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SOCIAL WOMEN SHARE: TECHNOLOGY AS AN ENABLER

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Abstract

The concept of Social Media is at the top of the agenda of many entrepreneurs, business executives and decision makers today. This paper examines the new media and digital culture which has become an important part of our daily activities, using the social network perspective, a theoretical concept as used in the social and behavioural sciences. This theoretical perspective allows us to identify the dynamics of social networks: the concept of social media today, for many a new and stimulating environment and for others a social space that evokes feelings of frustration or fear of losing touch with the real world. Are women equipped to thrive in this digital age and especially in this virtual environment? In examining current research findings on *social women*, new models of work, levels of engagement, transformational leadership styles and women entrepreneurs that have been de-mystifying the world of social media through the lens of their own experiences, this paper argues that women enjoy a slight edge

over their male counterparts and that today's business climate is more inviting for aspiring women entrepreneurs. The bottom line is that *social women* are doing what most women do "naturally", namely creating relationships, community, connections and support. Isn't that what social networking is all about? Social women share content in multiple ways and working online has been a financial windfall for many, including stay at home moms and homemakers. Finally, this paper presents tips and advice from successful women entrepreneurs who tell how they have been using social media to excel in their careers and balance their career/family/personal lives.

Keywords: new media, social media, social networking, technology as an enabler, integrating a gender perspective, "feminine" skills and leadership qualities

1. Introduction: What is Social Media

The new media and digital culture, for many a new and stimulating environment, has become an important part of our daily activities. Yet we have hardly begun to understand to what extent the new media has changed our daily lives, practices, habits and culture. This paper examines social media using the social network perspective¹ (Wellman 1988), a theoretical concept used in the social and behavioural sciences, which refers to a social structure made up of a set of actors (such as organizations, social groups, individuals, etc.) and the ties established between these actors. Social network analysis is a perspective within the social sciences and not a method or narrowly-defined theory. Social networks are formally defined as "a set of nodes (or network members) that are tied by one or more types of relations [...] network analysts take these networks as the primary building blocks of the social world, they not only collect unique types of data, they begin their analyses from a fundamentally different perspective than that adopted by individualist or attribute-based social science." (Marin & Wellman 2009) In other words Alexandra Marin and Barry Wellman (2009) argue that social network analysis is neither a theory nor a methodology but rather a perspective/paradigm. This paradigm allows researchers to identify and examine the dynamics of social networks, the web of group affiliations, global or local patterns, influential entities, relations and their patterns. Three examples of such a social structure and social network are the social media: Facebook, Twitter Pinterest, etc.

¹Social networks analysis, now one of the major paradigms in contemporary sociology, emerged from sociology, social psychology, statistics, etc. (see Georg Simmel, Jacob Moreno)

The concept of Social Media today is at the top of the agenda of many entrepreneurs, business executives, decision makers, etc. who want to identify ways to make commercial, cost-effective and profitable use of applications such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Second Life. However, despite this interest, there seems to be very limited understanding of what the term "Social Media" exactly means. In their study Andreas M. Kaplan & Michael Haenlein. (2010) begin by describing the concept of social media and how it differs from related concepts such as Web 2.0 and User Generated Content. They define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content". Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) classify the social media into more specific categories according to group characteristics: social networking sites, blogs, collaborative projects, content communities, virtual game worlds and virtual social worlds.

Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest are only three examples of today's social media, a type of online media (new media) that expedites, promotes and encourages social networking as opposed to traditional media, which delivers content but doesn't allow viewers/readers/listeners/audiences from diverse social groups to participate in the creation or development of the content. In other words, social media is interactive and accessible to everyone throughout the globe. It includes mobile based and web-based technologies which allow conversation and turn it into interactive dialogue between social groups, organizations, communities and individuals. Paula Uimonen (2012) argues that social media is all about intercultural interactions through innovative forms of ethnographic representation that weave together visual and aural narratives making sense of and unfolding the stories narrated in a dramatic world: visual observations, interviews, life stories, etc.

For many using social media provides opportunities to reach and connect with a diverse range of people from all around the globe, for others the social media evokes feelings of frustration, fear of losing touch with the real world or getting lost in the swirl of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc. Nevertheless, research shows that social media is here to stay! (SheSpeaks 2012, Marien & Van Audenhove 2010, Kaplan & Haenlein 2010) It's all about engagement, looking for connections and opening a dialogue. It's a matter of igniting the desire for interaction, commentary, and conveyance of ideas that powers social media.

The power of social media has a tremendous impact in modern society since it can mobilize mass audiences towards a specific purpose, ignite revolts against oppressive regimes, etc. For example social media played a major role during the "Arab Spring", *the Arabic*

rebellions or the Arab revolutions. Arab Spring refers to the uprisings that arose independently and spread across the Arab world in 2011. The movement originated in Tunisia and quickly spread to Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. This revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests that began on December 17, 2010,² has to date forced from power rulers in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen. Civil uprisings and protests erupted in Syria, Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco, Algeria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Oman, Western Sahara, clashes at the Israeli borders, and these uprisings and protests are continuing in 2012. The role of websites such as Twitter and Facebook in igniting revolts against oppressive regimes is very powerful (Chebib & Sohail 2011, Storck 2011) Namely, Facebook and Twitter have helped people in organizing and coordinating protests, by cross-communicating and information spreading, not only during the revolution in Egypt against President Hosni Mubarak but also during the demonstrations in Athens by the movement called "Aganaktismenoi" (the Resentful or the fed-up), namely demonstrations organised and coordinated by the Facebook Group and Twitter Pages proving that social media can be used as a tool to 'change' the world.

An anonymous Cairo activist is quoted in a study by Nadine Kassem Chebib & Rabia Minatullah Sohail, (2011: 139) Which explores the impact social media had on the Egyptian Revolution in 2011 which ended with President Hosni Mubarak's resignation on February 11, 2011, thus ending his 30 year old regime. According to a Cairo activist, "We use Facebook to schedule the protests, Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world" The combination of different social media channels under a coherent and concrete strategy can mobilize not only political changes but also every aspect of our lives and of course the entrepreneurship's arena as well. Facebook founded in 2004 as a website platform for Harvard students and after 8 years has reached more than 800 million active users. The second most famous/popular social media channel worldwide is Twitter with over 140 million users. Undeniably, social media is extremely powerful. But is it as easy as it seems?

1.1. New media

Most technologies described as "new media" today are digital. That is, new media does not include paper-based publications, books, magazines or television programs, unless they contain technologies that enable digital interactivity. For example, the online encyclopaedia

² See: Source Watch: http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Arab_Spring

Wikipedia allows interactivity since it combines Internet accessible digital images, texts, or videos with web-links and allows contributors to participate creatively, provides interactive feedback, etc.

New media—a broad term in media studies that emerged in the latter part of the 20th century—refers to immediate access or real-time generation to content on any digital device. It refers to digital technologies—*social media*, games, data visualizations, software, mobile technology and digital music, CD-ROMS, and DVDs. Another aspect of new media, as previously cited, is users interactive and *creative* participation, including community formation, a social structure made up of a set of actors, community formation around the content: i.e. *social media* which is unfolding a digital culture of social relationships and community building through online conversations and social networking.

Consequently the new media has also been providing opportunities to promote "democratization" processes with regard to publishing, creation, creativity, distribution and consumption of media content, and not only! The democratization process also include the role of social networks in tackling the digital divide, the concept of technology as an enabler or a *digital agency* to promote best practices, advocacy and education, (Kamberidou & Fabry 2012, Kamberidou 2010). Technologies such as social media are used in a variety of ways, not only to talk about current events, ensure mobilization, organize around an issue, solve problems or defuse anger, but also to enable professional growth. Many women entrepreneurs, for example, have been using the social media to market their businesses, raise their profile, etc. However, before jumping into social media you need to know and clarify what you expect from it. What are your social media goals? For example, if you are an entrepreneur (1) how will social media support your initiatives or your business, (2) increase revenue, (2) decrease costs, (3) increase customer support, etc. You need to be willing to work for the long-term payoff and/or hire a media expert/manager, among other things.

1.2. Technology as an enabler

More and more people today are using technology, digital tools to work independently, market their brands or ideas, monitor results instead of hours and in particular to balance their personal/career lives, which the traditional model, namely the *long-hours tied down to a desk model* does not permit. (Kamberidou & Fabry 2012) Technology as an enabler means flexible working conditions for both women and men. Digitally mobile lifestyles and virtual workplaces refer to new models of work, flexi-programs and schedules, which are usually

perceived as a benefit for women with children and associated with low commitment. This is untrue! Firstly, the demand for greater flexibility is not only about motherhood. Not only women want more flexibility in relation to work today. For example teleworking—working at home using a computer and phone— is most common among highly skilled senior-ranking men. (Cox & Maitland 2009)

New models of work are emerging due to globalization, changing demographics and social attitudes. For example, parenthood is a role that men are increasingly sharing, and the concept of retirement is dying as older people now work beyond retirement age and young people are taking time off to travel, study, work for non-profit organisations, do volunteer work, etc. In other words, careers are no longer linear and unbroken. (Kamberidou & Fabry 2012) Needless to say, digital tools are also giving women the chance to build a business from home and create unique work schedules, especially working moms.

Aspiring women entrepreneurs have been relying on this flexibility to achieve the so valued career-family balance. A growing number of women entrepreneurs have been de-mystifying the world of social media through the lens of their own experiences and providing us with a look at how social media has significantly enhanced the growth of their businesses, a topic examined in the sections that follow. One need point out here that numerous studies show that women enjoy a slight edge over their male counterparts when it comes to social media. (Cowley 2011, Woolley & Malone 2011, Karacostas 2012, Akalp 2012) Research shows that women seem to possess stronger communication skills and social intelligence than men and are also better listeners (Cowley 2011, et al., SheSpeaks 2011). In today's digital economy which requires these skills, these so-called "feminine" skills and leadership qualities—whether the result of biology or social conditioning— are more significant now than ever.

2. Collective group intelligence rises when women participate

A recent study published in the Harvard Business Review shows that women excel in communication skills, are better listeners than men, and not only. (Woolley & Malone 2011) The study finds that the collective intelligence of a group rises when the group includes more women, despite the standard argument that gender diversity is essential in order to achieve better results.

What makes a team smarter? Anita Woolley and Thomas Malone (2011) argue that the more women on board the better the results. According to their findings there is little correlation between a group's collective intelligence and the IQs of its individual subjects,

whereas the collective intelligence of a group rises when the group includes more women. Specifically, female and male subjects aged 18 to 60 were given standard intelligence tests and were randomly assigned to teams. Each team was asked to solve one complex problem—and to complete several tasks, including decision making, brainstorming and visual puzzles—and given intelligence scores based on their performance. The teams that had members with higher IQs did not earn much higher scores, as was expected, whereas those that had more women did. The female factor seems to play a major role here.

The study also shows that women tend to be stronger at drawing people into conversation and what's more are better *listeners*, a great advantage for the entrepreneur who can better attune herself to customer needs and build more effective employee teams and partnerships. In fact Wooley & Malone (2011) point out that many women entrepreneurs described building their business as building a team. Anita Woolley, assistant professor at Carnegie Mellon University, asks: "What do you hear about great groups? Not that the members are all really smart, but that they listen to each other. They share criticism constructively. They have open minds. They're not autocratic." (Wooley & Malone 2011)

Another study conducted by a research team in the UK, after examining how men and women communicate, said men speak more words than women in a day, but have a weaker command of language in social situations. Men also use the same words repeatedly and pay unconvincing compliments. (Cowley 2011) Researchers found that men and women used similar language when conversation centered on issues such as current affairs or politics, however they differed widely when it came to social situations, social talk and chit-chat. This study dispels the myth and gender stereotype that women are chatterboxes: "It is men who are more likely to talk for the sake of talking when engaged in social chit-chat by recycling their words with ritualistic and redundant language that doesn't contain new information," argues Manchester University researcher Geoffrey Beattie. (Cowley 2011) More analytically, for over a one week period researcher teams carried recording devices and transcribed 50 conversations, which were split between men and women in serious and social conversations. Subsequently, each conversation was given to five volunteers who read five different versions with every fifth word erased. The volunteers were asked to guess the missing word. According to the researchers, in social situations men used a few simple words and when it came to paying compliments the limited variety of their vocabulary became even more obvious. The study showed compliments from women had more detail, making them less

predictable and more genuine while men were 90% predictable and frequently used words such as "really" and "nice". (Cowley 2011)

2.1. Social Women are Listeners and 'Sharers'

The "Social Woman" (SheSpeaks 2011) wants to share and listen and not just use the Internet or social media as a megaphone to get her voice heard. According to the results of an online survey with 3,963 U.S. women, September 13-15, 2011, the top self-described trait of the social woman is that she *listens*. For example, the SheSpeaks (2011) findings show:

- 82% say they "listen carefully to the opinions of others", rather than debating or trying to convince others of their own views.
- Only 40% enjoy trying to change other people's minds.
- 86% are motivated to share when they find information that would be interesting to others.
- Women *listen* to their friends, gather information and then *share* it with other friends: online news being the top source of information (57%), followed by TV (50%), social media posts (49%) and email (48%).
- Their friends are the most influential people in their lives (83%), more than their spouse/partner (68%), professional experts (46%) or parents (44%).

Although social media is the talk of digital and marketing professionals, women of all demographic groups prefer the personal touch, sharing face-to-face with each other: 89% say they prefer personal contact, compared to 67% who like to share via social networking. Even though 84% say that "social media helps me feel more connected to others", the vast majority of women (93%) across all age groups agree that technology helps them connect with others (adding however that face-to-face relationships are more satisfying). One need point out here that over half (57%) agree that young people spend too much time connecting with others online or by texting, and that this is harmful for their future relationships. (SheSpeaks 2011)

The statistics of the SheSpeak's study show that women have high levels of engagement and that these social women are sharing content in multiple ways— i.e. facebook and smartphones are the fastest growing sharing mechanisms—mom's interact twice as much online with more people than non-moms (homemakers), etc. With regard to homemakers –women who work at home—they are active bloggers and engage online more consistently than moms. Almost two-thirds (63%) of homemakers say that: "*Working at home (either as a homemaker or professional who works at home) makes me feel isolated sometimes*" and (68%) started a blog in order to connect with others. SheSpeaks (2011) also shows that sharing for moms, who

interact twice as much online than non-moms, is more about inspiring change, making a difference in the world, feeling good about themselves and wanting to make the world a better place for their children. For example,

- 60% of moms share because they want to inspire change (50% for homemakers/women with no children) and they believe they can make a difference by sharing (63% moms vs. 52% homemakers).
- Moms (51%) are more likely to have commented on "issues important to the local community" (51% moms vs. 38% homemakers).
- Sharing is part of who they are (72% vs. 63%).
- Want to help other people take advantage of promotions (86% vs. 77%) and comment more about shopping info in their blogs (25% vs. 19%) but less about lifestyle topics such as fashion/beauty (8% vs. 15%).
- Unlike homemakers, moms over-index in sociability and say they "seem to know everyone" (42% moms vs. 28% homemakers).
- Prefer to share by posting on social networking (73% moms vs. 57% homemakers).

3. **Women entrepreneurs: women are conciliators and better team mates**

By the year 2018 the demand for female management skills will rise dramatically! The UK Chartered Management Institute (CMI) predicts that women will be moving rapidly up the chain of command because their emotional-intelligence skills will be indispensable and valued. This trend will also accelerate due to the alarming talent shortage, reads a *Time Specials*³ article which cited the CMI projections, according to which the work world in 2018 will be more fluid and virtual, and the demand for female management skills will be stronger than ever. The article entitled "Women Will Rule Business," by Claire Shipman and Katty Kay argues that "[Women are] consensus builders, conciliators and collaborators, and they employ what is called a transformational leadership style—heavily engaged, motivational, extremely well suited for the emerging, less hierarchical workplace." One need point out

³ The Future of Work. Women will rule business. *Time Special*: http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1898024_1898023_1898078,00.html (Thursday, May 14, 2009) Read more: http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1898024_1898023_1898078,00.html#ixzz1xBIC94PA

here that many studies confirm that businesses and companies that utilize or take advantage of their female talent pool have an important competitive advantage and greater success rates. For example, a 2008 McKinsey & Company study (CEW (2009) shows that companies with the most gender diverse management teams— namely that have women on board— have on an average higher business results, greater success with regard to profits and sustainability.

One must also call attention to the alarming predictions that if there is no drastic change in the female employment rate, demographic developments in Europe indicate that by the year 2036 there will be a drop of 24 million in the active workforce! Moreover, with regard to the European ICT sector, the Commission estimates that it will face a shortfall of 700,000 skilled workers by the year 2015, partly explained by a lack of women engineering and computing graduates. (Kamberidou & Fabry 2012)

Today, on a global level, there is a shortage of 1.2 million staff in the ICT sector. The lack of talent in the ICT industry and the small minority of women entering the job market in this field is a disadvantage for all. Women in Europe are drastically underrepresented across the board in ICT – in the academia, in education, in training programmes, in industry and in high level careers in this sector—so we need to address the factors that act as obstacles to inclusion and ensure that the opportunities are open to women on equal terms with men. If not addressed resolutely, the shortage of ICT-oriented women will have a great impact on future generations. Consequently, Europe's young people must be re-socialized to view ICT as an appealing or viable career option and field of study.

In the global business sector this *leadership gender gap* seems to be widening as well, despite the fact that research— in the business sector in Europe and the US— shows that companies with women in leadership positions are more successful in regard to return on sales, equity and invested capital.⁴ In the top European companies, from 2004-2008, women's participation in decision making positions has hardly risen. The number of women on the boards of European companies in 2004 was 8% and in 2008 it slightly increased to 8.5%, with the exception of the Scandinavian countries. (Kamberidou & Fabry 2012, CEW 2009)

With regard to entrepreneurship, women are also significantly underrepresented here as well, necessitating that we address this gender participation/engagement gap. According to European Commission (2012a) recent figures [Last update: 02/02/2012] women

⁴ Source: Women Leaders and Resilience: Perspectives from the C-suite, Accenture 2010. (<http://newsroom.accenture.com/news/resilience+key+to+keeping+your+job+accenture+research+finds.htm>)

entrepreneurs in Europe make up only 30% of all entrepreneurs, an alarming decrease from 39.4% in 2010! The 2010 statistics showed that 39.4% women chose to be self-employed compared to 50.2% men and that women entrepreneurs made up only 34.4% of the EU's self-employed workforce.⁵

On the other hand, surveys conducted by the National Foundation of Women Business Owners (NFWBO) show that the women-owned firms that do compete in the global market stimulate growth and are focused on business expansion.⁶ Women entrepreneurs have a significant impact on the economy, not only in their ability to create jobs for themselves but also in creating jobs for others.⁷ Research also shows that women entrepreneurs are highly educated, use more high technology systems than their male counterparts and are an economic force to be reckoned with for sustainable economic recovery.

A study conducted for the Small Business Administration (SBA) titled *Are Male and Female Entrepreneurs Really That Different?*, Erin Kepler & Scott Shane (2007) observe that women entrepreneurs in the US are more likely to prioritize and minimize risk so that their business and personal lives work in harmony, whereas male entrepreneurs primarily focus on starting a business to make money and have higher business expectations. No doubt, the digital age has made it more feasible for risk-averse aspiring entrepreneurs of both genders to start a business. A wealth of low-risk opportunities and ventures like e-commerce, blogging, web-based services, cloud-based tools and virtual workforces further lower entry cost. Sure, the tendency to minimize risk can lead to higher success rates for female entrepreneurs, that is woman-owned businesses are more likely to have positive revenues, as the SBA study shows. However, Kepler & Shane (2007) argue that this could be described as *risk-phobia* which could also mean that women are more likely to place limits on the size of their business and are less likely pursue outside funding from investors to stimulate growth. In contrast however, as previously cited, NFWBO found the women-owned firms that do compete in the global market today stimulate growth and are focused on business expansion.

⁵ Ibid. Also see figures in: "Women Entrepreneurs encouraged to take the plunge", 08/12/2010 http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/itemlongdetail.cfm?displayType=news&lang=el&tpa_id=1020&item_id=4772&tk= Published 08/12/2010 (retrieved 26/2/2012).

⁶ See: International Entrepreneurship in: http://www.internationalentrepreneurship.com/european_entrepreneurship/greece_entrepreneur.asp (retrieved 12/2/2012)

⁷ "Women Entrepreneurs encouraged to take the plunge", 08/12/2010, in: <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/1675&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Moreover, key drivers for economic growth, innovation, employment and social integration are the 23 million small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the EU today which represent 99% of businesses. Consequently the European Commission's aim is to promote successful entrepreneurship and improve the business environment for SMEs, in order to allow them to realise their full potential in today's global economy. (European Commission 2012a)

3.1. **EU Networks for Women Entrepreneurs**

Europe needs more entrepreneurs and actions are being taken to overcome obstacles and change mindsets, especially in view of the fact that women entrepreneurs in Europe today make up only 30% of all entrepreneurs. Examples of these mindsets, namely social attitudes and stereotypes, are clearly displayed in a recent study conducted in Estonia. Tallinn University of Technology (TUT), being the forerunners in ICT fields and in initiating technologies such as Skype, decided to investigate possible scenarios on how female students at TUT see their input in entrepreneurship. Online questionnaires were sent out to female students in order to gain a more coherent understanding of gender and how it affects career choices and what could be done to improve the underrepresentation of girls/women in ICT. According to the results of the survey women do not want to start their own IT company, and the reasons given were: (1) Fear of new things, (2) unwillingness or lack of courage to be a leader, (3) fear of the responsibility, (4) work-life balance, (5) competing with men, and (6) professional competence. (WiTEC 2012)

In order to eliminate such obstacles and specifically this gender gap, the EC is promoting, supporting and encouraging female entrepreneurship. For example, the *European Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs* was inaugurated in Warsaw, during a Polish Presidency event on 15 November 2011. This network has been enforcing and complementing the actions that started with the creation of the European Network of Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors (ENFEA) in 2009 (European Commission 2012a)

The European Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs is one of the actions proposed in the 2011 Small Business Act (SBA) Review to promote female entrepreneurship in Europe in order to stimulate growth: "*Europe's 2020 strategy and economy greatly rely on SMEs achieving their potential. The SBA is the EU policy framework aimed at strengthening SMEs so that they can grow and create employment [...] Other measures on the SBA agenda include a mentoring scheme, and steps to promote entrepreneurship among women graduates*".

(European Commission 2012a) To date seventeen countries have joined the European Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs: Belgium, Hungary, Greece, Cyprus, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, the United Kingdom, Albania, Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Republic of Serbia.

This European Network of Mentors is extremely active. For example, only the Greek branch of the network has produced and included 104 business mentors and mentees. The national network "Business Mentors"—the Greek branch of the European Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs—to date has 103 members and 51 mentors, even though they were only required to recruit 26 mentors and 52 women mentees. In other words one mentor per mentee. The Greek branch has already completed three training sessions for mentors (two in Athens and one in Thessaloniki in May 2012, is in the process of holding a webinar for the mentees in June 2012 and now matching the mentoring couples that will be introduced to each other at the kick off session in July 2012. Additionally, other than coordinating and ensuring that these relationships run smoothly for the entire duration, one webinar session will be held for mentors every three months from September 2012 to August 2013.

A study undertaken by the Commission in 2008 on women innovators and entrepreneurship ⁸ confirms that the obstacles confronted by women in innovative entrepreneurship are of three types: (1) Contextual obstacles: educational choices, traditional views and stereotypes about women in science and innovation. (2) Economic obstacles: the innovation sector requires substantial investment and women are perceived as less credible financially than men. (3) Soft obstacles: lack of access to technical scientific and business networks, lack of business training, role models and entrepreneurship skills. Consequently, in order to overcome these obstacles, the Commission and Member States have been supporting and promoting women entrepreneurship in Europe with a series of activities and projects. In 2009 the European Commission helped establish the European Network of Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors—launched in Stockholm during the Swedish Presidency. The second phase of the European Network of Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors was inaugurated in 2010 during the networking event that was co-organised by the European Commission and the Belgian Presidency of the European Council, at which European Commission Vice-President Antonio Tajani, Commissioner for Industry and Entrepreneurship said: "Europe must build on its small

⁸ Female entrepreneurship portal: http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/promoting-entrepreneurship/women/portal/index_en.htm (retrieved 14/12/2010)

businesses. Supporting women entrepreneurs is essential to stimulate growth since the entrepreneurial potential of women has not yet been fully exploited. Our initiative will play an important role in encouraging women to take the plunge and launching their own businesses which will be good for them and great for a sustainable economic recovery."⁹

Today the Network is made up of around 270 entrepreneurs coming from 22 European countries. (European Commission 2012) The Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors highlight and focus on the role that women can play in creating jobs and promoting competitiveness. Specifically, by testifying to their experience in schools, at universities and in the media, these Ambassadors serve as role models and mentors inspiring women to have an independent career. Since the establishment of the European Network of Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors many initiatives and programs have been implemented, such as (1) the establishment of a micro-credit, mentoring, coaching and grants programmes targeting female entrepreneurs in Spain. (2) the establishment of a specific mentoring programmes in Latvia. (3) Romania has been organizing women entrepreneurs' days. (4) The UK 'Women's Enterprise Ambassadors' and a "Flying Start" programme encouraging entrepreneurship among women graduates and (5) the previously mentioned *European Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs* inaugurated in Poland on 15 November 2011.

3.2. Tips from Women Entrepreneurs

Today women-owned businesses are on the rise, thanks to the Internet and social media in particular. Social networking is allowing women to inexpensively reach many target groups. What could be better for marketing a business? With so many active women online (social women)—with such an expanding and new target market—it makes sense for women business owners, to market to them via social networking. Additionally, social networking also takes advantage of many women's so called *natural* strengths which were examined in this paper, such as "*listening*", communication, sharing, support forums, creating relationships, community building, and support. Isn't this what social networking is all about?

Groups, forums and even entire social networking sites that are created by women are perfect places for women entrepreneurs to market their business! Anyone involved in marketing online, can no longer afford to ignore social media. It's all about gaining a steady momentum: branding yourself, building a platform and enticing

⁹http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/promotingentrepreneurship/women/index_en.htm

people to be interested in what you have to say. When it comes to social media marketing there are so many choices! So how do you decide which social media outlets are right for you? Nellie Akalp (2010) argues you need to hear what your targeted community is saying so that you can craft a value proposition that will speak to them, and women are good listeners!

The International Association of Women Entrepreneurs (IAWEO 2012) found over 40 women entrepreneurs to share their secrets to social media marketing and here are some of them:

1. Stay Specific: Target customers and focus on information that builds customer trust. This means that your social media is interested in your customer and not just on making a sales pitch.
2. Hire a social media expert/manager so you can concentrate on your business.
3. Practice makes perfect: navigate, explore, tweet new ideas, products, etc.
4. Include a personal touch: always send a *thank you* for connecting to a new 'friend', take a moment to look over their page and find something you have in common.

Olga Stavropoulou, Founder, Owner and Managing Director of Militos Emerging Technologies & Services (www.militos.org), as well as a member of the European Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs recommends:

- Your content must add value to your readers!
- Refrain from over posting; avoid being one of those who exhaust social media friends with multiple postings.
- Take the time to add your own 'catchy' title than just posting a link.
- Develop and apply an internal social media policy to guide and facilitate your employees on how and when social media is used.
- Engage and interact with your social media friends and work on making your relationship stronger.
- Free your social sharing potential. Be creative, to the point, useful and share your values, goals, achievements with your readers.
- Set the limits up to the point you break the limits. Social media can take you on a global ride, and that requires smart strategy, planning and action.

- Be your 'biz'self! Social media can eventually reveal fakes and reward true entrepreneurs.

Stacy Karacostas (2012), a practical marketing expert, with five previous businesses under her belt, recommends:

- Hiring a virtual assistant. If you don't understand the technology hire someone to handle the technology side while you focus on your business strategy and content.
- If you feel uncomfortable about showing off your expertise or putting yourself all out in the social media, then look at social networking as a way to reach and help more people and let other women do the bragging for you once they have discovered you.
- Setting a social networking strategy, complete with goals, deadlines, specific limits on the time you're going to spend online. This is absolutely necessary as women entrepreneurs do a lot of multi-tasking between the business, kids, and relationships, and social networking can easily absorb all your time.
- Sharing referrals and connecting your favorite people and businesses together.
- Finding online groups, forums and even entire social networking sites that are created by women, for women since these usually offer support, connections, information, marketing opportunities, and more.

The Center for Women and Enterprise in partnership with Babson's Center for Women's Leadership hosted a panel with three successful women entrepreneurs (Akalp 2012) at which the following points were made:

1. Start slow, listen to the chatter in the social media, spend months collecting information in your area of interest/business, and don't worry about the competition since more often than not, you end up partnering with them to everyone's benefit.
- Whatever you post on social media should add value to the reader's experience and encourage them to come back to you for more. Once you or your business has been 'recognized' in the social media, they will be more apt to respond to traditional outreaches through e-mail.
 - Allocate your resources and time (yours and your staff's) for social media promotion. Use the tools that can help you manage and optimize your time in the social media world: Laterbro.com, hootsuite.com, and cotweent.com etc.

- Create a circular flow of communication through your use of social media that ultimately and always brings your clients back to your website.
- Decide on your 'framework' or 'brand' in the social media outlets: some social media are more relevant to certain aspects of your business development than others.
- Social media compliments marketing efforts, for example Twitter is great for 'trial and error' in the social media world. Whatever you put up there only lasts about 15 minutes, so you can test things out and not worry about it hanging out in cyberspace to haunt you.
- Learn to use the analytical tools that help you determine the impact your social media networking is having on your business.

Natalie Sisson (2010), an entrepreneur coach who today [2012] calls herself a *Suitcase Entrepreneur*, with a thriving online business using social media offers the following tips:

- Use social media as an integrated part of your business marketing approach.
- Connect with a diverse range of people from all around the world, people you may never have even discovered or had the chance to contact without the social media.
- Profile a few successful women

5. Concluding remarks-recommendations: Integrating a gender perspective

The main goal of integrating a gender perspective is that of gender equity/social equality for both women and men. Gender integration refers to the process of assessing and reassessing the implications for both women and men of any program and action plan at all levels: social, economic and political. This requires gender-specific interventions, policies and practices that may target exclusively women or interventions that target men exclusively, or even men and women together. One need point out here that gender issues do not concern women only, as men also have a gender and are subject to gender stereotyping, distinctive social expectations, social inequalities and exclusions. For example, male migrant groups or ethnic minority entrepreneurs, another important pool of entrepreneurs in Europe, also confront exclusionary practices and obstacles: discrimination, language barriers, limited access to funding, support services, as well as inadequate business, management and marketing skills. (Kamberidou 2010) Another example of a gender issue which concerns men exclusively are male athletes who belong to diverse

ethnic groups. Although many of the world's finest athletes and players are ethnic minorities or migrants, they are still under-represented in non-playing positions, in sport governing bodies, in positions of authority, etc. In other words integrating a gender perspective means identifying and eliminating systemic or unconscious bias and discrimination from structures and governing bodies, looking at the data on recruitment, promoting new role models and mentorship programs, developing and applying effective policies, etc. It requires shifts in organisational and institutional practices, attitudes or ways of thinking and in resource allocations and goals. In fact, the goal of mainstreaming gender equality is to transform exclusionary or unequal social and institutional structures into equal and just structures for both women and men. It entails ensuring a gender balance, increasing the talent pool and enabling everyone to realize their full potential. (Kamberidou & Fabry 2012)

One need reiterate here that gender is never detached or separate from diversities that define us as human beings, such as ethnicity, race, religion, disability, age, etc. Integrating a gender perspective means increasing the number of discriminated social groups (ethnic minorities, migrants and women) into power positions, encouraging and supporting inclusivity, appointing diversity officers, raising the profile of role models and mentors, promoting media campaigns against sexism, racism, etc. It means reassessing changing identities, stereotypes and gender relations and re-examining changing attitudes and social expectations.

We already have all the necessary research and analyses. Gaining a thorough understanding of the wastage of talent, including the talent shortages—trends, rates and differences—is essential in order to set realistic targets and integrate the gender dimension into the equation. Mainstreaming a gender perspective in social spaces (entrepreneurship, business sector, IT, Information Society, Education, etc.) means incorporating the human dimension, promoting diversity so as to change mindsets and stereotypes, especially as far as women are concerned. Research findings show greater exclusionary practices and underrepresentation with regard to women, consequently enabling everyone to realize their full potential requires bridging major social inequality gaps: the gender participation gap, the gender pay gap and the gender leadership gap. In other words, preventing this wastage of talent and in particular eliminating *gender devaluation* processes: the subtle processes by which women's engagement and contributions are minimized, undervalued or devalued in the so-called male fields. It requires re-addressing best-practices that will eliminate the *leaky pipeline*, break the *glass ceiling* and get more women to ride up the *glass escalator*.

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