Beckoning "Boss Babes:" Examining Mary Kay's Online Recruitment Rhetoric

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This essay critically examines the rhetoric that multi-level marketing (MLM) companies use online to recruit independent salespeople. By using a selection of Mary Kay Inc.'s webpages as a case study, I analyze persuasive tactics in the text through the lens of Charland's constitutive rhetoric and argue that these tactics, through seemingly well intentioned, are steeped with manipulative ideological underpinnings. By constituting audiences, MLMs like Mary Kay Inc. are making use of pervasive systems in society to their advantage, using entrepreneurialism, smashing the patriarchy, and spiritualism to develop second personas for their target audience and encouraging them to join their organization. This bleeding the line between social and economic spheres not only increases the company's bottom line, but also makes virtual visitors believe that they have been a part of the organization all along through the company's online call. While other scholars and journalists have noted that MLMs are often highly manipulative in recruiting practices, this essay, through borrowing a method originally used to better understand political rhetoric, can shed light on how such manipulation is done, and why it might be especially persuasive for its target audience.

Introduction

Multi-level marketing networks have changed the economic and social landscapes both nationally and worldwide. While a separation between work and home has culturally, in the United States, been the expected norm, companies that make millions by recruiting people to sell directly to friends and neighbors have caused this once definite line to blur. Starting with charismatic door-to-door encyclopedia salesmen, and evolving into Tupperware parties that gather dozens of women over hors d'oeuvres and wine, network marketing tactics have grown and developed to keep up with ever-changing social trends (Biggart, 1989). Now in the digital landscape of the twenty-first century, the independent salesforce that defines multi-level marketing companies has turned to new tools to sell their goods outside of its immediate geographic location.

While social media and other online contexts are helping independent salespeople sell their wares, it also helps them tap into another money-making resource: recruitment. Virtual contexts enable multi-level marketing companies to cast a wider net in attracting new salespeople all over the world. No longer does one have to be recruited by a salesperson in real life to join a multi-level marketing company, instead they can learn from and connect with salespeople virtually. Company websites are rich with persuasive appeals on the life-changing aspects of starting a career or side hustle in network marketing.

Although it appears that these appeals are considering the genuine interests of the recruit when taken at face value, looking closer, it seems there is much more than meets the eye. Through the use of rhetorical criticism methods, this research will examine the history and context of these companies, identify current literature related to multi-level marketing in online contexts, and analyze the online recruitment rhetoric of one of the largest multi-level marketing companies in the world, to bring to light the hidden persuasive forces that beckon new independent salespeople. Additionally, this research will examine the ethical considerations associated with this type of rhetoric and discuss the importance of continuing research on these types of communication.

Literature Review

Multi-level marketing companies (MLMs) have several different names including direct sales, network marketing, and business network sales (Marie, 2018a). While they go by several names, there are

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a few identifying factors that categorize MLMs specifically. First, MLMs are a type of organization that falls within the larger group of direct sales organizations (DSOs). While DSOs are interchanged with MLMs frequently, they represent a larger pool of businesses. DSOs have historically been face-to-face salespeople, selling products outside a fixed business location, like door-to-door salespeople or telemarketers. MLMs, on the other hand, are a specific type of DSO that also incorporates recruitment into their business structure (Biggart, 1989). Companies such as Amway, Tupperware, Mary Kay, and LuLaRoe, for example, not only use this structure to sell a variety of goods outside of a brick-and-mortar store, but also recruit a global workforce. In this business model, salespeople in MLMs get a commission from selling products or services they purchase at wholesale and can also increase their profit margins by recruiting others into purchasing bulk orders at a better rate, receiving royalties from the sales of those in their "downline," or people they recruit, and getting commissions for recruiting people who are effective recruiters themselves (Biggart, 1989).

Recruitment, therefore, plays a huge role in MLMs and looks vastly different from recruiting strategies of typical business firms. While traditional firms seek experienced candidates to bring in outside talent and expertise, as well as increase retention rates, MLMs are less concerned with candidates' previous work background and qualifications. Instead, these organizations largely recruit people with little to no experience in selling (Biggart, 1989). Instead of searching for demonstrated skill or talent, recruiters typically look within their social circles, looking for people who will see the recruitment process as building relationships (Marie, 2018a). Recruiters frame joining MLMs as an opportunity to do more than make money, but more importantly develop relationships through mentorship and find a fulfilling purpose in life (Marie, 2018b).

Many MLMs are also tied closely to religion and use these appeals to further captivate their workforce. Organizations like Thirty-One Gifts and Young Living Essential Oils have strong connections to Christianity with their mission, vision, and values (Thirty-One Gifts, n.d.; Young Living Essential Oils, n.d.). Even MLMs that have looser ties to religion still tap into its ideologies with mantras such as Mary Kay's "God first, family second, career third" (Ash & Pendelton, 2008 p. 128). People selling for MLMs report having reaffirmed their faith through participating in MLMs and find that participation is not solely about money, but the way that they can serve God and their community through the organization (Luca, 2011).

These emotional, relational, and sometimes spiritual appeals are especially persuasive toward women. With 75% of women making up direct sellers in the United States (Direct Selling Association, 2018), it is clear that this type of organization is attractive to women in particular. Since the beginning of direct selling and MLMs, women have been the primary focus both as customers and salespeople. Once men came back to their factory jobs after World War II, women were seeking acceptable ways to find empowerment (Biggart, 1989). MLMs ended up not only being a lucrative opportunity but the only opportunity for women to work and still maintain duties at home. With MLMs, women were able to gain autonomy and flexibility and also receive social rewards through their participation. Women could receive mentorship from other women, coordinate fun social events, and climb ranks through MLMs, blending the line between public life and home life into a rewarding and fulfilling experience for many. Not unintentionally, it also allowed MLMs to tap into a women-powered workforce that would accept lower pay and have fertile social networks that would yield substantial sales (Marie, 2018b).

Those who have studied MLMs in detail, however, are wary of this organizational structure because of two of its foundational principles: endless chain and prosperity thinking. The endless chain refers to the idea that there is an unlimited supply of people to recruit. With recruits having to incur risk by literally buying into the MLM system with kits, training, etc. it is assumed that they will eventually make their money back and earn substantial profits by recruiting others. However, it is mathematically false that there will always be a pool of people to recruit; eventually, someone is going to be at the end of the chain who has to foot the bill. This is precisely the reason that MLMs are sometimes regarded as pyramid schemes. Following the same principle, pyramid and Ponzi schemes draw recruits in by insisting that there will always be people to recruit when this is not the case, causing the people on the top of the pyramid to reap huge rewards while those on the bottom encounter the financial strain (Koehn, 2001). With prosperity

thinking, people are persuaded by the idea that if they work hard enough and are moral, the economic system will enable them to prosper (Haller, 2012). While it sounds good and well-intentioned, this type of thinking is credited for what ultimately caused such failures as the 2008 housing crisis (Marie, 2018a). There is no guarantee that solely from working hard and being a good person, you are guaranteed wealth, but it is this mindset that is ingrained and promoted throughout MLMs as a whole (Koehn, 2001). The connection between MLMs and pyramid schemes is further strengthened by the rate at which sellers lose money. According to a 2011 Consumer Awareness Institute study, a staggering 99.6% of MLM sellers have lost money through direct selling (Taylor). Additionally, 95% of direct sellers quit within the first 10 years (Taylor, 2011), demonstrating the dissonance between the promises of prosperity thinking and the reality of finding success within these businesses.

Despite aspects that are found to be questionable through the lens of research, MLMs and direct sales are a large part of the American economy. There are a reported 6.2 million direct sellers in the United States as of 2018, accounting for $35.4 billion in retail sales (Direct Selling Association, 2018). While there are benefits outside of financial gains for those associated with MLMs, the organizational structure heavily financially favors those who recruit, forming a hierarchical structure.

To better understand this phenomenon, this research will focus on one of the leading MLMs that also primarily focuses on women: Mary Kay Inc. This organization, like other MLMs, is driven largely through recruitment and relationships between women. For more than five decades, Beauty Consultants and Sales Directors, the lifeblood of Mary Kay Inc.'s independent salesforce, operate retail businesses in nearly 40 markets worldwide (Mary Kay Inc., n.d.a). Founded in 1963 by Mary Kay Ash, a former network salesperson herself, Mary Kay Inc. is an organization that does more than sell skincare products, but also offers "unlimited opportunities to women" first and foremost. (Ash & Pendleton, 2008, p. xxiv). By using self-instructional material from newsletters, magazines, manuals, classroom study, and firsthand experience guided by trusted mentors, new Beauty Consultants are indoctrinated with Mary Kay culture and ideology (Ash & Pendleton, 2008). Now, materials have also moved online to digital portals where Beauty Consultants and Sales Directors can access and manage sales data, goal tracking, recognition, tutorials, news, and more from www.marykay.com (Ash & Pendleton, 2008).

The company website is also where prospective recruits can get more information about joining the Mary Kay independent sales force. By clicking "Sell Mary Kay" at the top banner of the website, users are welcomed with information about becoming a Beauty Consultant and are prompted to connect with a local Sales Director or Beauty Consultant. The page also links out to a campaign entitled One Women Can ®, a campaign that has been in place in some form as early as 2013 with the "One Woman Can" Makeover Contest, part of Mary Kay's 50th-anniversary celebration (Mary Kay Inc., 2013). This campaign features seven videos of current Mary Kay consultants telling personal stories about their experiences with the company.

While scholars have examined multi-level marketing companies and online persuasion in communication scholarship, there is a great opportunity to learn more about these companies and their newer recruitment strategies through the lens of rhetorical criticism. The following sections will examine the current academic landscape related to these topics and address areas in which MLMs and their rhetorical strategies might be examined further.

Multi-Level Marketing in Research

Several studies have been conducted on multi-level marketing companies, or similarly structured, alternatively named companies. What we see with this collection of studies are the ways that MLMs frame their organization towards their independent salesforce. Many of these studies analyze the way that companies and salespeople co-construct identities, including how companies construct legitimacy, by highlighting entrepreneurism to attract recruits (Carl, 2004). When a salesperson's personal beliefs of need for autonomy, flexibility achievement, and success match with the discourse of the organization, the salesperson tends to identify closely with the organization and brand, and are thus more tied to the organization (Carl, 2004). Organizations and salespeople also co-construct dreams centered around

personal goals related to family, altruism, etc. (Pratt, 2000). By presenting themselves as a more enlightened and accommodating way to do business, MLMs distance themselves from traditional business models and focus their organizational structure around the success of the individual rather than the company (Pratt, 2000). Scholars have continued to explore how this business structure can ultimately turn the salesperson into the primary commodity of the company (Kong, 2001). It appears through these studies that not only do MLMs distance themselves from hierarchical business practices by feeding on the dissatisfaction of bureaucracy, they also can position themselves as altruistic and power-free (Kong, 2001). While prioritizing individual autonomy makes these organizations seem altruistic, they serve the ends of the organization (Kong, 2001). Salespeople are not owners of their own business like they might feel; they are similarly serving the ends of their MLM like any other retail company (Kong, 2001). This leads to questions about the ethical nature of MLMs, as their organizational structure directly opposes the perceived benefits of direct sellers, prioritizing the company over individuals.

As discussed previously, data demonstrates that MLMs are heavily gendered, being largely made of and for women. MLMs, and particularly women-centric MLMs like Mary Kay, seem to be a haven for entrepreneurial-minded women who are seeking to overcome obstacles. By finding a network inside of MLMs, it appears that these women are provided with the empowerment that they seek. Through pamphlets, conferences, and other media, Mary Kay not only encourages the relational and entrepreneurial aspects of MLMs, but also embeds conflicting ideals of femininity and feminism (Banks & Zimmerman, 1987). Mary Kay includes messaging that reinforces the stereotype of the female realm being in the home but also co-opts liberal feminist ideals of upward mobility (Banks & Zimmerman, 1987). It appears that this intermingle of traditionally conflicting ideologies creates a site where women are limitless with their entrepreneurial ambitions but can do so with the flexibility that enables them to care for their families and home. With white women entrepreneurs, in particular, the paradox of constraints and achievements is what ultimately creates a sense of empowerment (Gill & Ganesh, 2007). Finding the much-needed support, autonomy, and flexibility in a patriarchal landscape is a great obstacle for women seeking fulfillment (Gill & Gensesh, 2007).

Other researchers have examined the way hyper-femininity and luxury are promoted in Mary Kay culture through makeup, furs, diamonds, and the iconic pink Cadillac, solidifying the concept of the "ideal woman" as a mask when analyzing May Kay through cultural and performative lenses. By creating an "aesthetic of excess," the MLM can deconstruct and destabilize the patriarchal ideal woman, making it clear that this ideal is nothing more than a facade. Therefore, making gender central to the concept of Mary Kay, with this frame, is not co-opting liberal feminist ideals, but rather turns feminism on its head (Waggoner, 1997).

Internet Persuasion Research

Already there have been foundational research on the importance of the internet in businesses and analysis of the recruiting efforts of traditional businesses. Findings through analyzing the online recruitment tactics of Fortune 500 companies lay out an interesting framework of how these organizations create "movements of persuasion" through three levels of content (Young & Foot, 2005). Multimedia additions in particular, such as employee testimonials, have been found to create more credibility and attraction among internet users (Walker et al, 2009). In the context of retail sales, scholars find that audio/visual content performs better among browsers as opposed to text and images on these sorts of persuasive web pages (Appiah, 2006).

Based on available scholarship related to the matter, researchers undoubtedly find it important to study online contexts. While much rhetorical criticism is focused on works that have audiences interacting linearly and predictably, websites are more challenging. Two opposing forces, centrifugal and centripetal, cause the website viewer to go through the information hierarchically, from start to finish, and a dispersive way, moving along the page out of order (Warnick, 2005). These forces, while making it challenging for rhetorical critics, also pose an opportunity for new and inventive insight into the field according to scholars

(Warnick, 2005). Likewise, academics have identified websites as gateways through which organizations commonly interact and make impressions on their audience. One such study concludes:

> Websites are on-stage work areas where a performance is given to an actual or implied audience of potential customers, employees, suppliers, partners, and regulators . . . they provide frames of symbolic representations that inform and lure these potential stakeholders in to take a closer look. (Winter et al., 2003, p. 311)

Understanding online texts in this way, therefore, appears to open the door to analyzing websites through a rhetorical lens; they seem to have the same components such as audience, symbolic representation, and persuasion tactics that are frequently the focus for other rhetorical works such as presidential addresses.

Justification for Current Research

While the above scholarship helps us understand key components of MLMs, gender, recruitment strategies, and online persuasion, we must be aware of the limitations of these works and what new scholarship might do to address these gaps. All of the articles that address MLMs and business practices of firms are well over ten years old, (Carl, 2004; Kong, 2001; Pratt, 2000; Gill & Ganesh, 2007), some are even over 20 years (Waggoner, 1997) or 30 years old (Banks & Zimmerman, 1987). Even articles covering the internet and persuasion, though covering modern topics, are dated over ten years ago (Yong & Foot, 2005; Walker et al, 2009; Appiah, 2006; Warnick, 2005; Winter et al., 2005). With the speed of technological advances and the evolution of the internet and social media use in society, it is important to consistently address this type of work as rhetorical persuasion strategies and tactics in this sphere are constantly changing and adapting. Understanding how more advanced technology, situated in this time and place, will enable scholars to track these changes to better understand what the future of online persuasion (and other technologically mediated persuasions) might look like, and how it will impact audiences.

Likewise, although there are studies that encapsulate a variety of aspects related to MLMs including identity construction (Carl, 2004; Pratt, 2000), framing tactics (Kong, 2001), and gender roles (Banks & Zimmerman, 1987; Waggoner, 1997), they do not address recruitment strategies of women specifically. Scholarship on recruitment is more heavily discussed through the lens of the traditional firm (Young & Foot, 2005; Walker et al, 2009; Gill & Gensesh, 2007), and with the structure of MLMs being vastly different, it is unclear how well these works carry over. Therefore, there is a clear path in which scholarship can go to address these gaps; examining MLMs through their online recruitment contexts via rhetorical criticism has the potential to lead into an interesting and underrepresented field of vision.

Method

In this research study, we will explore Mary Kay's MLM by examining how its recruitment websites operate as constitutive rhetoric. Considered as a method of rhetorical criticism, such investigation is a way of analyzing how audiences are "hailed" and ultimately co-create the persuasive discourse that is targeted toward them, contributing to a larger narrative rooted in a perceived historical context that is co-constructed by the rhetor and intended audience. The following section will briefly cover the foundational literature and concepts of the constitutive method, provide examples of how this method has been successful in gaining insight into other research, argue how the method fits with rhetorical criticism generally, and within the specific context of Mary Kay's online recruitment rhetoric, and define steps for analysis.

Maurice Charland (1987) develops the constitutive rhetoric method from Kenneth Burke's (1969) idea that identification can serve as an alternative to persuasion as a subject of rhetorical inquiry. Charland (1987) demonstrates how rhetoric can create the means possible to create a new target audience, calling forth a group of receptive participants by way of interpellation. Through interpellation, an audience member recognizes herself as being addressed in the rhetoric and actively participates in the discourse, adopting what Edwin Black (1970) terms the "second persona." Rhetorical critics have utilized Charland's constitutive rhetoric to analyze a variety of texts and audiences. Along with the original study on "peuple Québécois," researchers have adopted the method in other political and historical contexts, including the

analysis of Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (Leff & Utley, 2004), women senator's legislative rhetoric (McGowan-Kirsch, 2019), and the Canadian suffragette movement (Thieme, 2010). It has also been used in the corporate sphere to explore marketing strategy (Stein, 2002) and corporate stewardship (Hanan, 2013; Smith, 2000). Constitutive rhetoric, furthermore, has been used by researchers to analyze rhetoric online through media such as Twitter (Woo et al., 2020) and blogs (Perks, 2015).

Researchers, like the ones listed above, find the constitutive rhetoric method particularly useful because of its ability to engage with texts in a way that highlights its ability to create new identities that have seemed to have always existed and construct narratives with these identities, creating depth of context to justify future actions. While some academics believe that rhetoric is called into being by the situation (Bitzer, 1968), this method is fueled by the constructive power of rhetoric and identifies not only how the rhetor is creating and defining audiences, but how the audience, also, in turn, engages and constructs their new identity. It is a useful way for researchers to engage with a text without missing the crucial involvement of evolving discourse; they can get a glimpse of the here and now of a rhetorical moment by examining the context of what it took to get to this rhetorical moment, and predict what it might mean for the future. Constitutive rhetoric can additionally serve in an advocacy context for research as well, shedding light on how rhetors persuade or manipulate audiences to take a certain action. Understanding the ideological tricks that these rhetors use can illuminate power imbalances and spark discussions on the ethical nature of such rhetorical means (Charland, 1987).

This method, therefore, is particularly useful within the context of MLMs and Mary Kay's recruitment, as we can take what we understand to be the constructed context of the moment, and apply it to how MLM corporations can persuasively define their target audience of recruits. By looking deeper into these subtle and pervasive forces, we can unearth clues within the text to determine how corporations are using these structures to have their audiences persuade themselves into joining their cause. While we might only be getting a glimpse into what is happening in this specific time and place, a better understanding of the construction of identities that MLMs help create is important in understanding the powerful hold that these groups have on our society and help us wrestle with the question of whether this control is within society's best interests.

Drawn from the work of Charland, and those who have built upon his work, the following sequenced series of questions, will act as a guide for textual analysis:

a. Who appears to be gathered as the target audience for this text?
b. How is the audience being invited to see themselves? What "second persona" are they meant to adopt?
c. Which ideologies/structures inform the audience to identify this way? How do these ideologies/structures make themselves present in the text?
d. What paradoxes are revealed with how the text invites the audience and assumes it already exists?
e. How is the audience called to act? How does this perpetuate the continuation of the identity?

As a final piece to the analysis, there must also be a discussion about the ethical nature of the rhetoric. As Charland (1987) notes, because of the cyclic nature of constitutive rhetoric, with text both being informed by past context and future action, critics must consider how previous and current texts might reach beyond the realm of an audience's free choice. Therefore, as a final consideration in the analysis, we must engage with the ethical nature of the text; to what extent does the audience self-select themselves to participate in this identity?

With this particular artifact, analyzing textual clues will determine the ideal target audience for Mary Kay's online recruitment strategy. Pulling examples from the two primary recruitment web pages and seven embedded videos will then construct a full picture of how the audience is invited to see themselves and tie it to key ideologies that make themselves present. Next, the study will address the paradoxes related to how the text creates this "second persona" and how it assumes its prior existence before examining how the audience is called by the corporation to act to propel this identity. Finally, the research will conclude with a discussion about the ethicality of this constitutive rhetoric.

Analysis

This analysis will address the series of five sequenced questions posed in the previous section by reviewing key quotes and observations from the text. By taking this course of action, it will be revealed how Mary Kay Inc. is constituting a rhetorical audience and creating a means for the audience to act on their identity.

Who Appears to be Gathered as the Target Audience for this Text?

By looking for textual clues on Mary Kay's landing page, "Sell Mary Kay," we can begin to develop a profile for the ideal audience member for Mary Kay Inc.'s online recruitment. While virtual visitors are greeted with information regarding the Independent Beauty Consultant program through this page, the last heading states the target audience most clearly; Mary Kay was "Started by a Woman, for Women" (Mary Kary Inc., n.d.b, para 7). Mary Kay specifically names women as being the key demographic for its target audience and continues to describe the ideal audience member throughout the rest of the page in a more subtle way. The company exclaims, "You've got dreams. Whether it's earning a little extra cash or making a full-time commitment, the Mary Kay opportunity offers the freedom, flexibility, and, of course, the fun that you've been looking for" (Mary Kay Inc, n.d.b, para 4). Through this quote, we can better understand more about the type of women that Mary Kay Inc. is after, someone who is goal-orientated but needs or desires some kind of support that they are unable to find elsewhere. Mary Kay is looking for women that have a void that needs to be filled (whether that void is constructed by herself or revealed by Mary Kay), whether it be the need for financial freedom, a flexible schedule, or a reason to get out of the house and socialize.

Even more subtly, Mary Kay Inc. describes its target audience by having virtual visitors form identifying links between themselves and the current Independent Sales Force. The company sparks this identification of their online audience through the text, "[t]he prizes and perks are fabulous, and nothing beats the encouragement and empowerment you receive from other women like you" (Mary Kay Inc., n.d.b, para 4). By using the phrase "women like you," the audience is called to draw comparisons between their identity and the identity of the Beauty Consultant that is portrayed on the website. On this page specifically, this is done primarily through imagery; photos of happy women grace the audience's screens. Women are smiling, are wearing confidence-boosting makeup (primarily brightly colored lipstick), and are embracing friends and family. Mary Kay's target audience therefore can be summed up as people who see themselves as confident and capable women with busy lives, looking for an opportunity to reach a new dream, or women who aspire to see themselves in this way.

How is the Audience Being Invited to See Themselves?

While the target audience likely already identifies herself as a woman outside of the context of this webpage, other aspects of the ideal Mary Kay consultant are constituted within this artifact to create a "second persona" (Black, 1970) that virtual visitors can easily slip into and adopt as easily as a pink Sales Director jacket. On the landing page, virtual visitors are greeted with a flashy name for this persona with the bold, headline text "Be a Boss Babe!" (Mary Kay Inc., n.d.b, para 1). This title, in conjunction with the imagery, enables the target audience to better understand what a "Boss Babe" is. Juxtaposed with the smiling, beautiful women that are in the arms of their loved ones, there is also imagery related to luxury including the esteemed pink Cadillac, designer handbags, and golden office decor. Women are invited to examine what their life could look like with Mary Kay, filled with family, friends, luxury, and happiness all at once, painting a picture that a Mary Kay "Boss Babe" has it all.

These images are further reinforced through active-verb statements that call the reader to further visualize herself as a Mary Kay "Boss Babe." Mary Kay encourages visitors to their website to "[p]ut

yourself in the driver's seat with an opportunity to earn the use of a Mary Kay Career Car, one of the best-in-class car incentive programs in the world" (Mary Kay Inc., n.d.b, para 4). By "putting themselves in the driver's seat" Mary Kay is asking its audience to adopt this second persona of a "Boss Babe" by imagining themselves owning and using the luxury powder pink cars that elegantly wheel through the browser window and appear to be the cause of the women's elated expressions. Having the audience think through this scenario helps them embody this persona and enables them to adopt the identity and emotions tied to being a Mary Kay "Boss Babe."

Women are encouraged to learn more about this second persona by clicking through to the "Real Voices" page that is linked to the landing page by the phrase "One Woman Can Pursue Her Dreams." On this secondary page, the audience encounters seven testimonial videos[1] highlighting the experiences of women that serve as Mary Kay's "Boss Babe" role models. At the top of the page, browsers are welcomed with the text:

> One Woman Can … make an impact, change lives, drive her dreams, give others hope, take that dream vacation. Thousands of women have discovered what their Mary Kay businesses can do to design the lives they want. These women share their personal stories to inspire you to have your own "can-do" success. (Mary Kay Inc., n.d.c, para 1)

With this text, women get a fuller, more elaborate description of what a Mary Kay "Boss Babe" means for the audience personally. When the audience adopts this persona, as thousands of women have done before, she has the opportunity to not only make her life change for the better, but to improve the lives of others. Seemingly selfish, life-changing aspects of living a more luxurious life by going on lavish vacations and driving fancy cars are intertwined by higher ideals like improving the community and taking care of her family to enforce the idea that a "Boss Babe" does not have to choose one or the other, but can do both. They are not limited solely to being presented with the vision of life that is expected through traditional gender norms but instead are invited to construct their reality with the help of Mary Kay, consequentially gaining freedom and autonomy while also maintaining a family.

Which Ideologies/Structures Inform the Audience to Identify this Way?

The "Real Voices" page is also rich with clues about the ideologies and structures that inform the target audience constituted identity of "Boss Babe." The videos and text on these webpages are littered with examples of how entrepreneurialism, patriarchy, and spirituality play major roles in enabling the target audience to identify with this "Boss Babe" persona and tap into persuasive emotional appeals.

Entrepreneurialism

Entrepreneurialism plays a significant role in how the "Boss Babe" role models describe their success with Mary Kay. In Video 3, the narrator discusses her experience becoming a top sales director:

> I woke up one day and I thought I might be able to do this. And that's when I decided to treat my business like a business instead of just something fun I could do to make $100…The beautiful thing about Mary Kay is that you don't always have to go hard. You can work your business any way that you want. I really needed to spend 12 months in the full Mary Kay year like I know how to work and not just pick and choose the months that I was going to work. And that's when I really saw my business explode. (Video 3, 1:05-1:40)

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[1] With the way that the "Real Voices" web page was laid out and videos embedded, there was no clear or pre-existing scheme to label or reference these videos with in-text citations. To distinguish and cite quotes from these videos, the author labeled the videos Video 1-7, starting from the upper left video and moving to the right and downward. The following sections will cite video quotations in format (Video X, timestamp of the quote), i.e. (Video 3, 1:05-1:40).

With this excerpt, we can see how entrepreneurialism is idealized by enabling the narrator to become financially successful through putting on the "Boss Babe" persona and dedicating her time and energy to Mary Kay. The more time and effort she puts into the business, the more rewards she can reap, gaming the free enterprise system. Hard work is correlated with earnings; while you don't *have* to put in the full-time hours as she does, she attributes making a larger profit to working more hours and dedicating her time and energy to selling Mary Kay. Where a salaried position a person gets paid the same no matter the energy or effort, Mary Kay "Boss Babes" use their entrepreneurial drive to make as much money as they are willing to go for within the capitalist system. She continues later saying, "I knew in Mary Kay that the harder I worked, the faster I would grow and live the life that I was looking to live" (Video 3, 1:52-1:57). Entrepreneurialism here gives her the ability and opportunity to pursue her dreams and become her ideal self by giving her flexibility and autonomy in her career. She is directly responsible for her success; no one is limiting the amount of effort she puts in beside herself.

Entrepreneurialism also helps inform the target audience when narrators draw direct comparisons to corporate America. The Narrator in Video 4 describes her experiences moving between Mary Kay and corporate America:

> An opportunity came around where I was given a position at a gas marketing firm. And I thought you know what, I'm going to take time and step away from Mary Kay. Here I was in corporate America with an amazing opportunity, but then I found after the honeymoon stage, people were just unhappy. And I was coming from Mary Kay and happy all the time…You know, when we see a lot of women that are stuck in a nine to five, they're stuck in that same old, same. And I share with them about the Mary Kay opportunity and how it can help to build their confidence. (Video 4, 0:30-2:40)

Here, the entrepreneurial system of Mary Kay is classified as fostering happiness and freedom as compared to a stifling corporate America where workers are unhappy with their restrictions. She characterizes the entrepreneurial aspects of Mary Kay as confidence-boosting, further reinforcing the fact that this type of business is more about developing people rather than the company's bottom line, and the people that work for Mary Kay are better off because of that.

Smashing the Patriarchy

Smashing the patriarchy is another distinguishing ideology that makes itself present in the testimonials of the current Mary May "Boss Babes." The narrator in Video 2 discusses one of the major effects that the patriarchy has on women and the way that Mary Kay addresses it:

> I had always wanted to be in the dental field and I thought it was a career of a lifetime being a dental hygienist but Mary Kay came into my life. You know as a hygienist there wasn't a lot of room for growth. It felt like all the time when I was there, I was building the doctor's goals and dreams, when I really could be building my own…I made that transition and quit dental hygiene and never looked back. I ended up using my first use of a pink Cadillac months later. (Video 2, 0:03-0:45)

Here, patriarchal forces are present in the account of the narrator not being able to break through the glass ceiling and move up in her career. Mary Kay in this scenario was able to allow her to break past the ceiling and become successful as a "Boss Babe." This classic patriarchal limitation is familiar to many working women and is instantly recognizable within the narrator's story. Mary Kay, therefore, can use this patriarchal shorthand to demonstrate how the company can help its audience overcome this obstacle.

Smashing the patriarchy is also prevalent in how some narrators address the roles of their spouses within their business. The narrator in Video 1 details her situation with this account:

> As I was growing my business, I had some challenges that we, as Latin women, know exist and experience in our homes. I was expecting to get a lot of support from my spouse, but sometimes because they love us, they don't want to see us struggle. In some ways that was one of my biggest challenges. When I was becoming more determined and successful in this business, I became a little discouraged since I wanted my significant

other to support my growth in this business…Mary Kay's Top Sales Director trip has been a great miracle in my life because my husband turned the TV on at the hotel, my name was on the screen. It was such a wonderful thing! He yelled, "Hey! Come see your name on the screen!" He was so delighted. He never imagined that the woman by his side was one of the top Latinas on this trip, in the whole country. (Video 1, 0:19- 1:50)

Here, instead of the patriarchal forces enacting themselves in the workplace, we are shown how they also take place in the home. Again, these forces are familiar to women and this story shows that not only is Mary Kay able to address issues of patriarchy in the workplace but also helps with the hierarchical structures in the household. Women can earn a substantial living and earn the buy-in from their husbands. What is interesting with this idea, however, is how, despite the patriarchy being addressed in a way that seems to overcome the hierarchical system at home, this video, and others that accompany it, nonetheless reinforce the idea that women are and should be the ones that care for their families. While mothers can now help provide for their families, they nonetheless should also be the ones to make sure that they are cared for at home. The narrator in Video 7, for example, states:

Before Mary Kay, I commuted 100 miles a day, worked 60 hours a week. My oldest at the time was going to go into kindergarten and I didn't know how I would be able to drop her off, work, and pick her up. I didn't know how people did that. (0:22-0:37)

While it doesn't seem an issue for the narrator of this video to work outside the home, there is the underlying expectation that she must also care for her children by way of being able to drop them off and pick them up from various places. To her, it seems like there is an expectation to do this herself and not seek help from a spouse, family member, or friend. Mary Kay, in this sense, helps her maintain the patriarchal status quo at home by giving her the flexible hours required to do the gendered tasks of childcare but does not relieve her of her childcare duties in any sense.

Spiritualism

Lastly, spiritualism plays an ideological role in developing the emotions that the target audience has toward Mary Kay. The organization, through its video testimonials as well as word choices, positions itself as a guiding and communal institution, much like a church. The narrator in Video 4 describes her spiritual experience with Mary Kay after she experienced a miscarriage:

It became so difficult. Corporate America put a timeframe on my grieving, you know, and not allowing that time to grieve and to experience that situation, where Mary Kay was just a full-on embrace. Every day we have food at our door…a lot of my sisters would just call and say, we were thinking about you…I thought I need to get back to my pink bubble. (Video 4, 1:15-1:52)

Here, Mary Kay evokes spirituality by serving as a revenant community of sympathizers. The sisterhood of Mary Kay, like a sisterhood within a church, is providing comforts of food and positive thoughts and prayers for the narrator. She describes this community as a "pink bubble" additionally evoking feelings of warmth and protection like one might experience in a church community.

Word choices throughout the webpages more clearly make connections between Mary Kay and spirituality. Mary Kay, for example, is described as a "values-based company" that has "purpose and staying power" (Mary Kay Inc., n.d.b, para 7). Putting values and purpose above profits positions Mary Kay closer to a charitable organization rather than a company. Testimonials even include words and phrases such as "miracle" and "saving my life" and "life-changing" when discussing the impact of Mary Kay (Video 1). Not only is the company providing a source of income, but it is further becoming equated to religion in the sense that it is changing the hearts and minds of its people.

What Paradoxes are Revealed with How the Text Invites the Audience and Assumes it Already Exists?

Interestingly, the sections that help identify the target audience for Mary Kay's online recruitment initiative also reveal the paradox that exists between how the corporation invites the creation of the audience and assumes that the audience already exists. The primary example is when Mary Kay points out, "the prizes and perks are fabulous, and nothing beats the encouragement and empowerment you receive from other women like you" (Mary Kay Inc., n.d.b, para 4). With this quote, there is an assumption that because "women like you" are helping to encourage and empower you to become a Mary Kay woman and you, because you are a Mary Kay woman, would also seek to encourage and empower others. Therefore, there is a paradoxical tension between needing encouragement and empowerment from others and already being a source of encouragement and empowerment. The corporation already assumes that the audience member has that ability within her while she is interacting with the text. Additionally, this paradox is evident in the text through the quote: "You've got dreams. Whether it's earning a little extra cash or making a full-time commitment, the Mary Kay opportunity offers the freedom, flexibility, and, of course, the fun that you've been looking for" (Mary Kay Inc., n.d.c, para 4).

Not only does Mary Kay enable people to pursue their dreams, but this framing demonstrates how the company can become their dream. Mary Kay not only provides access to enable you the time and flexibility to seek to fulfill one's ambitions, but it also fills the emptiness that freedom and flexibility can provide. Mary Kay is essentially serving up a dream to their audience on a silver platter, maybe a dream that they never knew they had. These two quotes engage the virtual visitor by letting them know that they are already the person that they wish to be, whether or not they know it yet.

How is the Audience Called to Act?

The constituted audience in this scenario is called to act through the provided text in a way where the audience is naturally cognizant of what to do. The primary call to action is linked on both the landing page and the "Real Voices" page when they are prompted to "Get Started" or "Start Your Journey." When virtual visitors click this link, they find the "Mary Kay Beauty Consultants Location: Find Mary Kay Cosmetics and Consultants Near You" page, an online tool that connects interested viewers to Beauty Consultants that are geographically nearby. On this page, viewers are instructed to

> Connect with a current Independent Beauty Consultant who can introduce you to the Mary Kay Opportunity and help you submit an Independent Beauty Consultant Agreement to the Company! Mary Kay® products can only be purchased by the Company and sold through our direct sales business model by Independent Beauty Consultants. Find a Beauty Consultant to help you start your own Mary Kay business today! (Mary Kay Inc., n.d.d, para 1)

These instructions provide clear, low-barrier first steps for their target audience to adopt their new second persona in the real world by networking with a local Mary Kay representative. Simply by contacting a consultant in the real world, the audience is actively becoming one with the second persona and continuing the spread of the company ideology by then serving as a point of contact for others in the future. This call to action seems natural and fluid within the constituted rhetoric; this is the obvious action that "Boss Babes" would have thought to do themselves, and by embedding the contact form on the website, Mary Kay Inc. has eliminated any obstacles to taking action.

Discussion & Contributions

Taking into consideration the five questions in the analysis of Mary Kay Inc.'s recruitment webpages and the One Woman Can ® campaign, there is still the question of why this analysis is important.

The following sections will dig into questions dealing with the "so what" of this research, examining specifically the ethical nature of this context.

By engaging the text with Charland's (1987) constitutive rhetoric as a methodological lens, it is important to discuss the ethical nature of the situation in which MLMs are taking advantage of the target audience's positions and constraints to first identify with the second persona, and then embody the identity and act in a prescribed way. Within this method, subjects of the rhetoric are not perceived as totally free because they bring with them previous experiences, conceptions, limitations, etc. that are rooted in ideologies, societal expectations, and norms outside of their control.

With the example in this essay, these positions and constraints are rooted in the audience's identity as women; they are constrained by the specific way society defines and expects a woman to think and behave, ranging from constraints and expectations related to being a mother, wife, feminist, women in business, etc. Therefore, there is no situation in which the target audience is unburdened by this previous experience and conceptions of what it means to be a woman; instead of having the agency to create a complete, unique identity for themselves, they are subjected to the constraints that society has pushed. Mary Kay Inc., in turn, takes these popularized notions of what it means to be a woman and uses them in their online recruitment web pages and campaign.

While there is variety in the way a woman can be, i.e. mother, sister, friend, business owner, she is nonetheless constrained with specific options and manufactured obstacles. While there is a feeling of free choice when engaging with the text, these constraints position the organization's laid-out options as one of the better choices given the set of circumstances that the target audience inherits by way of identifying as a woman.

In this sense, we can make the argument that Mary Kay Inc. is engaging in manipulation because they are seemingly aware of these constraints and are using them to persuade their audience to join their cause, resulting in the company making more money. For the perfect audience member, there is only an illusion that she is choosing to become part of Mary Kay's independent sales force. However, with the way the rhetoric is constructed, this choice was never hers; she was going to be an independent salesperson all along. In this sense, the company is not acting ethically with its online recruiting because of its coercive nature. Therefore, by MLMs engaging in constitutive rhetoric strategies, there is no way that they could act fully ethically.

What lessens the ethical burden in this situation, however, are the positive experiences that independent beauty consultants receive from becoming a part of this organization. Although adding members to the independent salesforce does indeed contribute positively to the company's bottom line, as we see in the analysis, this relationship is largely mutually beneficial. While "Boss Babes" work to the economic advantage of the company, they are also receiving economic, social, and sometimes spiritual benefits themselves. "Boss Babes," when they engage fully with the Mary Kay Inc. experience, get the recognition, scheduling autonomy, economic freedom, mentorship, friendships, and a whirlwind of other positive benefits that might be worth succumbing to coercive methods. Looking at the positive benefits from a utilitarian perspective, Mary Kay Inc. comes out looking like a positive force in women's lives rather than an evil corporation. Despite questionable methods of persuasion, the company has made a noteworthy impact in the lives of its salesforce. Even if attributing this impact as "life-changing" or a "miracle" might seem hyperbolic, these words depict the real emotions that "Boss Babes" embody and attribute to their Mary Kay experience. Even if MLMs, in general, have questionable structures and premises, we must still acknowledge the real benefits that these organizations have on populations that have limited availability of experiences that give them fulfillment. By positioning themselves as one of the only options that women have to experience these feelings while "having it all," Mary Kay Inc. has both exploited and empowered women in the same stride. Therefore, MLM companies like Mary Kay Inc. cannot be deemed completely good or bad; truth in this situation, as well as in most situations, seems to lie somewhere in between.

Conclusion

While the heyday of the door-to-door salesmen might have come and gone, multi-level marketing companies have demonstrated their lasting footholds on national and global economies. Blurring the line between social and economic spheres, these companies have found pervasive and persuasive strategies to grow their independent sales forces and make millions of dollars year to year. Through this essay, we explored the context of these organizations and dug deeper into the strategies that one of the leading MLM corporations utilizes to spread its power and influence in the digital age. By analyzing Mary Kay's virtual constituted audience through target audience, second persona, ideologies, and paradox, we get a clearer picture of how MLMs create persuasive arguments and enable their audience to feel as if they have been a part of the movement all along.

Digging deeply into these types of corporate communications contexts is important to understand the power that "values-based" companies have over their publics. By looking past the bright pink, sparkly exterior we can better understand the effects that persuasive marketing content has over us, and become better aware of how we might be hailed into action by seemingly unassuming means. By continuing research such as this, we as a society, can become better consumers of media and better understand what is being asked of us as we consume content. By doing so, we will be able to take back some of the power from these large companies and be better situated to make our own decisions about our economic and social lives.

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