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Network marketing dietary supplements: a multi-method analysis of user's
experience and social media network structures

Roberta Horsfall

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of MSc by Research

The University of Huddersfield

January 2018

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Abstract

Network marketing is an increasingly popular sales technique that holds both economic and public health implications for society. Using social media networking as a tool for this marketing method is a new and changing approach that has many benefits for distributors. The theoretical framework of contagion introduced by Berger (2013) was used within this study as it appeared to be a significant aspect within network marketing. Trust and word of mouth diffusion were also major components that were explored throughout the research, and how these factors associate with network marketing and the experience of representatives were considered. Gender differences and the role of motherhood were also examined as there appeared to be a connection between network marketing and family life.

The focus of the research was on the network marketing of dietary supplements, concentrating on three major companies – Forever Living, Juice Plus and Herbalife. The study took a mixed-method approach, gathering data using qualitative interviews alongside quantitative social media network analysis.

The qualitative section of the research involved ten semi-structured interviews with a representative from one of the relevant companies. The aim of the interviews was to observe the perceived experiences provided by individuals who use and distribute dietary merchandise through network marketing, and promote the products using social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Thematic analysis was used to examine participant's perceptions of their background in network marketing, in which three prominent themes were identified and discussed: reconstructing identity, representing a lifestyle, and mothers and network marketing.

It was concluded that many of the participants altered the way they wanted others to perceive their identities through social media in order to represent a desirable and successful lifestyle. It was also suggested that many mothers became a part of network marketing due to the flexible hours and a good work-family balance. This appeal was also

used within the attraction marketing aspect of the technique as it encouraged other parents to also become representatives.

The study also took a quantitative approach, in which the novel software NodeXL was used to analyse social media networks in order to observe and understand network structures relating to the relevant companies. One graph relating to each company was created every week for five weeks, totalling fifteen diagrams demonstrating the social media structures. It was concluded that the analysis suggested extensive connectivity was only prevalent with very few Twitter users, including both retweeting others and being retweeted themselves, suggesting a structure with few successful individuals and many generating less success.

The data from both sections of the research was correlated in an attempt to gain an overall perspective of network marketing strategies, success and use of social media. The research project as a whole aimed to provide useful information regarding network marketer's experiences, the use of social media as a tool within the network marketing world, and to understand how the role of contagion and influence relates to the topic.

There have been numerous studies carried out regarding social media as a marketing tool, however there is no previous literature focusing on the network marketing of dietary supplements and how social media networks are utilised within this setting. The recent development and growth of social media networking as a tool for marketing dietary supplements has significant public health and health behaviour implications. This notion and the issue that there are no known previous studies regarding this specific topic suggests that this research will be an important addition to the literature.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Network marketing is a growing marketing and distribution technique administered by various companies on a global scale. It is defined by The Direct Selling Association (2017) as “a method of marketing and retailing goods and services directly to the consumers, in their homes or in any other location away from permanent retail premises”, and described by Ferrell, Gonzalez-Padron and Ferrell (2010) as a face-to-face approach to marketing carried out by independent distributors who aim to build relationships with customers. Network marketers generate income from commissions through product sales and also through recruiting others to become associate distributors, (Kong, 2003).

In recent years the development of this marketing approach has been altered by the adoption of social media networking as a promotion tool. Chang, Yu and Lu (2015) suggest that due to the ease of online access and the effective diffusion of information, it is important that companies use social media in an appropriate way so that positive information is shared between network users.

The theoretical framework of contagion was considered throughout this research study, which arises from Berger’s (2013) work on the diffusion of information through various means including social influence and word of mouth. Word of mouth is an important concept within the topic of network marketing that can be administered face to face or transferred to an online setting, which is illustrated by Chu and Kim (2011) as electronic word of mouth - “eWOM”. It is suggested that this type of information diffusion is becoming a significant aspect to consider within social media marketing (Chu et al, 2011) and it is argued to be a practical marketing tool, (Trusov, Bucklin & Pauwels, 2009).

Throughout this research, Goffman’s Theory of the Self was drawn upon several times, as it appeared to be a relevant concept to consider when analysing the data. Goffman (1959) suggests that when in a social situation an individual offers a performance for people around them in order to build a certain presentation of their ‘self’. Goffman (1959) argues that the individual may not be doing this intentionally, and it may not always be for self-

benefit, however no matter how an individual wants to be presented, it is in their interests to control how others perceive them. Individuals will create a perception of someone else depending on how they look or act, therefore people may alter these traits in order to present themselves in a certain way, (Goffman, 1949)

This theory was relevant within the research due to the nature of the different techniques used by the women involved in the network marketing industry, and it was useful to assist in considering some of their experiences. It was also interesting to bring the theory in to a social media setting, as many of the women suggested expressing themselves in different ways on social media platforms in order to gain a desired perception from others.

Although there have been numerous studies regarding social media as a marketing tool, there is no known previous research in relation to the network marketing of dietary supplements using social media networking. This type of marketing has both economic and public health implications, therefore it is important to consider the effects of this type of distribution on these aspects as well as on individuals.

Contagion and Trust

The theoretical framework of contagion proposed by Berger (2013) appeared to be a significant aspect to focus on within this topic of research. The theory suggests that the act of consumers reviewing and recommending products to friends and peers is considerably more effective than more traditional methods of marketing, which Berger (2013) explains is partly because using a word of mouth technique often retains a more focused target audience that will more likely be interested in the specific product. It is proposed that an individual is more likely to trust recommendations or reviews from a peer rather than from a general advertisement, (Berger, 2013), and that a remarkably high number of product purchases are influenced by word of mouth, (Colvin, 2014).

Rapp, Beitelspacher, Grewal and Hughes (2013) convey the idea of contagion by cohesion, which develops when “the recipient has a strong relationship to the source”, (page 549).

This idea suggests that an individual is more likely to be influenced by something if the information is conveyed by a friend or family member. Like Berger (2013), Rapp et al. (2013) suggest that the development of contagion arises from word of mouth within peer groups.

It has been recognised that consumers occasionally feel a sense of belonging and pride towards product communities in which they involve themselves, (Rapp et al., 2013). Considering the concept of contagion and word of mouth, it becomes apparent that groups of people are often involved with the same products, therefore creating a shared social identity and consequently further effectiveness of contagion within a marketing context, (Rapp et al., 2013). This is important to consider as it demonstrates the significance of social influence and contagion through peer marketing.

It is suggested that there are many network marketing approaches that take the marketing concept and alter it to give consumers the experience of sharing opinions and experiences of products to friends and peers, (Ferrell, et al., 2010). This relates to ideas conveyed by Berger (2013) and Poon, Albaum and Chan (2012) regarding the importance of the element of trust within a marketing environment, and how it is a positive and useful tool. Trust is often considered to be something that causes the positive expectations of a desired outcome, derived from communication between the 'trustor' and the 'trustee', (Blöbaum, 2016). Bhattacharya, Devinney and Pillutla (1998) connect the concept of trust to the word 'vulnerable', suggesting that when providing someone with trust, the individual also presents their vulnerabilities. It is suggested that trust can only be present within a circumstance in which there is uncertainty, (Bhattacharya et al., 1998). According to Blöbaum (2016) although there are some elements that differ, trust is in effect still the same concept within a technological situation as within a real life circumstance.

Harridge-March (2006) defines risk as something "that implies that there is some degree of uncertainty about the outcome of an action", (page 747). If an individual trusts a company or individual online they are less likely to believe there will be risk involved with their actions, (Harridge-March, 2006), therefore it is important for online promoters and distributors to gain a consumer's trust. Kim, Sung and Kang (2014) suggest that online

communities provide assurance and people are more likely to share their ideas and experiences with others within this setting. Individuals are also more inclined to convey information when they believe it has originated from a trustworthy source, (Kim et al., 2014). This corresponds with the source credibility theory introduced by Birnbaum and Stegner (1979), which breaks down the concept of credibility in to three components: expertise, bias and the judge's point of view, and aims to understand how people judge whether a source is believable.

Poon, Albaum and Yin (2017) consider the theory that there are many different levels and elements within the concept of trust, including examples such as consistency, fairness and honesty. Trust is a critical component within a marketing context as consumers often purchase products with no previous experience, therefore they must rely on the seller to provide them with a positive outcome, (Poon et al., 2017). Poon et al. (2012) acknowledge the importance of trust within network marketing relationships, suggesting that trust is a crucial component of this type of marketing. Trust on an interpersonal level will assist in the guarantee of greater product sales and perhaps continued future purchase, (Poon et al., 2017).

It is suggested that the network marketing approach is often generated from relationships between friends and peers, (Poon et al., 2012). This implies that there is an increased level of trust within a more personal environment, which corresponds with Berger's (2013) idea that marketing is more successful when the promotion or recommendation is associated with personal relationships and the trust that develops from this approach. Young and Albaum (2003) also argue that trust is an important factor within network marketing, and that this trust is often stronger when the buyer and the seller have a pre-existing personal connection, such as a friend or family relationship. These relationship links and their connection to the products can often lead to the development of 'exclusive' social circles, which can change once formal business conferences change in to social congregations, (Bhattacharya & Mehta, 2000).

Although peer relationships can be regarded as a positive feature of marketing, especially within a network marketing context, it has also been found that friendships could potentially hinder sales, (Grayson, 2007). Research has found that individuals may feel

pressured in to buying products that their friends are selling, and salespeople sometimes worry that others may perceive them to be taking advantage of their friendship, (Grayson, 2007). This is also discussed by Kong (2003), who suggests that friendships may often be utilised in order to promote and distribute products. However, it could be argued that this is less of a concern now as network marketing is often carried out through social media, in which consumers expand past immediate acquaintances therefore a purchase is not dependent on friendship.

A study carried out by Poon et al. (2017) found that “no trust dimensions positively, significantly affect the repurchase of a direct selling product through the same salesperson”, (page 337), however it is suggested that this could be due to a general uncertainty towards network marketing as a sales technique. Burch (2016) suggests that this uncertainty could be due to the issue that network marketing has in the past been perceived by many as a pyramid scheme concept, in which a representation of the distributors as ambitious pressure-sellers has been formed. As a result of this depiction, this area requires further research in order to fully understand the concept of trust dimensions and their impact upon network marketing success. Despite the outcome of the study, Poon et al. (2017) still suggest that companies that use network marketing as a sales approach should concentrate heavily on the relevance of interpersonal trust when training distributors.

Online Marketing and Social Media

It is useful to consider the concept of contagion on a face-to-face basis, but it is also important to apply the theory to a social media context. Research carried out by Grover, Foreman and Burckes-Miller (2016) focusing on social network effects of body image found that young women focus greatly on how they represent themselves online. Grover et al. (2016) acknowledges the ‘social contagion effect’ when considering the research results, explaining that when a group of people become attracted to a central idea, enthusiasm builds and more people become heavily influenced. The study suggests that strong social network connections can influence how individuals act due to example led behaviour, (Grover et al., 2016). Although this study focuses on ideal body image, it does relate to this

particular research as it takes in to account the social contagion and influence of information and behaviour online. This can be linked to the network marketing of dietary supplements as many distributors post photos of ideal lifestyles and health changes which in turn can influence a person's decision to purchase.

Network marketing is one of the major marketing methods that uses social media as a tool. Word of mouth marketing is not a new concept, however employing this technique through social media has caused the approach to develop widely and largely influence marketing as a whole, (Kudeshia & Mittal, 2015). Kumar and Pradhan (2015) suggest that there has been a rise in the use of social media as a marketing tool in order to engage consumers and build relationships. Due to the development of the internet and social media sites, there has been an increase in the amount of individuals seeking support and advice online from peers and other consumers regarding the purchase of products, (Hajili, Lin, Featherman & Wang, 2014).

A rise in the use of the social media has altered the marketing realm as consumers can now at the click of a button use word of mouth as a tool for sharing experiences of products, (Shao & Hu, 2017). According to Ferrell and Ferrell (2012), customers are now using social media in order to discover information from others about a product before they actually buy it. The impact of traditional advertisements is depreciating due to the advancement of social media and information diffusion. Users are now buying products based on interactions with other consumers and the trust that is perceived between them, (Shao & Hu, 2017).

Cheung, Xiao and Liu (2014) suggest that research shows "the significant role peer consumer review plays in shaping a consumer's purchase decision", (page 50). This approach of seeking peer recommendations assists in building consumer trust, and demonstrates the importance of social influence on social media sites within the marketing environment. As discussed, trust is a vital component within marketing, however, Pentina, Zhang and Basmanova (2013) argue that the detached context of online buying can lead to problems with companies gaining trust from consumers. This could suggest why network

marketing is such a successful and growing technique, as there is a more personal purchasing experience.

Ferrell et al. (2010) acknowledges the importance of social media within a marketing context and recognises that network marketing is often used within this setting. Using social networking as an approach within network marketing is beneficial because the distributor is able to contact a large amount of people from different locations at the same time. The use of social networking sites to sell products has also been compared to sharing products and recommendations in a group at a friend's house, (Ferrell et al., 2010). This again implies that although the environment is different, there is the same concept present of successful marketing within peer groups.

Goodrich and de Mooij (2014) suggest that social media can be perceived as a 'hybrid' as it proposes electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and users can conveniently send relevant messages. In regards to this concept, Kimmel and Kitchen (2013) suggest that "WOM today can spread with lightning speed to reach countless numbers of consumers", (page 2). eWOM is a successful application for marketing as, considering the elements of trust and contagion, consumers are often cautious when dealing with more conventional methods of advertising compared to advice coming from friends or other social media users, (Chang et al., 2015). Colvin (2014) suggests that eWOM is considerably more powerful as a marketing concept than traditional advertisement. This addresses the proposal that network marketing can be a very useful technique in a social media setting.

According to Herrera, Armelini and Salvaj (2015) marketing companies are now attempting different ways of arousing interest in consumers due to the decline in influential capabilities of traditional marketing methods. Due to eWOM, attention has been turned to social networking sites and their effectiveness as a promotion tool, (Herrera et al., 2015). According to Andzulis, Panagopoulos and Rapp (2012), when it became apparent that the internet was beginning to have an impact on the shaping of marketing and advertisement, companies began developing various techniques in order to increase their success. However due to the free flow of reviews and recommendations, consumers still governed the information that was supplied to others and therefore held control over the success of

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products, (Andzulis et al., 2012). Although these techniques have now progressed due to an improved understanding of internet marketing and the development of social media, it could be suggested that using network marketing as a form of social media marketing is a more advantageous and successful approach.

Research carried out by Herrera et al. (2015) based on social contagion and online marketing suggests that contagion and word of mouth are useful means of diffusing information in a marketing context. However, it was found that this method can also have negative implications, being that if social media users are constantly exposed to promotions of certain products, they may begin to dismiss the information and therefore weaken the contagion, (Herrera et al., 2015).

Campbell, Ferraro and Sands (2014) argue that social media marketing and social media advertising are two very different concepts, in which social media marketing relies on the relationship between the seller and the consumer, and the feeling of a community within the distribution of products. As previously discussed, the success of social media marketing is usually obtained through the diffusion of information using word of mouth.

Since its launch in 2004 Facebook has grown to become one of the most well-known and used websites around the globe, with over four billion users, (Fu, Wu & Cho 2017). Twitter is also very prominent within social media with now over three hundred million monthly active users, (Twitter, 2017). An analysis carried out by Ferrell and Ferrell (2012) demonstrated that 68% of global network marketing companies have an active presence on Facebook and Youtube, and 62% of the companies utilise Twitter, implying the benefits of using social media within the marketing context.

It is suggested that Twitter “facilitates eWOM” (Kim et al., 2014) and that people using Facebook seek a connection with brands on the networking site due to the appeal of social identity and an attachment to products, (Anderson, Fagan, Woodnutt, & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2012). This could suggest why network marketing is developing on social media as such a successful approach. Communities are often formed between distributors and consumers, arguing that this could construct an individual’s social identity.

Social engagement is an essential determinant of social media marketing success due to online groups that are created through the exchange of advice and recommendations, which can be characterised as word of mouth communication, (Campbell et al., 2014). It is argued that social media users are more likely to trust recommendations on networks such as Facebook from friends or even people they do not know rather than direct from a company, (Chang et al., 2015). Brand theory relationship perspective builds on this idea of social engagement, proposing that brands on social media often represent stereotypical symbols that appeal to consumers as they can identify with these concepts, (Pentina et al., 2013).

Tamburrini, Cinnirella, Jansen and Bryden (2015) suggest that online communities can be recognised through the analysis of social media networks, whereby the 'members' of these groups have strong connections to each other. Before research was carried out, it was predicted that online communities would have similar social interests and identities, (Tamburrini et al., 2015). The aim of Tamburrini et al.'s (2015) study was to investigate whether people change the language they use depending on which group they are communicating with. According to Tamurrini et al. (2015) the results of the study showed a change in linguistic behaviour depending on the social group, which "supports a social identity perspective that views such linguistic variation as part of the process of social categorisation", (page 87). This suggests that within network marketing, representatives could alter their linguistic behaviour depending on who they are promoting a product to.

Bhattacharya and Mehta (2000) suggest that a large part of the social lives of network marketers is involved with other individuals distributing the same product due to related events and parties, which also indicates a creation of social identity. However, it must be considered that because their research was carried out in 2000 findings may be very different now. Social media networks have developed greatly since this date and a lot of the relevant discussions and meetings are now online instead of in a real life social setting. This may have an impact on the social groups that distributors associate themselves with as they can choose to separate their online role to their general life. Therefore, this was considered further when interviewing participants regarding their roles as a representative.

An article written by Carr (2011) considers the use of social media as a network marketing tool, by discussing techniques with network marketers selling Juice Plus. Some individuals explain that although sites like Facebook are useful for posting health articles and providing others with insights in to personal health behaviours, actually meeting people face-to-face can often be more advantageous. This is because the products can be better explained, and it also creates a relationship between the seller and the buyer. One individual proposed that it is important to understand that exchange between the seller and potential buyer must be based on a positive relationship not solely on the purpose of quick transaction, (Carr, 2011).

One particular Juice Plus representative explained how she found potential customers – “I’m looking for people posting stuff about I’m tired, I have no energy, I’m overweight, I’m sick, my kids are sick, my job stinks – things where the answer could be JuicePlus or a business opportunity.” (Carr, 2011). This suggests certain strategies that can be used by network marketers to find customers through observing people’s personal lives on social media.

Research carried out by Lang (2013) suggests that the way in which people present themselves on social media is not always an authentic reality, with aspects of their lives being altered in order to represent themselves in a certain way, usually positively for the purpose of creating a certain perception by others. This is relevant to online marketing, specifically network marketing as it provides representatives with an opportunity to influence consumers in ways that they believe to be useful.

Burton and Soboleva (2011) suggest that Twitter can be used as a means of eWOM and a marketing technique. Previous research shows that eWOM influences consumer behaviour through trust between peers on social networking sites, (Chu et al., 2011), and consumers perceive there to be a lower risk when purchasing a product if they have observed positive recommendations from peers, (Smith, 2002). This indicates that eWOM can increase or decrease the success of a company’s sales depending on reviews and recommendations from trusted sources on social media sites, (Chu et al., 2011).

Wang (2012) considers how social value is important in relation to marketing products online. It is suggested that an individual may associate social value of an item depending on the person who has posted a positive or negative review, which again relates to the idea of relying on comments from peers as a consumer. Further to this concept, Lin and Utz (2015) consider the various emotional responses that individuals can experience when using social media sites such as Facebook. These different emotions reported by participants within the study included happiness and joy, but also envy, guilt and boredom. These reactions were related to the content of the post but also dependent on the person posting the information the participant was reading; the emotion is likely to be stronger in response to information associated with friends or family, rather than someone they have a vague connection with, (Lin & Utz, 2015).

Although numerous studies demonstrate the success of online word of mouth techniques in the marketing world, there are some arguments to suggest there are also negative elements to this approach. Research shows that consumers can be apprehensive towards eWOM due to perceived social risk. This is often a result of promoters directing their recommendations at large audiences, which is perceived as less reliable than a recommendation advised in a real life situation from a family or friend, (Eisingerich, Chun, Liu, Jia & Bell, 2015).

There has also been research undertaken regarding the extent to which social media users believe information they receive from various sites. A study carried out by Lee and Oh (2017) aimed to investigate the normalisation of information shared on Twitter. It is suggested that social norms are created through certain behaviour from the majority of a group, therefore if a large amount of Twitter users are retweeting information, people will be influenced in to believing it is credible and will often retweet it themselves, (Lee & Oh, 2017). The results indicated that Twitter users identify copious retweets as “a normative cue”, in which the information is believable due to the large number of people sharing it, (Lee & Oh, 2017).

Influence

Pratt and Rosa (2003) propose the concept of a 'commitment crisis', whereby it is thought that workers' loyalty to their employment is decreasing, and people are focusing their concentration on non-work aspects of their lives. However, it is considered that network marketing may in fact be one type of employment in which people actually hold a firm commitment. It is suggested by Pratt and Rosa (2003) that a reason for this is distributors working for a network marketing company aim to recruit others to work within their team, which can encourage a sense of identity and community.

Research observed that network marketing organisations found married people with children at home as the most attractive and suitable distributors due to the risk of 'work-family conflicts', as these conflicts could be used to encourage people to establish their own work concept within network marketing through the attraction of flexibility and creating one's own schedule, (Pratt & Rosa, 2003).

Regarding health beliefs and behaviours, Salathe, Vu, Khandelwal and Hunter (2012) suggest that social networks are influential upon this element of people's lives, which is a product of like-mindedness. This can be considered from two different approaches – the idea that social connections are a result of like-mindedness, or the concept reversed, (Salathe et al., 2012). This idea could be acknowledged when considering the promotion of dietary supplements through network marketing, as like-mindedness and social influence could impact on the selling and purchase of products.

There is little previous literature surrounding network marketing, and even less regarding perceptions of the distribution technique, however research carried out in Australia (Kustin & Jones, 1995) suggests that negative perceptions are held of network marketing organisations as individuals view them as 'pushy' and 'uncomfortable' experiences. Results indicated feelings of mistrust and proposed that people are often suspicious of network marketing sales techniques, due to wariness regarding pyramid schemes and unfair commissions, (Kustin & Jones, 1995).

Gender

There is some literature that focuses on the relationship between network marketing and gender roles within society, and how these roles affect a woman's choice to establish themselves within the network marketing field. It was recorded in 2012 that 75% of people involved in network marketing were women, (WFDSA, 2013), and in 2016 the number was 74% in the US, (Direct Selling Association, 2017), demonstrating an obvious divergence between male and female presence within network marketing.

It is suggested that network marketing appeals to women due to the indicated guarantee of a lifestyle which can incorporate wealth, identity and flexibility that benefits work and home life, (Sullivan & Delaney, 2016), and can also provide women with economic prospects and a sense of empowerment, (Horner, 2010). Amundson (2011) also acknowledges that women choose this path due to the desire for a balance between family and work life. Sullivan and Delaney (2016) consider the role of post-feminism in the network marketing world, proposing that women globally are attracted to the idea of creating their own ideal lifestyle through being an entrepreneur often alongside a wife and mother.

Lamoreaux (2013) suggests that due to their gender, women are trusted more than men in the marketing industry using the network marketing approach. Women can also recommend products within their peer groups, which correlates with Poon et al.'s (2012) theory that marketing is successful when shared between friends.

It is argued that companies that employ independent distributors "...directly tap in to women's anxieties and desires to blend their perceived gender roles with the need for income", (Lamoreaux, 2013, page 44), and it could be considered that choosing employment specifically to cater for typical gender roles may actually demonstrate gender constraints against women, (Sullivan & Delaney, 2016). This is proposed by Clum (2009) who argues that women, often single mothers, are frequently pressured in to finding alternative means of earning money and improving their lives through techniques such as network marketing. However, Sullivan and Delaney (2016) provide a postfeminist argument in regard to female

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entrepreneurs, suggesting that it can create “choice and empowerment”, (page 840), which relates to network marketing and how it provides women with employment that can be achieved alongside family life.

Network Marketing Companies

This research project focused on three companies that use network marketing as a distribution technique in the sale of dietary supplement products: Juice Plus, Forever Living and Herbalife. The three companies promote the use of their products as ways to assist in ensuring customers gain a healthy lifestyle and positive well-being.

Juice Plus (2018) claim that people often find it difficult to eat the recommended amount of fruit and vegetables per day due to the busy schedules a large percentage of the population now experience. The products promoted and distributed by Juice Plus are concentrated fruits, vegetables and berries provided in capsule form, taken once or twice a day. Forever Living distribute a variety of products based on Aloe Vera including nutritional drinks and gels, nutritional supplements and health and beauty products whilst promoting positive health and well-being, (Forever Living, 2018). Herbalife promote and distribute various products including meal replacement shakes, nutrition bars and food supplement capsules. Herbalife (2018) claim that their products help people to follow a healthy balanced diet and “achieve their wellness goals”.

Based on reviewing all three websites belonging to the companies, it seemed that the main overall focus was on the positive promotion of health and well-being, with Herbalife focusing more heavily on weight loss in comparison to Juice Plus and Forever Living. Across all three websites, there was a large amount of product promotion, but also a major focus on the recruitment of representatives. For example, large sections on the Home pages attempted to entice readers to click on links such “Earning Extra Income”, “The Forever Opportunity” and “The Juice Plus Experience”, suggesting the use of positive and enthusiastic language as a way of intriguing potential representatives.

Conclusion

Overall the evident topics that emerged from the literature review were trust, contagion, word of mouth, social media, influence and gender. These topics were considered when collecting and analysing the interview data in order to compare findings and better understand the experiences and perceptions of individuals involved in network marketing and the issues that surround it.

Discussion within the literature surrounding trust suggests that an individual is more likely to be influenced by something if the information is provided by a friend, relative or peer. This indicates that network marketing products to a familiar audience contributes towards a more positive sales outcome due to the element of trust. Contagion and word of mouth were two interlinked topics discussed throughout various literature regarding marketing, and specifically network marketing. It was suggested that people tend to find information more reliable if it is conveyed through recommendation rather than through methods of traditional advertising.

These topics also relate to the discussion of social media and its importance as a tool within network marketing, as many products are promoted to family, peers and others through the use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Due to the growing popularity of social media and the familiarity of the representative, it is a fast developing accessory for product promotion within network marketing.

The topic of gender and network marketing was also considered within several pieces of literature, in which feminist perspectives of the topic were discussed. It was suggested that women with children often choose to become involved with network marketing due to the ease of balancing work and family life. It was also considered that women may feel pressured to find alternative ways to generate an income whilst staying at home, demonstrating employment that specifically caters to typical gender roles and therefore is

perhaps constraining. However, it was also discussed that network marketing can create choice and empowerment for women in this situation.

These various topics were taken in to consideration when collecting and analysing the interview data in order to gain an understanding of matters regarding network marketing and how individual experiences are affected by its employment. It is important to acknowledge that no research to date that has been referenced in this literature review has attempted to examine network marketing practises from both an individual and extensive stance. This research project carried out both interviews and social media network analysis, therefore it seems that it will fill this gap and be an important addition to the literature.

Chapter 2 – Qualitative Methodology

The qualitative section of this research study aimed to gain an insight in to the perceived social reality presented by the experiences of individuals who use and promote dietary supplements through network marketing, and to explore how social media is used as a tool in this distribution method. This included products supplied by the companies Forever Living, Juice Plus and Herbalife, which use a network marketing distribution technique. The data was gathered using semi-structured interviews which were then analysed using a thematic method.

Participant Recruitment

The qualitative section of the research comprised of 10 semi-structured interviews. Robinson (2013) suggests that it is often appropriate to obtain a small sample size within qualitative research, because it means that each participant has an established point of view within the study that can be analysed appropriately. Data collection was guided by theoretical saturation; participants were recruited depending on if there were further requirements within the research.

Within this qualitative section of the research a purposive sampling technique was employed with the aim to recruit participants of different ages and socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. It was decided that the sample would include only female participants, because prior exploration on Twitter and Facebook indicated that there was a greater ratio of women to men promoting dietary supplement products through network marketing on social media. It also seemed interesting to consider women's home and family life due to discussion within previous literature of the gender differences and distributors' backgrounds within network marketing.

Robinson (2013) suggests that purposive sampling ensures that participants hold a particular perspective or experience deemed as important to the researcher. A purposive approach is a practical way of gathering relevant and meaningful data for the study.

Participants were recruited through social media sites, predominantly Facebook and Twitter, by searching for individuals involved with 'fan pages' or relevant, frequent hashtags. Due to the nature of the product promotion, most distributors held very public social media pages therefore the participants were accessible and it was not difficult to contact individuals asking for their participation.

Before the data was gathered, a purposive sampling framework was initially drafted to present an ideal sample. However, there were some difficulties during recruitment such as individuals not replying to or rejecting invitations. Due to these problems an opportunistic sample had to be used in order to gain a reasonably sized sample. Below is the drafted purposive framework and the framework that was actually generated:

Table 1 – Drafted Purposive Sampling Framework

Gender	Age	Location	Education	Ethnicity	Company	Length of Time
All women, as the vast majority of representatives of Herbalife, Juice Plus and Forever Living seem to be women. Gendered language/imagery used in marketing.	18-25: 3 26-35: 3 36-45: 2 45+: 2	UK based, Ideally West Yorks	GCSE: 3 College: 3 Undergrad: 3 Postgrad: 1	Attempt to recruit women of different ethnicities if possible.	3 or 4 participants from Forever Living, Juice Plus or Herbalife	0-5 months: 2 5-8 months: 2 9-11 months: 2 12+ months: 2 Lapsed: 2

Table 2 – Sampling Framework

	Age	Location	Education	Ethnicity	Company	Length of Time
Participant 1	32	South Yorks	College	White	Forever Living	3 years
Participant 2	45	Essex	College	White	Herbalife	2 years
Participant 3	40	Scotland	Postgrad	White	Forever Living	10 months
Participant 4	44	West Yorks	GCSE	White	Forever Living	2 years
Participant 5	28	West Yorks	Undergrad	White	Forever Living	2 years
Participant 6	30	West Yorks	Postgrad	White	Juice Plus	1 year
Participant 7	34	West Yorks	Undergrad	White	Forever Living	1 year
Participant 8	28	West Yorks	GCSE	White	Juice Plus	1 year (lapsed)
Participant 9	25	West Yorks	College	White	Herbalife	6 months (lapsed)
Participant 10	40	Gloucester	College	White	Forever Living	9 years

Both tables show the ages of participants, the location they were based, what level of education they held, their ethnicity, the company they represented and the length of time they were engaged in network marketing. As shown in the table comparison, some of the expectations were kept, for example all participants were UK based and the majority from West Yorkshire, and there was a good variety of education levels. However, there were a number of differences between the first draft and the concluded framework. Personal details were not always available to view on potential participant's profiles before asking them to take part so it was difficult to gather a fully rounded sample.

As shown in Table 1, when creating the pilot participant sample, it was thought that there would be at least three people aged between 18 and 25 years old, however when the true sample was observed, no participants under the age of 25 actually engaged in the research. This could be because they were less experienced or that more network marketers are

older than was expected. There were also no participants that had been a network marketer for less than a year, apart from two women who had quit after six months and one year. This could be because, again, people that were asked and declined were less experienced, or because, like the two women mentioned, they had quit and did not want to talk about their 'failings'. The majority of women found to be promoting the products on social media were white, and the few women from different ethnic backgrounds that were approached did not respond.

This was not an ideal, rounded sample, however Robinson (2013) suggests that within research there is often 'self-selection bias'. This occurs when the sample is moulded by the voluntary participation of individuals – people who are more confident and eager to share their experiences will be more likely to volunteer to take part in the research, therefore altering the information gathered from the sample, (Robinson, 2013).

Snowball sampling is a technique in which current participants are asked to provide information of people they know who may be able to assist within the research, (Robinson, 2013). A snowball sampling technique was also used to recruit participants alongside other methods, as some individuals that were recruited online then provided details of peers they thought may be willing to take part. Within this particular piece of research, it was a useful method because individuals would be more likely to take part in an interview when asked by a friend or family member, rather than through social media by the researcher.

When recruiting participants, the individuals that were more willing to participate had been involved with network marketing for at least ten months, with some people distributing for over two years. Individuals that had only just started or had stopped being a representative were more difficult to locate, presumably due to a decrease in relevant posts, and less inclined to participate, perhaps because of the awareness of their own disengagement. However, two participants that had stopped network marketing all together did agree to be interviewed, which helped to provide the research with a different perspective on the topic.

According to Tyre (2017), "Out of 15.9 million network marketing start-ups, less than 1% actually build a sales force sufficient to attain a sustainable, full-time annual income", (page 29

3), and over 90% of new network marketers fail, therefore the lack of participants who have experienced this failure and the large number that have been successful may have impacted on the data as it could have produced biased information. Robinson (2013) suggests that the researcher must be aware of the chance of bias information effecting data in this situation.

Data Collection

To gain an insight in to the perceptions of the experiences of people who use and promote dietary supplements applying social media as a network marketing tool, ten semi-structured interviews were carried out. Saldana (2011) argues that interviewing is a useful data collection method as the participant can contribute their opinions, thoughts and reflections of their experiences. This is beneficial to the researchers as the interviewer can attempt to gain a full understanding of the participant's involvement in the required subject. All participants were provided with an information sheet and consent form before the interviews took place in order to ensure they fully understood the aims of the research and how their information would be used.

Interviews were carried out in a face-to-face setting when possible in order to build a rapport with the participants and observe their body language relating to their dialogue. To facilitate interviews, offers of conducting interviews in the home of the participant were made, but in all cases participants opted to meet in public places, for example a café or park. This was perhaps due to safety reasons or preventing feelings of intrusion. A friend or relative of the researcher was always informed of their whereabouts for security reasons.

Where participant's location was too far to facilitate face-to-face interviews, phone or Skype interviews were conducted instead, and the information sheets and consent forms were sent using email. This generated a slight disadvantage as the participant's facial expressions and actions could not always been seen and noted. It was found that the face-to-face interviews were longer and the participants seemed to go more in depth in their explanations of experiences, which was perhaps due to feeling comfortable in a more

relaxed setting than over the phone. However, carrying out skype interviews was beneficial as data was collected from women from different areas of the country, which takes in to account different experiences.

Regarding the interview content, due to the planned semi-structure nature of the interviews there was a basic structure in place containing key ideas, but questions were not fixed so that the interviewee was free to provide in-depth accounts of their opinions and experiences. A selection of questions and topics were drafted, and a pilot interview was carried out with one participant in order to identify any required improvements. Sometimes not every question was asked specifically as the participant may have provided relevant information as part of a previous question. The topics included how the participant found out about the network marketing company, if they used their products first or transitioned straight in to promotion, whether they changed any health behaviours alongside using the products, how they used social media as a network marketer, and the perceptions of it from their friends and family. Following the pilot interview, it seemed that it would be useful to ask for more detail surrounding social media usage as participants could have used various platforms in different ways, therefore it would be useful to compare this information. (See Appendix 3 for full pilot and revised topic guide.)

The interviews were recorded using a voice recorder so that the data could be listened to numerous times in order to transcribe the data easily and to gain a greater awareness of what the participant was saying. The transcriptions contained a reasonable level of detail regarding non-linguistic markers to provide the dialogue with context in order to analyse the content aided by more information.

Data Analysis

In order to analyse the interview data, an appropriate method should be used for the qualitative nature of the research. The chosen analysis technique was thematic analysis, which is defined as a method that uses the identification of themes to understand the data, and is unrestricted to specific theory, (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The interview data was

transcribed and then analysed by identifying themes throughout each transcription, assessing which topics were most prominent throughout all of the data. NVivo was used to assist in the thematic analysis of the data, which is a programme in which data can be inputted and themes highlighted and compared. It was useful for monitoring and exploring relationships between codes using a computer instead of a time-consuming manual technique.

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that thematic analysis is a useful method that provides a rich analysis of patterns throughout a collection of data. The technique starts with the researcher attempting to identify patterns of topics within the data, which can actually take place when the data is being collected. For example, if after three interviews have been completed the researcher observes similar issues being discussed, these may be noted down as a potential theme.

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that there are six steps that should be taken when carrying out thematic analysis with research. It is proposed that Stage one of the analysis involves the researcher familiarising themselves with the data by thoroughly reading through it more than once. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that the writing up of the analysis should take place from the beginning of the data collection and throughout, not just at the end, so that the data is well-known and themes can be more comfortably identified and compared. Within this project it was useful that the researcher carried out all of the interviews and transcribed them so the data was familiar throughout the research.

Stage two is proposed as “generating initial codes” (page 88, Braun & Clarke, 2006), in which from the familiarisation of the data a list of suggested interesting elements of the data is generated, and organised in to relevant groups. Stage three introduces the process of identifying themes, which comprises of organising the codes in to possible themes. This process may conclude with themes, sub themes, and some information that does not appear to fit in any section, however as the work develops the important themes should become clearer.

Stage four is suggested to be the phase in which the themes that have been identified are established, for example some themes may need to be discarded and some may need to be merged or split. Stage five involves defining and naming the themes, by identifying the significance of each theme and which parts of the data relate to which theme. A detailed analysis is required for each individual theme, and it is also important to observe and analyse the themes as a whole.

Finally, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that Stage six involves the write up of the report, which must include a logical and interesting explanation of the data, including examples from the interviews presented in an analytical way. These six steps were taken when carrying out the data analysis in order to form a coherent and relevant interpretation of the participants' accounts.

There were three final chosen themes identified from the literature as important topics to discuss relating to the research. Following several re-reads of the transcripts, initial codes were either merged with others, developed in to their own themes or sub themes, or removed completely. The first draft of the final themes included 'perceptions of network marketing', 'attraction marketing', 'trust', and 'mothers and network marketing'. However, following a review of the data and the themes this was altered. 'Perceptions of network marketing' was identified as a theme that did not take in to account the reactions to these perceptions, therefore was altered to 'reconstructing identity' so as to consider perceptions but also aim to discuss the way in which the women were altering the way they portrayed themselves in response. The theme of 'trust' seemed to be too broad and was discussed throughout the first two themes so it was merged. 'Attraction marketing' and 'mothers and network marketing' were observed in the review as appropriate and useful so were not altered.

A critical realist approach to this research was taken, which argues that we can never fully understand the world that we live in, we must interpret the way in which people understand and observe their reality through language and actions, (Archer, Lawson and Norrie, 2013). Ussher (1999) defines critical realism as "an approach that "affirms the existence of 'reality' ... but at the same time recognizes that its representations are

characterized and mediated by culture, language, and political interests rooted in factors such as race, gender, or social class”, (page 45).

A critical realist argument is that association between reality and the social notions we form is a major element within research and that due to the influence of life events and experiences, people and the knowledge they hold are constantly changing, (Danermark, Ekstrom and Jakobsen, 2001). Easton (2010) suggests that critical realism speculates that the world is a reality, but we cannot establish whether it is the truth or not, because we have little knowledge of it. Critical realism considers our behaviour and interactions in order to understand our concept of reality. Therefore, the approach was to analyse the data considering the participants’ understanding of the reality they engaged in to generate these perceptions. Relating specifically to the topic of interest within this research, an intriguing outcome of the data was how the women constructed their identities as online marketers. Therefore, although critical realism suggests we cannot truly understand the participant’s experiences, the way they socially and culturally shape them can be observed.

Ideas were also drawn from a discourse analysis approach, adopting the idea that language is constructive in that it establishes an individual’s interpretation of social reality, (Willig, 2003). This concept was used during data analysis in order to attempt to understand the participant’s construction of their experiences.

Crawford and Valsiner (1999) argue that “language and discourse are fundamental in the constitution of persons and subjectivity”, (page 259), and suggest that by applying discourse analysis the researcher is able to obtain some interpretation of the topic. This is a useful concept as constructions created by individuals produce various approaches to observing society and aids in understanding how people feel and act according to certain life events and or issues.

Ethics

Every effort was made throughout this study to adhere to the ethical principles required by the British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics (2014). Ethical approval was obtained from the host institution, (see Appendix 1 – SREP application), and an information sheet and consent form were provided, (see Appendix 2). The information sheet was given to the participants before the interviews took place, which provided them with an explanation of the purpose of the study and what it involved.

The participants were told that they could stop the interview at any time, and could withdraw from the study within a two-week time-frame following their interview. The time frame was given so that participants did not attempt to withdraw after analysis had started. The consent form provided the participants with an opportunity to give permission to take part in the research, for their words to be quoted by use of pseudonym and to be recorded using a voice recorder. They were also asked to tick boxes to show they understood their right to withdraw and the confidentiality and anonymity involved with the interview.

Gaining access to participants and obtaining their informed consent is an important part of the ethical procedure that needs to be considered, (Mauthner, Birch & Jessop, 2002). In this study the interviews did not commence until the Ethics Panel had approved the project, in order to ensure that all procedures were carried out correctly. (See Appendix 1 for full SREP application form). The participants were recruited through private messages on social media. This gave the participant the opportunity to consider their involvement and then agree, disagree or not reply. In order to retain anonymity, the participants were referred to as participant 1-10 throughout the study.

Chapter 3 – Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative section of this research project comprised of semi-structured interviews, which were conducted individually with ten female participants who were currently or had previously distributed dietary supplement products for Juice Plus, Forever Living or Herbalife. The interviews focused on the women's journeys and experiences throughout their involvement in network marketing, exploring topics such as their reasons for joining the company, support and views from friends and family, and the role of social media in their lives. Below is a table presenting details of the participants included in the sample:

Table 3 – Sampling Framework

	Age	Location	Company	Education	Length
Participant 1	32	South Yorks	Forever Living	College	3 years
Participant 2	45	Essex	Herbalife	College	2 years
Participant 3	40	Scotland	Forever Living	Postgrad	10 months
Participant 4	44	West Yorks	Forever Living	GCSE	2 years
Participant 5	28	West Yorks	Forever Living	Undergrad	2 years
Participant 6	30	West Yorks	Juice Plus	Postgrad	1 year
Participant 7	34	West Yorks	Forever Living	Undergrad	1 year
Participant 8	28	West Yorks	Juice Plus	GCSE	1 year (lapsed)
Participant 9	25	West Yorks	Herbalife	College	6 months (lapsed)
Participant 10	40	Gloucester	Forever Living	College	9 years

The overall sample was useful in that it covered a range of perspectives due to the differing network marketing companies, education levels and length of time as a representative. There were also two people who no longer worked in network marketing so it was useful to also gain an insight in to their perspectives and perceived experiences.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed after being carried out in a public place. The data was then analysed using the method of thematic analysis, in which three significant themes emerged. These themes will be discussed as a means of constructing particular

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versions of social reality provided by the participants. The analysis also drew upon discourse analysis ideas around construction of the self, regarding how the participants observed the world and how events influenced how they acted. A critical realist approach was taken when analysing the data in order to interpret how people observe their reality and experiences through the use of language and behaviour.

Ideas were drawn from Goffman's (1959) concept of the 'self', in that people can alter the presentation of themselves to others to preserve a positive reputation, even if this is not always intentional. When an individual is offering someone a service or a product, they must present themselves in a certain way in order to impress others. This can be conveyed through symbols expressed in a verbal sense, but also by communicating misinformation, (Goffman, 1959). It is interesting to consider the concept Goffman takes on stereotyping; suggesting that people build their perceptions of others based on their past experience of individuals in similar social situations, (Goffman, 1959). This could be considered in regards to many of the interview participants due to the issues they felt they faced when discussing network marketing and their lifestyle with others.

Reconstructing Identity

The first significant theme which emerged from the interview data was 'reconstructing identity', which developed from the frequent discussion of negative perceptions of network marketing, and how it was indicated that women altered their observed identity in order to be separated from the stereotype. The thoughts and beliefs held by their friends, family and themselves were widely discussed throughout the interviews along with the participant's identity associated with their role as a network marketer.

The perceptions of network marketing overall were generally acknowledged and considered as negative, by both the participants themselves and their family and friends. Most participants indicated that their views changed as they claimed to gain knowledge about the company and product, although some indicated that the opinions of their family

and friends did not. However, there were a small number of individuals who still held a slightly negative view even after several months as a representative.

It could be considered that this form of narrative – the impression of firstly being unknowing in the network marketing world – can be seen as a way for the women to present themselves as a sceptical outsider. This aids them in advocating themselves as reasonable and aware so that when they do display their identity within a network marketing role they can insist it is a legitimate business whilst proving that they are not naïve to any deception.

Considering the initial perceptions of the individuals, one of the evident justifications for initial negative perceptions of network marketing was adverse reactions towards the suggested role of a salesperson. It was implied that these first impressions of network marketing as a sales technique generated feelings of apprehension in some participants regarding joining the company.

“Urm, one thing I was very dubious about when I first joined... when I first heard about Forever, like when I first spoke to Georgina on the phone, was the fact that, urm, I can't... I could never imagine myself being a saleswoman. It's never something I've been interested in. it's not something that's caught my eye. Urm, I actually like, sighed, when I heard that that's one side of it, because it's not something that I class myself as being good at.” (Participant 1)

Although network marketing is a sales and distribution technique, several participants initially identified this as a negative element, for example Participant 1 to describe herself as feeling 'dubious' before signing up to a role in the network marketing industry. These reluctant comments may seem unusual because it is assumed that the job as a distributor within network marketing is to sell products to consumers, indicating the negative perceptions towards the identity of a salesperson.

“My instant reaction was 'I don't want to be an Avon rep', and I didn't understand what network marketing was about, I just thought it was selling products. My background is

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in learning and development, so it's developing people to achieve their full potential. So what appealed to me at that point was network marketing is about coaching and developing individuals to achieve the lifestyle that they want, or whatever it is that they want."

(Participant 4)

The way in which Participant 4 altered the expectation of the role of a network marketer from sales to coaching demonstrates the reconstruction of identity that appeared as a theme throughout the interviews. The participant seemed to be attempting to rationalise her reasons for joining network marketing, as though affiliation with the organisation with the goal of purely sales was a negative reason and she wanted to provide some sort of moral justification. Participant 1 also altered the identity of her role as a network marketer, contending the idea that her position involved purely sales, and advocated that she was essentially involved in recommending and providing products to willing customers.

"...to be honest, two and half years down the line now, I still don't class myself as being a saleswoman. I recommend... I genuinely recommend brilliant products to my friends and family, and to people on Facebook." (Participant 1)

The opposition towards the idea of being portrayed as a salesperson recurred throughout many interviews, indicating a specific identity perception and presentation of the self that perhaps diverged with their ideal representation. The way in which a person desires to be portrayed can be linked to Goffman's (1990) theory of 'the self'; how individuals can express their appearance or behaviour to gain certain perceptions from others. Kihlstrom and Klein (1994) suggest that individuals can construct themselves to fit in to a certain social ideal depending on their personality and how they wish to be perceived.

The issue of participants' apprehension of association with sales led to several individuals indicating that they never engaged in 'direct selling' as they did not actually participate in approaching potential customers, but used methods of recommendation and word of mouth strategies rather than traditional methods of sales. Participant 4 explained that she never directly approached people to buy products off her, but waited for them to display an interest.

“And I suppose it’s subtle, because I hate being sold to, so I wouldn’t want someone to do that to me”. (Participant 4)

This coincides with the suggestion made by Ferrell et al (2010) that network marketing adjusts the traditional sales concept in to merely sharing experiences and recommendations with friends. It suggests that negative perceptions of network marketing are often held due to the concern of being approached by a perhaps pushy representative attempting to distribute products. However, some participants emphasised and maintained the idea that their distribution techniques opposed that of ‘typical’ network marketing methods, and instead used methods of recommendation.

“...we’re a much sort of classier brand. We don’t really promote in that way because it’s quite spammy. So it’s more just sort of like product placement, so we’re just showing people that we use the products. So, urm, you know if I share photos of me using the products at least, you know, I’m practising what I’m preaching.” (Participant 5)

“...you can annoy people; some people don’t want to see it. But the way I look at it, I mean I don’t spam anybody, its genuine, people come to me more than anything” (Participant 1)

It is interesting that several participants used similar words during their reference to perceptions of network marketing, one of the more prominent words being “spam”. The interview questions never mentioned this word or implied any sort of negativity towards network marketing and perceptions of it, yet participants still argued against negative perceptions. It seemed as though they were defending the marketing technique and responding to critical voices, which raises the question of – what critics?

The word ‘spam’ indicates a pushy approach, and the word ‘classy’ suggests a reference to a criticism of other network marketing organisations taking the assumed means of constantly attempting to sell unwanted products. These words serve a social function to present the social practise of network marketing techniques as legitimate. The dialogue surrounding

these words suggests that some distributors and companies have now acknowledged concerns raised by Kustin and Jones (1995) and decided to employ a different technique that they therefore feel the need to defend, which will be discussed further in a later theme – ‘representing a lifestyle’.

This could also be identified with Goffman’s (1990) theory of the self, in that the participants seemed to be distancing themselves from a social identity that is open to doubt by others, for example the status of a saleswoman or someone that takes a ‘pushy’ approach within their job. They explained their role but then denied their engagement in the elements that bear negative connotations. The overall negative suggestions towards the concept of sales proposes that this could be a reason for the defensive behaviour and language used throughout the interviews. If there is a negative reputation surrounding the concept, it could lead to people reconstructing their identities in order to recreate a positive perception.

In contrast to other participants, one woman who previously worked for Forever Living but no longer distributes for the company suggested that other company members encouraged her to take a pushy approach by messaging potential customers on social media sites. This was contradictory to the discussion of most of the other participants, as this type of approach was what they claimed to avoid.

“But what my up line was pushing was for me to message five people a day, to join the team. So sales... I’m good with sales, I wasn’t good with the recruiting people to work underneath me. Because it was like... you’re messaging random people on Facebook.”
(Participant 7)

In addition to the participant suggesting that she was encouraged to use pushy sales techniques, several other women claimed that their method of marketing was not pushy but that representatives from other companies and even their own company took that approach.

“Because if I look on my social media now the amount of people that are doing things like, well, Forever Living, some Forever Living, Juice Plus, urm, what’s the other one, Younique. All of that and they just post, after post, after post, and I just skip through them. So I think social media, urm, unfortunately has been, oh what’s the word, it’s been kind of like just flanked really and just saturated with network marketers who don’t understand the concept of network marketing. They’re just selling products on social media.”
(Participant 4)

During the interviews participants were asked about their family and friend’s perceptions of network marketing and whether they had provided them with support throughout their time as a distributor. Alongside their own initial negative perceptions of network marketing, many participants explained that their friends and family held similar opinions. In some cases, a lack of support towards the participant’s involvement of the business was present. Participant 1 and Participant 10 both explained that a large percentage of their family and friends were unsupportive due to negative views of network marketing and the belief that it is an unconventional choice, to the extent that they did not feel they could talk to them about their choice of employment.

Several participants disclosed that members of their family and friends often initially referred to the companies as a ‘pyramid scheme’, which corresponds with Burch’s (2016) discussion surrounding the uncertainty of network marketing and the result of negative perceptions.

“It’s because it’s not the norm. It’s because you’ve gone against the grain, ‘it’s not a proper job’, ‘it’s a pyramid scheme’, its, urm, ‘there’s no security’, ‘where’s your contract’, all that sort of stuff.” (Participant 1)

“I’ve had everything from ‘it’s a pyramid scheme’ and ‘it’s never going to work’”
(Participant 3)

“So my mum didn’t really know what it was that I was getting in to, I think she thought it was a pyramid scheme, but obviously they’re illegal”. (Participant 5)

“They [family and friends] were mortified. So much so that I still don’t talk to them about it now... I think my mum thought it was an illegal pyramid scheme or something.”
(Participant 10)

The frequent reference to pyramid schemes suggests that perhaps there was a general concern that network marketing is a ‘scam’ that should not be relied on as a form of income. It was discussed that there was a stigma attached to network marketing due to these negative perceptions, however most participants proposed that common negative opinions of network marketing are held because people are not knowledgeable about the topic. This justification suggests a reconstruction of the concept perhaps due to negativity and a desire to represent oneself in a positive way.

“Absolutely, there’s a huge stigma attached I think, urm, to network marketing. And I think that’s because people don’t fully understand it.” (Participant 4)

“And you know you will get people that are negative about it [network marketing] but that’s because they don’t understand it.” (Participant 5)

Throughout the interviews there were so many descriptions of negative judgements of network marketing that it illustrates the reasons as to why so many of the women would reconstruct their identity in order to change the way they are perceived. As well as indicated negative perceptions emerging from outside perspectives, some participants suggested that they themselves were initially sceptical about network marketing and the business involved.

“At first I thought they were all absolutely mad, urm, because I went... I didn’t go to the local business meeting, which is where you would introduce people to the business and bring them along if they wanted to get a bit more information. I went to an event, which was at the royal armouries, so it was a success day event, so it was very ‘rah rah’, it was... everybody was happy clappy, it was urm, everyone... it felt like it was a cult if I’m honest with you. It felt like these people are brainwashed in to something.” (Participant 4)

The words 'cult' and 'brainwashed' indicate a hierarchical sense, suggesting that there was a feeling of power deriving from superior sectors of the company. These phrases also relate to an article written by Bhattacharya and Mehta (2000) that suggests critics of network marketing organisations often refer to companies as cults due to the distributors' heavy engagement with the organisations and the issue that their social lives are built around their work. Like some of the other women, although Participant 4 used these negative words to describe the company, she explained that she changed her mind once she had gained knowledge and experience within network marketing.

"I thought this is brilliant, and I laughed that day having gone in there thinking they're all crazy, they're all mad, to wow this is amazing. Even if I get positive outcome as a result of being in this business, that's enough for me." (Participant 4)

A large percentage of the participants took this same approach and disclosed their initial negative perspectives of network marketing prior to explaining the positive elements. This again could be established as a way for the participants to legitimise their role within network marketing by confirming themselves as reasonable and therefore have not been 'scammed' by the business. This could also link to Goffman's (1990) theory of the self, in that the participants may have felt the need to call attention to the notion that they too first saw network marketing the way a lot of people do, and they are not naïve to the reputation and stigma. Due to awareness of how others view network marketing, they could be defending their choice to become a representative after claiming to have gained knowledge on the topic and now hold positive judgment.

This justification of becoming involved in network marketing through gaining knowledge could also be seen as a way of reconstructing identity in order to provide a positive impression that they as network marketers are not merely pushy salespeople, but demonstrate many elements of themselves in order to generate success and attract others.

Attraction Marketing – Representing a Lifestyle

Another significant theme which emerged throughout the interview data was the concept of ‘attraction marketing and representing a lifestyle’, which is a technique used within network marketing instead of directly approaching potential buyers in order to sell products. Several women explained that instead of directly contacting people they influenced customers to approach them through attraction marketing, which involves sharing posts on social media demonstrating how using the products has benefited them, and generally presenting a positive representation of their lifestyle as a distributor.

Participants suggested that this meant people did not feel pressured in to buying products, but instead observed the lifestyles of distributors and were therefore more likely to approach them and engage in buying the products or become a representative themselves. It could be suggested that this theme relates to the concept of the ‘self’ and how an individual presents their self to others, in the way that the participants indicated a type of reconstruction of themselves through social media to portray what they wished for people to see.

“...the main thing in network marketing is attraction marketing. You’ve got to portray a lifestyle. It’s not...you’re not lying, you’re not bending the truth, you’re just representing, urm, what network marketing does for an individual if you use it correctly.”
(Participant 1)

The participant emphasised that representing a certain lifestyle is not lying, however she introduced the idea that deception is in some way assumed, which is important to consider regarding the concept of attraction marketing. Why would the participant feel the need to defend what she posts on social media if it is not a lie? This again relates to Goffman’s (1990) theory of the ‘self’, as it could be suggested that the participant is reconstructing her image and identity to represent herself in a certain way to specific people. This positive online ‘self’ is created to portray an appealing, if not in some way deceitful, lifestyle for the purpose of attracting potential customers or representatives.

This idea of representing oneself online in a certain way is discussed by Lang (2013), who suggests that social media is often used to portray a lifestyle in a positive way in order to have an impact on an online community. This could be the case regarding network marketing and social media as it benefits representatives to provide customers with a positive perception of the lifestyle they are trying to promote. This prominent discussion of the creation of lifestyle appeal throughout the large majority of the interviews shows its significance.

Although several participants discussed the idea that they did not perceive themselves as salespeople, it was indicated throughout the data that they were taking part in attraction marketing and representing a certain type of lifestyle. It could be suggested that they were in fact selling themselves and their lifestyle to the consumer, in order to influence others and gain success.

“Personally I never approach anyone; I just wait for people to contact me. So just from my daily social media posts like sharing me taking the products, sharing my results”
(Participant 6)

“So yeah I think there’s a lot of stigma attached to it, so it depends how you push it. Not really push it, but it depends on how you, how you sell yourself I guess as well.”
(Participant 4)

This demonstrates the importance of successful attraction marketing in order to gain a good outcome as a representative and build positive perceptions of network marketing as a technique. Several participants emphasised the importance of demonstrating how the products have benefitted their health and well-being through social media and face-to-face communication. It was suggested that presenting a healthy lifestyle is something that attracts people to the products and the company itself, and that this positive presentation needs to be maintained in order to engage potential customers. The interview data also implied that the necessity of portraying a healthy lifestyle contributes towards the alteration of other health behaviours. For example, Participant 1 explained that she now attends the gym more in order to maintain and demonstrate a healthy lifestyle.

“...it helps my business if I use the products. If I represent a healthy lifestyle, if I actually do have a healthy lifestyle... if I was for instance, no offence against anybody that is overweight, or urm doesn’t have a healthy lifestyle, but if I was to be like that, trying to recommend health and well-being products, it wouldn’t look too great. So obviously I’ve had to take care of myself.” (Participant 1)

“I will put a picture of me before and me now and say oh well I’m feeling really energised still maintaining my three and a half stone weight loss, thanks to Herbalife, and that’s it, that’s all I’ll do. I don’t put message me for details, inbox me, none of that malarkey, to be honest.” (Participant 2)

This suggests that presenting a healthy lifestyle arising from using the specific dietary products encourages greater engagement from customers than solely approaching people with a traditional sales technique, therefore selling their lifestyle and their own success as part of the attraction and influence upon consumers. This also indicates that perhaps the participants have not only reconstructed their ‘self’, but also made a physical transformation to their lifestyle, as they have had to become healthier in order to portray positive habits and behaviour. This advocates a positive aspect of network marketing, and also reiterates the idea of reconstruction. Participant one describes herself as “a product of the product”.

“So obviously I’ve had to take care of myself, so I do go to the gym now, I eat healthily, my family are a lot healthier. Plus, the supplements that we take on top of that from Forever helps anyway, and it helps...it will help the prevention of things as we do grow older... Yeah, I am actually a product of the product. So, like, I think it’s probably... I think the last time I worked it out I was using about 26 of our products daily.” (Participant 1)

This suggests how people are changing the way they behave and present themselves to others based on the product they are promoting, to generate the representation of a certain lifestyle and therefore a desired success. This could be seen to relate with Foucault’s (1988) theory on technologies of the self, in which he introduces that there are four main

technologies. However, it seems important to focus mostly on the technologies of the self, which “permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being”, (Foucault, 1988, page18). It is implied that the participants use the products of technologies of the self, in that they are used both to reconstruct and improve the self, and then this self is sold to others to generate success within their employment.

It could also be suggested that attraction marketing is carried out through the concept of trust, in that potential consumers may be more willing to participate in interaction with representatives if there is an element of trust. The concept of successful recommendation of products to potential customers relates to Berger’s (2013) idea that individuals are more likely to trust advice from people they regard as a ‘peer’, than from a general advertisement. Participant 4 emphasised the importance of trust within network marketing, indicating that a consumer is more likely to buy a product through recommendation. It was suggested by participants during several interviews that it was thought that a customer would be more likely to buy a product from a person they are familiar with.

“...you don’t buy on an advert, you buy on trust mostly.” (Participant 4)

“Some people were like ‘it’s a scam’, you know, urm, and others were like ‘yeah I’ll give it a try, because I trust you, you’re my family, you’re my daughter’, or whatever, ‘if you think it’s worth trying I’ll give it a try’” (Participant 6)

Some participants indicated that they sold products largely to their peer groups. Participant 6 discussed how some companies pay celebrities to post photos on social media sites of them using products, which therefore customers are more likely to buy due to the familiarity of the person in the photo. She then linked this to the trust of the familiar face of a friend or family member.

“I mean that’s why people, you know, trust celebrities. They don’t know them but they’re familiar, so in the same way its starts like that, you recommend them to your family and friends, like if you were to open a new hairdressers or a restaurant you’d tell your

family and friends about it, they'd go and support you wouldn't they? It's just like people coming round to it, they've got these warped ideas that there's something wrong with it, but it's like if you... if your mum or your sister opened up a new business you'd support them, wouldn't you? You'd know that it was a genuine thing." (Participant 6)

This also relates to Berger's (2013) ideas regarding the influence of familiar contacts and the impact of this trust upon product purchase. The idea of contagion within marketing (Berger, 2013) can also be connected with information taken from the data, as some participants explained how people from various peer groups became involved within the network marketing business.

"I get people who, my customers who love the products that are getting great results and then they've said 'oh look my cousins interested' or 'can you get in touch with them', and so I'll add them on Facebook, I'll send them some details, and then you... it expands quickly. And how it works as well, urm, they say power of numbers so, it's not about you knowing hundreds of people who are going to join your team, it's about who they know, and who they know, so you might know five people but if they know five more people, its goes from there" (Participant 6)

This demonstrates how the diffusion of information is a successful element of network marketing, especially on social media, as a large number of people can quickly and easily view the products and how people are using them. Some participants specified how attraction marketing and the awareness of products over social media can generate recommendations and therefore further trust in the representatives and products.

"We sell over 350 products, there is products that I've never tried yet, that I wouldn't need for anything because we sell a wide range of different products, so for different ailments, or different, urm, needs and wants, urm, and different lifestyles. So obviously I've got absolutely no problems with my joints, or anything like that, so there would be no need for me to take any supplements for that. So I haven't tried anything like that. Obviously I have influences in my life, that I know that 'she will benefit from that' 'he will benefit from

that', so when they've used it I've used their testimonials to speak to more people about it." (Participant 1)

The indication that the participant identified and located specific individuals that would benefit from certain products she is distributing demonstrates Berger's (2013) idea of a focused target audience within network marketing, and how these elements can mean it is often more successful than traditional methods of advertising. Topics from the literature and discussion in the data suggests that if a consumer feels that the products are tailored to their specific needs and recommended by a familiar face they will be more likely to buy a product. This emphasises the importance of trust and recommendation within network marketing as a sales technique.

Mothers and Network Marketing

Another significant theme that emerged from the interview data was 'mothers and network marketing'. A large number of participants had children and the initial reason that they joined a network marketing company was often due to the attraction of flexible hours to mould around family life. Although important in itself, the theme further continues from the theme of attraction marketing, in that many participants suggested demonstrating their ability to spend time with their children as an attractive element of network marketing.

Some participants conveyed that portraying a flexible lifestyle encompassing being able to work from home and spend time with their family was something that many people found attractive in network marketing, and was one of the reasons that individuals became involved with it. The role of the mother was a prominent theme throughout the interview data, as it was suggested that network marketing appealed to many mothers with young children. Several participants explained that they regularly posted photos of themselves spending time with their children to social media in order to engage other parents in their lifestyle.

“...the fact that I can work from home, and I can take the kids to school. So we’ll do school run selfies and stuff like that, urm, and obviously I’ve got to represent what I’m trying to attract.” (Participant 1)

“...my main, urm, niche I suppose in my business is mums, because I know what this business has done for me. So obviously I make sure that I’m very, urm, active and I put on things that I know mums would like. The fact that I’m going to the gym at 10 o’clock in a morning, whereas like most people can’t do that, that I’m on the school run, that I’m going to stay and play with my daughter, that I’m at the sports days, that I’m at the cricket matches. They’re things that I couldn’t do before, so I know how important that is to, especially a mum... mums and dads that can’t do that. So that’s what I’ll put on... things like that to attract them.” (Participant 1)

This demonstrates the element of attraction marketing that is clearly important when aiming to engage people with the companies and products. Participant 1 focused prominently on mothers due to the flexibility and work-family life balance that she believed network marketing could provide. There was a strong connection between network marketing and motherhood throughout the data, and the positive impact of it as an occupation for women with children. Several participants had young children and explained that network marketing allowed them to work from home and therefore spend more time with their family.

During some of the interviews it could be suggested that some women were reverting back to the perception of an outsider before they became a network marketer. Most participants spoke as though trying to persuade and attract the interviewer themselves in to the desirable lifestyle. However, Participant 8 explained how she had been influenced by other network marketers regarding the potential benefits the company could have on her as a mother.

“I was saying this to her and I was like I’m not really sure but she was basically saying to me that Juice Plus is designed for women with like busy jobs, maybe not as much money as they would like because of childcare. She was also saying that it helps women if

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they don't have any, urm, like help from their parents or their partner, if they don't have a partner, things like that. So there were a lot of positives to the negatives of life sort of thing. It sort of complimented like lack of time so it helps you financially if no one else was in a sort of way." (Participant 8)

It is interesting to observe a different perspective towards network marketing and representing a lifestyle, especially from the view of a mother, as it shows how important it is for some women with children to be able to work as well as spending time with their children.

"That's why I saw this as an opportunity to have more time to be at home with my daughter." (Participant 5)

This suggests that the attractiveness of being able to spend more time with their children was an influential factor in becoming a representative within network marketing. Participant 6 suggested that she utilised meeting other mums as a way of attracting people to the network marketing role in order to gain customers and recruit other members, due to a unanimous desire to be able to work flexibly alongside caring for their children.

"...basically I'm a new mum and I'm going to classes and I didn't want to have to go back to work and I didn't want to have to put my child in nursery and pay hundreds of pounds, so there's people who are likeminded who I meet at classes, who are in exactly the same position as me, and I've got a good opportunity that can help them. Urm, generally I've as well made friends at mum's groups, just like I would anyway because I'm out with my child, and I get chatting to people because, it's like they say your vibe attracts your tribe." (Participant 6)

This illustrated a type of attraction marketing away from social media and in a more face-to-face environment, as the participant demonstrated a way for women to be able to spend more time with their children whilst also working. Hearing this from someone whom they shared a common understanding with may have also further attracted a person to become involved with network marketing. Being approached by a fellow mother and perhaps peer

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may have generated trust and therefore increased likelihood of the person becoming involved.

By stating that “your vibe attracts your tribe”, Participant 6 indicated that by altering the way she acted in some ways around people she wanted to attract to the company, she therefore reconstructed her ‘self’ in order for her lifestyle to be perceived as positive and desirable.

“If you can be earning really good money whilst sat on the beach or sat playing with your daughter in the park why would you want to then go back sat on a motorway for hours?” (Participant 6)

It could be suggested that the participants were constructing the reality that if you can stay at home with your children whilst also working, it makes you the “ideal” and “capable” mother, that is something that others are envious of, therefore its function is to attract mothers to network marketing as a positive way of balancing work and family life.

Gallagher (1997) considers that mothers often have to deal with pressures from various opinions within society, some instructing that a ‘good’ mother should carry on in employment, and others advise that staying at home with the child is the ideal arrangement. Horwitz (2004) suggests that the mothering discourse advocates the image of the selfless mother who is expected to put her children before herself in all aspects of life. This can often lead to confusion over what is the best decision, and can lead to feelings of guilt and failure towards the societal expectation of the ‘perfect’ mother. Mothers are also influenced by the working discourse, in which there is an expectation to maintain employment after having a child, and again there may be feelings of guilt if this is not sustained. This relates to the theme as it is suggested by the participants that network marketing is an ideal solution in that a woman can both stay at home with their children whilst pursuing employment at the same time.

Chapter 4 – Qualitative Discussion

This research project examined the phenomenon of network marketing using a mixed method approach. Within the qualitative section of the project individual interviews were carried out to gain insight in to the perceived experiences and realities of network marketing representatives. The analysis of the interview data generated the identification of themes, providing an outcome that was first observed alone, and then incorporated with the data obtained from the social media network analysis through the use of NodeXL software. Thematic analysis was used to observe the perceptions of reality provided by the interview participants.

The first theme, 'reconstructing identity' developed from the seemingly clear and consistent underlying awareness of negative perceptions regarding network marketing, which was usually highlighted by the participants as arising from outside perspectives, such as friends and family. This recurring discussion of negative opinions indicated that the women working within network marketing felt the need to alter the identity observed by these perceptions in order to detach themselves from this common categorisation of a salesperson.

Several participants suggested that prior to becoming a representative they held adverse impressions towards the idea of becoming a salesperson and being defined by this role. Many participants indicated that they did not agree with the pushy approach to promotion they believed some network marketers were taking, suggesting that the rejection of the salesperson image was perhaps due to disliking the idea of approaching people in an attempt to sell unwanted items. Several participants removed themselves from the label of a salesperson and argued that their role was to recommend and advise others about the products they were representing. This automatic reconstruction of the role meant they provided themselves with a more positive and approachable self.

Whilst suggesting this, many participants denied using 'spammy' methods to promote products, indicating this as an objectionable way to carry out network marketing

techniques. It seemed that many participants were attempting to answer critical voices, but it was unclear as to where these voices were coming from. It could be that they recognised that network marketing as a sales technique is often perceived as intrusive and 'pushy' and they were attempting to defend themselves and prove their work as legitimate. However, it could be that there are other network marketing companies that damage reputations through taking advantage of the system and undertaking their marketing in an allegedly negative way.

This coincided with research carried out by Kustin and Jones (1995) which found that both customers and non-customers of network marketing organisations held negative perceptions that distributors were often pushy and aggressive when selling products. This wariness of pushy approaches often experienced and perceived by consumers is identified and discussed by Burch (2016), who suggests that people often feel uncertainty towards this type of marketing due to the representation that has been formed of 'pressure sellers'. These points suggested in the literature could indicate the critical voices that the participants appeared to be attempting to answer to. It proposes that there was some shared cultural knowledge about the possibility of network marketing techniques being perceived as pushy and intrusive, which was a representation that many of the participants seemed to be attempting to dissociate from.

Negative perceptions of network marketing also related to the concept of a pyramid scheme, which was discussed in almost every interview, although interestingly the word was never initiated by the interviewer. This may have been due to the negative reputation surrounding network marketing and the belief by outsiders that it is built upon a hierarchical system, and is another reason that the participants would attempt to reconstruct the way others perceived them.

There are plenty of documentaries that criticise network marketing companies and accuse them of using the pyramid concept to gain success. *The Pyramid Thing* is a documentary series that looks in to the lives of network marketers in order to gain an insight in to their experiences. The fact that the name of the documentary involves the word 'pyramid' suggests even before audience viewing that it is not in favour of the network marketing

concept. *Betting on Zero* is a major film documentary based on Bill Ackman attempting to expose Herbalife as a pyramid scheme. The production accused Herbalife of exploiting hundreds of thousands of underprivileged, vulnerable people buying in to the company, (Carroll, 2007).

In 2016 the Federal Trade Commission alleged that Herbalife were making deceiving claims about the company; it was proposed that in order to generate an income as a representative of Herbalife individuals had to recruit others as fellow distributors, instead of actually selling the products being promoted, (Fair, 2016). A lawsuit was filed, accusing Herbalife of misleading customers in to believing buying bulk produce and recruiting others would create success, when there was actually little or no consumer requirement for the Herbalife products, therefore leading to individuals losing copious amount of money. A settlement was created stating that Herbalife must change the structure of the company so that representatives rely on the sale of products to generate any kind of profit, (Fair, 2016).

This lawsuit was mentioned by one representative of Herbalife during the interviews. All participants aside from one denied that their company worked using the pyramid concept, apart from the one woman who claimed that even after the settlement agreement the best way to be successful within Herbalife was to employ people underneath you. This raises consideration – is this the way in which network marketing is functioning?

It was noted during the analysis that several participants seemed to provide justification for joining a network marketing company, especially after acknowledging negative perceptions from others. Many women seemed to deem it necessary to demonstrate themselves as rational and non-naïve to the network marketing concept. Several participants reconstructed their identities by distancing themselves from the concept of a salesperson and providing moral justification for initially becoming part of the network marketing scheme. For example, joining due to a desire to help people not just to generate sales and profit.

As mentioned, several participants indicated that they felt they did not perceive themselves as salespeople, but as representatives that genuinely recommended products to others. This

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coincides with Berger's (2013) idea of word of mouth and how it is a more successful way of marketing than traditional sales and advertisement. The indication of word of mouth marketing also coincides with the concept of 'eWOM', meaning electronic word of mouth, which Chu and Kim (2011) suggest is a successful way of diffusing information using social media platforms. Chang et al. (2015) propose that eWOM is successful for marketing because consumers are more likely to buy through recommendations and peer reviews which are found online rather than traditional methods of advertisement. Berger (2013) suggests that this word of mouth marketing technique is beneficial because it possesses a more focused target audience due to the familiarity between the distributor and the potential customer.

The theme 'representing a lifestyle' considered that many of the participants felt they were successful through attracting people with a lifestyle constructed over social media. This image of construction could coincide with Goffman's (1990) concept of the 'self' and how he uses the metaphor of the 'stage'. He suggests that everyone has their own social roles to play within society which can alter depending on the situation and the audience. Individuals present their identity in certain ways in order to achieve a positive reaction from other. Goffman (1990) focuses on 'face-saving' behaviours which people use to avoid negative perceptions and issues such as stigma. It could be suggested that some of the participants were constructing a 'self' separate from their other societal roles in order to present themselves positively to potential customers and fellow distributors. This 'self' may also have been developed to detach themselves from the negative image of a pushy seller in order to be more successful.

Considering that some participants were apprehensive towards the idea of being perceived as a salesperson, this links to the idea of the 'self', in that they attempted to alter the image in order to receive a more positive reception from others. This would be in their interests because if they were perceived as a peer that was recommending products which they used themselves, they would be presented as a trusted associate that would appeal to consumers.

Baumeister (1982) postulates that individuals have two significant rationales that impacts upon their behaviour – “to please the audience and to construct one’s public self”, (page 3). Foucault (1988) proposes that there are “technologies of the self” that allow individuals to reconstruct themselves to achieve certain positive states of elements such as happiness, wisdom and perfection. This strays further than what is attempting to be interpreted, but it provides a platform on which to consider the dialogue. It could be perceived that the participants were using the products they sell as a “technology of the self” in order to attract others. Many participants discussed altering the way they presented their lives to others in order to become successful, which suggests a transformation of the self in order to sell their own lifestyle and therefore their products and network marketing as a concept.

One participant’s account of her experiences emphasised this concept of technologies of the self, and she even went as far as to describe herself as “a product of the product”, indicating that she had reconstructed her ‘self’ so much to accommodate her role, it had become part of her identity. This again emphasises the reconstruction of not only the self, but also physical state too with a type of material transformation in order to achieve success.

Several participants indicated that many of their posts to social media platforms were aimed to portray a positive image to attract consumers and other potential representatives to their lifestyle. One participant claimed that she was not lying, however this specific dialogue suggests some form of deception, therefore relates to the concept of the self in that the individual was reconstructing their image to change the way they present themselves to an audience.

Whilst it has always been the case that people can alter their image for the benefit of a positive representation of themselves, in recent years it has become easier to completely reconstruct the appearance of one’s self and life, (Brunskill, 2013). Social media users can now post whatever they deem necessary to generate a certain lifestyle they wish to portray. This phenomenon can be applied to the use of social media in network marketing and the act of representing a lifestyle to entice consumers, as the participants showed they represented themselves online in a certain way in order to do this.

It is important to consider the transition in sales within society from face-to-face and traditional advertising to social media marketing. It is increasingly simpler to portray a reconstructed lifestyle online as one can pick and choose when, where and what is posted to whom. Brunskill (2013) proposes that social media users often construct a 'social avatar', which is a representation of themselves created through a selection of favourable elements to display to others online. It is argued that it can generate a division between the online self and the offline self.

It could be suggested that this point also relates to Goffman's (1990) theory of the 'self'. The altered representation on social media could be compared to the front and backstage distinction that Goffman (1990) offers in his theory, in that individuals involved in network marketing may alter the way they present themselves online could be their front stage. This concept does differ from the original theory due to the online element however it does seem useful to consider the relevance of Goffman's (1990) theory in relation to the analysis.

Considering the theme of 'mothers and network marketing', a prominent amount of the interview data suggests many women are attracted to a way of generating an income that provides flexibility within the home. This desire for employment that favours family life supports ideas suggested by Amundson (2011), in that network marketing appeals to mothers due to the ideal perception of a balanced family and work life. It also coincides with views portrayed by Lamoreaux (2013), that network marketing provides an enticement initiated by typical societal gender roles, indicating that women are expected to stay at home to look after the children and must build their work around the household. However, it could be argued that this is not the case as some of the participants felt they played an equal role alongside their partner in terms of employment and income.

The interview data suggests that the attractiveness of being able to spend more time with their children was one of the initial reasons for the participants joining network marketing. It suggests a production of a "desirable" self, as it advocates that network marketing produces the "perfect" mother, who can stay at home with their children whilst also earning a good wage and maintaining a healthy lifestyle at the same time. This relates to the mothering discourse, that is described by Horwitz (2004) as constructing the ideal vision of

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the 'perfect' mother to be selfless and therefore make decisions based purely on the child's needs.

This can often lead to feelings of uncertainty towards the best decision regarding employment. It is argued that mothers often feel the need to demonstrate commitment to their children, and that mothers who work outside of the home are inadequate within the parenting role and are not perceived as the traditional 'good' mother, (Gorman & Fritzsche, 2002). The interview data suggests that the desirable identity of the 'ideal mother' whom can both stay at home with children and generate an income may be utilised in order for representatives to persuade other women to also sign up to a company as a network marketer.

Many participants suggested that they used the role of the mother and the flexible family lifestyle to entice and interest other women to join the company. Therefore, this initiative was used as a part of representing a lifestyle and attraction marketing, in order to appeal to a certain group within society, which could also connect to Lamoreaux's (2013) argument of the attractiveness of certain employment by typical gender roles.

However, it could be argued that there is becoming a change in the traditional perception of the 'ideal mother'. Braun, Vincent and Ball (2007) suggest that some women are arguing that being a working mother demonstrates a constructive role model for a child, and establishing a good work ethic is paramount in a child's upbringing. Sullivan and Delaney (2016) take a post-feminist approach, arguing that women are empowered by and attracted to the idea of becoming a successful entrepreneur as well as a wife and mother. It could be argued that network marketing can be attractive in that it fulfils perceived important aspects of the mothering role that seem prevalent at this time – staying at home with her child, and demonstrating a positive work ethic simultaneously.

Overall the analysis of the data produced from the interviews presented the conclusion that many of the participants constructed the reality that they were taking on a role that was not the position of a salesperson, but something else such as a mentor, a team member or simply a peer providing others with product recommendations.

Many participants seemed to reconstruct their identities portrayed by others in order to become a successful network marketer. The most significant reconstruction seemed to be through the use of attraction marketing on social media, which was administered by the participants posting photos of activities and their general lifestyle in order to engage other social media users.

By deliberately posting positive elements of their life on social media platforms it created an attraction and therefore others were intrigued by how they too could achieve the same. This included posts regarding health, perceived luxury assets, and flexible working hours, often relating to their children. This links to the theme also generated from the data of mothers and network marketing, as many participants suggested that they aimed a lot of their lifestyle representation at mothers who would be attracted to the idea of moulding their working hours around spending time with their family.

Attraction marketing and the target audience of mothers also related to the theme of trust which was also prominent within the data. By avoiding the perceptive role of a salesperson and portraying a positive lifestyle and identity through social media as a peer and fellow mother, others are more likely to trust this representation, and therefore success is more attainable for the individual.

Chapter 5 – Quantitative Methodology

This research project also took a quantitative approach which intended to visualise and analyse the structure of social media networks employed by network marketers as a tool for sales and promotion of products. This was carried out using the software NodeXL, in which information gathered from the social media platform Twitter was inputted in to the software and presented in graph form to highlight the structure.

Data Sampling

Regarding NodeXL, information was gathered from Twitter pages belonging to individuals who posted information regarding the relevant organisations. This technique required large amounts of data in order to be able to carry out an appropriate analysis, therefore participants were not informed of the data collection, however their information was kept anonymous. The ethics of the sampling was considered and is explained in the ethics section below.

Data Collection

NodeXL is a software add-on to Excel, which imports information from Twitter and Facebook based on inputted words or hashtags and produces graphs demonstrating the networks and relationships between users. This research project consisted of two very different levels for analysis – interviews that incorporated participants' individual accounts of their involvement within network marketing, and the analysis of social networks using the software NodeXL, encompassing data from Twitter in order to demonstrate and examine the relationships between users and tweets regarding network marketing. The analysis of social media networks observed objective tweeting behaviour, providing some insight in to what happens at an aggregate level.

Network analysis of social media is relevant within the data because the promotion and sales of products within network marketing relies on communication and connections on

social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. It is important to query how participants' accounts of their experiences fit, or do not fit, in to the wider context.

Twitter is a social networking platform that is used worldwide due to its user's ability to distribute information to a large number of people within a short space of time. This advantage has resulted in the development of electronic word of mouth as a marketing tool in order to diffuse information relating to products, (Kim et al., 2014). Twitter allows users to circulate short pieces of text (tweets), and tag them with relevant keywords using 'hashtags', (Weng, Menczer and Ahn, 2013). Weng et al. (2013) suggest that complex contagions within a social network are influenced by social reinforcement so the diffusion of information within groups of high density is increased.

NodelXL is a novel piece of software that has recently started being used within research to carry out network analysis on social media. The software is an add-on to Excel and downloads samples of 18,000 tweets at a time, showing connections between users based on their posts. In order to visualise the networks using Node XL, information was imported from Twitter by inputting a relevant keyword in to the 'search network' category, for example Foreverliving, Juiceplus or Herbalife.

Once the data had been imported the software produced a table of metrics to show the density of the connections between nodes in a network. Within the metrics are shown the 'edges', which are the users, and the vertices, also referred to as nodes, which are the connections between the users.

Data Analysis

When creating the visualisation graph, the graph metrics were altered in order to gain the most appropriate and useful results. It was decided that the graph would be directed, and within the graph metrics vertex out degree, vertex in degree and betweenness and closeness centrality were checked. The vertex's out degree was the amount of outgoing edges connected to the vertex, and the in degree was the number of incoming edges. A self-

loop referred to one outgoing edge and one incoming edge. Betweenness centrality measured the number of times a node connects along the shortest course between two other nodes.

The 'in degree' and 'out degree' were selected to be considered within the graph, which displays the frequency in which a user is being re-tweeted, and how much they are re-tweeting others. All neighbour less vertices were then chosen to be clustered in to one group as they were neither re-tweeting nor being re-tweeted. After researching how to use the software, it was seemed that the Harel-Koren Fast Multi-scale algorithm was the most appropriate method to be used to lay out the graph. Harel and Koren (2001) created the algorithm and suggest that it is able to deal "extremely well and extremely fast with certain classes of large graphs", (page 23), and makes the graph more readable due to the edges being mostly the same length.

Hansen and Smith (2015) suggest that in order to make the graphs clear and easy to read, all neighbour less vertices should be placed in to one group, so that graphs with a large amount of isolated nodes does not appear as chaotic. Once the metrics had been organised and the layout chosen, a graph was produced demonstrating the connections between the Twitter users.

Due to NodeXL being a relatively new software used within research, there is limited previous literature regarding its use. However, there are a small number of projects that utilised it to analyse network which were considered before carrying out the social media analysis for this research. Harris, Moreland-Russell, Tabak, Ruhr and Maier (2014) carried out a study using NodeXL to analyse communication on Twitter regarding childhood obesity. Data was imported from Twitter from June 2013, consisting of posts that held the hashtag #childhoodobesity. It was concluded that "There is an opportunity to better disseminate evidence-based information to a broad audience through Twitter by increasing the presence of credible sources in the #childhoodobesity conversation and focusing the content of tweets on scientific evidence", (page 62, Harris et al., 2014), and it was suggested that examining social media networks can provide an understanding of how certain health information affects the general population. Overall it seems that the use of hashtags on

Twitter can provide a large audience with useful and relevant information regarding various health issues.

Bosch (2017) carried out a study using NodeXL to analyse the social media networks relating to the South African student-led campaign known as Rhodes Must Fall, which was often posted on Twitter as #RMF. The research was carried out in order to investigate youth activism. The student-led campaign consisted of protests to remove the status of British colonialist Cecil John Rhodes due to the issue of racism and exclusion of black students. The study presented that social media debates should be observed as just as useful and relevant as traditional media stances, and that Twitter is beneficial in providing young people with a platform for activism, (Bosch, 2017).

These very different studies show how versatile the use of NodeXL is and how it can be important to analyse and understand various social media communications throughout society. The use of NodeXL within this research was relevant to how network marketers connect with potential consumers in order to generate success.

A limitation of using NodeXL is that only specific words were used to import the data, for example Forever Living, Juice Plus and Herbalife. Large numbers of users probably use various words and hashtags in their posts that do not include the names of the companies, therefore the number of tweets and retweets regarding the topic will be higher than found in the analysis. Also, some users who are against network marketing schemes may use the words and hashtags and still be imported in to the graph metrics. Bosch (2016) suggests that although NodeXL is useful in that it presents relationships between social media users, a limitation is that it only acknowledges the density of connections and not the nature of the content. However, this supports the reason for taking a mixed method approach to the research as it provided different insights in to the topic.

Ethics

Due to the nature of the data collection for analysis using Node XL, ethical considerations had to be made because consent could not be obtained from individuals. Kahn, Vayena and Mastroianni (2014) discuss the ethical debate surrounding this type of data collection, firstly suggesting that large scale research surrounding social media is developing and therefore is likely to be present in the future. It is argued that although at first glance this type of data collection and analysis may seem unethical, the so-called data has been publically provided by social media users to a large amount of unknown others, (Kahn et al, 2014). Taking this in to consideration alongside the fact that it would be extremely challenging to obtain informed consent off every individual involved in the network analysis, it was decided that the information would be used as long as the anonymity and confidentiality of the social media users would be taken extremely seriously.

Chapter 6 – Quantitative Analysis

The second section of this research project involved the social media network analysis of data imported from Twitter using the novel software NodeXL. NodeXL is an add-on to Excel, which downloads samples of 18,000 networked tweets at a time, producing a graph that demonstrates how Twitter users are linked through connections such as the retweeting of information and the follows, replies or mentions of other users.

The graphs were made to be directed as the data needed to demonstrate the connections between the Twitter users and their activity. NodeXL provided metrics to display the density of connections between nodes in a network, which included the vertex out degree, vertex in degree and betweenness and closeness centrality. In degree represents the number of incoming connection, out degree shows outgoing connections, betweenness centrality highlights how each node is connected particular parts of the network, and closeness centrality demonstrates how close a node is to others within the metrics. The imported information then produced a graph in which connections between social media users could be analysed. NodeXL was used in order to gain a more objective structure regarding the way in which network marketers discuss products online, and to observe the connections between various social media users, (Aldhous, 2012).

Data was imported from Twitter using the names of the related network marketing companies – Forever Living, Juice Plus and Herbalife. The software then provided a table of graph metrics which then generated a graph for each different phrase presenting the social media network. When observing the graph metrics, it was important to consider the graph density, which presented how interconnected the tweets within the sample were, with the graphs clustering nodes together depending on how densely they were connected based on Twitter activity, (Hansen & Smith, 2015).

There were some disadvantages to NodeXL, for example the limit on the amount of tweets that could be imported to one graph. However, it could be suggested that 18,000 tweets are enough to produce a reliable result, especially as fifteen graphs were created in total - five graphs were generated at weekly intervals, using the relevant words for each company.

This was carried out in order to be able to sufficiently observe any patterns or changes within the data, therefore a larger amount of Twitter connections could be analysed and compared.

After reviewing all fifteen graphs, it was observed there were some minor variations in data, however the major characteristic was that there were often one or two Twitter users that had a prominently larger amount of connections with other users than the general group. The metrics that were analysed specifically were the number of in degrees and/ or out degrees someone had compared to the other users within the import, which showed how many times a person was retweeting other posts and how many times they had been retweeted themselves. It was found that only a small number of users were retweeting others and their posts were being retweeted a notably greater amount of times than the other Twitter users within the metrics. This suggested a hierarchical construction, in which there were perhaps some people within the companies that were particularly more successful than the majority of representatives.

The overall results from the data suggested that there was a generally low number of Twitter users that had a high level of in degree and out degree density, meaning that they were being retweeted and are retweeting a large amount. In contrast, there was a relatively high number of users that had a low level of in degree and out degree. This suggested that the minority of individuals using social media to promote their products through network marketing are successful, and that the majority are unsuccessful as they connected with very few people on a daily or weekly basis. The table below shows an overall view of the relevant metrics throughout the varying graphs. The left hand column represents the graph number and the name of the company; FL being Forever Living, JP being Juice Plus, and H being Herbalife.

Table 4 – NodeXL Graph Metrics

	No. of users with 0 retweets	No. of users with 1 retweet	No. of users with 2 retweets	No. of users with 3 retweets	No. of users with 4+ retweets	Highest no. of retweets for one user
Graph 1 FL	165	171	38	8	14	71
Graph 2 FL	24	0	81	10	3	10
Graph 3 FL	32	26	9	0	5	18
Graph 4 FL	18	34	9	1	2	6
Graph 5 FL	22	35	4	1	6	12
Graph 6 JP	249	891	187	22	20	69
Graph 7 JP	176	869	152	24	15	80
Graph 8 JP	259	875	163	30	18	196
Graph 9 JP	333	858	175	30	19	202
Graph 10 JP	342	878	104	15	16	188
Graph 11 H	366	292	66	12	11	183
Graph 12 H	587	247	43	4	13	332
Graph 13 H	542	708	95	30	36	143
Graph 14 H	154	241	40	11	6	49
Graph 15 H	655	954	133	26	42	166

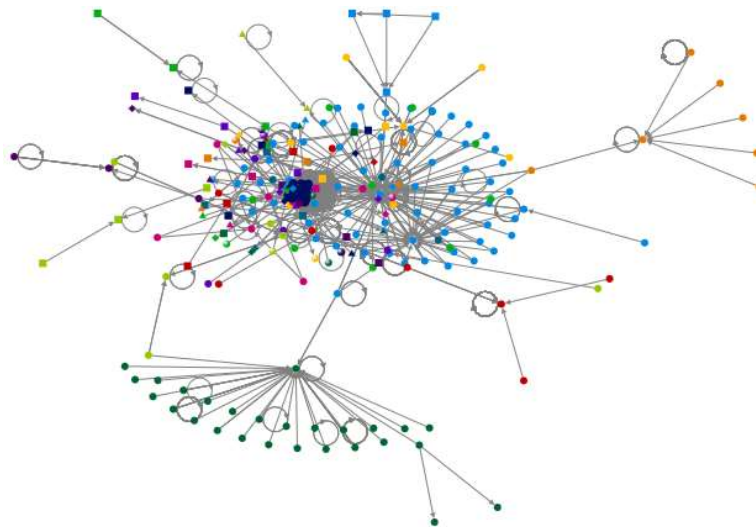
The data in Table 4 highlights the pattern of large numbers of users not being retweeted, and smaller amounts of people with higher amounts of connections. Graphs 2, 3, 4 and 5, which held data from tweets containing the phrase 'Forever Living' produced a relatively smaller amount of data than the other graphs, and the reason is unknown. The pattern was still similar, just on a smaller scale.

It seemed strange that the majority of people that appeared to be more active on social media and were more willing to take part in interviews were representative of Forever Living, however there was a relatively smaller amount of data within NodeXL compared to the other tweets relating to the other companies. This could be merely coincidence that the sample held more participants from Forever Living, or it could be that the more successful representatives were more willing to engage in the study.

It was clear that there was a large number of Twitter users with 0 retweets, presenting an average of 262 nodes, whereas the average number of users that had been retweeted 4 or more times was only 18. This is a large difference and suggests that a small number of users are successful in their connectivity on Twitter, whereas the majority of network marketers using the social media platform have relatively little relevant association with others. This low density within the metrics could be a consistent pattern within these types of network marketing, suggesting success for small number of representatives and less success for higher numbers.

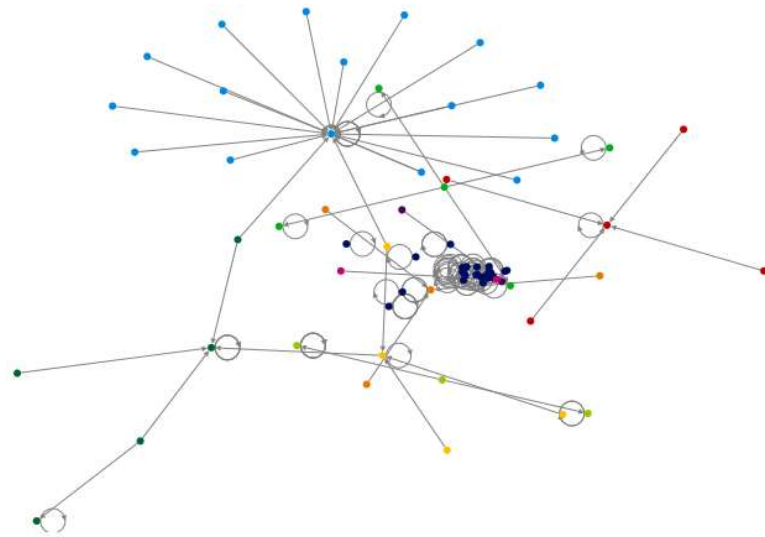
Below are 15 graphs created using NodeXL to visualise Twitter connections between users posting about Forever Living, Juice Plus and Herbalife.

Graph 1 - Forever Living



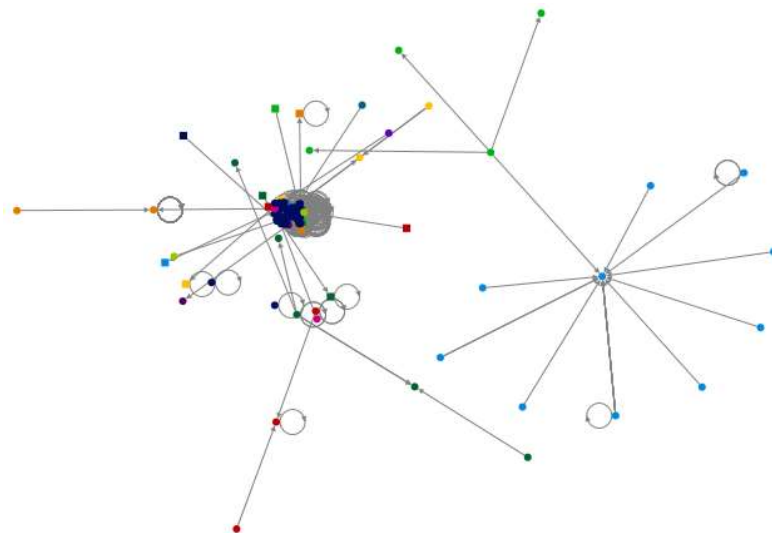
This graph demonstrates one large cluster of activity, then one user slightly separated from the principal group, with several connections to isolate users.

Graph 2 – Forever Living



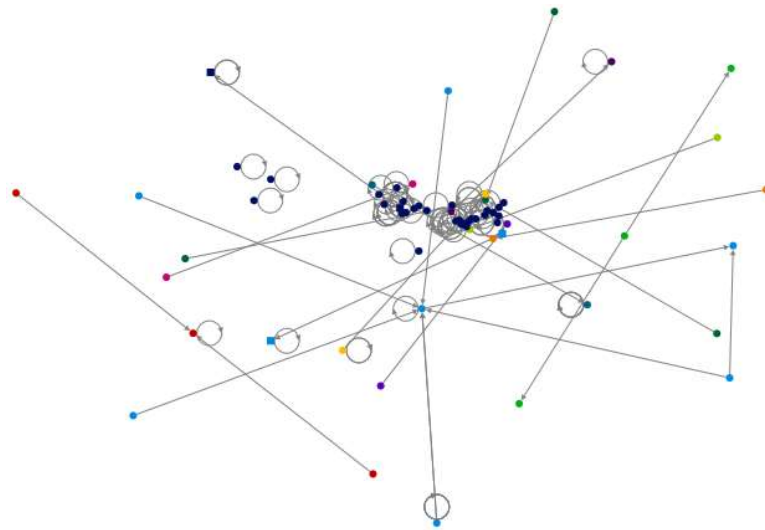
This graph shows a large number of users with only one connection, with a relatively small cluster of nodes in the centre.

Graph 3 – Forever Living



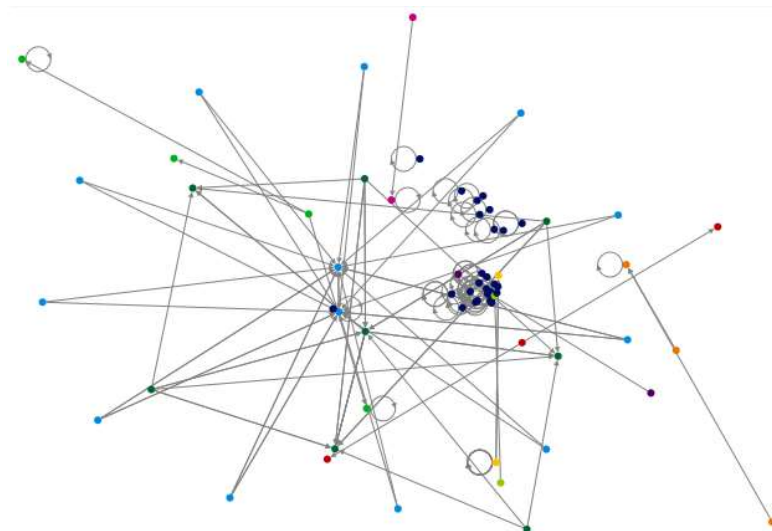
This graph shows a small cluster of nodes demonstrating activity with other users, and several users with very little connections.

Graph 4 – Forever Living



This graph shows a small but obvious group of users connected in the centre, surrounded by several users with only one connection.

Graph 5 – Forever Living

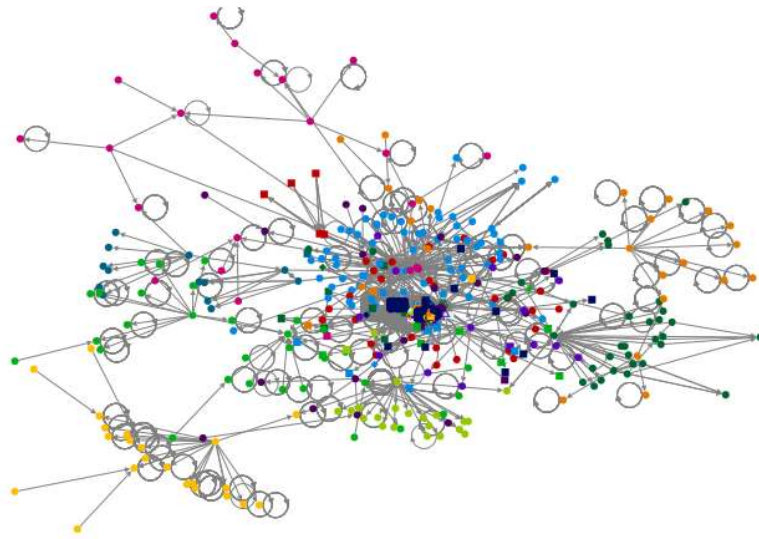


This graph shows a large number of users with very little activity, alongside a small cluster of users with larger numbers of connections.

As can be observed in the graphs, apart from Graph 1, not a huge amount of data was imported from Twitter by NodeXL using the word 'Forever Living', and it is unknown as to why this is. It could be suggested that due to the concept of attraction marketing and representing a lifestyle on social media to attract potential customers and fellow representatives, the specific words 'Forever Living' were not that frequently used by network marketers in tweets. Interview participants working for Forever Living suggested that instead of promoting the company itself, they used attraction techniques such as posting about their flexible hours and their healthy lifestyle in order to engage interest from people. This may be the reason for the lack of data with the Forever Living graphs.

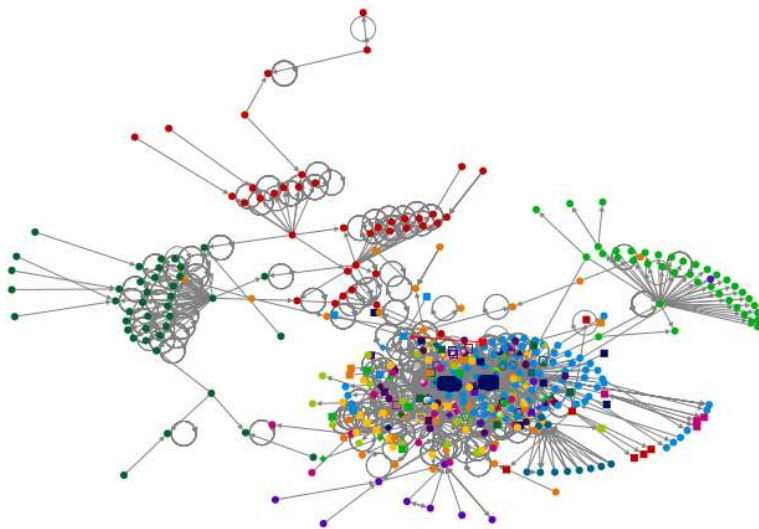
Although there is not a large amount of data, clusters of retweets can be seen, demonstrating that there were some Twitter users that had more connections with others than isolate users that had no retweets or had not retweeted anyone themselves. Within the graphs created, no more than 14 nodes had four retweets or more, and the number of nodes that were not retweeted at all ranged between 18 and 165, demonstrating the difference between densities of user activity.

Graph 6 - Juice Plus



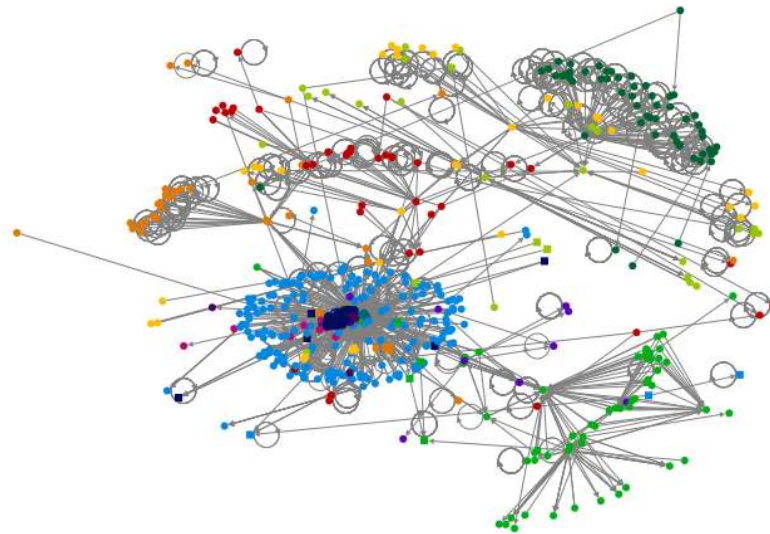
This graph demonstrates a large cluster of nodes in the centre with many connections with other users, however the figure does not have definitive, clear-cut clusters like some of the data in other graphs showed.

Graph 7 - Juice Plus



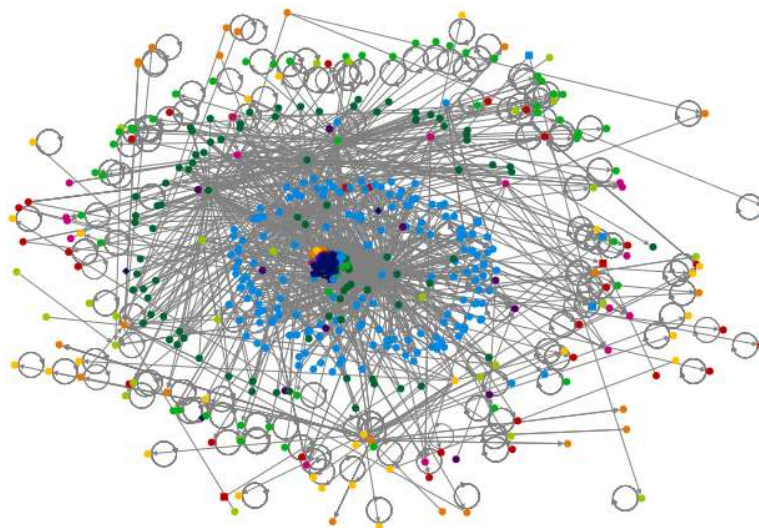
Unlike graph 6, this graph demonstrates quite clear, unambiguous clusters of nodes showing one large group and four smaller collections.

Graph 8 - Juice Plus



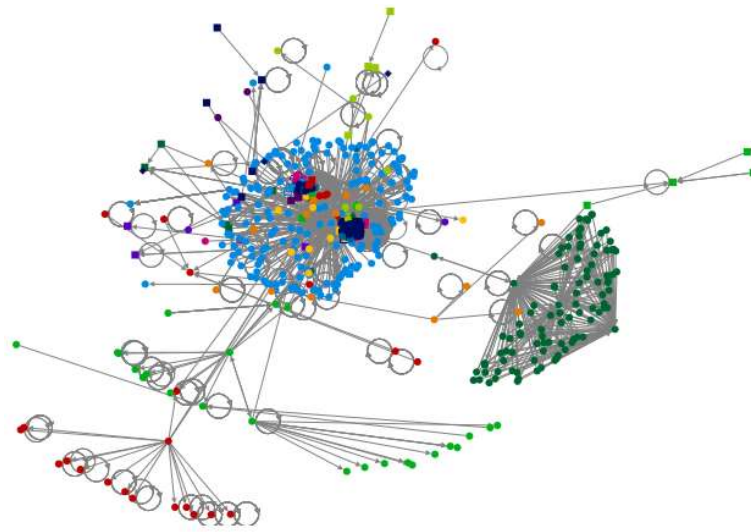
This graph also shows several distinct clusters – three large clear ones, and a few smaller less defined groups.

Graph 9 – Juice Plus



This graph is quite different to the others in that there is just one very large cluster of activity, with no obvious separate groups of nodes.

Graph 10 – Juice Plus

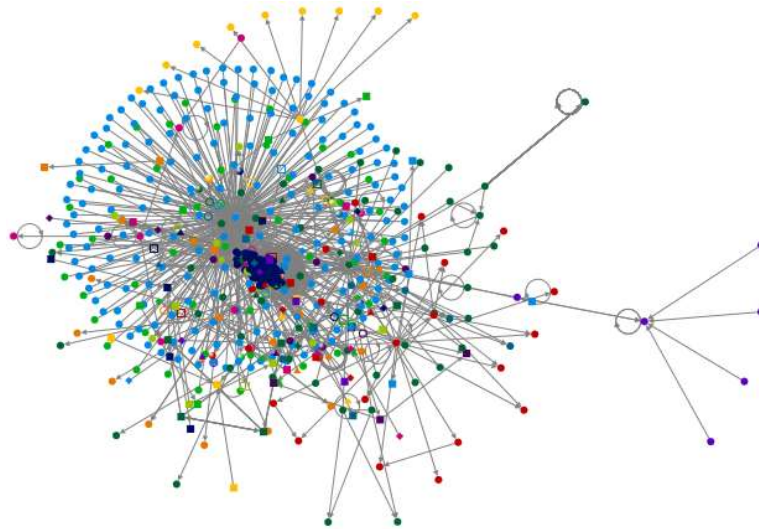


This graph shows two very distinct, large clusters and two smaller groups.

There was a considerably larger amount of data imported in to NodeXL regarding Juice Plus than Forever Living, which can be observed in the graphs. Graphs 7, 8 and 10 demonstrate clear groups of clusters, showing how some Twitter users had greater activity levels, including both retweeting other users and being retweeted themselves. For example, data in Graph 8 presents two major clusters of users with large amounts of activity, which are shown in the graph metrics as the official Juice Plus and Juice Plus UK accounts. The third clear cluster is a Twitter user working as a Juice Plus representative, with a total of 20 retweets. There are two other users that have over ten retweets, but then the numbers began to drop significantly, with 1,340 users with less than ten retweets; 1,134 with one or less. This again demonstrates a pattern of a small number of successful representatives, and a large number that could be unsuccessful.

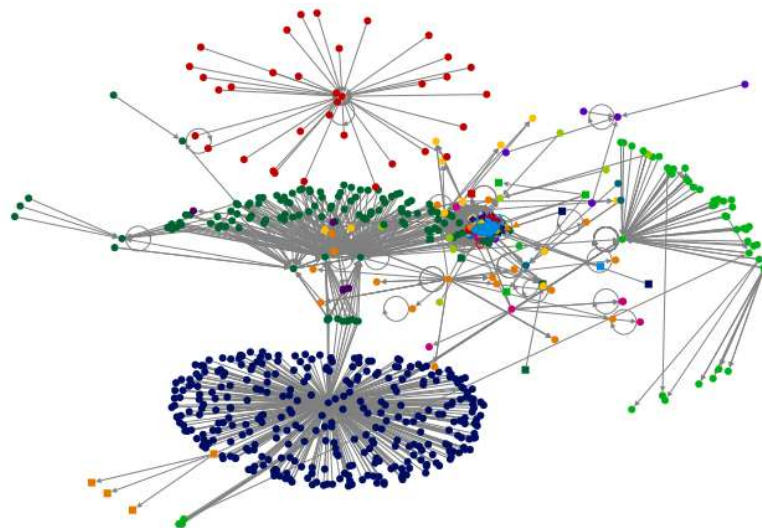
An interesting point to note regarding graphs 6-10 is that whereas the other diagrams suggest some quite clear clusters within the network, graph 9 seems to demonstrate a large amount of activity collected around a central focal point. Although the exact reason for this was unclear, it could have been due to a specific event or significant day for the company leading to perceived important posts by the official Juice Plus Twitter accounts, and therefore large numbers of retweets and other network activity.

Graph 11 – Herbalife



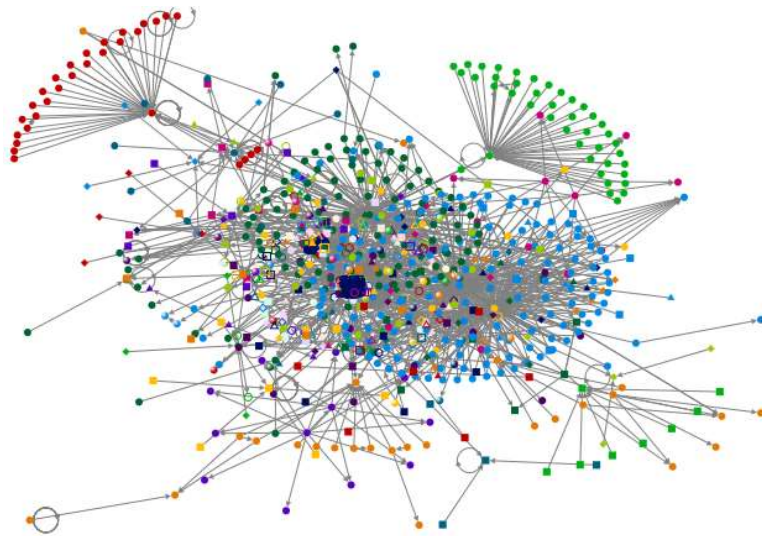
This graph shows one very extensive cluster, with one user engaging in a large amount of activity compared to others.

Graph 12 – Herbalife



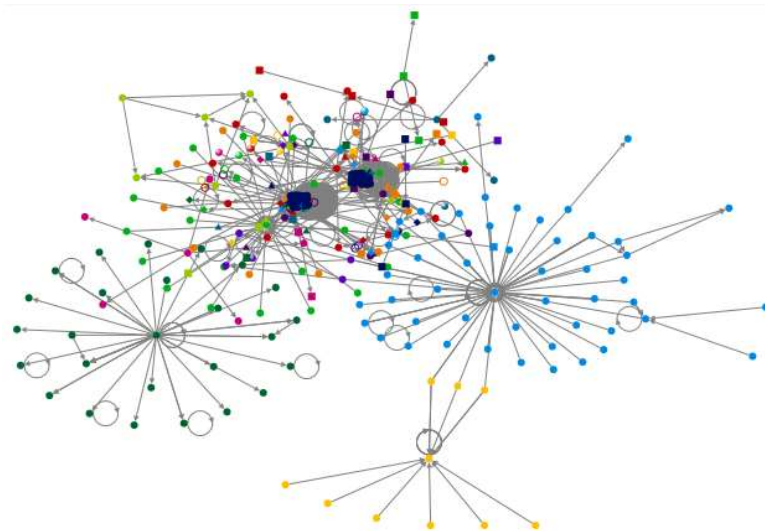
This graph demonstrates four very distinct groups, one showing large amounts of user engagement and activity.

Graph 13 – Herbalife



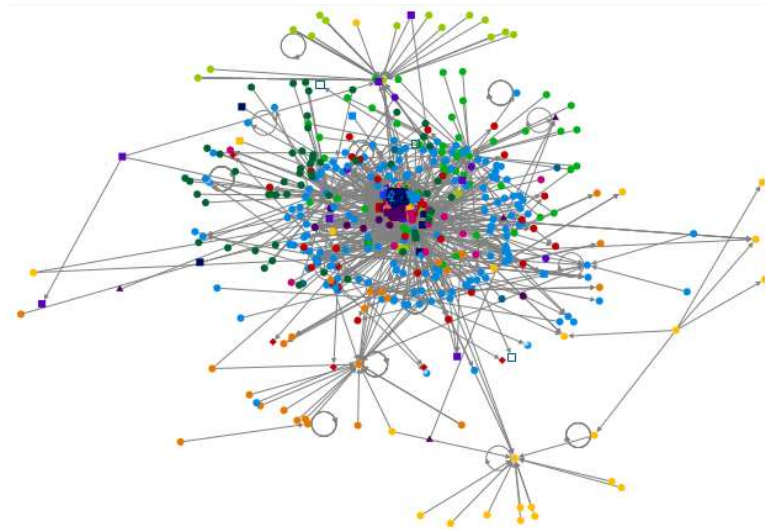
This graph shows one very large but quite chaotic cluster in the centre, with two smaller groups and isolates surrounding it.

Graph 14 – Herbalife



This graph shows two small but dense clusters, and three relatively sparse groups.

Graph 15 – Herbalife



This graph demonstrates one large cluster in the centre, surrounded by isolates and users showing very little activity.

Regarding the use of the word 'Herbalife', Graphs 11 and 12 presented clear clusters of Twitter users that engaged in high levels of social media activity, including both being retweeted and retweeting others. In Graph 11 the most prominent cluster demonstrated a user that had been retweeted 183 times, which was a large amount considering only 11 users throughout the data had been retweeted 4 or more times.

Graph 15 also demonstrates one particular user that had a considerably higher activity level than other users within the import, and there were many users with very few retweets. It is interesting to note that the graphs related to Herbalife look slightly different to the other companies as there are quite obvious key clusters of retweeting behaviour that seem less interconnected to each other. This is most prominent in graph 12, which demonstrates clusters of network activity that are quite separate from the rest of the nodes. This could suggest that some Twitter users engage in large amounts of network activity and retweeting behaviour. As shown in Table 4, graph 12 held a Twitter user that had a significantly larger in-degree than within the other graphs, demonstrating 332 retweets in total.

Chapter 7 – Quantitative Discussion

Focusing specifically on Twitter, the novel software NodeXL was used to explore social media activity regarding communication of individuals involved in network marketing. The overall results from the network analysis presented 15 graphs demonstrating Twitter user's activity and connections with other users relating to posts comprising of the names of various network marketing companies. The graphs demonstrated that there was often a considerably small number of users with high levels of social media activity, including behaviours such as retweeting posts by others and being retweeted themselves. It seemed to be more important to focus on users being frequently retweeted, as this showed greater engagement from others who were potential customers or representatives, whereas if someone was retweeting another post it did not mean they would receive an active exchange.

Observing the graphs, the general pattern was that a large number of people posting 'Forever Living', 'Juice Plus' or 'Herbalife' had little or no connective activity with other users via Twitter, with most people not being retweeted at all. A graph for each company was created every week for five weeks to gain a reliable result, and similar outcomes were generated throughout this time frame, suggesting a consistent pattern. This similar sequence demonstrated throughout the analysis suggested that within network marketing and social media there are often a small number of profitable network marketers, and a large number of individuals generating little success.

In general, a large number of the graphs presented various clear clusters of communication. Bosch (2017) describes these clusters as "communities within a larger network, which are formed not only around common social ties, but also shared interests and backgrounds.", (page 226), suggesting that this density of activity was due to common engagement with a similar topic, in this case a network marketing company.

Most of the graphs demonstrated that there are some definite groups of people that retweet particular users. Within the clusters there seemed to often be a central user that was connected to many other individuals, often with just one pivotal user. This did vary

between the different companies, but for example a graph created regarding Herbalife showed that one user had 332 retweets, however only 13 people held four or more retweets, inferring few people with copious connections.

The NodeXL social media analysis was useful in that it provided a more extensive overall observation of the network marketing structure compared to the interview data which contributed a more in-depth insight in to individual interpretation of experiences. The NodeXL analysis also provided an overall perception of the different activity rates of various users involved with network marketing.

Of course there are weaknesses to this section of the research, as it cannot be guaranteed that the users within the data were network marketers. There could have been some information posted by people interested in the products, or by people campaigning against the companies. Furthermore, only the names of the companies were used to import that data, and large numbers of network marketers probably use various words and hashtags within their posts that do not actually include the names of products or companies. This could especially be the case if an attraction marketing technique is being used by representatives, as posts would most likely be relating to their lifestyle in general rather than specific information regarding the company they represent.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

This research project examined the phenomenon of network marketing using a mixed method approach. Individual interviews and analyses of Twitter networks were used to gain insights from different levels relating to the subject matter. After collecting both qualitative data through interviews and quantitative data through NodeXL it was interesting to observe how the results and outcomes related to one another. An overall outlook of the results suggested that both sets of data were equally as relevant and important within the research. The social media network analysis could be considered as the larger picture that presented the density of user activity and the connections between network marketers and consumers, whereas the interviews demonstrated a more thorough observation of people's experiences and perceptions of reality as a part of the network marketing concept.

It was interesting to observe the differences between the perceptions of network marketing and the attitudes towards their own progression provided by various participants. The women that held positive opinions of the marketing technique, which was the majority of the participants, claimed to be profitable within the business and presented a successful and attractive lifestyle. In contrast, the women that indicated negative perceptions disclosed that they had not found network marketing to be rewarding within their lives. It is likely that this is found by the majority of people involved with network marketing, so the sample generated in this research project only begins to reflect the issue.

Even the participants that spoke positively about network marketing seemed to acknowledge an unfavourable cultural perception towards the marketing concept. The theme of identity reconstruction was prominent within the interview data analysis, as many participants recognised a general assumption that network marketing representatives engage in 'pushy' practises in order to gain sales. The acknowledgement of this meant participants attempted to detach themselves from this image and create a different, more positive representation. This was pursued mostly through the use of attraction marketing on social media, in which words or photos were posted on social media platforms that were

intended to create a positive representation of their lifestyle in order to interest and influence others.

This related to the concept of trust and contagion pulled from the literature review, which suggested that people are more likely to engage in sales when the information is being relayed by a peer or someone of familiarity, as there is a greater sense of trust and level of social influence, (Berger, 2013). Often network marketing uses word of mouth techniques through face-to-face or social media interaction, meaning the representations often have some connection to the potential consumers, even if it is not very strong. Many participants explained that by using this technique they avoided approaching people, therefore disengaging with the pushy conception and creating an attractive representation of their lifestyle and self.

This reconstruction of identity and attraction marketing concept also linked to the theme of mothers and networking marketing. Many participants suggested that a large percentage of their target audience were mothers with young children who were attracted to the flexible hours that were involved with being a distributor. Some representatives explained that they often posted photos of them taking part in activities with their children in order to appeal to women who felt they would benefit from a similar work schedule.

As previously discussed, this theme of reconstructing identity could relate to Goffman's (1990) theory of the 'self', and the use of the elements of 'frontstage' and 'backstage' as a metaphor for the way people behave in certain situations. This version of their own identity created by the participants as part of their work in network marketing and desired social media image would be interpreted as the frontstage, therefore it seems important to also consider the backstage element of their lives. Information taken from previous literature and the analysis of social media networks suggests that most network marketers do not gain huge success, which would incorporate with this backstage part of their identity.

Further to many of the women attempting to disengage with the negative assumptions surrounding network marketing, almost all of the participants, including those claiming success, explained that their family and friends did not initially support their decision to

become a network marketing representative, and several claimed they still did not approve after months or years of their engagement with the role. The phrase 'pyramid scheme' was mentioned frequently throughout the interviews when discussing this lack of peer and family encouragement, reiterating the suggested shared negative cultural beliefs surrounding network marketing and its approaches.

The recurrent discussion throughout the interviews of the pyramid concept seemingly coincided with data taken from the Node XL analysis of social media network structures. Although participants denied that the companies worked in this way, they suggested that family and friends were frequently concerned that this was the case. The graphs showed that in most cases there were very few Twitter users that had large in degree and out degree counts – meaning that they were frequently retweeting others or had been retweeted by someone else. When observing the graphs this suggested that there seemed to be very small numbers of users often connecting with others, and large numbers of people that did not regularly connect with others at all. This suggested a structure with few successful people at the top and a large number of unsuccessful people below them.

Although this is what the data seemed to present through the social media network analysis, it did not actually coincide with the accounts from the interviews. A large number of participants that engaged in the interviews claimed to be successful within the network marketing industry, and had been a representative for years, gaining a reasonable profit. This did not correspond with results from the NodeXL graphs, as the quantitative data suggested that there were actually very few successful network marketing representatives.

The explanation for this lack of correlation could be that there are indeed many unsuccessful representatives, however perhaps they were not as willing to participate within the research as the women that were successful. The participants that had generated a profit from working for a network marketing company were probably more likely to hold enthusiasm towards sharing their success story with others. This does suggest the formation of a bias result; however, it was difficult to gain a fully rounded sample as many people that were asked to take part in the research either did not reply or refused the invitation.

This proposition generated from the NodeXL analysis of Twitter usage could be argued against as it could be suggested that the reason for the lack of network activity from users is that many network marketers do not actually include the company names within their posts. Through the interview data analysis, it was found that many participants claimed to use the method of attraction marketing to become successful within the industry. This was carried out by uploading positive posts regarding their lifestyle relating to aspects such as health, prosperity and flexible work hours in order to attract potential customers or distributors. Many participants indicated that they rarely posted names of the products or the company on social media, which would explain the lack of activity shown through NodeXL. It is possible that there are many successful network marketers using attraction marketing and engaging in frequent social media connectivity, yet it was not obtained from the social media network analysis.

Overall the mixed methods approach to this research presented a useful variation of data, from both quantitative and qualitative methods. Data from NodeXL provided an extensive perspective of the larger picture of network marketing and social media, whereas data from the interviews presented an analysis of individual perspectives of participants' roles as a representative and distributor. The project took a step towards comparing individual accounts of social media practices and network analysis of tweeting behaviour. Due to the current major growth of social media usage within society, this type of mixed methods approach would be a beneficial research technique for observing social media behaviour on both an individual scale and from a broader perspective.

If further research was to be carried out on this topic it would be interesting to further explore some aspects that were not examined in this project. Many participants suggested that they used attraction marketing which involved posting positive aspects of their health and general lifestyle instead of promoting and selling products directly. It would be interesting to observe network marketer's social media behaviour and practises that does not involve the use of words such as the product or company name, but instead through uploading posts regarding lifestyle that could attract potential customers and representatives. This research could be done through noting relevant, but not specific,

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phrases used in network marketer's social media posts, and then searching these in an attempt to observe other behaviour patterns.

It would also be useful within further research to recruit a larger sample, with more former representatives who had disengaged with network marketing in order to gain different perspectives on the concept. The research could also include men as well as women to observe potential differences in techniques, perceptions and experiences.

As there is little previous research regarding network marketing experiences and the use of social media within the technique, further research would be a useful addition to the literature and would be relevant to the growing interest in social media patterns and behaviours in today's society.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – School Research Ethics Panel Application Form

THE UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD
School of Human and Health Sciences – School Research Ethics Panel

APPLICATION FORM

Please complete and return via email to:

Kirsty Thomson SREP Administrator: hhs_srep@hud.ac.uk

Name of applicant: Roberta Horsfall

Title of study: Marketing dietary supplements through network marketing: a multi-method analysis of user's experience and social media network structures.

Department: Psychology

Date sent: 06/04/2017

Please provide sufficient detail below for SREP to assess the ethical conduct of your research. You should consult the guidance on filling out this form and applying to SREP at <http://www.hud.ac.uk/hhs/research/srep/>.

Researcher(s) details	Roberta Horsfall Student
Supervisor(s) details	Timothy Gomersall Susanna Kola-Palmer
All documentation has been read by supervisor (where applicable)	YES This proposal will not be considered unless the supervisor has submitted a report confirming that (s)he has read all documents and supports their submission to SREP

Aim / objectives	<p>This research will focus on the direct selling of dietary supplements through social media networks, aiming to gather data from individuals who use and promote products from companies such as JuicePlus, Herbalife and Forever Living.</p> <p>Direct selling is an increasingly popular marketing technique that holds both economic and public health implications for society. Using social media networking as a tool for this marketing approach is a new and changing technique that has many benefits for distributors.</p> <p>The recent development of social media networking as a tool for marketing dietary supplements has significant public health and health behaviour implications. This notion and the issue that there are no known previous studies regarding this specific topic suggests this research will be an important addition to the literature.</p> <p>Objectives of the research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To review previous literature regarding the use of peer-to-peer marketed supplements and identify gaps in which further research is required. • To investigate perceptions and experiences of individuals who use dietary supplements and promote them to their peers, through the use of interviews. • To identify the personal contexts shaping people's initiation and continuation of supplement use. • To analyse the shape of the networks surrounding supplements that are marketed on a peer-to-peer basis (e.g. JuicePlus+) to examine the diffusion of influence.
Brief overview of research methods	<p>The study will comprise of 20 interviews, exploring the experiences of individuals who use and promote dietary supplements. We will aim to recruit participants of different genders, and socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The novel software of NodeXL will also be used to analyse the structure of social media networks employed by dietary supplement producers as a tool for direct selling and promotion of products.</p>
Project start date	January 2017
Project completion date	January 2018

Permissions for study	n/a
Access to participants	Participants will be recruited through social media sites, primarily Facebook. Key words such as “Juice Plus” and “Herbalife” will be searched and then people who promote and sell the products will be messaged privately asking if they would like to participate.
Confidentiality	All data and information provided by participants will be kept confidential at all times. The approach to confidentiality and anonymity will be explained in the information sheet given to participants. Audio data will be transferred on to a password protected computer straight after the interview and deleted off the recording device.
Anonymity	Anonymity of participants will be maintained through the report of findings through the use of pseudonyms and any locations that are mentioned will be changed.
Right to withdraw	The participants will be offered the right to withdraw from the study through the information sheet and consent form they will be provided with. It will also be explained to the participants that they will have the right to refuse to answer any questions they are asked. It will be explained to the participant immediately after the interview that they can ask for any information they have provided to not be included in publications or talks. The participant will be told that they will have the opportunity to withdraw from the study for two weeks after the interview has taken place. Further to the information sheet, these points will be verbally explained prior to interviews and in a debrief following them.
Data Storage	All electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer. Data in note form will be kept in a locked bag or drawer. In transit the data will be stored in the boot of a car and never left there unattended.
Psychological support for participants	n/a
Researcher safety / support	See attached completed Risk Analysis and Management Form
Information sheet	See attached information sheet
Consent form	See attached consent form

Letters / posters / flyers	n/a
Questionnaire / Interview guide	<p>Although there are no fixed questions due to the semi-structured nature of the interview, there are relevant topics and examples of questions listed below that will be addressed.</p> <p>Information about demographics.</p> <p>Age.</p> <p>Gender.</p> <p>Ethnicity.</p> <p>Education. (high school ≤ 16; college ≤ 18, first degree (BA, BSc), higher degree (MSc MA, PhD, MD).</p> <p>Postcode.</p> <p>So to start, please can you just tell me a bit about yourself?</p> <p>How did you find out about the product?</p> <p>Can you tell me about the first time you purchased the product?</p> <p>And what about the first time you used the product?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What did you do? - What happened then? <p>Do you have a specific routine or ritual involving the product?</p> <p>Have you changed any other health behaviours in your life alongside using the product?</p> <p>Can you tell me how you transitioned into distributing the product?</p> <p>Can you tell me about the experience of your first sale?</p> <p>What about now? How have sales changed from when you first started?</p> <p>Do you use social media to promote the products?</p> <p>How have people responded to the promotion of the product, such as friends and family?</p>
Debrief (if appropriate)	<p>I will carry out a verbal debrief in order to provide the participant with a thorough understanding of what they are getting involved in. I will recap the research aims and objectives and explain exactly what I will be doing with the data. I will remind the participant that they have a two week timeframe in which they can withdraw from the study, and they have the right to ask if anything specific can be taken out of the data.</p>

Dissemination of results	The results may be used for publication or conferences. The participant's identity will be kept confidential at all times.
Identify any potential conflicts of interest	n/a
<p>Does the research involve accessing data or visiting websites that could constitute a legal and/or reputational risk to yourself or the University if misconstrued?</p> <p>Please state Yes/No</p> <p>If Yes, please explain how you will minimise this risk</p>	NO
<p>The next four questions in the grey boxes relate to Security Sensitive Information – please read the following guidance before completing these questions:</p> <p>http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2012/oversight-of-security-sensitive-research-material.pdf</p>	
<p>Is the research commissioned by, or on behalf of the military or the intelligence services?</p> <p>Please state Yes/No</p> <p>If Yes, please outline the requirements from the funding body regarding the collection and storage of Security Sensitive Data</p>	NO

<p>Is the research commissioned under an EU security call</p> <p>Please state Yes/No</p> <p>If Yes, please outline the requirements from the funding body regarding the collection and storage of Security Sensitive Data</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>Does the research involve the acquisition of security clearances?</p> <p>Please state Yes/No</p> <p>If Yes, please outline how your data collection and storages complies with the requirements of these clearances</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>Does the research concern terrorist or extreme groups?</p> <p>Please state Yes/No</p> <p>If Yes, please complete a Security Sensitive Information Declaration Form</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>Does the research involve covert information gathering or active deception?</p> <p>Please state Yes/No</p>	<p>NO</p>

Does the research involve children under 18 or participants who may be unable to give fully informed consent? Please state Yes/No	Data will be collected from social media sites in order to analyse the networking patterns. The individuals will not know that their information is being used for a research project, however they have willingly provided this information for the public to read. Their names will not be included in the analysis in order to maintain their anonymity.
Does the research involve prisoners or others in custodial care (e.g. young offenders)? Please state Yes/No	NO
Does the research involve significantly increased danger of physical or psychological harm or risk of significant discomfort for the researcher(s) and/or the participant(s), either from the research process or from the publication of findings? Please state Yes/No	NO
Does the research involve risk of unplanned disclosure of information you would be obliged to act on? Please state Yes/No	NO
Other issues	n/a
Where application is to be made to NHS Research Ethics Committee / External Agencies	n/a
Please supply copies of all relevant supporting documentation electronically. If this is not available electronically, please provide explanation and supply hard copy	

All documentation must be submitted to the SREP administrator. All proposals will be reviewed by two members of SREP.

If you have any queries relating to the completion of this form or any other queries relating to SREP's consideration of this proposal, please contact the SREP administrator (Kirsty Thomson) in the first instance – hhs_srep@hud.ac.uk

THE UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD: RISK ANALYSIS & MANAGEMENT

ACTIVITY: Interviews			Name: Roberta Horsfall	
LOCATION: Participant's home			Date: 06/04/17	Review Date:
Hazards <i>Identified</i>	Details of Risk(s)	People at Risk	Risk management measures	Other comments
Interviewing in the homes of participants alone	Personal safety	Researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Log times and date of interviews with colleagues / administrator I will inform a friend or relative when I am going to carry out an interview and will let them know when I leave the participant's house 	Specific interview arrangements and location will be identified with supervisor, friend or relative
Loss/ theft of data	Security of data	Interviewees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Electronic data to be stored only on password secured computer equipment and storage devices Digital cameras and Dictaphones with audio recordings to be transported in a lockable case 	Laptops, and other electronic data storage devices to be transport in the boot of a car and taken in to the house or university straight away

Appendix 2 – Information Sheet and Consent Form



Interview Information Sheet

A study of the network marketing and promotion of dietary supplements.

Hello, my name is Bobbie Horsfall and I am an MSc Psychology student at the University of Huddersfield. As part of my degree I am investigating the experiences of individuals who use and promote dietary supplements through network marketing and social media, and would like to hear about your knowledge in the area. This information sheet provides you with further details about the research and the procedures involved.

It is your decision whether or not you take part in this research. If you decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form, and you will be free to withdraw from the study up until two weeks after the interview without giving a reason.

I would like to interview you about your experiences selling and using dietary supplements. You will be asked about your background as a dietary supplement distributor, and your use of social media within this area. This information will be used to help understand the public health and health behaviour implications of using social media networking as a tool for marketing dietary supplements. I would also be happy to provide you a summary of my research findings.

- The interview will be audio-recorded, notes will be taken and your responses will be typed up.

- Throughout the interview you have the right to decline any answers to the questions without further explanation.
- You may end the interview at any point, and don't need to explain why.
- Your name will be removed from the written notes. Your identity and all the names and places you mention will remain anonymous.
- Information obtained during the research will be treated as confidential and securely stored at University of Huddersfield.
- You can withdraw from the study within a two-week time-frame following the interview.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at:

u1364452@unimail.hud.ac.uk

Or the project supervisor, Dr Timothy Gomersall, Senior Lecturer in Psychology,
University of Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield HD1 3DH

Email: T.Gomersall@hud.ac.uk

Consent form

Marketing dietary supplements through network marketing: a multi-method analysis of user's experience and social media network structures.

Thank you for your consideration to take part in this research project in which you will be interviewed. This form is being presented so you can show that you are willing to be a participant. It is important that you read, understand and sign the consent form. Your contribution to this research is entirely voluntary and you are not obliged in any way to participate. If you have any questions please contact me through email:

u1364452@unimail.hud.ac.uk

I have been fully informed of the nature and aims of this research as outlined in the information sheet provided. ☐

I consent to taking part in the research. ☐

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the research up until two weeks after the interview without giving a reason. ☐

I have had the opportunity to ask any questions I feel are necessary regarding the project. ☐

I give permission for the interview to be recorded using a voice recorder,
and transferred on to a password protected computer. ☐

I give permission for my words to be quoted (by use of pseudonym). ☐

I understand that no person other than the researcher/s and facilitator/s
will have access to the information provided. ☐

I understand that my identity will be protected by the use of pseudonym in the
report and that no written information that could lead to me being identified
will be included in any report. ☐

I understand that my words could be used in published outputs such as
conference papers and articles. ☐

If you are satisfied that you understand the information and are happy to take part in this
project please put a tick in the box aligned to each sentence and print and sign below.

Signed
NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS
Date

Appendix 3 - Pilot and Revised Topic Guide

Pilot Topic Guide

How did you find out about the company you currently distribute for?

Did you buy the products first and then become a distributor, if so, how did you transition?

Can you tell me about the first time you purchased the product?

Do you have a specific routine you follow with the products?

Have you changed any other health behaviours in your life alongside using the products?

Can you tell me a bit about the experience of your first sale?

Do you use social media to promote the products, if so, how?

How have people responded to your role as a network marketer, such as friends and family?

Revised Topic Guide

Please could you tell me a bit about yourself and how you found out about the company you currently distribute for?

How did you find out about the company you currently distribute for?

Did you buy the products first and then become a distributor, if so, how did you transition?

Can you tell me about the first time you purchased the product?

Have you changed any other health behaviours in your life alongside using the products?

Can you tell me a bit about the experience of your first sale?

What about now? How have sales changed from when you first started?

Have you changed any of your distribution techniques since first joining the company?

Do you use social media to promote the products, if so, which platforms?

Please can you provide some detail on how you use social media as a representative?

How did people such as friends and family initially respond to your role as a network marketer?

Has this changed at all, if so, how?

Appendix 4 - Example Interview Transcript

Researcher: Hi, thank you for meeting me today.

Participant: Hi.

R: Do you have any questions about the interview?

P: No.

R: Ok, we can start. So, please could you tell me about how you found out about Forever Living, and what you were doing at that time in your life?

P: Ok, so, urm, I was in the midst of a career, urm, a long term career in health and social care. So, I'd done that for 12 years. Urm, I kind of loved what I did, well I did at first, I actually did love what I did at first, urm, I thought it was very rewarding, urm, and I liked the idea of looking after people and doing things people couldn't do for themselves and helping their independence. But, I've got two children, and at the time my kids were three and... eight... three and eight, and they'd got to the age... it was ok when they was younger because they didn't know any different. They just saw me going out to work and that's what I did, they went to the childminders, they went to school, etc., but, urm, they started... the older they got they started realising mummy weren't there as much as she should be, and other mums picked them up from school, and it weren't nice for them, so that started playing on my heart strings. Facebook was actually, urm, how I found out about Forever, urm, I didn't...I'd never heard of anything about it before, I'd never seen it, I'd never used the products so I wasn't a customer before I joined Forever. I literally did just join it for the business, urm, side of things. It was a post by a lady who lived over the road from me at the time, and she just put something along the lines of 'I'm looking for some people who've got an extra, or a spare, 5 to 10 hours a week who would like a couple hundred pound extra a month', and I thought hmm I'll have a look at it. I'd noticed that she'd done bits and bobs of

things previous to that, but I'd never really took note, never read any of her statuses, I'd never read any of her posts, never really looked at anything. And she'd never asked me about the business, urm, or offered me any products or anything like that. Urm, she wasn't a friend friend, she was a Facebook friend, but our sons were friends. So, urm, that's how I first found out about it on Facebook, on social media, urm, I gave her a message. She then put me in touch with her up line, the lady who introduced her to the business. Urm, I didn't know at this point but Laura, who'd put the status on, wasn't really building a business through it she was just really looking after herself and her regular, like her few regular customers. Urm, taking advantage of the wholesale discount. So, she put me in touch with the business builder of the team at the time, urm, I spoke to Georgina, urm she lived down in Wales, spoke to her on the telephone a few days later, and she basically just said, urm, how amazing it would be, urm, and she sold it to me, there and then on the phone. So I joined Forever on the 14th November 2014 , didn't have a clue, didn't have a clue where to go from there , but yeah that's how I joined.

R: Ok. So how does the system work, do you stock the products or order them when people ask you to?

P: Yeah, so we don't stock anything, it's like supply and demand. Urm, we join with... we have to purchase the products, there's no start-up fee or anything but we've got to buy something, it's a recommendation... you can't recommend something if you haven't tried it.

R: Yeah.

P: So that's how it works, urm, so Forever have actually designed a box that you purchase. You buy this box, it's got, urm, 19 of our best selling products in it, and then it's up to you then what you do with it now. It's designed for you to use, so you get a feel and a benefit from the products, in order to passionately talk about them to people, that's what you do, urm then you're given a wholesale site, and also a retail shop link when you join as well. Urm, so, it's up to you again how you do things, you can order in, urm, like a big, if you had a few customers you'd order a big – ordering off your wholesale site to yourself.

R: Right.

P: Then you distribute it. Or you can send your link, depending on where your customers live, or if they just want to order from your link, you send them a link and they order it and it goes direct to them.

R: Yeah, so did you try the product before you sold it to anyone?

P: Yes, with the box I got.

R: And what did you think of it?

P: I wouldn't have been able to sell anything that I didn't like. Urm, one thing I was very dubious about when I first joined... when I first heard about Forever, like when I first spoke to Georgina on the phone, was the fact that, urm, I can't... I could never imagine myself being a saleswoman. It's never something I've been interested in. it's not something that's caught my eye. Urm, I actually like, sighed, when I heard that that's one side of it, because it's not something that I class myself as being good at, or thought I would be good at, and to be honest, two and half years down the line now, I still don't class myself as being a saleswoman. I recommend... I genuinely recommend brilliant products to my friends and family, and to people on Facebook.

R: Yeah. So, do you use the products regularly? Do you have a routine?

P: Urm, what we do, like what we try and do when we join the business or when our friends and family join the business, we do like a black bin exercise. So you put everything that Forever can replace, urm, we are advised, or, urm, told, that this would be a good idea to do. If you put everything in a black bin liner, put it under your stairs or wherever, in the cupboard, urm, replace it with Forever stuff, and use it for three months to see how you find it. But don't get me wrong, I'm not like, I'm not naïve to think that, urm, or I don't expect anybody to be that naïve to think that I absolutely love every single product. We sell over 350 products, there is products that I've never tried yet, that I wouldn't need for anything because we sell a wide range of different products, so for different ailments, or different,

urm, needs and wants, urm, and different lifestyles. So obviously I've got absolutely no problems with my joints, or anything like that, so there would be no need for me to take any supplements for that. So I haven't tried anything like that. Obviously I have influences in my life, that I know that 'she will benefit from that' 'he will benefit from that', so when they've used it I've used their testimonials to speak to more people about it. So again, and they don't mind recommending my products on social media.

R: Yeah. So do you feel that since you've been using Forever, have you been doing other things on the side that have been healthier, have you changed any other behaviours?

P: Yeah. Urm, it's really strange, I mean my husband is a gym freak, like goes to the gym loads, and he has done since I met him ten years ago. Urm, and he's always tried to get me into it, urm, and he's always tried to... it's just never been something that I've seen as a necessity. Obviously there's quite a few years between me and my husband, so I were being quite a cocky 20 odd year old, thinking I don't need to do that. I can eat what I want, I can drink what I want. As I started Forever at 27, urm, 28, obviously I were knocking on 30's door, so things were a lot harder. Weight started creeping up, obviously two children later, urm, and I actually did need to start looking after myself anyway. On top of that, it helps my business if I use the products. If I represent a healthy lifestyle, if I actually do have a healthy lifestyle... if I was for instance, no offence against anybody that is overweight, or urm doesn't have a healthy lifestyle, but if I was to be like that, trying to recommend health and well-being products, it wouldn't look too great. So obviously I've had to take care of myself, so I do go to the gym now, I eat healthily, my family are a lot healthier. Plus, the supplements that we take on top of that from Forever helps anyway, and it helps...it will help the prevention of things as we do grow older. So yeah I do do the... I drink the drinking gels every day, I take the supplements every day, urm, I take the weight management stuff regularly, urm and I use all the creams and makeup, yeah.

R: So if you're doing that are you encouraging other people and showing them that you use the products yourself.

P: Yeah, I am actually a product of the product. So, like, I think it's probably... I think the last time I worked it out I was using about 26 of our products daily. So obviously there is

products that I'll use every other day, or, urm, every week. So obviously I'll use a face mask once a week or something like that, wash my hair every couple of days using the shampoo and conditioner, but supplements, makeup, skincare, weight management, urm, drinking gels, urm, so obviously if you take them in to items, there's about 20 items that I use absolutely every day.

R: So can you tell me a bit about social media, did you use it right from the beginning to promote the products?

P: Yes. Facebook's my favourite, it's everybody's. Urm, yeah I was already on social media, already on Facebook, I was already on Instagram, urm, before I joined Forever. I did use it for its purpose – to reconnect with people from school to, urm, recommend other things as well, like to show friends and family that live further away my lifestyle, urm, how the kids were getting on, all that sort of stuff. Urm, so yeah I did already use it. Yeah.

R: And so do you feel that you're quite active on Facebook to keep people looking at your profile?

P: Yeah, urm, the main thing in network marketing is attraction marketing. You've got to portray a lifestyle. It's not...you're not lying, you're not bending the truth, you're just representing, urm, what network marketing does for an individual if you use it correctly. So yeah, so obviously my social media's quite a mix. I'll have influxes of, urm, product recommendations, urm, or recruitment if I'm going on a recruitment drive or a retail drive or anything like that, but generally my Facebook is a mix of stuff. So, there'll be the kids on there, there'll be the odd little funny post about the cat, there'll be, urm, the fact that I can work from home, and I can take the kids to school. So we'll do school run selfies and stuff like that, urm, and obviously I've got to represent what I'm trying to attract, if you know what I mean?

R: Yeah, that makes sense.

P: So obviously if... my main, urm, niche I suppose in my business is mums, because I know what this business has done for me. So obviously I make sure that I'm very, urm, active and I

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put on things that I know mums would like. The fact that I'm going to the gym at 10 o'clock in a morning, whereas like most people can't do that, that I'm on the school run, that I'm going to stay and play with my daughter, that I'm at the sports days, that I'm at the cricket matches. They're things that I couldn't do before, so I know how important that is to, especially a mum... mums and dads that can't do that. So that's what I'll put on... things like that to attract them.

R: Yeah. So when you first started it, how did your friends and family react? Were they supportive, or did they not know what to make of it?

P: No. Urm, when I first joined Forever I hosted two parties, two like launches, to, urm, launch my business. Like a business would have an opening day, like a hairdressers would have an opening day, with a ribbon and all that sort of stuff. We did it, but we did it from home. Urm, it was... I did two of them. I did one on the Friday before and one on the Friday after. Urm, I invited friends and family and I thought half a dozen of them would come, urm, and I think more than anything they just came to be nosy. They wanted to know what it was, and what I'd got myself in to. It's not like I'd done anything like this before neither, so that's probably what intrigued them – 'what's she doing?' Urm, they bought things out of, urm, I suppose they felt obliged, they wanted to support me initially, urm, but no, none of them still to this day do not support what I do.

R: Oh, really?

P: No, they don't. It's really, really...urm... it's hard, to still continue to do something like this when everybody that's around you is against you.

R: Why do you think that is?

P: It's because it's not the norm. It's because you've gone against the grain, 'it's not a proper job', 'it's a pyramid scheme', its, urm, 'there's no security', 'where's your contract', all that sort of stuff. You know, like I mean my mum and dad are actually quite, I'm 31 and my mums only just 50 this year, so they are quite young parents for my age, but they're still in

the older generation, where again it's down to conditioning. Everybody just expects you to get a proper job and work, but I mean to be fair if my mum and dad knew how hard I worked... because I don't tend to talk about it now. They know what I do, they don't...they don't support it. Urm, they would rather me go out and get a proper job. They'd be happy with that, but they don't diss me, urm but they just let me get on with it and I just... I'd rather not talk to them about it.

R: Right, yeah. So even though you've been doing it so long, has it got better? Has no one thought you're doing well, and become more supportive?

P: No. I think... it's really... it's not very nice to say, but I think that they're sat there waiting for it to fall, so they can go 'I told you so'. Urm, so that's quite hard. So obviously... but for me, because of the type of person that I am, it makes me work harder.

R: You want to prove them wrong?

P: Yeah. I will never quit this. That's one of the main reasons, I need to prove them wrong. My husband on the other hand was completely the opposite. He still now doesn't completely understand the business, urm, he's actually in the business himself as well, and he does... he can work it, urm, but the thing is with him its... he's got no desire to work it around what he's already doing because, urm, in his head I'm better at it than he is so I'll make our millions, sort of thing, with that and he'll continue to support me behind the scenes until we get there, so he works, he keeps our head above water as far as that's concerned, with the consistent, urm, income coming in and he looks after the children when I need to go out and do stuff. He's completely and utterly supportive, yeah.

R: That's good.

P: So that's all I need really. I think it would've been different if he'd been unsupportive, it would've been a lot harder living with someone. You can't ignore it can you?

R: No. So obviously from what you've said you're going to carry on doing it, you wouldn't do anything else?

P: No. I cannot imagine ever doing anything else, and that goes for the company as well. I would never... I mean I get messages all the time from other network marketing companies, and not that I'm dissing any of them, it's just... Forever are perfect for me. I were really lucky, because I know a lot of people that joined network marketing aren't lucky enough to find the right company for them the first time round. So they have to do a little bit of company hopping, urm, to find their place I suppose. But Forever, luckily for me, is the right company for me and I can't imagine doing anything else.

R: Yeah. So, can we just go back to when you first started? What were your first sales like? Was it more family or were there general people?

P: So, my first sales were obviously family supporting me, my very first sales. Urm, and then it came from... 99% of my business is built on Facebook. I'm not going to lie. I mean, it's not, it's not recommended from, urm, the companies, that we like put everything on social media because it can be classed as spamming... you can annoy people, some people don't want to see it. But the way I look at it, I mean I don't spam anybody, it's genuine, people come to me more than anything, I just... I think if you get it right, and there's lots of material out there to help you get it right, urm, YouTube videos, courses that you can take... social media courses that you can take. Urm, we're lucky in the fact that the team that I'm in, we get a lot of outside training, we get a lot of outside trainers in to work with us on social media or, stuff like that. So if you've got it right you won't ever have to spam anybody. So, as long as you are putting things out there... and I do, and that's what's happened with me, so, urm, on the back of a post being put up I can get two or three messages about either the products or the recruitment side of things. Urm, so that's how I've built it, so yeah, random people. And I've built my network on Facebook, and social media... all social medias, since I joined Forever. Because obviously our aim is to network, so like, I've come here today and I'll normally sit down and speak to other people. It's the same as doing it online. I can speak to ten times more people online in the same amount of time than I can face to face. Now, I'm not saying, I'm not dissing face to face networking because it's... it 100% needs to be done, and I do do it all. You couldn't ever rely just on Facebook, or social media, you would have to go out and do usual face to face, telephone calls, all the stuff that was there... I mean Forever is 40 years

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old next year. So, social media's not been about for that long so people have been building like six figure incomes before Facebook even... before telephones even came along. They were knocking on doors, you know, and speaking to people in the street. So, urm, that is the true authenticity of network marketing, of networking with people, but I think moving with the times is what we all need to do, and we do need to use social media but very effectively, and in the right way. So yeah, random people.

R: Do you feel that you've made friends through other network marketers, do you ever meet up as groups?

P: Yeah, definitely. Urm, I'm not one of those network marketers who are like dissing other companies, I will pat anybody on the back that gets themselves in to network marketing, that makes that jump, that makes that leap. Whether it's Juice Plus, whether it's Younique, whether it's another network marketing company. Urm, not, and I don't, urm, I won't say I won't buy from any other companies either. I mean, just for instance the other week, urm, at a business meeting – I go to networking meetings – so, again face to face, and I've met, I've got friends that are in Norwex, is it Norwex? Yeah, Norwex, urm, a company that sells household stuff. I've got cloths, body cloths, face cloths from them, urm, I have got lipstick from Avon, like MAC lipstick from Avon that I don't... that we don't sell. So anything that... I would rather, what I do, if I'm looking for something in particular, I'll go on Facebook. Any of that, like candles, I won't go to a shop and buy, I'll buy from Candlelight, I would rather buy from somebody else that's doing network marketing. Jewellery, I love Stella and Dot jewellery, that's another network marketing company. I have got a friend that does Stella and Dot, yeah so I'll use her. I'd rather use her, I'd rather give the profit to her and that household, for her kids, for her future, than these big companies, so yeah, I think it's the future. Definitely.

R: Yeah. Right, I think that's it. Thank you so much for your time!

Appendix 6 - Example NodeXL Table

An example of the metrics from a social media analysis including the word 'Herbalife', in-degree, out-degree, betweenness centrality and closeness centrality. The in-degree has been set to show 'largest to smallest', demonstrating the highest number of retweets belonging to each user.

In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality
332	1	218717.500	0.001
111	1	87415.206	0.001
108	2	41584.360	0.001
43	2	46500.000	0.000
35	1	1122.000	0.029
25	3	5903.719	0.001
11	1	3001.000	0.001
8	1	42.000	0.143
5	1	12.000	0.250
5	1	12.000	0.250
5	1	12.000	0.250
4	1	6.000	0.333
4	0	12.000	0.250
3	1	998.000	0.000
3	1	2.000	0.500
3	0	2.000	0.200
3	0	2.000	0.200
2	1	0.000	1.000
2	1	0.000	1.000
2	1	0.000	1.000
2	1	0.000	1.000
2	1	1.000	0.000

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