first
one-on-one interviews to get to know them better and to get first pieces of information. Then on the basis of our first meetings we created a more personalized schedule for the next set of interviews for almost all of the interviewees. All in all, we interviewed 10 female entrepreneurs, however, in our thesis we include 4 stories, that from our point of view were the most exciting and information-rich for our research topic, as they provided us with most interesting facts, bright experiences and insights and opinions on the current condition of female entrepreneurship in Russia. These are the stories of the following entrepreneurs: Lena, Elena, Svetlana and Olga. Other female entrepreneurs will be introduced as well and represented as a strong voice of Russian female entrepreneurs throughout all the stories.

Before our meetings we forwarded our interviewees the topic in question and kindly asked them to think over the topic we would like to discuss with them before the meeting. For the following meetings we conducted a questionnaire to make an interview process easier and not to forget something important as we were still a bit nervous in the process. To reduce our and possible candidates’ anxiety, we tried to choose the informal places such as cafeterias to have a more casual chitchat over a cup of coffee, or, if it was possible, we met at their offices, where they were in their element and more confident (Edward & Holland, 2013).

We conducted the interviews in our native (Russian) language both in person and with the help of other resources such as e-mails, phone calls and through Skype sessions. It goes without saying that one-on-one interviews give an interviewer an opportunity to see the candidate and witness the element of non-verbal communication, which sometimes can tell you more than words (Eunson, 2015). However, we understood that for some candidates it was almost impossible to leave their workplaces during their worktime, and they wanted to head straight home to see their loved ones after a long and tiring workday, so we actively used the benefits of virtual connections. Besides, such a method was more cost efficient for us, as all “coffees and bagels” during the interviews were totally on us.

Ethics is a very important issue for the researchers to keep in mind (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In order not to infringe on anybody’s rights, we asked for permission to record the interviews to have continuous access to them during the writing process so that not to miss something important. To keep privacy some of the candidates asked us not to provide their surnames, but only names. We kindly fulfilled this request for all our interviewees embedded here. That is why the readers see only the names in the section, where we describe these stories.

In order to deliver our readers a clear and complete story of each female entrepreneur, we provide comprehensive information about each case, which perhaps partly does not have a close
relation to our research topic. However, it cannot be separated from the context. We hope that our readers could understand our intention and enjoy reading the complete stories. We also hope that this part of our field research will help us gain certain experience and provide us with a holistic view on economic as well as social happenings in our country in the sphere of entrepreneurship, which will reinforce our understanding of the present state and give us an ability to look forward and make predictions about the future.

2.4 Qualitative content analysis

After we finished with conducting our interview, we start with work with the received information using qualitative content analysis approach. Qualitative content analysis can be defined as “an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytic rules and step by step models, without rash quantification” (Mayring, 2000, p. 2). Researchers regard it as a flexible method for the analysis of the data (Cavanagh, 1997).

The goal of this approach is to identify important themes and categories within the body of the content, and to provide a rich description of the social reality created by those themes and categories as they are implemented in the certain setting (Mayring, 2000). Through careful data preparation, coding, and interpretation, the results of qualitative content analysis can support the development of new theories and models, as well as proving the existing theories and providing more detailed descriptions of the particular settings or phenomena.

A researcher can choose a specific type of the content analysis approach according to his/her theoretical and substantive interests and the problem in question (Weber, 1990). The differentiation of content analysis is limited to classifying it as primarily a qualitative versus quantitative research methods (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The three types of the qualitative content analysis approach are conventional, directed and summative approaches (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Conventional approach is usually used with a study design which aim is to describe a phenomenon (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This type of design can be applied when the existing theory or research literature on a phenomenon is limited. Researchers avoid using preconceived categories (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002), instead allowing the categories and names for categories to flow from the data.
Directed approach is used when the existing theory or prior research about a phenomenon already exist but are incomplete or would benefit from further researches (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The goal of a directed approach is to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory. Existing theory or research can help focus the research question. It can provide predictions about the variables of interest or about the relationships among variables, thus helping to determine the initial coding scheme or relationships between codes. This has been referred to as deductive category application (Mayring, 2000).

In terms of summative approach, data analysis starts with the search for the occurrences of the identified words (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Keywords derive from depending on the goal and the interests of a researcher or a literature review (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The usage of this approach provides the insights into how words are actually used.

Speaking about our own research we choose a combination of directed and summative approaches, as a conventional one does not suit our research due to the fact that the research literature on the phenomenon of female entrepreneurship is not limited, and we use preconceived categories in the data processing. We believe this combination is a good match to the research objectives as well as the used methodological tools.

A research should keep in mind that despite the chosen type of the content analysis approach, six important question should be surely addressed (Krippendorff, 2004): which data should be analyzed, how the data are defined, from whom the data are received, which context is relevant, what the boundaries of the analysis and what should be measured. The answers to these questions help us capture the most crucial and sufficient data for our research.

When it comes to the analysis itself, the analysis shall start with putting all the transcripts and collected data together (Yin, 2009). It should be mentioned that all the interviews were firstly translated into English. Our next step was to divide the data into topics we needed in terms of objectives and the purpose of our study, which finalized in the table, presented in our findings in chapter 6.

In the beginning of the data analysis process, we reread all the transcripts to have a general understanding and perspective of what the interviewees told us. The categories then were chosen to extract the necessary data: “is an entrepreneur”, “has higher education”, “has additional education”, “experienced difficulties with financials”, “experienced difficulties with marketing”, “experienced difficulties with management”, “experienced difficulties with cultural prejudices”, “experienced difficulties with corruption”, “count on governmental support”. The answers were
than highlighted in the texts and the table was formed according to the answers given by the female entrepreneurs.

Besides, we also proceeded the data with the help of the keywords. We arranged the data according to the key words “education”, “barriers”, “the beginning of career”, “business mistakes”, “advice”, “views on entrepreneurship” and many others so that we could easily find the needed data in the full scope of the texts.

### 2.5 Limitations

Our values and opinions are deeply laid in our minds. These deeply-laid visions form our frames of reference, and as result, sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Sometimes it very hard to see something from another perspective, as things are perceived from a personal point of view that has been formed by personal background, experience, country of origin, gender, and so on. Being aware of these internal limitations from out courses during our master studies and since there are two authors of this thesis with various backgrounds we do our utmost to look upon things differently and critically challenging our understandings and visions.

Speaking about external factors, we assume that the geographical factor is the first limitation to bear in mind. By this we mean that the problem of regional inequality is extremely acute in Russia nowadays. Some regions are many times more developed that others (Kuznetsova, 2015). The main reason for that is, of course, the territory the country occupies. However, it is not the only reason. Most scholars today (Belkina, 2015; Tarasov, 2017) state this happens because of the high level of concentration of business and economic activity in places, where the level of life standards and incomes is high so that businesses could prosper and benefit from these factors. Due to this fact we claim that our research cannot be conducted and our findings cannot be applied to the poorly developed regions, where the level of the entrepreneurial activity is rather low. Besides, it is impossible for us to represent the vast geographical differences of interviewees – that is the second reason why we will focus on female entrepreneurs from big industrial centers (Moscow, St Petersburg, Kazan, Kirov and Samara – the cities where the female entrepreneurs who participate in our research are having or used to have their businesses).

We also realize that there is a great deal of successful women to interview and interesting cases that are worth studying. However, this may take us endless amount of time to analyze this variety and endless number of pages to describe. That is why we include the best examples of the
interviews and cases that provide us with in-depth, information-rich facts about the studied phenomenon and, thus, contribute the most to our thesis.

One more limitation lies in the information resources about female entrepreneurs in our study. We gather information on the basis of participants’ answers and we cannot prove or falsify the facticity of these data. The information received through secondary data collection could be intentionally corrected by the authors to present a better article, or our interviewees as well as the female entrepreneurs from our case studies could have suppressed some information for personal purposes or just to look better than they really are. Moreover, there is no so much time and resources to explore every aspect of the information from our interviewees and female entrepreneurs from case studies. Despite all this, we do our utmost to provide the readers with rich and trustworthy information.
3. Foundation of the tower: Literature Review

A construction of any building starts from constituting the basis. The basis serves as the main backbone for any building to stay strong. In order to understand how we can build our own scientific research we should lay a strong foundation as well. This is where a literature review steps out as a strong foundation for our studies, providing us with the information about where everything has come from and why the current situation is as it is right now.

3.1 Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is a process of launching, designing and running a new business, that initially is a small one. Thus, people who create a new business are called entrepreneurs (Yetisen et al., 2015). The word “entrepreneur” originally derives from 17th-century French word “entreprendre”, which means “to undertake” and refers to individuals who undertake the risk of new enterprises. To go a little bit deeper into the definition, entrepreneurship can be described as an ability and eagerness to develop, organize and manage a business venture together with any risks that may occur to make profit in the end (Leithy, 2017). Entrepreneurial development nowadays has become very significant: it is one of the key factors of stable economic development. The objectives of the industrial development, regional growth, and the generation of the higher rates of employment depend upon the entrepreneurial development (Yetisen et al., 2015).

Since the beginning of the development of the concept of entrepreneurship, various theories on that topic emerged and a great number of scholars contributed to the studies of this very phenomenon. They introduced various theories, characteristics and views upon entrepreneurship. As they are all equally important in understanding of this phenomenon and its development within the history, we made a table which includes a small overview of the existing concepts as they appeared in the chronologic order to have a better view of the evolution of the concept of entrepreneurship (see Figure 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholar(s) and Year</th>
<th>Key characteristics of entrepreneurship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cantillon, R, 1755</td>
<td>• Entrepreneurs are defined as self-employed;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• They deal with additional uncertainty;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource: the scientific works of the authors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Say, J B, 1803 | • Entrepreneurs shift economic resources from low to high productivity areas with higher yield;  
• Entrepreneurship involves many obstacles and uncertainties. |
| Marshall, A, 1890 | • Entrepreneurs and managers have different but complementing characteristics. |
| Schumpeter, J, 1911 | • Entrepreneurship is the main driving force of moving an economy forward from the static equilibrium, based on the combinatorial capabilities of the entrepreneurial individuals;  
• Combinatorial capabilities result in the recognition of a new good/quality, a new method/process, a new market, a new source of supply or a new way of organizing the firm/production;  
• The role of the entrepreneurs is distinctly separated from the role of the inventors. |
| Knight, F, 1921 | • Entrepreneurs are a special social class which directs economic activities;  
• Uncertainty is the primary aspect of entrepreneurship. |
| Penrose E, 1950 | • Entrepreneurial and managerial skills should be distinguished;  
• Detecting and exploiting the opportunities for smaller businesses is the basic aspect of the development of entrepreneurship. |
| Kirzner, I, 1973, 1997 | • Entrepreneurial activity moves the market towards equilibrium as entrepreneurs look for and discover profitable arbitrage possibilities. |
| Gartner, W, 1985; Aldrich, H & Zimmer, C, 1986 | • Entrepreneurship is the outcome of actions of individuals who act in and are influenced by the organizational and regional environment in which they live and work. |
| OECD, 1998 | • Entrepreneurs represent an ability to allocate resources so as to seize new business opportunities;  
• Entrepreneurs are central to the economic growth. |
| Wennekers, S & Thurik, R, 1999 | • Entrepreneurs should obtain the skills of multi-tasking;  
• Entrepreneurs perceive and create new opportunities for the market, operate in the conditions of uncertainty and introduce products to the market, decide on the allocation, form and further usage of resources, and, in the end, manage their businesses and compete with others for a share of the market. |
| Shane, S, 2003 | • Entrepreneurs promote a more productive economy due to more efficient and innovative ways of production;  
• Entrepreneurship is the basis of stable economic growth. |
| Braunerhjelm, P, 2010 | • Entrepreneurs specialize in taking judgmental decisions about the coordination of scarce resources. |
Though the scholars view entrepreneurship from their own perspective and their findings may differ from one another, the results of their studies have something in common. The main characteristics of entrepreneurship that derive from almost all the studies and the majority of the scholars agree upon are the following: economic and dynamic activity, innovations, risk bearing and profitability. Entrepreneurship is an economic activity as it involves the creation and operation of a company with an intention to create value and wealth by ensuring optimum utilization of the scarce resources. As this value generation activity is performed continuously in the midst of the uncertain business environment, thus, entrepreneurship can be regarded as a dynamic force (Salgado-Banda, 2005).

Speaking about innovativeness, entrepreneurship implies a continual search for new ideas and solutions. Entrepreneurship forces a person to evaluate continuously the existing modes of business operations in order to let more efficient and effective systems be evolved and later adopted (Dollinger, 2008). That is to say, entrepreneurship is a continual effort made for the synergy within the organizations.

The growth in the numbers regarding entrepreneurship can be basically attributed to the following fundamental forces: an increase in the factors of production, improvements in the efficiency of the allocation across the economic activities, knowledge accumulation and the rising rate of innovations. Providing full employment and efficient allocation, growth is therefore driven by knowledge accumulation and innovations (Salgado-Banda, 2005). Innovations also result in the increase of useful knowledge. Stated differently, innovation is one vehicle that diffuses and upgrades already existing knowledge, consequently acting as “a conduit for realizing knowledge spillovers” (Braunerhjelm, 2010, p. 3). The process of innovations is thereby considered as one of the critical issues in the comprehending development of entrepreneurships.

The notion of entrepreneurship is inextricably intertwined with the readiness to bear the risks. This aspect of entrepreneurship emerges from the creation and implementation of new ideas. New ideas are always probationary and, as a result, the outcomes of their implementation may not be immediate and that positive as it was expected (Braunerhjelm, 2010). An entrepreneur should be ready to face the unexpected outcomes and be ready cope with them.

Another feature of entrepreneurship highlighted by scholars is profitability. Profit potential is the likely level of return or compensation to an entrepreneur for taking on the risk of developing an idea into an actual business venture (Burkow, 2008). Without a profit potential, efforts of entrepreneurs would remain only an abstract and a theoretical leisure activity (Brazeal, 1994).
As one can see, entrepreneurship is a very important concept which among other economic factors ensure economic growth and stability. It offers certain benefits to the economy as well as to the society (Dollinger, 2008). Entrepreneurship is a means of the economic development as it stimulates creation through the innovative ideas and improvements in the living standards, maximization of the output from the given resources, influences the development of the managerial skills, and so on, and all these factors are crucial for stable economic development of any country.

Another benefit of entrepreneurship is connected with the fact that it helps identify and develop the managerial capabilities of the entrepreneurs. An entrepreneur studies a problem, identifies its solution as well as alternatives, compares the alternatives in terms of cost and benefits implications, and in the end chooses the best option (Burkow, 2008). Moreover, the managerial capabilities are used by the entrepreneurs while creating new technologies and products, which results in higher performance. Entrepreneurship leads to the creation of new organizations where entrepreneurs gather and manage physical, human and financial resources and direct them towards the achievement of objectives through managerial skills. By creating efficient organizations, entrepreneurs contribute to the production of a greater variety of goods and services, making them available to society. There are various classifications of the types of entrepreneurship. Among others, one can also divide entrepreneurship by the gender of an entrepreneur: male and female entrepreneurship. Within this thesis we are mostly interested in female entrepreneurship and talk about this very phenomenon next.

3.2 Female entrepreneurship

Referring to the notion of a female entrepreneur, it can be defined as a woman who initiates, organizes and runs a business enterprise. These are women who innovate, imitate or adopt business activities (Lewis et al., 2014). Female entrepreneurship, as a subject of the academic research, has gained a lot of popularity in the recent years. A considerable amount of attention to this field has been caused by the growing recognition that female entrepreneurship has a profound impact on the economic development (Fetsch, Jackson & Wiens, 2015). Women's contribution to the national economies in terms of job creation, economic growth and wealth generation is considered to be extremely valuable and is less doubted nowadays (Lewis et al., 2014). Besides, economies with the high levels of female entrepreneurial activity are less subject to financial crises and encounter economic slowdowns less frequently (Global Entrepreneurship Research Association 2017, p. 29).
Due to gender inequality in entrepreneurship, the world economy bears significant losses which can be calculated. According to the study examining the quantitative effects of gender gaps in entrepreneurship (Cuberes & Teignier, 2014), low female participation in entrepreneurship brings such negative effects as aggregate productivity reduction as well as income per capita decrease. Middle East and North Africa, followed by South Asia and Latin America are reported to have the highest income loss due to lower economic opportunities for women, 38% and 25% respectively, while in Europe this loss is estimated to be less than 10 percent (Cuberes & Teignier, 2014). It is estimated that if women's participation in the economy was identical to men's, annual global GDP would have increased by $28 trillion, or by 26 percent by 2025 (Woetzel et al., 2015).

Though the role of female entrepreneurs has undergone some changes: it is not so undervalued and underplayed as it used to be, the potential of female entrepreneurs is far from being fully realized in many economies. Today female entrepreneurs account for about 30% of all entrepreneurs worldwide (MasterCard Index of Women Entrepreneurs, 2017). Women are falling behind men when it comes to the number of female business owners, the size of women-owned enterprises, and their access to economic resources (UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment 2016, 2). Moreover, women-owned businesses are not only smaller but also less successful in obtaining credit, resources, and assets.

Taking into consideration the impact that female entrepreneurs have in terms of economic activity, it comes as no surprise that many countries are preoccupied with this issue or that women’s economic empowerment is a cornerstone of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment 2016, 2). As it is stated in OECD (2014), there is a great variety of different types of policies that could decrease that gender inequality: reduction of administrative burdens and excessive regulatory restrictions, ensuring equal access to finance, supporting measures like courses, training, mentoring, and consultancy services including professional advice on legal and fiscal matters, (Cuberes and Teignier, 2014). These measures can result in greater productivity and overall output and, potentially, can lead to women's welfare.

Though the impact of female entrepreneurship is undoubtedly recognized to be significant, it is far from being fully realized due to a number of barriers which are examined further.
3.3 General preventing factors of female entrepreneurship

While the definition of entrepreneurship is focusing more on launching and running a business, one should not forget that there is one more significant element to take into account – risk. If a person decides to become an entrepreneur he or she should not forget that all the risks that may occur are borne by the entrepreneur. A significant number of start-ups are forced to closure due to a number of factors: bad business decisions, worsening economic conditions, lack of investments or consumer demand, or even a combination of some of them (Belicove, 2012). As a result, future potential entrepreneurs reject the idea of starting their own business, realizing that the stake is rather high.

Of course, all the mentioned above negative factors may occur to any entrepreneur and are more or less common factors that may scare a future entrepreneur when he or she wants to make a decision whether to start the entrepreneurial journey or not. From a theoretical perspective the gender of an entrepreneur should not matter and both male and female entrepreneurs should ‘obey’ the same rules. However, it is not so true in the real world. Women face far more challenges, especially when it comes to the countries like Russia where the male power is widely represented in the society and women are outmatched (Korsun, 2016).

Taking into consideration that differences lie in the nature itself of female entrepreneurship in different countries, as well as in contexts it exists, scholars, nevertheless, highlight common barriers that prevent women from embarking on an entrepreneurial career.

The main obstacle that has been dominating that list as long as entrepreneurship has existed is fear. Women may succumb to a great variety of fears, starting from the fear of failure and ending with the fear of success. First of all, they are frightened that they will fail and lose everything, primarily finances that were invested and probably credibility in the public eye. Secondly, they fear the unknown, i.e. inability to balance working full-time, family duties and starting a new business or incapacity to make a consistent income and at the same time be deprived of benefits and a retirement fund provided by stable job. Moreover, they are afraid of not being supported by their families and friends and consequently having to face all the difficulties alone. Finally, one may be shocked that some are stricken with fear of success, for example if business takes off faster than they can keep up with it (Walthour, 2016).

Another huge obstacle to business formation and success is access to capital and mobilization of startup resources. Women typically fail to attract the required level of capital
investment vital for business foundation and growth (Collins-Dodd et al., 2004). Thus, in comparison with men, they go into entrepreneurship with fewer financial assets and resources connected with human and social capital (Collins-Dodd et al., 2004). In general, women lack not only hard resources, like finance or capital assets, but also soft resources like management experience, networks and family support.

In addition to insufficient financing, OECD (2012) identifies the following barriers. First, informational factor can serve as an obstacle as it turns out that many women often lack accurate information or have only common, stereotypical idea about entrepreneurship. As a result, they do not view it as an attractive path for them. Second, in an attempt to reach a better work-like balance women end up running smaller companies and earning less in comparison with men. Third, women generally possess less confidence in their skills to turn into entrepreneurs than their male counterparts. Moreover, women are underrepresented in entrepreneurship due to their less experience in management and leadership when they start up a business.

Further we would like to present the existing literature and give an outlook on the current situation of female entrepreneurship in Russia.

3.4 Entrepreneurship in Russia

Before proceeding with description of female entrepreneurship in Russia, we find it reasonable to shed the light on Russian entrepreneurship in general as it has its own specificity and flavor and should be taken into account for better understanding of the topic.

Entrepreneurship in Russia has always been an important part of economy of the country. It has a very long history, however, the main starting point for entrepreneurship in Russia refers to the year of 1991, when Russia appeared as an independent state after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Sätre, 2016). Considering the negative experience of planned economy in the USSR, market economy was introduced by the example of the developed countries. Entrepreneurship came along with that novelty.

There was a burst development in this sphere, as it was not properly controlled and people had more freedom which they fully enjoyed, as the newly appointed government had a lot on its agenda and did not have enough time, firstly, to create the regulations till 1995 when the first legal act regarding entrepreneurship was adopted, and secondly, to make those regulations proper. This resulted that the first steps of the development of entrepreneurship, when the proper basis should
have been installed, turned out to be very chaotic, incomprehensible and involved lots of illegal procedures. Thus, the presents state of entrepreneurship is still highly influenced by this ‘perestroika’ period, as people are reluctant to obey the new rules and laws and continue to be on the take, fraud and opportunistic behavior (Zheleznikov, 2016). They got used to the previous patterns of behavior that influence their values and motives of actions.

Still, legal issues and taxation are the most deterrent for those who are considering to become entrepreneurs. According to the independent research of one of the top Russian banks Alpha Bank issued in 2017, the majority of entrepreneurs are dissatisfied with the tax rates and see them as the main reason why the most entrepreneurs left the market during the economic crisis of 2015 – they could not cope with the tax burden, as it turned their small profits into losses. Among other problems, corruption and extended personalized networks are detected by the researches as the major ones.

One of the significant trends of the modern development of the world economy is the increasing role of entrepreneurship as the more mobile and flexible form of business organization. This is evidenced by the increase in the share of entrepreneurship in GDP of the country, growth in the number of employed in entrepreneurship (Kiseleva & Pinkovetskaya, 2016). Over the past 15 years the share of entrepreneurship in the GDP of Russia has nearly doubled. Nevertheless, it is still not comparable with the indicators in developed countries. For instance, the share of entrepreneurship in the GDP of the European countries reached 58%, in the USA this indicator is 50%. However, this ratio in Russia has not yet reached the level of the developed countries – in Russia it is only 21% according to the National report “Global entrepreneurship monitor” (2016).

In addition, entrepreneurs are people who create something different or even new – this way they change or transform existing values (Drucker, 1993). It is a central path to job creation, economic growth, and prosperity. The dynamics of employment in the sphere of entrepreneurship over the last 15 years in Russia is unstable. The share of entrepreneurship in total employment in Russia does not exceed 10% (Kiseleva & Pinkovetskaya, 2016).

The state of entrepreneurship indicates the health of the overall economic state of any country (Brooks et al., 2015). That is why it is so crucial for the governments to pay attention to this sphere of economics and try to do their utmost to change the situation to the better. Russia is not an exception, and we consider that in the light of present economic conditions there is a lot to be done to improve the current state of entrepreneurship. This is relevant particularly for the female entrepreneurship in Russia, which we are going to discuss in the next part of this chapter.
3.5 Peculiarities of female entrepreneurship in Russia

One of the most urgent challenges looming on the government's horizon is to define new growth factors for Russian economy. Women's entrepreneurship is undoubtedly one of them. Women are regarded as a strong economic power. Not only are they running or starting their own businesses but they are also employing others, so that they are participating in the growth of their respective economies (Yetisen et al., 2015).

In Russia women constitute 54 percent of the whole population, while only 23 per cent of all women are engaged in entrepreneurship (Merkulova, 2016). Dealing with this imbalance may be the exact step necessary to facilitate the economic development of the country.

To understand the nature of female entrepreneurship, especially in Russia, better, it is crucial to take a step back to the very beginning and understand the reasons why women choose this career path. Recent studies show that in low to middle income countries (Russia is among them) in comparison with high income countries (for instance, Sweden) more women want to become entrepreneurs because they are looking for a source of additional income to support their families, as the rate of wages is not enough (Yetisen et al., 2015). Women with such an intention account for about 45% of all entrepreneurs in low – middle income countries. Russia is not an exception. According to the data provided by the all-Russian non-governmental organization of small and medium business “OPORA Russia” (Opora is a transliteration of a Russian word and is translated as ‘support’), which is entitled to support entrepreneurship, the most popular reason why women tend to starting their own business is the sought for addition income. In 2016 this reason was chosen as the main one to become an entrepreneur by 37% of respondents (see Figure 3).
The second most popular reason why females choose to become entrepreneurs (28% of respondent) is to accomplish the goal of self-fulfillment. This happens because in eastern business practices, it is not considered beneficial to exhibit perceived feminine traits. While in eastern businesses there is a tendency to follow the methods based upon mutual respect and understanding, western business’ expectations are for business leaders to be more ruthless, headstrong, and less sensitive or respectful (Yetisen et al., 2015). This means that in eastern countries like Russia men are more expected to show these traits, while women are not seen like that. Social customs, class restrictions, culture restraints, and norms leave women lagging behind men (Yetisen et al., 2015). As a result, through becoming entrepreneurs women want in a way to prove they are to the same extent capable of business leaders as men are.

Another important reason that women in Russia tick as a reason for becoming entrepreneurs is a desire for independence. This can be about financial independence, when women do not want to be dependable from their parents or husbands, or from the situation on the job market financially, and choose to earn their living themselves. Women do not want to take
money from family members or believe that they could earn more by themselves and be financially independent. This can also be about the issues of control. When women are working in a company, they have bosses and managers that tell them what to do. Besides, they have to obey certain corporate rules, established in a company, which may range from what to wear and how to talk. Some women are tired to be under control and decide to be in charge themselves. Even if the revenues from their own small firms are lower than the wages they were paid while working in an office, they still feel more in control and happier than they used to be at their previous workplaces (Loscocco & Leicht, 1993).

The forth popular answer is legacy. By this, Russian women mean that their main intention to start own business was to create something long-lasting and beneficial for the society to be remembered after their death and to hand down their legacy to their children and to the world. The scope of other reasons accounts for 8%.

Even though the overall state of female entrepreneurship is improving globally and in Russia in particular and the formation of female-owned business networks is steadily rising, there is a number of challenges and barriers that female entrepreneurs in Russia face (Barsukova, 2010). Among the preventing factors that dissuade Russian women from founding companies may be stated the following: economic factors, insufficient financing, sociocultural conditions, namely, gender stereotypes, bureaucratic obstruction with corruption of public officials and lack of entrepreneurial qualities and skills including appropriate education and work experience (Gallyamov, 2016). This is what we are going to touch upon next.

### 3.5.1 Economic factors

The development of female entrepreneurship in Russia is complicated, first of all, by economic conditions. The examples of such economic barriers are listed below: fuzzy and frequently changing legal provisions, concerning the opening and development of business; excessively high taxes; lack of start-up capital and the complexity of access to financial resources; not so favorable state policy towards female business development, and the absence of governmental support (Gallyamov, 2016).

In Russia there is a long-held belief, supported by various sociological researches (Babaeva & Chirikova, 2005; ForbesWoman, 2016), that the most part of female entrepreneurs feel the inequality of opportunities that may help reach certain success in comparison with men. The most
successful female entrepreneurs of Russia also support this public opinion (Gorelova, 2017). The statistical data corresponds to it as well. According to the research entitled “MasterCard Index of Women Entrepreneurs” (MIWE), complied by the MasterCard company in 2017, Russia is on the 38th place (see Figure 4) with result of 59.6 out of 100 in the list of the countries assessed by the proper economic conditions for women to run their businesses. The first places go to New Zealand (74.4), Canada (72.4) the USA (69.9), Sweden (69.6), Singapore (69.5), Belgium (69), Australia (68.5), the Philippines (68.4), the UK (67.9) and Thailand (67.5) respectfully.

Figure 4 MasterCard Index of Women Entrepreneurs

Though the discrepancy between the leading countries and Russia is not extremely big (15 points with New Zealand), this discrepancy signals that Russian government has a great room for improvement in this sphere, as well as it can follow the example of the mentioned above countries with top results, where financial services are of easier access and better quality, and the governments are actively supporting their female entrepreneurs.
Consequently, there is no surprise that the support from the state is reported to be quite poor. In reliance with conducted surveys female entrepreneurs state that they do not feel any governmental or municipal assistance, and, therefore, they can rely only on themselves in the course of entrepreneurial activity. Thus, 20.4 per cent of women in entrepreneurship count on their own efforts, without awaiting any support. Quite a small number of businesswomen (10.2%) wish to be supported by government authorities, law enforcement agencies and courts (Gallyamov, 2016).

The state measures supporting female business activity are highly required. Its necessity is acknowledged by the government. In 2017 Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev signed the “National strategy of actions in the interests of women for the years 2017-2022”. According to this document, the implementation of the measures, aimed at strengthening women’s position in the political, economic, social and cultural fields is expected. Furthermore, besides such issues as gender stereotypes, violence against women, disparity in salaries between men and women, it will address the issues which are aimed at increasing women's participation in small and medium-sized businesses and granting women that introduce innovations. Also, one of the targets is to enhance the quantity of women in business, although there is no specific benchmark figure. This document may be considered a good step towards the development of female entrepreneurship only if adopted measures will be well-designed and implemented.

3.5.2 Access to financial resources

Other issues to consider are financial resources, as the entrepreneurial process and success are extremely dependent on initial conditions. In general, women tend to possess less personal financial resources than men (Volkova, 2017). Thus, for a given opportunity and equally capable individual, women must assemble additional resources compared to men.

Taking into consideration that women often have a difficult time obtaining financing, it is no wonder that they start as less ambitious firms that are financed mostly by own available resources. A 2004 study by the Kauffman Foundation of 570 high-tech firms found out that women only raised 70% of the amount that men raised to start their firms, which eventually had an impact on their ability to expand their business (Kauffman, 2009). It seems obvious that companies with bigger capital and more resources at start-up level have more opportunities to grow than firms with less resources. That is why, years after start-ups, firms founded by women continue to fall behind
men-owned firms regarding such performance measures as revenues, profits, assets and employment (Kauffman, 2009).

The issue of women having a harder time getting finance than men for the same business opportunity is common also for Russia. One of the main challenges preventing Russian women from growing as entrepreneurs is the lack of initial resources and, consequently, the need to search for other sources of financing. That is why, what business women count on before starting their companies is of a great interest. Regional surveys (Gallyamov, 2016) indicate that 43% of female entrepreneurs hope to receive funds from relatives and friends, 34% view the possibility of obtaining a bank loan, 28% expect loans from business support funds which provide loans on more favorable terms and 20% rely upon other investors and sponsors. Finally, only 29% of respondents can invest their own funds (Gallyamov, 2016).

Low affordability of financial resources is considered to be the main obstacle to start business. Women claim that it is difficult to obtain financing due to high interest rates (the average loan rate for SMEs is 16.6%), a large volume of required documents and the need to provide collateral (Volkova, 2017).

Moreover, the problem of obtaining additional financing is aggravated by existing discrimination. In the regions banks provide women with loans more reluctantly than men. Overall, two-thirds of female entrepreneurs are unable to get the funding they need (International Finance Organization, 2014).

That is why in this case such state measures as a subsidized credit and a preferential system for female business would be of great assistance as they could facilitate access to financing and have a favorable impact on female entrepreneurship in general.

3.5.3 Educational barriers

The other obstacle that hinders Russian women in their effort to become owners of their businesses is lack of knowledge, experience, entrepreneurial skills and unawareness about informational sources and educational programs on this topic.

The majority of the female entrepreneurs have a university degree which can be explained by high education level of the whole Russian population (Barsukova, 2010). However, higher education does not guarantee that entrepreneurs will be competent in taking financial and managerial decisions. Furthermore, spheres that women are selecting for start-ups do not
correspond with the area they specialize in. Their criteria for choosing the industry are either its profitability or personal interest in it. Sometimes women even do not consider market demand and real opportunities for making money but take into consideration only skills they possess and preferences of particular field.

As far as the entrepreneurship courses are concerned, plenty of women are totally indifferent to them as they believe that success of their business has nothing to do with attendance of these courses. (Barsukova, 2010) However, they could have avoided many problems at the initial stages of their businesses if such programs existed and were attended by them. Nevertheless, in comparison with men, women tend to more frequently be students of such programs. The number of male entrepreneurs, that attended them, neglected them and that are enrolled for them now, is respectively the following- 35%, 61%, 4%, while female’s ratio is slightly higher - 47%, 51%, 2% (see Figure 5). This can be explained by women’s less confidence and bigger cautiousness.

Figure 5 The comparison of men and women attending the entrepreneurial courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Gender</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male entrepreneurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of entrepreneurs that attended the courses</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of entrepreneurs that did not attend the courses</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of entrepreneurs that are attending them now</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Some women being on maternity leave prefer to combine motherhood with some kind of activity. They are often illegally engaged in business, for example organizing hairdressing services at home (Cherkasova, 2016). If these women could have acquired information about registration, taxation and state support, they could have opened their legal business.
There are being taken steps in this direction. Thus, for example, “Mother-entrepreneur”, educational program run by “OPORA Russia”, teaches how to draw up a business plan, how to keep financial records, how to combine motherhood, business and household duties, and so on (Cherkasova, 2016). Therefore, the more entrepreneurial programs and informational sources are available for women, the bigger number of legal businesses are launched.

### 3.5.4 Blat and corruption

Entrepreneurship in post-communist Russia had a distinguished feature – the business was conducted with the help of “blat” – transliteration of a Russian word, which can be defined as “the use of personal networks to obtain goods and services in short supply and to influence decision-making” (Ledeneva & Kurkchiyan, 2000, p. 7). Soviets had managed to overcome the social and economic constraints imposed by government due to extended personalized networks. Thus, when people needed a better job or a new apartment, rare commodities, medical specialists or other services they did not fail to resort to that sort of help. This phenomenon was a day-to-day practice to such extent that it could not help but get ingrained in the mentality of the whole nation. That is why it could not just vanish from people's mindset overnight.

Though the role of social networks is of much smaller scale now, it still continues to play a significant role (Ledeneva, 2009). Once blat made it easier to endure and tolerate an imperfect society, while now it only impedes the development of entrepreneurship based on free market conditions and serves as a huge barrier for people to conduct business fairly. It activates unjust distribution of privileges and allows to get around the bureaucratic system in some way. Individuals with right networks are able to circumvent formal procedures, obtain advantages (for instance, grants can be issued to certain people due to existing relations of trust and reciprocity) and so forth.

The phenomenon under consideration is a grand obstacle for both men and women on their path towards becoming successful entrepreneurs as some are frightened that only people with connections can achieve everything. Though this barrier can be viewed from the point of view of people of both sexes, women more than men tend to fear it.

The usage of personal networks to achieve the objectives goes hand in hand with corruption. Corruption has always been and still is one of the main hurdles en route to business
development. For example, while dealing with certain registration or licensing issues, entrepreneurs may be compelled by government officials to give bribes.

What appears to be interesting, according to the results of regional Russian survey, bureaucratic barriers are more negatively assessed by women themselves than men (Gallyamov, 2016). The results of that survey found that 66.9% of female entrepreneurs confirmed that they had faced corrupted state officials and only 30.6% of respondents replied that they had not had to deal with them (Gallyamov, 2016). Apparently, the fact that some proportion of women did not witness the corrupt practices does not serve as an evidence of the absence of the given phenomenon but proves that these entrepreneurs have not had the chance yet to face open or disguised extortion activities.

The answers to the question "what public services are the most corrupt" also indirectly confirm the stated above. Thus, 33.8% of respondents replied that "all of them are corrupt", 26.1% named "sanitary control services", 15.3% picked "authorities responsible for registration of legal entities" and 10.2% chose "departments of MES exercising fire security control" (Gallyamov, 2016).

As for the areas of entrepreneurship where bribes are required most of all, 10.8 % of respondents named "real estate, rent and the provision of services", 8.9% of experts named "wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles, household goods and personal items", and 3.2% chose "hotel and restaurant business" (Gallyamov, 2016).

Given that there is evidence that an increase in the proportion of women in business and government reduces corruption in the state, the growth of female entrepreneurial movement will probably serve favorably to reduce the impact of corruption (Gallyamov, 2016).

### 3.5.5 Sociocultural conditions

As soon as it became possible, Russian women stepped into business, demonstrating huge enthusiasm, perseverance, courage and creativity. Till the end of the 1990s a Russian female entrepreneur was associated with a seller on the market or with the owner of a hairdresser or a beauty salon, at best, while today the situation is remarkably different. Many female entrepreneurs' businesses are equal to males by its type and scale. They are represented not only in traditional spheres like trade and services, but also in agriculture, construction, high-tech industries and banking (Mislivskaya & Yermilova, 2017).
Nevertheless, women are still encountering conventional views and attitudes which are difficult to surpass. The traditional gender-roles society implies that entrepreneurship is a male-dominated field and not everyone is eager to doubt this notion.

Women are considered to be “weak sex”: they are more prone to doubt and diffidence by their nature. Women's predisposition is not to be risk-averse and to help a man. When women are handling their decision-making models and stressful situations, they are more influenced by their feelings and can succumb to panic to a greater extent than men.

It is also important to highlight the fact that a businesswoman has to combine her entrepreneurial activities with roles of a wife, mother, caretaker that are expected of her. Sometimes husbands cannot accept that their wives devote less time to the family due to overburdening at work and make them drop their businesses. Besides, some husbands with patriarchal values are not eager to get used to the idea that women raise their self-esteem, become truly independent from men and get on an equal footing with them.

Besides, credit institutions, potential investors, and power structures still treat women differently than men due to not sufficient belief in women's capabilities to repay a loan and develop a business. It is a relic of a patriarchal system. Of course, this tendency is gradually disappearing, as the Russian women prove that they are in no way inferior to men. However, this attitude still exists (Mislivskaya & Yermilova, 2017).

Besides, women quite frequently encounter prejudiced attitudes. Many Russians, seeing successful women, especially young and beautiful, in spheres other than the tech, creative, and media sectors, assume that they have had some help. They even have to prove to others that they have achieved it on their own, without any man’s or ‘daddy’s’ money (Lepeska, 2016).

In general, female entrepreneurs prevail in such spheres as trade, personal services, education, food service, health, retail, hotels, tourism, beauty products, and sport, as well as advertising and media. The reason behind is twofold. First of all, women themselves tend to prefer such industries where they can get advantage of their traits of character and social behavior (Gallyamov, 2016). Secondly, certain spheres just keep women out. The natural-resource industries, namely, oil, gas, and metals, that constitute the foundation of Russia’s economy, remain men's domain (Lepeska, 2016).

Moreover, given that Russia’s conflict with the West has intensified, some claim that there has been a return to traditional values and gender roles, as a kind of protest against western society (Lepeska, 2016).
3.6 Chapter's summary

Entrepreneurship in Russia like in any other country has its own remarkable history. This history to a large extent determines the current state of entrepreneurship as well as the values and patterns of behavior of its participants. For instance, it is still believed in the society that females are less capable of becoming and being entrepreneurs than males. If we look at the statistical data we see, that the number of females is almost 3 times smaller, than the number of men in this sphere. This serves as a call for action, firstly, for the Russian government to start reforming the existing laws and procedures so that to create suitable and favorable conditions for the female entrepreneurship to flourish.

Among the obstacles that are holding many women back from starting their own businesses are the insufficient funding or shortage of venture capital, legal restrictions or ineffective state institutions, socio-cultural conditions, lack of proper education as well as personal fear of failure and lack of confidence in their own abilities. To overcome these barriers the government should implement policies to improve the current situation.

For good reason, there is a proverb that a Russian woman can “gallop on a horse and enter a burning house” which means that Russian woman's spirit is enormous. In the times when Russian women are being empowered as never before, they have a unique opportunity to take the reins and define their own role in the future of Russia.

The enumerated barriers are supposed to hold women back from entrepreneurship. In the next chapter we will present the stories of female entrepreneurship both successful and not in this journey and on the basis of them we will try to reveal whether these barriers are the main factors that prevent women from becoming entrepreneurs or whether obstacles are concentrated in other realms not investigated before.
4. Main blocks of the tower: The stories of success

Having laid the foundation of the tower, it is time to embark on a construction of the main part of the building. Thus, after we have described the methodology and literature review that gave us a better understanding of the research topic and created a guidance through our whole research journey, we are ready to proceed with our case studies. With the theoretical sensibility gained from the literature review, we decided to start our empirical research with two examples of successful female entrepreneurship in Russia. Each story will serve as a block of floors with spaces of different colors and shapes reflecting souls of its heroines. Plunging into a story and revealing its hidden mysteries is like surmounting every new flight of stairs and moving higher and higher towards the dome - our destination, our cherished goal. Below we will present these magnificent stories and our findings that we made out of them.

4.1 Olga Slutsker

“Any victory will never be guaranteed even by the brightest leader, but by the actions of the whole team” (Olga Slutsker for Tatler Magazine, 2013)

The first case we would like to describe is dedicated to the World Class company and its founder. According to the official webpage of the company, today it owns 40 gyms and 43 through the franchising. This is a chain of fitness clubs, represented not only in Russia, but in Monaco, Kazakhstan and Kirgizia as well, besides, two new fitness clubs are awaiting to be opened this year (2018) in Latvia (ForbesLife, 2017). What is more, according to the new agreement with RIXOS hotel chain, concluded on the 28th of February, 2018, the gyms in these hotels will be renovated and reopened under the brand of World Class. This agreement has already started to be fulfilled in hotels in Turkey, and will continue in hotels in Switzerland, Egypt, Georgia, United Arab Emirates and Croatia (NewsRussia.Today, 2018). With the help of this agreement and such wide representation globally World Class chain will become truly international. All this can serve as the indicators of great success for the founder of the World Class company – Olga Slutsker.
1. Getting to sports

Olga was born in St Petersburg in 1965. She was not good at the field of academic studies at school, so her parents made the decision to focus more on her achievements in sports. She went in for fencing, which she enjoyed more and more from one training to another. Those drills formed her dream to become a professional sportswoman. Following her dream, she entered and graduated from the Academy of Physical Education in St Petersburg, Russia.

Her strong personality can be traced throughout her career from the very beginning. She did not give and headed towards her goal through thick and thin. As a result, her dream to become a true professional in sports came to life. After the years of persistent trainings and exhaustions, she became a part of a national fencing team, won a series of competitions, and finally became a master of sports.

2. New twist

Though sport was everything for Olga, a new player came in game – love. She got married and left her career in sports to become a loving wife and mother. Though she was happily married and became a mother of two children, she started to miss physical activities and just sitting at home doing almost nothing (Naira, 2017). Once travelling in Spain, Olga visited a local fitness club, which she enjoyed a lot. When she came back to Russia, she asked herself a question: “why there is no any fitness club in Russia like that?” At that time (it was the year 1992) there was no fitness industry as we know it today. All sports activities took place at the state stadiums and complexes – there were hardly some private fitness clubs (International Herald Tribune, 2007). After careful consideration she decided that it was a good chance to go in for entrepreneurship, as there were hardly any competitors on the market and she could found the first fitness club, which would be like the one in Europe.

Though the idea was really brilliant, it was rather hard to find the financing. Those times (1992-1193) were really hard for the country – it was a time of fully economic transformation, and it was almost impossible to take a loan in a bank. The only way out was to find money somewhere among relatives and friends. This is when Olga’s husband Vladimir stepped out. He was not in raptures from the idea of his wife, as he was an entrepreneur himself, and a rather successful one, thus he was better than others aware of the fact that the state of the economy did not favor her venture. Furthermore, the level of income of an average citizen could not afford a membership in
a fitness club, so he did not believe, that she could find a sufficient number of clients and make this new venture profitable (My Business, 2007). He could have become an investor from the very beginning, but he did not want to. In the end, after Olga’s vain attempts to find an investor, he met her halfway. He agreed to give her money on the terms of a noninterest loan. She had to do but to agree with that.

Her main driving force was to create a unique fitness club that never existed in Russia before that comply with European standards and, as a result, compete with the European fitness clubs. “Of course, I was afraid. Who was not?” she said in the interview to the magazine “Faces” in 2007. She did not sleep nights thinking about the words of her husband and others, who did not support her bold idea. Finally, she resolved. Despite all the scaring facts and figures, Olga opened her new first World Class fitness club in Moscow in 1993. As she said herself: “This club was made by me with love, warm and a strong belief in success” (Time Out Moscow, 2007). The first clients were primarily the friends of her and her husband, and his business partners, who could afford to pay a membership fee. As they were a part of so-called elite, they spread the news among their friends very quickly. As a result, that very became very fashionable to have a membership of the World Class club, and Olga got the clients and, as a result, the profit. The press also played its role. A lot of articles about the breakthrough in the sphere of fitness services were a very good advertising as well: more and more people wanted to become a part of this new fashion (Russian Newspaper, 2012).

Soon, the new venture became profitable. However, the brand “World Class” itself was a Swedish one. In 1996 Olga bought all the rights from a Swedish company and became a rightful owner of the company. Besides, she had to repay her husband a loan he had given to her. She did the same year (1996). Nevertheless, very few people knew about that deal among the spouses, which later brought Olga some problems.

3. Times of trouble

The first trouble that Olga faced was the lack of her education (My Business, 2007). The education she had got before was devoted to the physical side of a person but had nothing to do with management. The rumors started to spread that she was more a figurehead, than a real CEO. To eliminate those rumors and to have a better understanding of how to manage a rather fast-growing company, she entered a university to study this sphere. She got a degree in management. However, the worst was about to come.
Due to the fact that everybody thought that Vladimir had just given his wife money and was the real head of the company, nobody noticed Olga. Most people took her as a wife of a rich man who just got bored sitting at home, and her husband just let her be a sort of creative director, but nothing more. Nobody of them could imagine, that Olga was the one and only, who developed this business from the very beginning. Moreover, some number of the most profitable clients were still the friends and business partners of Vladimir. This would never be a matter until their divorce in 2009. Olga herself remembers that time as the hardest in her life.

According to the Russian laws, all the marital property should be equally divided between the spouses. These conditions threw into question further Olga’s ownership and management of the Worlds Class company, which at that time had already counted for 49 fitness clubs on the whole. Though the World Class issue was settled for Olga under rather favorable terms, as she did not lose her ownership of the company in exchange of some other property, that story did not end happily. Vladimir at that time was at the Federal Assembly of Russian Federation. With the help of his influential connections he got the full custody over their two children, took them to Israel and prohibited Olga seeing them. Since 2009 she had never seen her children again.

That broke Olga’s heart. She sank into a depression and did not want to come out of her home. As she told herself: “I could not find a reason to get out of bed” (Tatler, 2013). Her friends did their utmost to help Olga be out of doldrums. She returned back to her work and devoted all her energy and time to it. As she later said herself to the Tatler magazine: “My work is my safety ring. It helps me forget for a while that I have problems out there. It gives me hope and confidence, that I can do something good for our society, as sport is life, and I can help a person take a step to a better life”.

4. The state of business

Olga managed to turn her passion for sports into a very profitable business. Today World Class is a very successful chain of fitness clubs. This could be judged not only by the financial performance of the company and the prizes and rewards this chain has, among which can be noted such awards as “Brand of the year” of EFFIE in 2001, 2004, 2008 and 2011, Super brand of the Russian market (2005) and many others. World Class was also certified by IHRSA (International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association) as the European fitness chain, which is a very prestigious title. Among the partners of the company there such giants as Reebok, Technogym, RIXOS and Precor.
Besides, today being a member of World Class is very prestigious. What is more a majority of Russian champions in various sports train in World Class (Tatler, 2013). Olga Slutsker managed to build from zero a company which is very successful on the native Russian market and is penetration the international one.

5. Opinion on business

Her position regarding entrepreneurship is that it is a vast territory of opportunities, and what is more important – independence, as an entrepreneur is making his/her own decisions, as she said in the interview to the Vorkug TV. She considers entrepreneurship as a driving force of progress, development and improvement.

However, Olga thinks that it is a way harder for a woman to be an entrepreneur in Russia comparing to a man. She links it with the deeply entrenched values of the Russian culture and the role of a woman there. In the interview to the Vorkug TV she said: “I understood that in our country a woman is very helpless. Even a woman like me, who has a financial opportunity to get consulted by highly qualified lawyers, is famous and has influential friends, is almost helpless in front of a man with money and power”. Nevertheless, Olga believes that it is not a reason for a woman to reject an idea of becoming an entrepreneur and give up. It is a recipe for a woman of how to become stronger, financially independent and unlock the potential. She enforces her argument with a phrase: “A strong person racks not on the difficulties. He/she knows where to go and goes ahead.” (Tatler, 2013).

4.2 Natalya Kasperskaya

Our next case is dedicated to a representative of an IT industry - Natalya Kasperskaya, owner of the "InfoWatch" Group, co-founder of "Kaspersky Lab", one of the richest women of Russia, mother of five children and a generous donator to charity.

Being the wife of Eugene Kaspersky, the computer genius, who created his own antivirus program for a computer, Natalya decided to reap the benefits of her husband's activity and insisted on establishing their own company - Kaspersky Laboratory in 1997. She became the CEO of the company and turned a small startup into the fourth leading global antivirus company with the value at $1.8 billion (Bric magazine, 2015). Then she managed to survive a dramatic divorce and a
difficult business separation, resigned as a CEO and started from scratch again. She took over InfoWatch, company that had very vague prospects and nobody believed in its future. However, now it is estimated at $40-50 million (Panfilov, 2015).

Further we will go deeper into her magnificent story of success and reveal key moments from her life that show her as an incredible female entrepreneur.

1. **Background**

Natalya Kasperskaya was born on 5 February 1966 in Moscow into a family of engineers. Being a child, she did not see herself in an IT-related profession, however, she chose to follow in her parents' steps (Bric Magazine, 2015). Thus, Natalya graduated from the Moscow Institute of Electronics and Mathematics with a degree in Applied Mathematics.

Natalya met her future husband, Eugene Kaspersky, at the age of twenty and they got married just six months later. Right after graduation she gave birth to two sons and stayed on a maternity leave. Her career in IT started when she was 28 with a position as a salesperson for computer accessories and software firm with just a 50-dollar monthly salary.

In 1991 Eugene together with his colleagues released anti-virus software as a product called AntiViral Toolkit Pro (AVP), with sales being $100–200 per month (BusinessClass, 2014). When Natalya became responsible for marketing and promotion, she managed to expand distribution channels to the extent that sales increased to more than $1 million in 1997 (BusinessClass, 2014).

In 1997 Natalya convinced Eugene, who was satisfied with working for a company, to establish their own company and make profit out of it (BusinessClass, 2014). That is how the Kaspersky Lab emerged. Natalya became its CEO and personally organized all the business processes and distribution channels, with sales doubling each year and reaching $126 million in 2007 and turnover approaching $7 million in 2001 and exceeding $67 million in 2006 (Skripnikov, 2007). Under her guidance it transformed into a leading antivirus corporation with a network of regional offices worldwide.

Shares in 'Kaspersky Lab' were initially split between Eugene (50%), his two teammate programmers (20% each), and Natalya (10%) (Sedakov & Filonov, 2014). Natalya did not complain about such share distribution as she assumed that it was normal to have majority stake as a family. She could not imagine that situation might change.

Though Natalya and Eugene divorced in 1998, they kept being reliable business partners until unexpected total breach between them. Due to deepening ideological divide between them,
Natalya was suspended from her post in 2007, with her remaining stake being sold out in 2011 (Sedakov & Filonov, 2014). Her resignation and change in management dramatically affected the company: its rate of growth decreased considerably, with global revenue growing by 40% in 2009, 13.7% in 2011, and only 6% in 2013 (Bric Magazine, 2015).

Natalya recalls this period as one of the most painful in her life. “Eugene decided to take over with no experience in management and business, but since he was the main shareholder, I had little chance to win. At that time my whole life was Kaspersky Lab and the unexpected hit from my long-time partner was incredibly harmful” (Bric Magazine, 2015).

Departure from the company, she devoted her life to, was a deep blow to the very heart. Nevertheless, it was not in Natalya's nature to despair and give up. In accordance with the business separation deal with Eugene, Natalya became majority owner of “InfoWatch”, Kaspersky Lab's subsidiary, which she headed in 2007.

2. “InfoWatch”

At the time Natalya took over its operations, “InfoWatch” had vague prospects and was a real albatross around 'Kaspersky Lab’s neck (Bric Magazine, 2015). It was considered to be the unwanted left over after a fierce couple's business struggle. Some even presumed that Natalya's career was over.

“InfoWatch” was founded in 2003 with the view of developing protection of confidential corporate data from leakage. When the product was launched, the management was worried that it would not be well received as not many clients could see the sense in corporate information monitoring and blocking. Even Data Leak Prevention market did not exist then: it was not segmented and analysts did not consider it separately. By 2007 “InfoWatch” had had a negative cash flow, with the brand not being promoted at all (Bric Magazine, 2015). As for Natalya, she perceived that situation as a challenge rather than a complete disaster and vigorously started acting (Kozyreva, 2016).

However, Natalya’s previous experience in management was not that much relevant since the technological solutions and product line of “InfoWatch” were targeted at large and medium enterprises, rather than small businesses and retailers (Panfilov, 2015). Thus, absolutely different target audience required a fundamentally new approach and way of conducting business.

Eventually, Natalya managed to build distribution channels, find constant clients and promote the brand. As a result, entirely unprofitable “InfoWatch” started to bring first earnings in
2012 and proceeded with growing at an annual rate of 60—70% (Roem.ru, 2015). It gained momentum to the extent that independent experts estimated the business at $40–50 million in 2015 (Panfilov, 2015).

As far as Natalya's current role in the company is concerned, she deals with strategic issues and product line choice, digs into the performance of unprofitable projects and does not monitor that many successful businesses, while CEO exercises operational command on a daily basis. As Natalya jokingly describes her vision of her company's future: “My dream is that my business grows on its own, while I am planting flowers at my country house” (Panfilov, 2015).

3. **Opinion on entrepreneurship**

Natalya compares business with a child who needs close attention and around-the-clock care. “Once it is neglected, it will get out of control, pick the wrong path and cause trouble. That is why small business cannot be left unattended, while such giant company as Kaspersky Lab does not require daily monitoring” (BBC, 2010).

Speaking about financing, Natalya it is extremely difficult to attract investments at the initial stage of launching business – the time when they are mostly needed. “The more successful and profitable business turns into, the more interested investors become. However, over time, when investors seek to invest in already profitable business, their money is no longer required as owners do not wish to give away large portions of their shares in return for gained capital. That is the entrepreneurship paradox” (Panfilov, 2015). Natalya's advice on how to obtain financing sounds like: “Getting money on good terms may be possible only in case, if one can persuade others that he/she actually does not need money. Thus, the more money one is looking for, the worse conditions will be.”

“Those who start IT businesses tend to be tech people for the most part. Having totally different set of mind, they are consumed with the work they are doing, namely technologies themselves. While business has nothing to do with technologies, it is about communication. Incapable of conducting business, at the same time, they, are afraid to hand over the reins to someone else. As a result, interesting projects cease to develop at the initial stage.” (Klimenko, 2017). Natalya highlights that women are better at communication and dealing with people, while men surpass in logic and (BBC, 2010).

Reflecting upon a woman's position in a predominantly male's industry, Natalya states that she does not experience any difficulties in working with men. “On the contrary, being a female is
an advantage rather than a disadvantage. A woman is like a bright spot amongst grey and blue suits, who is easily distinguished. That is why everyone remembers her just because there are not too many like her around.” (Bric Magazine, 2015). Natalya considers gender topic to be totally irrelevant to business. “Either a person works well or he/she does not work well. That’s it. Therefore, a woman does not have to earn credibility just to prove something to men, if she is good at what she is doing, she will definitely gain respect.” (BBC, 2010).
5. Main blocks of the tower: The narratives of female entrepreneurs

In this part we are going to proceed with our dear interviewees. Each story serves as a block in our research tower that enables us to accomplish our research. As it has already been mentioned before, we fully describe only four stories, while the others will be represented as the strong voice to enforce their stories and entrepreneurs’ opinions.

We were lucky to get in touch with ten female entrepreneurs. They are Alina, Katerina, Maria, Julia, Anastasia and Olesya, and four women, whose stories will be told later on: Lena, Olga, Elena and Svetlana.

For several reasons we do not include all the stories. Some of the interviewees had time only for one interview, for instance, which gave us the answers to some questions, nevertheless it was not enough in terms of our research, others despite the differences in industries, ages and regions, almost completely recall the stories which will be presented further, so it seems wise to include their thoughts as a part of other story. However, their contribution to our research is equally valuable, that is why we tell a few words about each of them, at first, to show our respect and express our gratitude. From their interviews we include those facts that are the most important for our analysis and future conclusions. Then, finally, we will proceed with the description of four stories of our amazing entrepreneurs.

5.1 Interviewees

Alina is 42 years old. She graduated from Kazan Federal University where she specialized in sewing. Besides, she got an additional education in personnel management at the same university. Her entrepreneurial journey started from a small show room of dresses, which grew to a recognizable brand in the region and led to her success. She reckons that the toughest barrier was and sometimes still is her struggle with cultural prejudices. It is worth mentioning that Kazan is an administrative center of the Tatarstan Republic – a region where Islam is a prevailing religion, where a social role of a women does not include being an entrepreneur (Samigullina et al., 2015). As a result, the cultural pressure there may be much stronger than in any other region, says Alina. Nonetheless, she had managed to run her company for almost ten years.

Katerina is 31 years old. She graduated from Moscow Technical University where she studied at the faculty of Telecommunicating systems. She owned a small IT company in Moscow
which specialized in electronic studies of English for almost 5 and a half years. Her company created an online educational platform where people could learn English whenever they want and wherever they are. She had to leave the market as her company could not reach the breakeven point and the amount of debts was constantly growing. Katerina herself binds her to failure with her managerial and marketing mistakes.

Maria is 56 years old. She has no higher education. She has always worked as a cook in local restaurants and cafés in Samara. Her hobby is closely connected to her work – she likes to bake cakes. She has always baked them for some celebrations like birthday parties, New Years and so on. In the nineties (1997) she decided to quit from her low-paid job and use her hobby as a way to earn her living, so she opened a home-based bakery. Almost 10 years it was a profitable business as she was among the first in her city to develop such a business, and the number of the rivals was very low, while the level of demand was rather high. Later there was a huge shift in the customers’ needs, to which Maria could not get used to. She had to sell her company almost 5 years ago.

Julia is 43 years old. She graduated from Moscow State University of International Relations, where she studied international economic relations. After years of working in several companies, she set up her own company in e-commerce, which is, putting it in a nutshell, an online platform where all the shops that suit certain criteria can register and sell their goods. Julia has already been running this company for almost seven years. She believes that an abiding desire to learn something new every day is a cornerstone of success for any entrepreneur. Among all other barriers she emphasizes the lack of necessary managerial/marketing education which provides a female entrepreneur with a set of skills and knowledge that lead to stable and successful process of entrepreneurship.

Anastasia is 36 years old. She graduated from St Petersburg State University majoring in management. She owns a company in Moscow which provides repair services of such gadgets as phones, laptops, tablets and so on. She reckons that the economic situation is hard for any entrepreneur today and only those who are highly qualified and are aware of trends will be able to survive. For the low percentage of females in this sphere Anastasia blames the wrong perception of entrepreneurship by women in Russia. This is what she says about the issue: “The only difference in the risk of being fired one day and entrepreneurship failure exists if the initial investments for the venture have not been repaid yet, and you have to find money to do that. Of course, it is a complicated task, however, that is the only difference. A woman which is fired and a woman which has to close her company, are both unemployed and have to search for new
options. Women in my circle like to remind me about the economic crisis: when it comes, tough
days will come for me. For those women it is very hard to explain that they are in a riskier situation
than me – they work for someone, and if their companies will go bankrupt because of somebody’s
stupid decision, they will sink together with the company. While I am self-employed and I believe
that it is much easier for me and my small business to survive the storm, than for their corporative
giants. But if this day comes I will remind myself that I had a far more independent and amazing
career journey than they had.”

Olesya is 38 years old. She graduated from St Petersburg State University where she studied accountancy. After working for almost 10 years as an account she realized that if being an accountant is such a responsible job and an average career path to the position of the chief managerial accountant was estimated by her as 10-15 years more, why could not she arrange a promotion herself? She opened her small accountant firm in St Petersburg as well for those small businesses that outsource accounting functions. Her company has been operating in the market for 7 years already. She says that it was not that hard for her to become an entrepreneur: she did not lack education as management and marketing were a part of her education or she suffered from prejudices. She emphasizes that the most there are two main barriers for women to become entrepreneurs: fear which pertains to any person – a man or a woman, who is taking risks, and simple reluctance of women to become independent, which can be explained by deeply-laid peculiarities of Russian culture and its norms and, as she says, a strange belief that entrepreneurship for a woman is something scary, unbelievable and impossible.

All these women together made an invaluable contribution to our study. With the help of the information and facts they provided to us we will be able to make further conclusions on our research topic and, in the end, answer our research question. After this small overview of other interviewees, we will proceed with the description of our four main stories.

5.2 Lena

“What the eyes fear, the hands do” (Russian proverb)

Lena was the first candidate who was eager and found time to talk to us. We contacted her in person as Aleksandra, one of the authors of this thesis, is her regular client. Elena represents the segment of beauty and SPA, which is supposed to be a true female sector (Silverstein & Sayre,
2009). After the first meeting we had two meetings, on which we discussed the new emerging topics and issues. Perhaps, this may seem that we have not had that much interviews. Actually, this happened due to the fact that we had plenty of information about her business before, as Lena and Aleksandra used to meet a lot.

Lena is the owner of the company “Nail X” (the real name of the company was hidden at Lena’s request), which is represented by three beauty salons in Moscow. Her company exists in the market for 6 years already and is pretty successful. The mission of her company is to provide people with high-quality service at a reasonable price. Her salons offer their clients a great variety of nail and brow service, such as manicure, pedicure, nail polishing, various designs, brow design and coloration and so on. Of course, almost 97% of her customers are women, however, as Elena says herself, even men need to look perfectly, and perfection is comprised by details, even by such small as perfectly-looking nails.

1. The Beginning

Lena was born in Moscow in 1988. She graduated from the College of Beauty and Hospitality Services where she studied at the Faculty of applied aesthetics. After the graduation she started working as a manicure master. On the whole, she liked her job and what it involved. However, it was mostly a low-paid job, and it became harder and harder from year to year to earn her living. Nevertheless, she did not want to change her occupation despite that fact that there was a little space to grow professionally.

During our interviews we were glad to admit how communicable and benevolent Lena is. These traits of character helped her establish good relations with her clients and get regular ones, who only wanted to have their nails done by her. Due to this, Lena very often heard the complaints from her clients that nail service was getting pretty expensive while the quality leaves much to be desired. Lena did her small, as she called it, “investigation” and found out that most salons in Moscow were using Chinese materials which were cheap but of poor quality. At the same time the prices of the nail services were unreasonably high, and some clients started to do manicure at home – of course, much worse than it could have been done in a salon by a professional, but much cheaper. Lena realized that the price could be lower, while the quality does not need to suffer, as the materials of better quality were not in high demand and their price was not as high as the Chinese ones.
Both these conditions: her wish to earn more and her clear vision of the state of the beauty industry led her to the idea that she could be a person who could change the present state even by her little step. Though she still could not decide whether that was a step to a future paradise or to an abyss.

2. “Nail X”

Her first nail studio was opened in 2013. She told us that it was the toughest decision of her life. She realized that she faced lots of difficulties on her way to the final goal. First of all, she needed financial resources. Of course, her salary as a nail master could not afford her make the savings of such an amount that she needed. Moreover, the rate of her salary did not allow her to take a loan, as she could not provide the reassurance of its repayment. After tireless search of possible options, she had only one way out: she had to pawn her parents’ flat. This seemed crazy as her venture seemed quite risky. She commented this situation: “My parents supported me in my venture, which I actually did not expect. I got lucky that they have economic backgrounds, especially my father, and the number say something to them. My father made me draw up the whole business plan. This, actually, was pretty tough. Especially for a person who does not know a thing about it. He spent hours reading, calculating and making notes with me. After sometime we made a decision to take a loan charged upon our flat. This was the most serious decision I have ever made: even getting married seems to me much easier right now comparing to this”.

Then other issues came at play like finding a right place, future employees, suppliers and, what is more important, future clients. When we asked Lena about her feelings about the initial process she told us the following: “When we finally found the right place and I entered it as an official lessee, I saw only the white plastered walls. Then a huge wave of fear laid me over. There were those white walls, which were the frightening symbol of how much should be done to succeed. As a result, a lot of questions started to pop out in my head like “Will I succeed? or “Will I be able to do this?” and everything in that vein. My first wish was to run away from that room and never come back. It took a lot to pluck up my nerve and remind myself of an old Russian proverb: *What the eyes fear, the hands do. It is high time to get off the ground*. Here we insert a small remark about this proverb. It is usually said when there is very difficult work ahead. However, there is no need to exaggerate the difficulties. Just do what you have to do to gain results (Armeyskov, 2014).
Though Lena does not have an education in marketing or close to it, she says she has a kind of a knack for the wishes of her clients. At that time, they wanted to get a better service for a lower price. That was when her previous experience proved useful. She started to send invitations to her own salon to the clients she used to work with before enclosing the price list. Except for the advertisements, that mailout turned out to be the main source of the initial clients’ flow. She went further and made three combo sets of prices: manicure without a coating, manicure using Chinese coating and manicure using American coating. The last option is the most expensive out of three, however, the difference between the second and the third is not that big, so that clients could choose what they want, of which quality and not to be deceived in price. This idea caught the clients’ fancy at once. This division is still included in the price lists of all the three salons with small alterations (the website of her company, 2018).

As we have already mentioned before, Lena has already opened three nail studios in Moscow. The third one has appeared recently, the second one three years ago. The fact that Lena’s business is expanding is such a competitive industry and in such a big city as Moscow is definitely an indicator of her success. Besides, Lena names the factor that form her point of view is the best indicator – to get an appointment one should call 4-5 days in advance and he/she can choose from time option that are left, or 7-8 days to get a time window he/she wants. She adds that this time frame increases before and during the public holidays. This means that the clients enjoy the service that her salons provide and their needs are satisfied, and this is the main driving force and the indicator of success to her.

3. Views on female entrepreneurship

During all our interviews we wrote down her thoughts and suggestions on this topic and put them together here. Lena reckons that in general a woman who has a desire to become an entrepreneur is able to do that in Russia. Of course, she adds that this way is tough and demands will power, firmness and common sense. This is what she says about entrepreneurship: “It is a relentless work. It takes most of your time – sometimes, I see dreams about my work, how I am counting something or heading somewhere. You should be ready for unexpected twists, keep an eye on your rivals, communicate with the suppliers, be an expiring example for your employees – it is like having 5 jobs in one. It is extremely tiring – but it is worth it as the gains are unbelievable. When you see the results of your efforts and the happiness on the faces of your customers and
employees and realize that this is what you did yourself – this is the best feeling I have ever experienced”.

Lena told us that she has not come across corruption and bribes yet. However, she told us that such cases still happen and she is familiar with such situations, which occurred to her female colleagues. She adds she in case she will have to give a bribe to save her business and its amount will be that high, she will pay. When we asked her about the barriers that could get in the way of female entrepreneurs, she told us that she could not name certain external barriers like cultural or economic that could hinder only females. However, she notes, that this may be applicable to her industry only, as it is almost fully represented by females, and one comes across male entrepreneurs in the beauty sphere, especially in the nail service sector rarely. She could not recall coming across the cultural prejudices in this sphere or in her neighborhoods.

However, Lena adds that the barriers really exist but they are not that even. She calls them “personality barriers”, and we like that expression and will use it as well. By this she means that plenty of women for some reason think that it is not a female case to be an entrepreneur. She could not think over the definite reason why this happens: the influence of history and culture, or this is the influence of male-dominating Russian society, or everything together. However, the most common opinions that she heard while asking her female friends about what think about becoming entrepreneurs were: “Why would I need that? That is too complicated and looks very risky” or “I am a woman, and it is not for me. It is a male preserve.” Lena finds it strange, as she says herself “we are not living in the 18th century anymore where a woman could be only a mother and a wife. Women are enjoying equal rights today, however, they for some odd reason, do not want to use them. Something should be done with the values in our society. We will not prosper until we are equal. Women should oppose to men and act to prove that they are also capable of everything and even more.”

Besides, we also talked about educational barriers. Lena told us that this may really be an issue for a majority of female entrepreneurs. She suggests two solutions in case that problem emerges: to hire professionals in marketing, taxation and so on, which undoubtfully lead to extra costs and the issues of trust, which Lena was forced to do and will have to do soon as she is expecting a baby. Her second way out is to get extra education. Here she thinks is a root of the problem. There is no such a program in good universities of Russia that could prepare a person how to be an entrepreneur. Being a good entrepreneur includes knowing plenty of things, and no program includes such an entrepreneurial bundle of necessary subjects.
When we asked her whether she is planning to get an extra degree she answered: “I am planning to get a degree in the sphere of management to reduce the possibility of repetition of managerial mistakes. However, I am forced to postpone this idea for several years as I am going to be a mother, and this, to my mind, is a way more important right now. Nonetheless, despite the fact that I do not have a necessary degree in the field of management, I never stop my education in the field of nail service. As often as possible I attend the latest exhibitions of new materials and gels and follow various magazines on this topic to be sure that my studios are furnished according to the latest trends in the industry to satisfy my clients to the full.

Besides, I realize that relevant education is necessary not only for me, but for my employees as well. That is why I do my best to make my dear nail artists attend the latest courses which improve their qualifications. Of course, I pay for them, as in my business the qualification of a nail master is the main driver of success, and I want my employees to be the best and beyond competition.”

4. Advice

Lena was also very kind to add some tips for the female entrepreneurs. That is fully her initiative, as she hopes that her story among all others would serve as an inspiration as well as a kind of “entrepreneurial guideline” for those who are considering to become entrepreneurs and who already are ones.

Her main advice is that a woman should not stay alone with her venture. Though to some woman it seems that entrepreneurship provides them with a greater amount of freedom and enables them enjoy their independence and do what they want, which is, on the whole, true, a woman should not try to do everything herself. Entrepreneurship is a very serious and important step in a life which demands all time and attention as well as lots of efforts. However, it is impossible to be everywhere and notice everything, and sometimes something can be left out which may lead to misfortunes. This is when “a maintenance crew” comes to rescue. Even if no emergency happens, it is still important to have somebody by the side – whether it is a husband, parents, friends, colleagues, or all together, to feel their support and, as a result, remain in high spirit and be sure there are people who will be a helping hand in case something happens.

One more tip from Lena sounds as: “Do not repeat the mistakes of your previous bosses.” By this she means that when females become self-employed, and they need to hire workforce and to manage it, they sometimes forget why they have left their previous jobs. “They inexplicably
forget that they were not paid enough or they could not get a promotion or had little space for personal development and so on. For instance, my previous boss wanted to have more money for herself and did not spend money on our education. As a result, when there was almost a breakthrough in nail coating, she lost her clients, as the nail artists could not satisfy the new needs of clients. That is why I always keep in mind her negative experience and try to avoid such a situation.” Such inattentive attitude may hinder the success of a female entrepreneur, that is why Lena strongly recommends female entrepreneurs with the previous working experience to analyze the negative experiences and situations they have faced during that period and do their utmost to guard against alike errors.

5.3 Olga

“Only those who are professionals in their sphere, understanding the craft inside and out and shooting with breakthrough ideas, who are not mere imitators, copying what already exists, can really succeed.”

Our next choice of female entrepreneur fell on Olga. As far as her educational background is concerned, Olga graduated with a degree in philology from the most prestigious Moscow State University where she studied Russian as a foreign language to teach it to foreigners. Although her path was not connected with pedagogy, values embedded at that time, namely her strong love for arts and literature, reflected in her life.

Her main distinctive characteristic is enormous amount of enthusiasm, passion and total dedication to everything she is involved in. Once she comes up with an idea, she immediately starts evaluating pros and cons, possible variants and alternatives, never doubting her own capabilities. When a decision is made, she does not contemplate on probable failure but gets down to work. While interviewing her, we were amazed with her firm conviction that everything is possible if one is brave enough to grasp it.

It is precisely for this reason that we were not surprised to find out that various businesses she launched were in totally different spheres and had nothing in common. The scope of her business activities ranges from touristic services and cultural sphere to textile production.
1. Studio “Cultural code”

The project that Olga was most delighted to talk about is her studio “Cultural code”, founded in 2014 and designed to provide lectures with outstanding people with artistic backgrounds. It positions itself not only as a place that holds lectures on history, painting, architecture, etiquette, Russian and world culture, Christianity, but also as a space for conversations and communication. Its lecturers may be famous to different extent, but all of them possess the profound knowledge of the issue and unique opinion, which they are more than eager to share with the listeners. The club unites people that are keen on self-development and look for new experiences that color our life.

Olga was totally full of enthusiasm while setting on this path and exploring this field. No wonder, being very intelligent and raised on classical literature, she took pleasure in being involved in arts community, meeting prominent people and enriching herself with new knowledge. She was also delighted that this project carried out a positive function as it helped to enlighten people. As she claims herself this project is her dearest brainchild that she immensely enjoyed creating and is most proud of.

Colossal amount of energy that she possessed and invested was undoubtedly useful, however, it did not contribute much. From the financial perspective, this business was completely unprofitable. The underlying reason was that it served as an analogue of an extremely popular project “Direct speech” that has been domineering in this field for some time and, consequently, her business could not compete with it. Moreover, there have appeared a great number of similar projects that poached lecturers from their rivals and offered practically the same content. In result, visitors were familiar mainly with the studio “Direct speech” and did not differentiate others.

Thus, Olga had difficulties with attracting customers and some rare successful events were just a matter of chance. Olga understands that it resulted from very little advertising which was mainly in the form of social networks and word of mouth. Thus, on a Facebook page there were only 100 followers with the same number of views of the event in general. That is why it came as a total surprise when all the tickets were sold out within 5 minutes from the announcement and there were 1000 views. It turned out that day there had been a TV program dedicated to the same lecturer that they were going to host and it played into her hand. Olga was not going to miss that opportunity and organized the second lecture with this person and it was sold out again in an instance.
Nevertheless, such lucky opportunities did not emerge frequently. Lectures used to be attended by only half of those who were even interested. That is why the project did not last long and Olga was forced to close it in 2016, though she still considers bringing it back to life. After its closure Olga was not despondent and did not let the gloom get the better of her, on the contrary, she threw herself into further projects with even renewed vigor.

2. **Tailoring business**

Her next project was related to tailoring business that she started in 2017. Completely unexpectedly she was given an idea to try herself in this sphere as it was really popular. She saw reality clearly: it was a common practice to produce something and advertise it in Instagram, and she thought she would use the same strategy as well.

Thus, she plunged wholeheartedly into the work and launched her own line of clothing. She got to know the production inside and out: from the types of stitches and linings to the actual ways of sewing. She opened a showroom in Moscow and also sold the items online through Instagram. At first it was visited mostly by Olga's friends but then it gained some popularity due to increase of followers.

However, it was not so profitable as well. To her mind, bad sales are caused by lower purchasing power of the population, witnessed nowadays, rather than by her probable mistakes. Indeed, current economic situation in Russia, characterized by declining consumer demand, leaves much to be desired. This business is still run by her; however, she has certain doubts about its future.

3. **Crucial factors in business**

In our dialogue, Olga also shared her understanding of key ingredients required for business to flourish. According to her, “in business every person should do what he/she meant to do, i.e. what he/she is really good at”. She is convinced that only those who are “creators”, who are real professionals rather than blind imitators that quickly copy what already exists, can succeed.

Drawing a parallel with her not so prosperous tailoring business, she concludes that this may be the exact reason of its difficulties. Given that Olga is not a seamstress, she knows the basics of sewing but she is not able to do it herself. Coco Chanel, on the contrary, being a seamstress herself, was able to create what she had in mind not giving insurmountable challenges to her
employees. Therefore, Olga's principle is “if one is not able to do it himself from top to bottom (from the ground up), he/she will not succeed”.

Another crucial factor required for business to survive that Olga highlights is a customer base. “Given that in Moscow “in every house” there is a touristic agency, beauty salon, dentistry service, to be compatible one needs to find its own niche and attract regular customers”. Both the studio “Cultural code” and her tailoring business, existing on the basis of social networks and word of mouth, failed to conduct a proper advertising campaign and, in result, lacked loyal customers.

Reflecting on this point, Olga admits it herself that her insufficient entrepreneurial knowledge and shortage of business education could have led to such outcomes. Indeed, not being competent in business strategies, marketing, leadership and financial schemes, though equipped with infinite energy and commitment, Olga did not carry out the envisaged purposes.

4. Views on female entrepreneurship

Olga considers that an employed woman, holding high post of a chairman of the board or a vice-chairman, faces much more hardships in surviving in a male-dominated environment than a self-employed woman. She explains it by the fact that women have to adapt to male patterns of behavior and conduct business in accordance with “men's rules” as some female traits are regarded inappropriate and irrelevant by men. Female business owners, in their turn, are at liberty to behave any way they wish, with their peculiarities being to their advantage.

A woman is used to working considerably more compared to a man. “Being an owner of her business, a woman can willingly labor even 26 hours a day. It is where gender differences emerge. It is in women's nature to cherish, nurture, protect their businesses the same way that they take care of their children, with total love and commitment. Women's dedication to business will be way more considerable than men's. Meanwhile, they will also manage to look after kids and run a household.”

Striking fact is that Olga was totally surprised to find out that Russian female entrepreneurs comprise less than 30% of total amount. Surrounded by businesswomen she was totally sure that the proportion was at least equal. She also took a pause to answer the question about preventing factors that women encounter. In her opinion, for a really motivated person there could be no obstacles that could discourage him or her. As for Russian women, she doubts that there are serious gender issues or any other barriers related only to women. She even stated that it may be easier for a woman to start business in some way, for example when it comes to dealing with different
administrative instances women tend to be more self-disciplined and pay more attention to filling in the papers than men.

5.4 Elena

“Business is freedom in a way that it enables one to take decisions, hold responsibility, be a master of one's life. All winnings are yours but all failures are yours as well.”

Having graduated from Moscow State Pedagogical University with a degree in pedagogy and psychology and the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration from the faculty of State and Municipal Administration, Elena worked for government entities such as Department of Education, Employment Services Department and Chamber of Commerce and Industry for quite a long time.

Elena entered entrepreneurship in 2007 and she found herself on this path totally by accident. Holding the position of Deputy Director in the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, she did not feel that her potential was fully realized. Besides, she provided reasons of her quitting that she considers purely female. “Firstly, forced to share one office with my boss, I lacked my own space and freedom. Secondly, at my previous workplaces I had held leading posts, that is why I was used to signing documents all by myself, holding responsibility and taking decisions. Deprived of all that, I did not feel myself. That is why when I was offered to head the advertising company in Kirov, my hometown (Kirov is situated 950 km away from Moscow), I eagerly grasped that opportunity anticipating new possibilities for my personal growth. Though I was totally unfamiliar with this sphere, I did not question my abilities and I was not afraid to step into the unknown.”

This decision entirely transformed her life. Currently, she is the head of advertising agency, travel agency, restaurant business, company providing printing services and non-profitable organization in the field of tourism, healthy lifestyle and innovative activity, all of which she founded by herself and runs on her own. Surprised by this enormous list, we could not help but wonder, how Elena manages to cope with obviously great amount of duties and responsibilities, and Elena willingly revealed her own secrets of success.
1. Own business recipe

During our dialogue, we were always impressed by her positive attitude about her business and life in general. Her key rule that she eagerly shared with us is to be surrounded by happy people. “The more happy and affluent people there are around us, the more happy and affluent we are.”

That is why her personal rule that Elena sticks to is to create such environment that an employee would be unwilling to leave or work for someone else. “One cannot assume that business is not interconnected with people, working for him/her. If people fall in love with the work they are doing, they become so devoted to it that they will surpass any expectations and surprise even themselves. People are the main asset and I owe my success mainly to their incredible performance.”

Elena is also firm about not letting her employees combine several jobs. “One cannot be loyal and devoted to several workplaces at the same time, that is why either an employee is fully committed to my company or he/she does not work for me. That is my principal that I do not violate.” Elena's way of dealing with employees undoubtedly proves to be effective as her employees from advertising company, her first brainchild, still remain with her after 11 years of fruitful cooperation, which she is extremely proud of.

Elena also underlines the importance of setting right tasks that would cause some alterations as any company should undergo permanent process of development and should not stand still. “If there are no changes witnessed within 6 months, a company is worth closing as it is not subject to development. Sometimes I even set objectives that are not so reasonable but can trigger some change. For example, I tend to organize a questionnaire with the view of obtaining feedback from employees though I know its results already in advance. The underlying reason is to diversify employees’ day-to-day responsibilities and avoid professional burnout. Implementing even slightest changes in the working process enables employees not to get bored and distracted, which consequently helps to retain employees in the company and, as a result, demonstrates attractiveness of the company.”

Furthermore, Elena revealed her own vision on how to quickly start a business. At different courses she was taught that an initial step is to draw up a business plan, calculate all possible losses, predict probable difficulties and only then one can actually start acting. “When I imagine following these tactics, I realize that it would have taken me 20 years to found any company. I have never practiced it as it could have trapped me into believing that it is so troublesome and
time-consuming which is not. However, one should not confuse it with business planning and business idea that are obligatory and essential.”

Elena enjoys every day that she is in business. Her overall objective of starting a company is never related to earning money but is due to pure interest in the process itself. Full of energy and openness towards people and new things, she does not cease to inspire people who are more than willing to follow her.

2. Views on female entrepreneurship

Elena does not consider starting a business in Russia to be a difficult procedure at all. Once a decision is made, the documents are submitted to tax inspection to register a commercial company or to the Justice Department if it is a non-profitable organization. The moment they are ready, one is able to conduct business. She reckons that in many foreign countries, on the contrary, people more frequently encounter some obstacles at an administrative level.

To convey more clearly to us the essence of the foregoing, Elena formulated a beautiful metaphor. “I live on the seventh floor and do not take the elevator. While I am walking up the stairs thinking about it, I happen to stop on the fifth or sixth floor to have a little break and catch my breath. In case if I am just climbing the stairs by inertia not reflecting upon what floor it is, I manage to reach the top without even noticing it. The same is relevant to business. If starting a business itself is a medium or long-term goal, one will undoubtedly pay attention to unnecessary details like filling in applications, visiting different instances, etc. It may obviously seem then as a lengthy and time-consuming process. However, if opening a company serves as an initial stage for fulfillment of real long-term goals, no one will perceive it as a barrier.”

Sharing her thoughts on corruption, she firmly states that it is inevitable to face it in any way. However, she considers herself to be an exception to this rule. To her own surprise, she has never been involved in any corruptive actions and has never bribed anyone. Explaining this unique situation, Elena makes an assumption that due to the impression of a kind and gentle person that she creates no one has attempted to extort bribes from her. Nevertheless, Elena concludes that even corruption should not be viewed as a huge obstacle for business as it is a national particularity and everyone is used to it.

Elena also touched upon stereotypical thinking of women towards business and expressed her own vision on this topic. “Many women presume that it is extremely difficult to conduct business as huge amount of responsibility falls on their shoulders and they definitely suffer from
lack of time. Not all women are eager to sacrifice their personal life for the sake of something. Not being accountable for business decisions, they are convinced that it is much easier to spend certain hours on the working place and then return to their families. However, they fool themselves into believing in that. In reality, business enables us to have much more freedom and time rather than employment. Women are just unaware of all amazing possibilities that business has in stock for them.” Moreover, Elena is convinced that women are more likely to effectively negotiate with business partners or some intermediate bodies due to gender specifics.

Speaking about some negative men's attitude towards female entrepreneurs, Elena confirmed that some men tend to look down on female entrepreneurs. To her mind, it has nothing to do with some peculiarities of the country, geographical location of her town or her social status. It depends only on a specific man, his inner problems and his own wrong attitude to women. In no way it can be viewed as a problem on a national level.

Reflecting upon real preventing factors dissuading women from becoming entrepreneurs, Elena highlights entrepreneurial courses. It may occur to someone that she means their non-attendance by women or their poor quality. Though she admits that educational system aimed at preparing people for being entrepreneurs is organized completely in a wrong way, she underlines utterly another criterium, i.e. excessive saturation with information. Elena considers that entrepreneurial courses, providing women with the overwhelming amount of information on business situations of every sort and kind, cause an opposite effect: women are burdened, discouraged and frightened in advance.

In the end, Elena stressed that it might be in a Russian mentality to regard female entrepreneurship from a negative, even martyred, perspective and create some fictional barriers only with the view of justifying the obvious fact that women may simply do not wish to enter entrepreneurship.

5.5 Svetlana

“The idea of corruption is so deeply anchored in our minds, that we perceive it as normal.”

Svetlana (we changed her real name at her request, and she chose a pseudonym herself) used to be the owner of a law firm, which she founded in 1998 in Samara. She was its owner for almost 20 years. In 2015 she had to declare bankruptcy and considered to return to the work in the
public sector. She kindly found time to communicate with us through e-mails and Skype sessions, as her city Samara is 1000 kilometers away from Moscow and, unfortunately, we could not arrange a face-to-face meeting.

1. A path to entrepreneurship

Svetlana was born in 1962 in the town of Tolyatti in the Samara’s region. She graduated from the Samara University, where she studied civil law. After her graduation she started working within her specialty as a paralegal. On the whole she enjoyed her work, as she had certain passion to law. The years of hard work and sleepless nights led to a series of promotions. As a result, she held a post of a federal bankruptcy commissioner. Such a job implied countless business trips countrywide. At first, she enjoyed that, as she was paid pretty enough to support her family, which at that time was her main aim. However, she could not stay at home more than a week until the beginning of a new project, which could be located hundred kilometers away. As a result, she sees that as the main reason of her divorce with her first husband. She reckons he could not assume the role of a housekeeper and a nanny for their son, as well as get used to her constant absence. That hindered his self-esteem and his career potential, as he had to quit his previous job to stay at home with their son.

Svetlana had to come back to Samara and concern herself with divorce. Besides from that moment on she had to look after her son as her ex-husband returned to work. That meant that she could not work as a federal bankruptcy commissioner. She made a decision to quit for a while to have a small rest to smooth rumpled feathers and to spend more time with her son, as she had some financial savings for a rainy day that could provide their living for some time.

However, sometime later she realized that it was almost impossible for her to return to her previous job. The main reason, of course, was her son, who she could neither leave alone for such a long time, nor take with her, as he had to go to school. Her ex-boss offered her a transfer to the administrative block provided a significant reduction in position and salary. She could not agree to that.

Thinking things out, she remembered how hard it was for her to get divorced with all that papers and red tape and total disorganization in law services. She thought how it would be nice to have everything together in one place being served by a qualified lawyer. That is how the idea to open her own law firm came to her mind.
“Firstly, I did not take that serious”, – she said. “I thought that it was one of the ideas that are crazy and come to your mind from total despair.” Still looking for a job and thinking over this idea for almost two months she started to ask her friends and acquaintances, whether they had ever come across some difficulties or inconvenience trying to get any legal services. What she found out is that people in her city were not satisfied with them, and sometimes they even had to go to Moscow to get what they needed when the issue was very serious, as the quality of legal services was much higher there. As Svetlana did not receive good job offers, she finally decided to try being an entrepreneur.

2. The firm

Like in the interviews with the other female entrepreneurs, one of our first questions was regarding initial investments. Svetlana replied: “I was lucky that opening a small firm like mine did not require much initial investment. All I had to pay was the fee for the license of a notary, small reparations of an office and the monthly rent. Undoubtedly, one needs to find money even for these small operations. That was when my family and at that time my boyfriend, who is now my husband, offered me financial help at the start.” Having received the essential financials, she started her entrepreneurial journey as a “sole agent”. For the first years she did not have any employees. Her job implied witnessing of documents, authentication of deals and unofficially, giving legal advice, as she had plenty of acquaintances, who came to her to ask for a piece of advice. Later, as the demand was constantly growing, she had to employ specialists in law to help her with the growing number of clients. She expanded her firm from notary to a law one, which included the notary. From that moment on she could give legal advice.

Everything was fine and stable for 8 years. Svetlana’s firm was growing step by step. However, during the crisis of 2008 she started to be dogged by problems. The first and the major one was connected with a decrease in demand. Svetlana was forced to reduce costs which resulted in dismissal of two employees. She adds: “That was my first huge mistake. I did not have crisis management skills. No question about it, I had no managerial skills at all. I did not need them that much before: my team at that time consisted of 8 people. Dismissing two people of my team seemed to be the easiest and the fastest solution of the problem. That is what I did and still regret.” That resulted in the fact that Svetlana got to the list of the unfavorable employers. “I did not have free time to get extra education – maybe this could have helped me. After the first two left, three more left after them. It became very hard to find skilled and qualified professionals – they did not
want to work with me thinking that they may be fired if a better tomorrow will not come. I could not attract them by other means like by a higher salary as I could not afford that.”

At the time of trouble, the authorities came in play. “They offered me “help” if it can be called this way. They suggested me helping them in their sometimes illegal operations. They suggested paying a significant sum of money in case I agreed that could help me save my company. If I did not, I would be forced to close my firm. Well, I agreed. I could not complain to anybody as the authorities who I could complain would be on their side”. This “collaboration” lasted for a number of years, until one day Svetlana refused to perform one task. “I did not want to participate in the deal they wanted me to. I cannot say what it was, but in case something had gone wrong, I would have been under arrest. Almost immediately they found one million reasons to shut down my firm. Don’t think that I did not want to fight: beforehand I knew for sure that I would lose.”

When she left entrepreneurship, she started to think what she could do next. “I was thinking of returning to the public sector and continue working, as I could still earn money. Then I starting to think the following away: I earned enough money to never get back to work. I am 53, and soon I will be able to retire officially (the age of retirement in Russia for now is 55 years for women and 60 for men (Butrin & Manuylova, 2018). What is more, my return will mean that I have totally put up with what my government has done to me. That would be a betrayal of my own values and pride.” She retired later and remained unemployed.

3. Views on entrepreneurship

Svetlana believes that entrepreneurship is an integral part of stable economic development in Russia. After she told her story we could not help but asking about corruption: if it caused such a problem for her why she still believes in entrepreneurship. She told us: “The idea of corruption is so deeply anchored in our minds, that we perceive it as normal. We are ready to give or take bribes as it is a norm of our daily life in Russia. We just hope this phenomenon will pass by and will not interfere with us. So, when future entrepreneurs decide to set up a firm they are aware of this risk and do not consider corruption as a barrier, it cannot stop them, because corruption in our country is everywhere in every sphere.”

Talking about the cultural prejudices, Svetlana said that this she did not face them and believes that they are not an issue of significant importance anymore.

Svetlana believes that to make the contribution of entrepreneurship to the economic development more significant, the government should “advertise” entrepreneurship and the
measure it takes to improve this sphere. “Potential entrepreneurs should know about the opportunities in this sphere. They should be aware of the measures the government takes to improve the overall situation and how it could help one entrepreneur in particular to recover.

Having told the stories of our dear interviewees, we will describe our findings and the results of our analysis in more details in the next part.
6. Final floors: Findings

As we told the stories of our interviewees, we would like to present the results of our analysis and our findings here. They serve as final upper floors of our scientific tower which stand on what has already been built before and this way help us get closer to the answer of our research question.

We conducted a small table to have a better view on our research. This also serves as a kind of guidance of our interviewees gathered all together and of our findings (see Figure 6). This table includes the answers to the questions which we find the most relevant to our research. Some of them have already been mentioned earlier, others are represented here. For the answer “yes” we use this symbol “✓”, for the negative one – “✗”.

Figure 6 Table of Facts

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Is an entrepreneur</th>
<th>Higher education</th>
<th>Additional education</th>
<th>Experienced difficulties with</th>
<th>Count on govern. support</th>
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<td>✓</td>
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</tr>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>✗</td>
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<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Resource: data collected through various articles and interviews.
Among other findings we would like to highlight the following one: the majority of the barriers emerge not at the initial stages but later, even in some years, during the process of conducting the business. This in most cases happens because the females do not specialize in the fields of business administration and management but specialize in other fields. That is why the educational barriers may have a greater negative impact on female entrepreneurs than other barriers. This is the topic of the following part.

6.1 Educational issues

Almost all the female entrepreneurs highlighted the importance of education. Eleven out of twelve presented female entrepreneurs have higher education. Nevertheless, the majority of them specialize in their interests whether it is sports, fashion, IT, beauty, etc. When it comes to extra education that could provide them with the knowledge needed for being a successful entrepreneur, some of them had a degree education in management or management was a sufficient part of their educational program from the starting point (Julia, Olesya and Anastasia), others (Olga Slutsker, Alina, Natalya Kasperskaya and Elena) understood the need of the education in the course of entrepreneurial process and got it to update their qualifications and to cover blind spots in management, some (Maria, Olga, Katerina, Lena and Svetlana) did not have managerial education at all. What is more, most of women pointed out that they made managerial mistakes throughout their career.

However, the majority of them believed that this education does not cover or include the more important subjects and issues than it could. Alina, Julia and Anastasia said that they still lack marketing, leadership, financial or crisis management skills, while Katerina added that she lacked them as well – skills that distinguish a successful entrepreneur. Nine out of ten interviewees believe that the existing educational programs are not able to give the necessary amount of knowledge sufficient for an entrepreneur.

All the mentioned above facts led us to conducting our small investigation. We searched for an educational program entitled “Entrepreneurship” or something analogous to it in the top-10 Russian economic universities in 2017, conducted by the Federal portal “Russian Education”. We focused our search on the master programs, as we believe that a career of an entrepreneur is a conscious choice of more grown-up people. This is what we found out: almost none of them provide such an educational program (see Figure 7).
These statistics are rather dissatisfying. Only three out of ten best economic universities have a program that could provide people with valuable knowledge and experience in entrepreneurship. What is more, the programs of entrepreneurship are represented only in Moscow or in the Moscow branches of the universities and on average have no more than 7 spots. As a result, those who are running their business not in the capital, have two rather inconvenient options: either to leave business to get necessary education, which seems almost impossible, or continue working without it.

These findings, proving the general tendency of Russian female entrepreneurship, suggest that Russian women choose the sphere of their business solely on the basis of their interest or the
field they got education in, sometimes even without general understanding of how to conduct business. Later they suffer due to managerial incompetence and are forced to catch up on knowledge in a rush which not always turns out effective. As we can see this finding complies with the information and statistics described in the literature review.

6.2 Financial literacy

The next finding that derives from insufficient education is the lack of financial literacy that leads to ineffective management and, in worst scenario, to bankruptcy. The majority of our interviewees (all, except Olesya and Julia) highlighted that there were difficulties with obtaining finances and their management due to the shortage of knowledge in this sphere.

Surveys illustrate that financial illiteracy exists on the national level. According to the first Russian study of financial literacy of small and medium-sized businesses, conducted at the initiative of the Central Bank of Russia, NAFI Analytical center, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, “Opora Russia”, every fifth entrepreneur in Russia demonstrates a low level of financial literacy (NAFI, 2017). Moreover, female entrepreneurs, running micro-enterprises, dominate that list. Thus, 37 percent of female entrepreneurs are reported to have the lowest level of financial literacy.

Due to the lack of knowledge women do not seek to attract external funding for the development of their businesses (62% of women versus 55% of men). Only half of the surveyed women (58%) is able to correctly calculate the deposit interest income, unlike 70% of men. Also, women are not so familiar with the essence of factoring (34%), bank guarantee (57%), or leasing (49%) (NAFI, 2017).

Women's low level of financial literacy is closely linked to their entrepreneurial experience and the size of their businesses. Women are less experienced than men: 32% of women are conducting business for less than 5 years, 14% - less than two years; the figure for men is respectively, 25% and 6%. The share of women running small enterprises is 78% versus 58% of men, while the turnover of 78% does not exceed 10 million per year.
6.3 Corruption

As far as such huge preventing barrier as corruption is concerned, interesting outcomes concerning it emerge. None of our interviewees have denied such phenomenon or tried to underestimate its importance. On the contrary, everyone recognizes its existence and effects on business flourishing. One of the interviewees (Svetlana) experienced rather serious problems because of this very phenomenon. Nevertheless, attitude towards corruption is surprisingly indifferent. Everyone highlights that corruption is so inscribed in the mentality of Russian people that it is perceived as something totally normal, that cannot dissuade people from starting business. That is why women do not view it as an extraordinary obstacle for entrepreneurial process.

Thus, this finding contradicts in some way with the studied literature on this topic and shows this phenomenon in a different light.

6.4 Government support

According to our interviewees, they do not count much on the government support of entrepreneurship. Only three of the interviewed entrepreneurs (Alina, Julia and Olesya) rely on government support programs and consider them effective. Besides they believe that the government does not take measures regarding the improvement of entrepreneurship and all the adjacent issues. The majority even added that they treat the government programs with caution. They do not even apply for them as they consider that such programs contain some hidden agenda to cover fraudulent schemes and that entrepreneurs can really get the needed help. Such mistrust is an unfortunate case, as for now the government has worked out a number of efficient programs for further entrepreneurial development and improvement among which is, for instance, the “National strategy of actions in the interests of women for the years 2017-2022”, presented in the literature review.

6.5 Cultural prejudices

As one can notice only one female entrepreneur has faced the barrier of cultural prejudices – Alina, who is currently running her business in the Muslim region. She told us that in the beginning it was very hard for her to be an entrepreneur as she was very much judged and
criticized, and still is. However, in her opinion, the cultural barriers in general do not bother those who are working outside her region, especially in such big cities, as Moscow or St Petersburg. In Kazan these barriers are still dramatically influenced by the religion which prevails there. During our interviews, all the interviewees agreed on the fact that the cultural prejudices have been overcome and now do not influence female entrepreneurs to the extent they used to.

This is very surprising to us, as before the research was carried out, we as well the friends and acquaintances we asked about the issue, thought that females are often hindered by some cultural preconceptions. Here we have a contradiction with a literature review, according to which such prejudices have influence the choice of women to become female entrepreneurs. Our interviewees believe, that such cultural issues are not of great significance anymore and cannot be seen as barriers in general. We cannot say that cultural prejudices do not exist at all and are faded away: they exist, that is true, however, they are not spread all over the place. In some regions of Russia, where the culture is totally different due to historical premises or other religion, for instance, and exist as almost independent states and are even called “republics” in terms of administrative division of Russia, and the phenomenon of female entrepreneurship there demands a separate research.

6.6 The myth of female entrepreneurship

As a result of our research, the main preventing factor that derives from the case studies, interviews and our own investigation is the myth of female entrepreneurship. We refer to it as a “myth” as it is based on the strong beliefs of people, which may be totally unjustified and groundless, with the roots being unknown and going way back. Our myth of female entrepreneurship in Russia resides in the fact that the conditions of the phenomenon under consideration does not correspond to overall perception existing in the country. The theory which could comply with this finding was not represented in the literature review and is regarded as a new twist of our research.

According to our dearest interviewees, female entrepreneurs in Russia are not attacked by a great variety of barriers fully described by us in the literature review. On the contrary, many of them underline that women's position in entrepreneurship is not that different from men's. They similarly face the same economic, financial, bureaucratic and management issues, etc.
Furthermore, they highlight that startup problems tend to be equal for men and women, with gender prejudices being minimal and not of great importance.

However, due to the common feeling floating in the air, Russian women unreasonably consider entrepreneurship to be such an unbearable burden that they cannot withhold. That is why they tend to believe that they are simply unable to do that, that business is such a tough call and this is not their cup of tea. Some women cannot even imagine such a possibility of going into entrepreneurship because of the spread notion that entrepreneurship is a terrific process.

To tell the truth, embarking on the process of writing our thesis, we were victims of this myth as well. Subconsciously we believed that the current situation of female entrepreneurship fully complies with this myth, with women being bombarded by various barriers that discourage them from becoming entrepreneurs. However, having carried out our research, we came to the conclusion that it is just a myth that should be dispelled. We do not claim that business environment for women in Russia is close to perfection, there is still plenty of room for improvement, though it is not that dreadful as it is perceived by Russians.

6.7 High potential female entrepreneurship Model

Besides, we would like to propose a small model of favorable conditions for female entrepreneurs to succeed. The metaphor of the tower that goes throughout our research has been chosen on purpose: our model has a shape of a tower as well (see Figure 8).

Figure 8 High potential female entrepreneurship Model
Business, that a woman is starting and nurturing, is a tower itself. Its most crucial part is the foundation that is based on a woman's educational background, entrepreneurial and leading skills and experience, attitudes, her worldview and frames of references. Then the tower is comprised of other blocks like the ability to obtain finances, willpower, motivation and enthusiasm. Stability as well as height of the tower depends upon solidity of the foundation.

We understand that female entrepreneurs are influenced by the general business environment they exist in (The Female Entrepreneurship Index, 2016). That is why in our model
the entrepreneurial environment serves like a soil that holds our tower. If it is a swampy place, anything even the most solid tower will sink. On the contrary, if it is stable, it will withhold the building for many years.

Combination of gendered attitudes, social norms and beliefs forms an obstacle for a woman to construct her own entrepreneurial tower. From our point of view, attitudes are crucial in forming opinions as they, eventually, create a country's “entrepreneurial culture”, i.e. how the overall population views entrepreneurial endeavors, risk assessment, and acceptance of business ownership as a promising career option. Cultural environment, in its turn, has an impact on an individual opportunity recognition and willingness to take the risk to start a new venture.

The barriers are illustrated as the troops of the enemies that are ready to attack the tower. They constitute a danger to the safety of the tower construction. These barriers differ from the situation and can be in various ways dangerous. That is why it is highly important to protect the tower with a castle wall. It can be built from the extra relevant entrepreneurial education, constant acquisition of knowledge, newly gained skills, changed perceptions, innovative ideas and other factors that can foster the progress of a female entrepreneur. It enables to fight off the attacks of the troops providing the safety of the tower. What is more, when some troops see the fortified tower, they are powerless in front of it and cannot wreak any havoc and retrieve. However, others can go onto the offensive, therefore it is crucial to constantly improve and develop the castle wall construction so that to be ready to beat off the more serious enemies.

The same is relevant to the healthy state of a company. If a female entrepreneur is equipped with all the necessary knowledge and experience to be ready to face the barriers and fight them back, then less barriers can threaten her business, its stability and bright future. Fighting against more ominous obstacles can provide a female entrepreneur with valuable experience and help point out the weak places so that to avoid mistakes and have more chances to succeed in the future.
7. The dome of the tower: Conclusions

Finally, all the blocks of our research tower are constructed and we have reached its top. Looking from the dome allows us to view the whole picture from above with all its beautiful landscapes and poor holes. We are now able to look beyond the horizon and determine what this place is deprived of and what alterations are necessary for its development and prosperity. That is why we are more than willing to share our own vision on the possible changes in female entrepreneurship in Russia and provide suggestions that could trigger them.

In this final chapter we give voice to our own opinion on female entrepreneurship in Russia as well as present our view on alterations that could be implemented and that subsequently could have positive impact. We hope that this chapter may serve as a guideline for everyone who is interested in the entrepreneurial sphere as he/she may acquire new ideas and get encouraged in some way. In particular, we address all the women who might be willing to enter entrepreneurship but are afraid of some probable barriers that, as they think, exist in entrepreneurship.

Reflecting upon our whole thesis process, we are astonished with what results we arrived at. This journey transformed our perception of female entrepreneurship in Russia. Besides, it triggered thoughts on how to realign the system, which, ultimately, led us to the results that we have. It is also worth stressing that we are grateful that this working process gave us an opportunity to enhance our communication skills dealing with people that hold leading positions in business. Finally, being influenced by our outcomes to such a great extent, we hope that our work will be useful for our readers and it will add value to our society.

7.1 Educational toolkit for female entrepreneurs

We believe that in order to have a better and more stable development of entrepreneurship within the whole country, female entrepreneurs should be educated well both to be prepared and qualified. This requires the existence of sufficient educating programs in the universities in all the regions of the country. Therefore, we believe that creating entrepreneurial educating programs of the master level will increase the literacy of female entrepreneurs as well as give them an opportunity to obtain necessary managerial skills and improve their overall scope of knowledge. The main goal of these studies is to encourage people to become entrepreneurs by giving enough knowledge and initial experience so that they get necessary management, marketing, leadership
and crisis management skills and familiar with the bureaucratic procedures, taxation and financial peculiarities, the benefits as well the risks of entrepreneurship and be ready to bare them. We address our findings and recommendations to those who are in charge of the educational management in Russia and hope they will find our contribution to this sphere valuable.

We also believe that having a good and successful practice in this sphere may help forward the improvements. That is why we would like to give the benefit of our studies at the Linnaeus University and gained experience and connections in Sweden. The master program “Entrepreneurship” at the Linnaeus University could serve as an example for those who are in charge of creating educational programs in the universities and other educational organizations in Russia. We contacted our friend Polina who is also from Russia and is currently studying on this program. Her opinion on this program is that it helped her gain a better understanding of the issues regarding entrepreneurship as well as acquire new skills and sufficient knowledge. Besides, she finds the program well-balanced from academic perspective and inspiring for future entrepreneurs. Unfortunately, she reckons that our country cannot propose something analogous to this particular program and hopes together with us that the quality of education in this field will improve. That is why we also suppose it is necessary for the universities and educational organizations to emphasize the existence of such programs so that to increase the awareness of these entrepreneurial education programs among the potential entrepreneurs, as some programs already exist, however, it seems that people on the whole are not aware of their existence.

7.2 Entrepreneurial environment

Nevertheless, providing sufficient education in the universities and in other educational organizations is not enough. We suggest that creating favorable infrastructure such as business incubators, startup zones and exhibitions and science parks will also stimulate females to make notice of entrepreneurship as a promising choice of their career as well as increase the awareness of entrepreneurship as a concept within the society.

However, this is only a part of a puzzle entitled “entrepreneurial environment”. The government and the existing system contribute to the development and recognition of entrepreneurship. We address our findings to the policy makers in the economic sphere so that they could pay more attention to some disadvantages of the existing system which emerged during our investigation. The mistrust towards the government measures turned out to be on a rather high
level, which leads to the fact that very few potential entrepreneurs believe in effectiveness of the existing programs and participate in them. We suppose that increasing the awareness through the channels of the mass media and professional networks can draw more attention to these programs. Here arises the issue of promotion: how to kindle the interest of female entrepreneurs and increase the level of trust. We offer the solution to this problem through presenting inspirational stories, which can serve as an encouragement to others, in a way communicate with female entrepreneurs and tell more and with particular examples about the benefits of such programs.

7.3 Inspirational stories

In terms of our thesis we present the stories of the female entrepreneurs. A story is a powerful tool. It can be a source of inspiration telling about those who strive to achieve the set goals, and who are successful in this pursuit (Gardner, 2011). Some of the stories are the examples of success, some are very thought provoking and serve as an example of how things should not be done, this way providing extra thoughts on how to avoid such mistakes. The stories share the ideas of female entrepreneurs who have valuable and sufficient experience in this sphere, provide with interesting insights and unconventional opinions.

Through these stories we address all the potential female entrepreneurs. We hope that the presented stories will also encourage future female entrepreneurs and show that female entrepreneurship in Russia undoubtedly has some drawbacks, but what is more important, it offers significant benefits. That is why we believe that it is highly important to tell more stories of female entrepreneurs. Beautifully told stories of success as well as these that deal with negative experience broadcasted in the media and covered in the Internet will inspire and instill confidence into women, so that they would feel the freedom to realize their entrepreneurial ambitions. We believe that every person needs a role model, so that to strive to achieve success. Telling the inspirational stories of female entrepreneurs will provide women with role models to look up to and to be more self-confident and encouraged to reach the same level of success or even higher,

We fully understand that as there is no single recipe for success, there cannot be the only correct approach towards improving such enormous sphere as female entrepreneurship in Russia. However, we hope that our recommendations will be of help not only to Russian women, who refrain from becoming entrepreneurs owing to existing myth of female entrepreneurship, but to all women who might have doubts whether they are able to step on entrepreneurial path or not.
7.4 The journey is not over

In our work we highlight those factors that from our point of view need to be addressed in order to improve conditions for female entrepreneurship in Russia and reinforce the incentive structure for women to start their businesses.

We are fully aware that there can be no silver bullet for creating the conditions suitable for all high potential female entrepreneurship in Russia to flourish. Besides, we recognize that the myth of Russian female entrepreneurship cannot be dispelled at once; it will take years to eliminate this perception existing in the society. That is why our research needs to be further developed, with the actions being taken in the future. This way we address our findings to the future researches in this or close fields hoping that our research can inspire them, provide them with some insights or even change their perceptions and add value to their new research.

Furthermore, we assume that our work can serve as the basis for further studies. For instance, regional studies covering bright peculiarities of these regions with different religion and attitude towards female entrepreneurs as well as special economic and sociocultural factors where our findings and suggestions cannot be applied.

We hope that all these will foster some progress in creating a larger, more educated and better skilled pool of women from which high potential female entrepreneurs will emerge. Eventually, women pursuing their entrepreneurial ambitions will benefit Russian economy and society as a whole.
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Appendix
Questionnaire for the interviews (contains questions which were asked to all interviewees):

1. Do you have higher education? If yes, what do you major in?
2. How did you manage to obtain initial investments? Were there any difficulties to raise enough capital?
3. How did you make the decision to become an entrepreneur? What were the driving forces of this decision?
4. Do you have any previous job experience? If yes, was it hard for you to opt for self-employment?
5. What barriers do you consider the most influential on female entrepreneurship in Russia?
6. Were you a participant of any government programs of entrepreneurial support? Were you aware of the fact that the government is working out such programs?
7. Did you face any situation which involved corruption?
8. Did you face the difficulties in maintaining finances and/or accounting?
9. Have you ever faced any difficulties while managing the stuff?
10. Would you like to get extra education to improve your knowledge and skills?
11. How would suggest to improve the educational system in order to have more educated female entrepreneurs?
12. Can you think of a situation when you think you made a business mistake? What was the reason for that? What were the outcomes?
13. Have you felt that you are facing some difficulties because of the cultural prejudices?
14. What characteristics do you believe should a potential female entrepreneur possess?
15. What are the main driving forces of success in entrepreneurship? Is there any recipe for female entrepreneurs in particular?
16. What barriers do you consider the most influential on female entrepreneurship in Russia?
17. Why do you think the number of female entrepreneurs is rather low?
18. In your opinion, is it difficult for a woman to start up a business in the current conditions?
19. How would you suggest improving the field of female entrepreneurship in Russia?
20. What can you advise potential female entrepreneurs?