

## Chapter 7

# The Shift Towards a Digital Business Model: A Strategic Decision for the Female Entrepreneur

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The chapter aims to offer a comprehensive overview of the shift towards a digital business model for the female and male entrepreneur. This shift is analyzed by a ground test theory based on a comparative case study. Two case studies, categorized as small to medium enterprises operating in the creative industry in the city of Turin, Italy, are analyzed against the six dimensions of the business model framework—value proposition, target market, value chain, revenue mechanism, value network, and competitive strategy—and then used as a basis to compare a female and a male digital entrepreneur. As emerged, there is not a remarkable difference between the two entrepreneurs. Both stress the relevance of the digital approach in the aforementioned six dimensions of the digital business model, highlighting the relevance of the “value network” to improve employees’ working experience and customers’ experience.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The number of women in board chair posts in European companies is still low (around 7 percent) although there is growing support from the European Commission to improve gender equality in workplaces (Jourova, 2016). This is encouraging more women around the world to set up and run their own business. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2016) estimated there are around 163 million women entrepreneurs. This has resulted in a huge, positive impact not only for the economy but also for the growth and well-being of local, national and international communities.

According to Nicolas and Rubio (2016), women are more prone to pursue social values in business than men. Harding and Cowling (2006) and Leahy and Villeneuve-Smith (2009) also noted that women tend to develop a business with the scope to help their community rather than to solely make money. Additionally, woman entrepreneurs are more innovation-driven than men across the world (GEM, 2016).

This may be the result of the current digital revolution which seems to bring lower barriers to entry, reduce offline inequality between women and men, and disembody entrepreneurial individuals (Dy, Marlow, & Martin, 2017). Furthermore, the digital revolution has enhanced entrepreneurial opportunities based on the adoption of digital media and information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Davidson & Vaast, 2010; Castells, 2010; Mole & Mole, 2010). This revolution, thus, stimulates digital entrepreneurship which is considered a more meritocratic place where any individual can run a business with only a laptop, a measure of creativity and a product/service to offer (LeBlanc, 2015).

Despite this, woman entrepreneurs are still treated differently to their male counterparts and as the online space is integrated with offline space and so the gender inequality persists (Sassen, 2002; Wajcman, 2010; Daniels, 2009, 2012; Marwick, 2014).

Therefore, in order to critically explore the digital entrepreneurship effects on women entrepreneurs, this chapter aims to offer an overview of the shift towards a digital business model of a female and a male entrepreneur. This shift is analyzed by a ground test theory based on two case studies. Here two case studies, categorized as small to medium enterprises operating in the creative industry in the city of Turin, Italy, are analyzed against the six dimensions of the business model framework (Chesbrough, 2007): value proposition, target market, value chain, revenue mechanism, value network and competitive strategy in order to examine the difference between a female and a male digital entrepreneur.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows: section two offers a development of the literature review, arguing previous and current studies on female and male digital entrepreneurs and the shift from traditional BM to DBM within SMEs. Additionally, the state of the art of the digital business model is also reviewed along with the digital business model. Section three describes the research method and justifies its suitability for the present research. Section four presents the results which is followed by section five where, theoretical and managerial implications are discussed along with limitations and recommendations for further research.

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