

Chapter 19

Social Media as a New Opportunity for Female Entrepreneurs: An Analysis of the Fashion Industry



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Abstract This paper aims at analysing new entrepreneurial organization models resulting from the integration of female and male elements and at finding a valid facilitator instrument for the sharing of values and objectives in the use of new technologies and communication, such as social media. On the basis of the theoretical framework of the androgynous organization, the study concentrates on the field of fashion that, in the last few years, has experimented new forms of female business connected with the creation of new markets deriving from development of the *Web 2.0*. The main objective of the paper is to provide greater comprehension of the role of new technologies and in particular of the social media in the development of female entrepreneurial activities, thanks to greater visibility of these new businesses, with the phenomenon of the fashion influencer at the base. The methodology of the study is based on a qualitative analysis related to the elaboration and application of the theoretical framework of the androgynous organization (Granelli and Robotti in *Il valore premiante delle diversità*, Harvard Business Review Italia, StrategiQs, Milano, 2016), in the case study by the fashion influencer Chiara Ferragni, at the first place in the Forbes' Top Influencers list 2017. Through an analysis of a case study in the field of the fashion industry, an attempt has been made to illustrate the characteristics of organizations that are handling technological change in the best possible way, from the point of view of gender questions. The study carried out identifies a model that allows organisations to be much more generative and, in particular, to identify the

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specific characteristics of women that companies must introduce in order to become more generative. The archetypes identified are essentially hospitality, fertility and generativity, consistency, intimacy and practicality.

Keywords Women entrepreneurs · Social media · Influencers
Fashion industry · Gender studies

19.1 Introduction

In the last few years, the belief that diversity represents a rewarding value within organizations has spread among many researchers (Granelli and Robotti 2016; Paoloni 2016). Initially diversity was seen as a deviation from the norm compared with some defined dimensions: today, however, diversity is defined in a much broader manner, considering the phenomenon of globalization and the numerous generations present simultaneously in working areas due to an increase in retirement age. Therefore, for purposes related to the competitive advantage, it is believed that providing diversified human resources on all levels allow for full use of the talents, reflection of the market and having a much more creative organization and, therefore, innovating with greater propensity.

On the basis of renewed requirements and trends of the external environment, the leadership model of traditional male companies is demonstrating numerous limits and, for the objective of this research, a new leadership model will be tested, bearing different values called the “androgynous” model.

This research paper aims to analyse new models of entrepreneurial organisation born from an integration of female and male elements that are used in new communication technologies such as the social media (Van Looy 2016), a valid facilitator instrument for the sharing of values and objectives. Therefore, on the basis of the theoretical framework of the androgynous organisation (Granelli and Robotti 2016), the study focuses on the field of fashion that, in the last few years, has experimented new forms of female businesses connected with the creation of new markets deriving from development of the *Web 2.0* (Cosenza and Nannelli 2017; Lin et al. 2014; Mohr, 2013; Sedeke and Arora 2013; Kim and Mauborgne 1999).

The main purpose of the paper is to provide greater understanding of the role of new technologies and, in particular, of the social media, in the development of female entrepreneurs, thanks to greater visibility of these new businesses born together with the phenomenon of the fashion influencers at the basis. In particular, the methodology of the study is based on a qualitative analysis related to the elaboration and application of the theoretical framework of the androgynous organization (Granelli and Robotti 2016) in the case study by the fashion influencer Chiara Ferragni, at the first place in the Forbes’ Top Influencers list 2017 (<https://www.forbes.com/top-influencers/fashion/>).

In this perspective, the paper is organised in the following way. After the introduction, an analysis of literature is presented in Sect. 19.2, the methodology is

illustrated in Sect. 19.3, the theoretical framework of research is illustrated and interpreted in Sect. 19.4, the case study on the basis of the framework is clarified in Sect. 19.5 and, finally, the first conclusions are presented in Sect. 19.6.

19.2 Female Entrepreneurial Activities and Social Media

For purposes related to this paper, an analysis of the literature on gender studies, entrepreneurial activities and technological innovations has been carried out through a structured literature review. This analysis aims at providing a general picture of research in the field of international journals discussing the various topics of gender in constant development.

First of all, on the basis of classification of the 2016 “Scimago Journal and Country Rank” (SJR), all of the journals from the “Gender Studies” category have been selected. A total of 118 international journals dealing with the gender topic in various fields of research have emerged.

In order to select the most relevant journals in the field of investigation, the authors have carried out a content analysis of the journals’ titles, using the keyword indicated in the following Table 19.1.

Considering this content analysis, the following journals have been selected (Table 19.2).

After having selected the list of journals, each of them was analysed in the order of journal’s impact according to Scimago, searching for articles studying the use of the new internet-based technologies created on the ideological and technological foundations of the *Web 2.0*, or the social media (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010).

As can be seen from Table 19.3, research has identified a total of 10 articles published on selected journals containing references related to the use of web and social tools.

In particular, some of the publications selected refer to social problems such as the Gill-Petersons article (2015). Several authors have discussed the theme of inclusion and participation through the social media (Thornthwaite et al. 2018; Rashid 2016). Thornthwaite et al. (2018) have investigated into the topic of *Web 2.0* technologies, elaborating optimistic forecasts according to which the social media may alter the traditional models of participation in work trade-unions by their

Table 19.1 Keyword for content analysis of the titles of the magazines from the category “gender studies” (SJR 2016)

A.	Entrepreneurship
B.	Technology
C.	Performance
D.	Management
E.	Development
F.	Work
G.	Organization

Table 19.2 List of selected magazines

1	Gender, Work and Organization
2	Gender and Development
3	International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship
4	Gender in Management: An International Journal
5	Affilia—Journal of Women and Social Work
6	Gender, Technology and Development
7	Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory

Table 19.3 Results of research of the articles that include social media and new technologies

Name of the magazine	Number of articles	Keyword
Gender, Work and Organization	3	Unions; inclusion; participation; coaching; equality
Gender and Development	0	
International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship	2	Female entrepreneur leaders; mobile adoption; gender gaps
Gender in Management: An International Journal	1	Leadership; ecological model
Affilia—Journal of Women and Social Work	0	
Gender, Technology and Development	3	Digital inclusion, social inequality; refugees; social change; video game
Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory	1	Sexting

members, as these social instruments have the potential to promote the gender inclusion and contribute to trade union diversities, central for an efficient representation. However, the Rashid (2016) study refers to diffusion of the new technologies of information and communication (ICT), such as computers and internet, offering huge opportunities for the wellness of people in developing countries. The article explores the differences in gender in the ICT offer in Bangladesh, Brazil, Chile, Ghana and the Philippines, analysing the data of approximately 5000 people interviewed using ICT headquarters for public access. In analysing the gender differences, the author has studied the concept of digital inclusion. The results show that women from Bangladesh are more likely to be subject to digital exclusion compared with other countries.

Other authors focus their attention on gender and on the use of social media and video games. In this regard, the objective of the Gackenbach et al. (2016) study is to investigate into gender and culture and their relationship with two types of use of the media connected with internet: games and social media. The results that emerged refer to the difference in gender about the types of preferred media, as well as specifications within this media, therefore, gender preferences in video games.

Considering the economic-business aspect, two studies exist that focus on the topic of social media, leadership and coaching. In particular, Ozkazanc-Pan and Clark Muntean (2018) have studied a British coaching website specifically aimed at women: the authors consider coaching websites as an important means to diffuse the female post-feminist work and psychological consultancy produced through digital work of female entrepreneurs.

The topic of leadership is also dealt with by Cukier et al. (2016) with the objective of examining the representation of women in Canadian television cover, exploring the notion of substantial representation with regards to gender and leadership. This study reveals that women are not sufficiently represented in Canadian radio and television media. Furthermore, it observes that women are less likely to be framed as leaders or experts. From an analysis of the main newscasts analysed, women rarely have positive representation or they are in positions of leadership/experts and are often represented as victims.

Finally, the topic of entrepreneurial activities and the social media is carefully discussed with reference to Arab countries. For example, Ameen and Willis (2016) investigate in the use of mobile phones to support female entrepreneurial activities in Arab countries, with the objective of exploring new ways of filling the divide between sexes in terms of entrepreneurial activities in these countries. The results of this research indicate that female Arab entrepreneurs are interested in the use of mobile phones. However, authors believe that female entrepreneurs have not yet fully acknowledged the potential of mobile technology beyond its basic use. On the other hand, Swan (2017) investigates into the gendering practices through which female entrepreneurs become disadvantaged in the field of technology.

In light of this analysis of literature, we can deduce that there are very few studies considering new technologies and the social media as instruments that can facilitate female entrepreneurial activities, considering how the organizations can change following the introduction within a company of social instruments, not only providing innovation but also values such as connectivity and sharing. No article connects the gender with the organizational models capable of adequately facing the change generated by the use of new technologies.

Therefore, the research question of this paper is the following:

RQ: With regards to gender questions, what are the characteristics of the organizations that face technological change in the best way?

19.3 Methodology

The work method is based on a qualitative analysis, related to the elaboration and application of the theoretical framework of the androgynous organisation (Granelli and Robotti 2016); the application is carried out in the case study by the fashion influencer Chiara Ferragni, included by Forbes (Forbes' Top Influencers list 2017) in first place among the influencers in the world of fashion, with reference to

millions of followers on the various social platforms (in particular, Instagram) and the high number of visitors of her blog “The Blonde Salad”, as well as her entrepreneurial skills.

The case study methodology is considered useful to answer the research question as it allows researchers to “capture various hidden nuances, models and elements that other research approaches may neglect” (Berg 2007, p. 318).

By bringing together our observations with our data sources, it has allowed us to “clarify the meaning, identifying different ways of seeing the phenomenon” (Stake 2000, p. 444), and to summarise the facts and validate our results through triangulation (Yin 2014, p. 120).

First of all, the first step for internal validation is to guarantee that the selected case is a topic of appropriate study. In this paper, we have studied the case of the fashion influencer Chiara Ferragni, as she emblematically represents the importance that these new figures, born following diffusion of the *Web 2.0*, play in the fashion industry, in which new market spaces dedicated to them have been created. Furthermore, the case of Ferragni has been investigated by several experts from numerous points of view; effectively, this case analyses one of the most influential fashion bloggers in the world, capable of appearing in the *Forbes* magazine in 2015 among the most influential people in the world under 30 and, in 2017, in first place in the *Forbes’ Top Influencers* list.

A common criticism to the method of the case study includes problems with the generalisation of results. Yin (2014, p. 48) observes that the case studies are not conceived to provide statistical generalisations; on the contrary, they aim at providing an analytical generality from the observations of a phenomenon with the objective of providing theoretical explanations that may be applied to identify similar cases. Considering that, one of our objectives is to provide detailed studies that go beyond simple empirical descriptions; actually, we have validated our conclusions externally with a triangulation process that includes our sources of data and external references.

19.4 The Androgynous Organisation Framework

The economic and social challenges require new capacities of the companies that refer to excellence in the products and services offered as well as inclusive capacities that actively involve the numerous number of stakeholders. In particular, among the factors that have modified modern organizations and that will drastically continue to affect the organizations of the future, technological change and connectivity can be found, influencing the nature of the work and the working areas, increasing the power of consumers and of the communities (Kiron et al. 2013). Another change refers to the research and management of talents that are becoming more and more important due to the demographic deficit that no longer refers only to developed countries. Four generations live together within the organizations, also as a consequence of the increase in the age of retirement, bearing different values

that should be combined in order to work together. Furthermore, power is transforming, it is becoming easier to acquire but also easier to lose. With reference to the market, the competitive advantages have a short life and duration depends on the fact that they are based on difficult competences to repeat. From a social point of view, capitalism is an economic model that has been highly criticized, therefore greater attention is focused on the activities performed by companies who, therefore, cannot be exclusively interested in aspects related to economic performance but must take charge of their social and environmental impact, resulting in the external informative of a company of a voluntary nature, such as the Corporate Social Responsibility Report being of vital importance. In fact, in this world that is increasingly social, interdependent and transparent, in which companies exposed to public opinion operate, thanks to the simplicity in diffusion of information, the majority of which is due to the diffusion of use of the social media.

On the basis of these changes, some scholars (Granelli and Robotti 2016) have proposed the model of androgynous organization, adopted in this research to analyse the case study and answer the research question.

This model has been elaborated following the facts of the recent changes that affect modern organizations such as, the new technological instruments implemented on the ideological and technological foundations of the Web 2.0 (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010; Safko and Brake 2009). These experts state that, in order to make organizations more generative, some characteristics of women, considered as female archetypes, should be introduced or reintroduced in companies. Generativity refers to the concept elaborated by the German psychoanalyst Erik Erikson, indicating the level of psychosocial development of man developing in the fullness of life and clarified in dealing with the creation of something to guide future generations; therefore, obliging them to look beyond and work on something whose results they will not see. From a business point of view, we refer to virtuous companies that develop projects that go beyond the short term, socially oriented and, above all, to the dimensions of values, where economic sustainability does not sacrifice the environment or the benefits of all stakeholder categories. In this perspective, the economic dimension is closely connected with the social one, and the stakeholders move closer to the shareholders.

The female archetypes that must be introduced in the androgynous company model are the following: hospitality; fertility and generativity; consistency; intimacy; practicality.

As can be seen in Fig. 19.1, the first requirement of an androgynous organization is welcoming, declined in the organization as arrangement of the same to care for and protect "at all costs" the various stakeholders. Fertility and generativity refer to the desire to renounce to picking of fruits in the short term, giving priority to the demands for sustainability of economic activities on the long term. Consistency represents the ability to persevere tirelessly in everyday work, unlike the male tendency for discontinuity. Another important characteristic lies in the ability to build a real intimacy between the individuals that form the organization and proximity with the relative community and its clients. Finally, practicality refers to efficient management of relations, also guided proactively to problem solving.

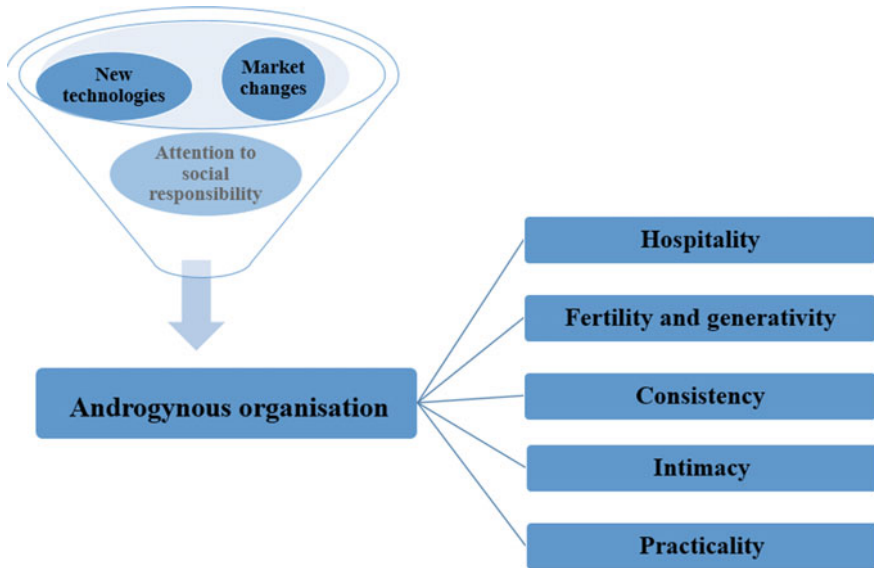


Fig. 19.1 Our elaboration of the theoretical framework of androgynous organisation

19.5 Analysis of the “Chiara Ferragni” Case as an Androgynous Organisation

The objective of this paragraph is to study the case of the fashion blogger Chiara Ferragni who created her blog, “The Blonde Salad”, in 2009, together with her ex-boyfriend Riccardo Pozzoli. Popularity of the blog reached its peaks almost immediately, allowing Ferragni to transform her passion for fashion, travelling and photography into a successful career. Ten years after opening of the blog, the fashion blogger runs two companies generating a turnover of 6 million euro and employing more than 14 people: the blog “The Blonde Salad”, that together with Pozzoli have transformed into a true lifestyle magazine and the collection of shoes, the “Chiara Ferragni Collection”.

The blogger and entrepreneur, Chiara Ferragni, was selected among 30 of the most influential under-30s in Arts and Style by Forbes in 2015 and, in 2017, she was classified in first place by the Forbes Top Influencers List, affirmed as an international and influential celebrity for fashion events throughout the world.

In particular, she focused on an in-depth study of all of the phases faced by the business of the “The Blond Salad” and the “Chiara Ferragni Collection” (Keinan et al. 2015), from the origins to all subsequent developments, in order to identify the main features of the organisations that she handles, whose founding element is the use of new technologies and of the social media.

First of all, transformation of the blog from a passion into a business thanks to the collaboration and exchange of knowledge between the two individuals involved right from the beginning, Chiara Ferragni and Riccardo Pozzoli.

At the beginning, the majority of monetization of the business based on the social media originated from the sale of publicity banners on the blog, but they soon realized that the involvement of the contents and product placement could provide better results. Subsequently, with “The Blonde Salad”, Ferragni also started to create limited collections in co-branding with various clothing brands.

When, in 2011, an Italian footwear company contacted Ferragni and Pozzoli, the idea was born to create a small collection of shoes bearing the name of Ferragni. However, after signing of the agreement, they realized that huge problems would have emerged from the partnership. The young age and lack of experience, as they stated, led them to sign a license agreement without negotiating, having had distribution and quality problems. In any case, the range of shoes generated \$100,000 of annual profit.

In 2013, together with the imminent expiry of the licence agreement, Ferragni and Pozzoli saw that, despite the problems encountered, shops were still asking for Chiara Ferragni shoes. Therefore, the due decided to concentrate their efforts on the construction of a real business with a strong brand of its own. Pozzoli found an angel investor, Paolo Barletta, who provided them with an initial amount of \$500,000 necessary to restructure the activity. In the spring of 2013, they set up a new company called the “Chiara Ferragni Collection”, owned by Ferragni, Pozzoli, Barletta and the sales manager Lorenzo Barindelli.

Pozzoli signed a new license agreement with another Italian footwear manufacturer so that the “Chiara Ferragni Collection” could achieve 10% of proceeds in royalties. In particular, it is a hybrid licence agreement, as all of the decisions related to the Collection, including distribution, are made by the Ferragni group. On this occasion, they preferred to have complete control and give the majority of their profit in exchange. Therefore, Ferragni and Pozzoli decided to present their shoes as a small design collection with a strong brand identity.

From 2013, Instagram became the most used instrument in the field of fashion, a lot more than Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest or blogs. The development of Instagram represented a challenge to the business model of “The Blonde Salad”, that was losing visitors as the same contents were published on the blog and on Instagram. Therefore, they understood that they needed to change strategy.

Restructuring began towards the end of 2013; the new strategy was to stop selling any kind of product connected with editorial contents and to transform the blog into real online magazine of the lifestyle of Ferragni. Starting from the resources of know-how and of the network to build much more interesting contents connected with lifestyle, Ferragni and Pozzoli decided to invest 50% of profit margins into the acquisition of new talents and expand the team. They hired a graphic designer with a background in fashion and a couple of people with a background in marketing and more creative communication.

The website of Blonde Salad was completely redesigned and organised as an online lifestyle magazine. Half of the contents involved the activities of Ferragni,

but the other half included advice on shopping, mood boards of inspiration and other editorial contents. Ferragni stated “I wanted the site to be a growing source of inspiration for people because, as far as I was concerned, I wanted to present a positive story and see beautiful things around us. The team truly succeeded in translating my language into highly inspiring posts. The posts of “The Blonde Salad” are now programmed several weeks in advance according to an editorial introduced by Alessio Sanzogni, with more investments in contents”.

To date, the Chiara Ferragni organisation is very attentive to the brands with which it collaborates; in consideration of the history and values of the brand, they have decided to work with exclusive contents. The primary interest refers to positioning of the brand and the possibility of closing contracts with final validation and that can express ideas in an independent manner, sacrificing profit in some cases.

Finally, the Ferragni organisation was able to take advantage of the technological innovations based on the foundations of the *Web 2.0*, as well as company changes and the creation of new market spaces in the fashion industry (Cosenza and Nannelli 2017).

19.6 Discussion and Preliminary Conclusions

The aim of this research paper was to analyse new entrepreneurial organisation model born from an integration of female and male elements and used in new communication technologies such as the social media, a valid facilitator instrument for the sharing of values and objectives.

With the analysis of the Chiara Ferragni case study, identification of the characteristics of the androgynous organisation within her two companies has been possible.

First of all, the Ferragni organisation was born from the hospitality principle, as part of a collaboration with another person, Riccardo Pozzoli, and aimed at listening and communicating with its stakeholders. Furthermore, hospitality was also expressed when the business was restructured, investing into the employment of talents. Especially at the beginning of 2013, fertility and generativity represented a key element of the organisations of Ferragni, willing to sacrifice greater short-term profits, favouring requirements of credibility and sustainability of her business, with reference to the blog but most of all with reference to the “Chiara Ferragni Collection”, therefore asking the manufacturers of collections for a smaller royalty fee in exchange of the decision-making power in every production phase, also to control the quality of the products. Furthermore, constant and everyday work that these activities require represent a prerogative to remain in contact with her followers. Another important characteristic lies in the ability to build a true form of intimacy between the individuals that form the organisation and with the community of belonging with its customers. Finally, practicality is expressed when, with the ascent of Instagram, the organisation understands the problem of dual

publication of the contents on the blog and on the Instagram profile and decides to modify the business model of the blog, transforming it into a magazine.

Therefore, through an analysis of this case study, an attempt has been made to illustrate, from the point of view of questions of gender, the characteristics of the organisations that face technological change the best. For this reason, the theoretical framework of the androgynous organisation has been clarified and used (Granelli and Robotti 2016), born from the integration of female and male elements and used in new communication technologies, such as the social media, a real facilitator instrument for the sharing of values and objectives.

The model considers that, in order to make organisations much more generative, the introduction or reintroduction of some specific characteristics of women in companies, considered as female archetypes, is necessary. The archetypes identified are essentially hospitality, fertility and generativity, consistency, intimacy and practicality.

In particular, attention has been focused on an in-depth study of all of the phases faced by the business of “The Blond Salad” and the “Chiara Ferragni Collection” (Keinan et al. 2015), right from the beginning up until the following developments, in order to identify the main characteristics of these organizations whose founding element is the use of new technologies and the social media. In particular, the characteristics of the androgynous organisation within the two companies of Ferragni have been identified.

Future research will be aim to expand the analysis of the androgynous organisation to other fields that, unlike fashion, have been less affected by the advent of new technologies based on *Web 2.0*.

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