

Chapter 14

Women Enterprises, Relational Capital and Corporate Strategy: A Multiple Case Study



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Abstract This paper aims at analysing how relational capital (RC) contributes to the born of women enterprises in Italian small and medium enterprises (SMEs). In this way, this research is supported by a qualitative research methodology using a multiple case study (Yin 2009) comparing a small female enterprise and a small man enterprise to point out their characteristics and differences. Thus, the paper applies the CAOS model of micro-entrepreneurship by Paoloni (2011). Using such model, we're able to share some factors and to classify different types of connections, identifying several kinds of existing relations. Findings show a predominant use of networks characterized by informal and permanent relations, supporting the need to reconcile work and family and to involve relatives and friends in the network. As such results are confirmed in female and male enterprises, we assume that dimensions is a dominant factor instead of gender factor. Additionally, we emphasize the lack of a corporate strategy in the female enterprises. Lastly, given that female entrepreneurship is regarded as central to the development and welfare of economies, the deepening of knowledge of how women entrepreneurs manage the start-up of her business can contribute in improving the participation of female entrepreneurs in the economy.

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14.1 Introduction and Research Question

The paper aims at discovering how relational capital (RC) (Cuozzo et al. 2017; Stewart 1997) contributes to the born of women enterprises in Italian small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (Paoloni and Dumay 2015). In this perspective, the origins and the motivation of this study derives from the assumption that micro-enterprises are both key drivers of economic growth in Europe and woman entrepreneurs are key developers of these businesses.

Obtaining data supporting the analysis proposed in the study, a qualitative research methodology was adopted using a multiple case study approach based on examining current events of real life in depth (Yin 2009). Thus, the cases study proposed are in the field of beauty and hairdressing, through the proposition of a HairShop history in Italy, and in the field of betting, through the proposition of a Betting Shop in Italy.

In this way, the paper introduces, adopts and develops the CAOS model (Paoloni 2011) of micro-entrepreneurship, examining the personal characteristics of the female and male entrepreneurs (C); the environment in which the micro-enterprises operate (A); organizational and managerial aspects (O); and the motivations for starting a new business (S).

Using the CAOS model, we're able to share these factors and to classify different types of connections, identifying several kinds of existing relations. Results show a predominant use of networks (Lombardi 2015) characterized by informal and permanent relations, supporting the need to reconcile work and family and to involve relatives and friends in the network (Larson and Starr 1993). Thus, we emphasize the lack of corporate strategy (Cesaroni et al. 2015; Covin and Slevin 1991; Teece 2010) in the micro-enterprises proposed. However, given that female entrepreneurship is regarded as central to the development and welfare of economies, the deepening of knowledge of how women entrepreneurs manage the start-up of her business can contribute in improving the participation of female entrepreneurs in the economy (Ntseane 2004).

In the light of the previous purposes, the research question is the following: How does RC contribute to the start-up phase of women-owned micro-enterprises and which kind of network entrepreneur uses? (RQ1).

The paper is structured as follows. In the following Sect. 14.2, the literature review is developed. Next, the methodology is shown in the Sect. 14.3 and findings are shown in Sects. 14.4 and 14.5. Conclusions, limitations and implications for future research are presented in Sect. 14.6.

14.2 Literature Review

Several scholars in the international scenario investigate women enterprises and their characteristics in the last decades (Paoloni and Lombardi 2018). Starting from the gender challenges topic, some scholars (Roomi and Harrison 2010) analyze this kind of challenge sustaining Islamic women entrepreneurs. Additionally, scholars (Waring and Brierton 2011) analyze the impact of women enterprise on the economy in the light of the increase of business ownership of women as well as on the well-being (Kabote 2018).

An interesting field of research is directed towards measures encouraging women in building up an enterprise. Braidford et al. (2013) propose a study in this field referring to USA, Canada and Sweden. In the light of women empowerment, scholars investigate enterprises solutions fighting poverty and restore dignity (Roy and Lahiri-Roy 2010) and the impact of women enterprises on some sectors (Torri 2012). Additionally, enterprise diversity in the light of women and ethnic minorities is investigated by literature (Carter et al. 2015).

International literature is also focused on relevant organizations operating in the field of women enterprises. Some scholars investigate the International Council for Small Business, International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship, National Women's Business Council Best Paper Award for Women's Enterprise Development (Weeks and Duffy 2011), Women's Enterprise Policy Group (Brierton and Bennett 2012), the inaugural webinar session of the Women's Enterprise Committee, International Council for Small Business (Brush et al. 2012) and the Women's International Centre for Economic Development (O'Carroll and Millne 2010).

Additionally, the study of women enterprises is strictly connected to RC. International literature investigates the role and the impact of RC in new enterprises (Hormiga et al. 2011); some models to assess RC referring to bank sectors (Hosseini and Owlia 2016); the professional figure promoting relationships identified as catalyst for university/industry relations (Pérez-Astray and Babío 2011).

Some scholars define activities supporting RC in the context of multinationals (Zaragoza-Sáez and Claver-Cortés 2011). Other scholars identify in the same study characteristics of RC and social capital (Delgado-Verde et al. 2011). Delgado-Verde et al. (2014) discuss a model for the analysis of vertical collaboration supplier-customer relationship effects on product innovation results.

Further literature focuses on some frameworks to define RC in the field of service and non-service industries (Ghane and Akhavan 2014), RC in the pharmaceutical industry (Dicu et al. 2011), implementation of CSR initiatives in family businesses (Sharma et al. 2012), RC and incubated technology entrepreneurs (Gately and Cunningham 2014). Additionally, Sussan (2012) defines customer-to-customer interaction as sub-component of RC. Lastly, Peng (2011) define which are resources and transformation in the inter-firm partnership applying intellectual capital navigator.

14.3 Methodology

The paper is based on a qualitative research methodology using a case study approach based on examining current events of real life in depth (Yin 2009). In this way, the paper introduces, adopts and develops the CAOS model (Paoloni 2011) of micro-entrepreneurship (Fig. 14.1) in the field of beauty and health care, examining the personal characteristics of the female entrepreneur (C); the environment in which the micro-enterprise operates (A); the organizational and managerial aspects (O); and the motivations for starting a new business (S).

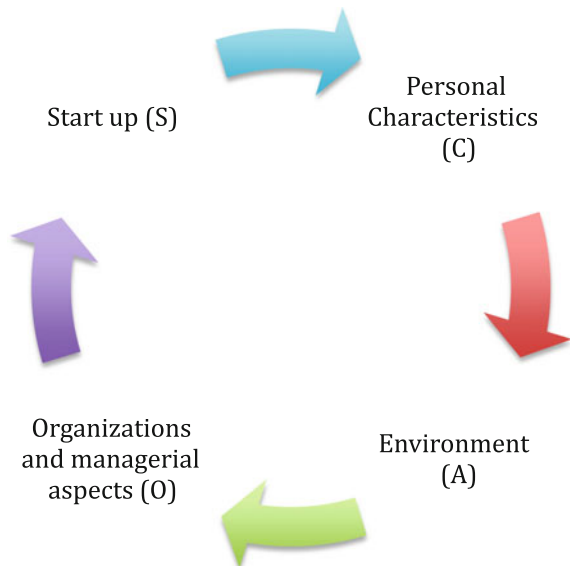
This is an interpretive framework to investigate whether and how the use of RC supports female entrepreneurs in creating their business competition. Particularly, we investigate the following elements of the CAOS model in the light of the multiple case study in Italy.

Personal characteristics of the female entrepreneur (C)

This element determines distinctive factors of each entrepreneur affecting the role played by female entrepreneur within its firm and capability to build networks and take advantages from them. Elements composing these dimensions are the following:

- anagraphic information of entrepreneur (name, surname, age, education, experiences);
- micro-enterprise information (denomination, legal form, dimension, location);
- motivation in the business creation;
- business vision;

Fig. 14.1 The CAOS model by Paoloni (2011). *Source* Own elaboration from the CAOS model



- management form;
- entrepreneur role in the firm;
- decision making process activation.

The environment in which the micro-enterprise operates (A)

The environment of the micro-enterprise (A) determines the socio-economic-cultural context in which the enterprise is located. Thus, the environment can influence connections that a company creates interacting with subjects in this context. Additionally, the environment also impacts on the relationships coming from social media tools.

Organizational and managerial aspects (O)

This element derives from the women entrepreneur's objectives, tasks and responsibilities within the organization; referring to social media this variable is directed to understand why and how women entrepreneurs are using social media within the company and which are expected benefits. It includes the following actions:

- roles assignment;
- responsibility identification;
- operative and management procedures definition to define how execute roles and business actions.

The motivations for starting a new business (S)

It is the relevant phase in which the female entrepreneur is focused on the following actions:

- study of the environment;
- write a business plan;
- find financial funds;
- choose legal form;
- build up the organizational structure;
- starting the business.

The model for analyzing case study

The model we use to analyze the relations of female and male entrepreneurs in the multiple case study is found on the following Paoloni's matrix (Paoloni, 2011) based on four types of network relations. The matrix is composed by the intensity of the relation variable—permanent or temporary—and the type of relation variable—formal or informal.

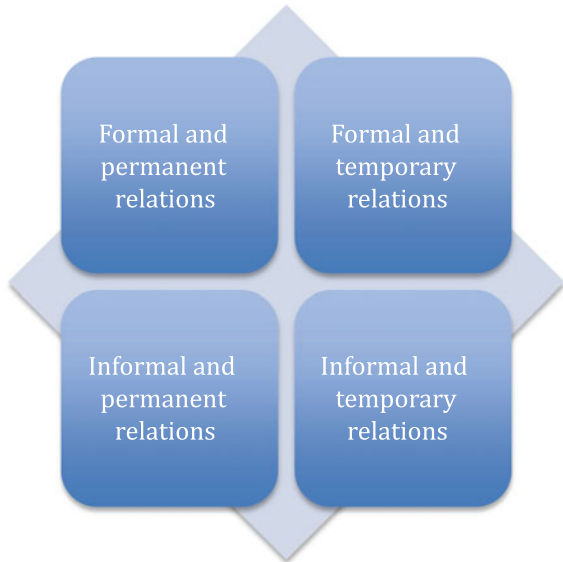
The model identifies four network relations as shown in the Fig. 14.2.

14.4 The Case Study “Hair Shop”

The case study of Hair Shop in Italy is analysed through the application of the Paoloni's framework of CAOS.

Fig. 14.2 Relations matrix.

Source Own elaboration



Personal characteristics of the female entrepreneur (C)

The case of Hair Shop born in Italy from a young female entrepreneur. Particularly, the female entrepreneur lived her adolescence with her brother and sister working in the hair shop centre of her mother. After her studies and many works, she decided to help her mother in her beauty shop for a temporary time. In few time, she was involved in the shop work. Thus, she decided to follow a specialization course of the franchising from which the hair shop pulls the name. After a period of 10 years, the female entrepreneur decided to open an own hair shop in the same country.

The environment in which the micro-enterprise operates (A)

The hair shop was located in a shop center. The female entrepreneur obtained a female financing around 70% of total financing to acquire equipment of her shop. The remaining 30% of financing coming from her personal resources and a part from her mother funds. However, the female entrepreneur's mother support was also a moral support during the start up phase of her business. Thus, the help of her mother together to the mother's network represented a real support for the female entrepreneur in the economic and emotional perspectives.

She starts a new business assuming one friend as worker in her shop. Owing to the fact that the work in hair shop consist of many hours in stand up position, the friend of female entrepreneur dismisses.

The daily work is of 8 hours and it is based on shop clean and clients' works: "On average, I starts at 9 am and I ends at 9 pm even if it is not always possible to respect such hours".

After the layoff of her first worker, she is alone in working in her shop. In few time, she assumes two new workers (one part time and one full time). She becomes pregnant and stops to work in the shop for only one week after the birth of her child. After this stop, her workers dismissed: *“when the girls start this work without any previous experiences, they are not aware of the work. The work is hard, always stand up and it needs of much patience by speaking and listening for many hours clients while the working go on”*.

She has some difficulties to affirm her position of leader in her shop with workers owing to her informal approach and her young age. In fact, her workers have the same age and it is difficult to accept a professional suggestion by people of same age although with many experience.

At this stage, she is alone in the hair shop and it seems that her internal network, organization and workers relationships are not working (Baluku et al. 2016). In this situation, the female entrepreneur's mother supports the tipping moment and the neo-entrepreneur and neo-mother with some own workers: *“When I started was all easy but after the born of my daughter and her growth has complicated the time management”*.

The internal organization is becoming complex but the new firm thanks to the familiar network starts and passes the initial obstacles.

Although there is not much advertise on the shop opening, the clients don't miss coming from the clients mother's shop and through the words of mouth.

The hair shop was located in a commercial center in a low traffic area. Other shops located in the some place gradually divest their activities owing the limited clients.

The motivations for starting a new business (S)

Main motivations of the female entrepreneur analyzed as entrepreneur derive from need of independence and self-realization. The economic factor is a support, a tool to achieve the main objective: her autonomy.

The need to be independent passes the firm risks and pushes her to be free in her business. The emotional impetus characterizes her even if she believes that it could be punitive for a female entrepreneur in the some activities: *“Yesterday, for example, a romanian lady with a disastrous economic situation come here. I didn't feel to ask her money.... perhaps a men would never have done not for sensible issues but because men have prevalent economic motivation compared to women”*.

The entrepreneur consider the women as penalised in the aesthetic cure of another woman because the men hairdresser only for his genre satiates the needs of woman client in the moment in which she choose to have the service.

She tells as men don't have mood swings but they have an economic motivation: *“we as women are open to critiques. In this work we need to be a few psychologist...sometimes from the hairdresser is much important to transmit well-being to client....it is preferred to have one hour of relax instead of one scream hairstyle.”*

The female entrepreneur underlines the relevance of relational ability as strength of business based on totally “client head”. Such relevance is retrieved also in the professional courses for entrepreneurs directed to understand the service and the

emotional service to transfer to clients. However, female motivation in the light of the female entrepreneur thought derives also from a trade-off between firm and family.

Organizational and managerial aspects (O)

The business started recently with a project for the future. She would like to assume a new worker to increase clients and business. This choice derives from an emotional motivation “*I like to see the shop full of people... it is ugly the shop without people and it makes me nervous to have long breaks but not to obtain more money but to feel me more useful and satisfied.*”

Referring to structural increasing strategy (Teece 2010), the entrepreneur would like to have an alive shop instead of a more large shop. She doesn't want to include adding services because she would like to be focalises and not provide not good services.

The analysis of relational capital in the start up phase

In the light of the Paoloni's matrix of relations, the network of hair shop is composed by informal and permanent relationships (C) coming from both franchising relationships and clients, workers and environment.

The only one relationship of formal type derives from the franchising contract. The entrepreneur considers such relationship mainly as support for the professional development identified as congresses and professional courses to acquire new competences in the field. Another facilities from the franchising network is the advertise on their website.

However, the construction of the clients network derives from the word of mouth. She tried to administer questionnaires to clients to valuate customer satisfaction.

Today, the business has found stability in the internal network based on two women workers and good relationships with the entrepreneur recognized as professional and relational leader. The relationships are based on trust and respect!

The environment of the shop is a small commercial centre where relationships with other entrepreneurs are good and where relationships foster the daily activities.

14.5 The Case Study “Betting Shop”

The Betting Shop case study is analysed also through the CAOS model application (Paoloni 2011).

Presentation and characteristic of the entrepreneur (C)

This business of Betting Shop was born in Italy from a young entrepreneur. In Italy, like in a lot of European town, gaming and gambling sector is really interesting for a new business and specifically this young man was passionate about that activities

since he was child. After a lot of cooperation and collaboration with other people in some town, he decided to open his betting Shop in another town. Thus, he decided to open his personal company and to find a minority partner.

The environment in which the micro-enterprise operates (A)

The shop, at first time, was located in a not commercial and central area in the town. This kind of shop is characterized by a particular structure of business, indeed, all betting shop are linked to a line and services provider who is authorized by the Italian law. The young entrepreneur obtained a bank financing around 30% of total financing to acquire equipment of the shop. The remaining 70% of financing coming for 25% from her personal resources, 25% from the provider services and line company and the last 20% from minority partner.

He starts the new business in this not central shop but soon he decided to move to other shop close to city center and in a populated square in town. At the beginning he worked alone and some times, during the week and with the minority partner. After few months the shop was really busy and started to producing good economics results but the young entrepreneur needed for employees to help him and for offer a service more quickly. Thus he decided to hire two workers and to offer more services to the customers. The gambling shop began to sell not only football bets but about all sports and all events subject to betting, like reality show or political election.

The daily work is of 8 hours and it is based on clients' works: "Generally, I starts at 10 am and I ends at 9 pm but three or four days in the week there are football events in the night so I ends at 11.30 pm even if it is often impossible to respect 8 worker hours.". The betting center had no difficulty in quickly establishing itself as one of the city's busiest shops, mainly because betting is a rapidly growing sector, so why the store's central location is strategic and very popular with both young people and adults finally, because the young entrepreneur has good interpersonal skills and knows many people in the city.

He has no difficulty in affirming his position as a leader in the shop with his workers because of his informal and friendly approach to and his young age. In fact, his workers are younger than him and have less experience in the industry than him. At this point the shop is working very well and the relationships with the employees are excellent and very informal and of great mutual trust. In fact, after only one year of activity, the young entrepreneur decided to liquidate the minority partner and to remain the single owner of the business.

The motivations for starting a new business (S)

The main motivations of the entrepreneur derive from the need to find a job that could be close to their attitudes and their passions. The need to be independent passes the firm risks and push him to be free in his business and to take himself the decision for the activity. Economic motivations characterize his way of working and for this reason he decided to remain alone in the company. Initially he didn't

have the necessary money to begin the business alone and he thinks it would be better to share the risk with a partner. “When things started to go well and I realized that my partner was not so motivated and dedicated to work like me, I decided to liquidate it and manage the activity myself”.

The entrepreneur considers this type of activity not very suitable for women because it can happen to deal with clients who are in particular personal situations or with people who could be difficult to manage. The entrepreneur tells that there are people who find themselves in situation of economic difficulty and think they can solve their problems by winning a bet, in almost all cases it doesn't happen, actually worsen their situation and “I must be able to remove them from the store before they are no longer able to pay for the services offered and without making them feel uncomfortable or unwelcome in the shop”.

Organizational and managerial aspects (O)

After two years of activity now the entrepreneur has new plans for the future, the first is to expand their store by placing in the posts for other games not even in the gambling industry, to always have the store full of people and attract new customers to enter and take advantage of the betting services. He also wants to put new televisions to broadcast during the day the largest number of sporting events, not just football.

The second project he wants to carry out is to open one more smaller shop in a country in the province to offer betting services to more customers, even in places where there are no such shops.

The analysis of relational capital in the start up phase

In the light of the Paoloni's matrix of relations, the betting shop network consists of informal and permanent relationships (C) coming from relationships with customers, workers and the environment. The only formal relationship derives from the contract with provider of line and services. The entrepreneur considers this relationship necessary for carrying out the activity because it provides the main service that is then offered to customers but doesn't bring new customers and new business opportunities. Another service offered by the provider of line and services is advertising on their website.

However, the construction of the customer network derives from word of mouth and the relational skills of the entrepreneur and his workers. Today the company is constantly developing in the network, always looking for new customers and new opportunities mainly because of the good relationships that the entrepreneur can keep with the people around him and being recognized as a professional and relationship leader. The shop environment is a central square of the city where relations with other entrepreneurs are good and relationships favour daily activities.

14.6 Discussion and Conclusions

Our case studies build up the RC in the start-up phase following some needs, which are satisfied by the networks utilization although some of these needs are not satisfied. Such analysis is very useful to analyse environment in which female and male entrepreneur are included to acquire awareness in increasing management company efficiency.

Often, the utilization of a specific network is not the solution to satisfy the operative or management need; it is necessary to pass only a difficult situation. For example, we can think about the need to have financial funds in the start-up phase of the company.

Additionally, activation of informal and permanent relation could be not the problem solution. A parent could absolve to the financial needs of the female entrepreneur but at the same time could not be absolve to the management financing support. In this way, the female entrepreneur could adopt a not efficiency solution coming back soon to the liquidity problem.

If the female entrepreneur is supported by an institutional organization in the financing help and the management of financial funds through a temporal and formal relation, she could solve the problem of liquidity in the long term considering the network utilization as strategic component for the company survival.

Analysing the CAOS model by Paoloni (2011), the female entrepreneur could acquire major awareness of her needs and connected problems considering all factors (CAOS) influencing her relationships in a dynamic manner. Monitoring such factors, the business competitive advantages, strategic dimension and entrepreneurial success are fortified. Moreover, it is possible to choose the relations following needs and to obtain more efficiency in the company management. The needs knowledge that the network doesn't fill could be the fundamental information also for the socio-economic and political environment in which the company is included and in the tools activation for the territorial support (asylum, listening and support centres to companies, major connections with institutional organizations) and political support for the born of female companies (financing, helping in the strategic management, strategic governance development and efficiency in the economic and financial communication).

Networks are recognised in the light of several sectors and several geographical area.

Although we analyse two pilot cases study under two different business idea on the market, female and male entrepreneurs achieve some results and performance. Thus, we assume that the main variable supporting the business development is the dimension of the company. So, elements influencing networks types are connected to dimensions of company. The environment in which the company is included has a weight in the network choose following the cultural, social and geographical context and the type of exchanges. Temporal element is fundamental in the RC choose. If fact, this is the moment in which is realized the business idea and the

female entrepreneur faces front to financial, bureaucratic and philological problems allowing for the activation of relationships networks for the start up phase.

However, the type of network in the analysed case identifies the needs of the female entrepreneurs as the need to achieve a certain security on the emotional perspective for the management of her hairshop (Emslie and Hunt 2009).

Main limitations of paper derive from the proposition of only two pilot case studies. In this context, we are going in the future research to fill this gap by studying several cases study in the international context to discover if the same network of current case study is adopted or otherwise to discover which are emerging networks.

The future research is directed to analyse further companies of different sizes to verify if needs by activation of networks in start up phase are characterized by gender or corporate dimension. In small dimension we need to verify if it is prevalent personal dimension or there is the identification of company with the economic subject/founder. In this way, needs by company are needs by (female) entrepreneurs. However, in a large company, where there is not a connection between company and man/female, needs are different and so there are different networks. In the light of our previous results, there is the need to build up a sample of small companies (male-female) to analyse differences and verify if all small male and female companies activate the same network or there are gender differences. If there won't differences, we'll focus on dimension component and extend the research to a sample with different companies dimensions.

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