

Understanding how social media micro-influencers influence the brand attractiveness in the recruitment process: A netnography at Avon

MASTER ORGANISATIONAL DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT



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Preface

With great pleasure and a sense of accomplishment, I present my master thesis on 'Understanding how social media micro-influencers influence the brand attractiveness in the recruitment process: A netnography at Avon'. This research has been written to complete my Master Organisational Design and Development.

During the course Organization and Society, the concept of a multi-level marketing company was introduced during a guest lecture by Bettine Wils. The concept instantly got my attention, and I was enthusiastic to hear I could gain more knowledge by writing my Master's thesis on MLM companies. After reading more literature on the topic, I became most interested in the role of social media in the socialization process of MLM companies. More knowledge of this is needed, as it has a significant influence. Therefore, I am excited about my findings and contribute to the literature on MLM companies.

I would like to thank dr. Claudia Groß for her supervision. During the process, she gave good feedback and helped me to finish this thesis. Her expertise guided the research and offered valuable insights. Additionally, the support I received was very motivational. Finally, I would like my fellow students for all the feedback I received and suggestions made during our trajectory.

In conclusion, I hope to contribute to the current literature on socialization processes by adding the factors that influence brand attractiveness in the recruitment process of an MLM company, which I have researched in the context of social media micro-influencers. May it inspire further research on the role of social media in the socialization process of MLMs.

Adelina Romme

Nijmegen, 17 June 2024

Abstract

Social media is an increasingly contributing factor to the recruitment processes of multi-level marketing companies. Therefore, the research explored the factors influencing brand attractiveness of MLM companies in the recruitment process. This has been researched in the context of social media micro-influencers because they are perceived as the most credible and relatable (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Knowledge of these processes is essential because being an MLM distributor is often connected to financial losses, legal problems, and ethical problems (DeLiema et al., 2018; Groß & Vriens, 2019). Data was obtained using a variety of methods following a netnography.

The research illustrates that, in the context of social media micro-influencers, multiple dimensions influence brand attractiveness in the recruitment process of MLMs. First, Avon's distinguished characteristics demonstrate that its history and brand loyalty are often used online. Additionally, micro-influencers illustrate extrinsic life goals such as external approval and rewards, and intrinsic life goals are to satisfy basic and inherent psychological needs (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Lastly, social media allows micro-influencers to create a feeling of intimacy with individuals on social media. Social media micro-influencers portrayed three sub-dimensions the most: Avon's history, financial rewards (incentive trips and events), and the illusion of intimacy created through social media.

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1. Introduction

Multi-level marketing companies (MLMs) are a form of direct selling companies. Within these organizations, self-employed MLM distributors promote the companies' products through various levels of independent distributors (DeLiema et al., 2018). MLM distributors generate income through product sales and training, recruiting, and motivating new distributors, known as their 'downline' (DeLiema et al., 2018; Groß & Vriens, 2019). When downline distributors purchase products from the company or recruit new distributors who make purchases, the upline distributors earn an override commission on the products sold by their downline distributors.

In 2022, MLMs had 114.9 million individual sales representatives worldwide (WFDSA, 2023). Almost half of the people who join an MLM company are young people (between 18-25 years), as stated by DeLiema et al. (2018). MLM companies have grown exponentially with the rise of social media. Social media usage increases the support bases of MLM organizations (Wrenn & Waller, 2021). Currently, the percentage of people recruited for an MLM through social media is 8 percent (DeLiema et al., 2018). Given that 114.9 million people participate in MLMs, an estimated 9.19 million people are recruited through social media. Given this number and the expectation that it has grown since then and will increase, it is essential to understand how MLMs use social media in their recruitment process. DSA (2020) stated: 'Social media can help direct sellers be more effective; 89 percent uses social media'. However, MLMs are associated with many legal and ethical problems, such as illegal pyramid schemes and harming customers (Groß & Vriens, 2019). Additionally, MLMs are related to customer financial losses. Of the people who join an MLM organization, 47 percent lose money, 27.3 percent break even, and only 24.7 percent make a profit (DeLiema et al., 2018). Due to these percentages, it is essential to gain more insights into the recruitment process of MLM companies, especially how these processes take place on social media.

In current MLM literature, little research has been done about social media's influence on MLM companies' recruitment practices. This is while all the large MLMs are active on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. The WFDSA (2023) even describes social media's influences on MLMs: 'The rise of social media selling and affiliate marketing has opened up new avenues for content monetization.' Even MLM companies themselves state that they should invest in participating in the rise of social media. Mattieu Comard, the managing director for Western Europe of Avon, states: 'We are investing

millions to help our representatives become true digital entrepreneurs to reach more people in their communities' (Vizard, 2023).

Recruitment belongs to the broader concept of socialization processes. Socialization processes are an essential theme in the current literature within the MLM field, providing insights into critical elements of MLM recruitment (Brooks, 2014), organizational socialization processes in MLM companies (Van Maanen & Schein, 1977), and psychological traits of people who are more likely to join an MLM company (Dixon et al., 2023).

Despite these insights, the existing MLM literature needs to include how these socialization processes occur on social media. Here, literature from outside the MLM field provides concepts to explore immorally manipulative marketing tactics (Sher, 2011) and celebrity endorsement's social media marketing tactics (Febrian & Fadly, 2021; Spry et al., 2011). Additionally, Piehler et al. (2022) and Nouri (2018) focus on the power of social media and the usage of social media influencer marketing.

This research combines literature on socialization processes and brand attractiveness to explore what makes a brand attractive in the recruitment process of MLMs. The research is conducted in the context of social media influences, focusing on micro-influencers. Social media is a frequently used form of information gathering during the employment search of individuals (Kissel & Büttgen, 2015). Social media micro-influencers are perceived as the most credible and relatable and, therefore, chosen as the research context (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Social media influencers promote the jobs and can influence the recruitment process by making a brand more attractive. Brand attractiveness can be described as the positive associations and characteristics of a brand about how it helps consumers fulfill their self-definitional needs (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Currás-Pérez et al., 2009; Elbedweihy et al., 2016). This can be achieved by various elements, such as the portrayal of extrinsic life goals and intrinsic life goals and linking the achievement of these goals to a brand. In addition, it can be seen as an essential predictor of brand loyalty and resilience to negative information about the brand (Elbedweihy et al., 2016). Thus, if an MLM company portrays these methods, it will make the brand more attractive to individuals. This while, as stated before, most people joining an MLM will lose money (Taylor, 2011). Therefore, more insights into the role of social media micro-influencers tactics on potential distributors' attraction toward MLM brands can complement existing literature on the socialization processes of MLMs. By complementing the literature, there will be more knowledge about MLMs' working process in the context of social media micro-influencers, which could

inform, for example, potential distributors not to join an MLM and prevent these illegal company structures from deceiving more people into the MLM trap.

Therefore, the main objective of this research is to investigate the factors influencing brand attractiveness of MLM companies in the recruitment process, which is researched in the context of social media micro-influencers. This research focuses on answering the following questions:

How do social media micro-influencers influence brand attractiveness in the recruitment process of MLM organizations?

The research is academically relevant and has important implications for various stakeholders, including consumers of MLM products and potential distributors for MLM companies. Additionally, it informs individuals about MLM companies' actions and tactics. The latter two groups stand to benefit significantly, given that a substantial number of MLM participants currently experience financial losses (Brooks, 2014). The research contributes insights into why people still join MLMs even though most lose money (Taylor, 2011).

This research followed the method of netnography to execute this research. It is the appropriate method for the research because netnography has been helpful in 'revealing interaction styles, personal narratives, communal exchanges, online rules, practices, and rituals, and discursive styles' (Kozinets, 2015, p. 3). Netnography is a qualitative research approach for gaining a cultural understanding that involves the systematic, immersive, and multimodal use of observations, digital traces, and elicitations (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024, p.1). This method deals with words, images, sound files, website creation, and other digital artifacts (Kozinets, 2015, p. 5). It allows the systematic examination of data such as reviews of MLM participants, social media data, and semi-structured interviews. This is to add new insights into the current literature on the socialization process of MLM companies.

Following the netnography method, the research needs a focus, in this case the company Avon (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024). Avon's choice is deliberate, as it is one of the oldest MLMs, specializes in women's products, and prominently features women in its social media campaigns. This choice is pertinent because more females tend to join MLMs than men (DeLiema et al., 2018). Additionally, influencers and celebrities have made the most impact on the beauty and lifestyle habits of the public (Nouri, 2018). The research provides insights into the influence of social media relevant to the largest group of MLM distributors.

Outline of thesis

The research is structured as follows: In the next section, the relevant concepts are introduced, including the research context of social media micro-influencers, brand awareness, and the socialization process used in recruitment by MLMs. The theoretical framework finishes with a conceptual model of all the theories. The methodology chapter offers a detailed description of the research design and its execution. This study utilizes a qualitative approach to explore how social media micro-influencers influence brand attractiveness in the recruitment process of MLM companies. The results chapter summarizes the data analysis and explains the research findings. The conclusion chapter provides a detailed response to the research question. Finally, the discussion chapter reflects on the results, potential contribution to theory and practice, limitations and suggestions for further research, and an overall reflection on the research process.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter includes theoretical concepts to understand the role of social media micro-influencers in brand attractiveness in the recruitment process of MLM companies. The research begins by defining the research context and exploring the impact of social media marketing strategies (2.1). The first social media marketing tactic is ‘Celebrity endorsement’ (2.1.1). Currently, individuals are no longer limited to the influences of traditional celebrities; there is the new influence of social media influencers (Nouri, 2018). This concept is elaborated in the section on social media influencer marketing (2.1.2). In 2.2, the research elaborates more on what an MLM organization is (2.2.1), defines the concept of brand attractiveness (2.2.2), and elaborates on the socialization processes used by MLMs in recruitment processes (2.2.3).

2.1 Social media marketing tactics

Social media and these influencers are highly used channels for people to access information during their employment searches (Kissel & Büttgen, 2015). Social media platforms are used to communicate the meaning and attractiveness of the brand to potential new distributors (Kissel & Büttgen, 2015). Two social media marketing tactics explain the context: ‘celebrity endorsement’ and ‘social media influencer marketing.’ Celebrity endorsement is a topic that has been studied for over 50 years and has changed significantly over the last decades (Schimmelpfenning & Hunt, 2020). Over the years, research on celebrity endorsement has focused on four different endorsement theories: credibility, attractiveness, image congruence, and transfer of meaning (Schimmelpfenning & Hunt, 2020). Celebrity endorsement can be seen as the predecessor of social media influencer marketing and forms the basis for explaining social media micro-influencers influence on individuals.

2.1.1 Celebrity endorsement

In today's competitive marketing landscape, where product differentiation is challenging, celebrity endorsements effectively attract customers to a brand by enhancing advertisement perception and increasing the perceived reliability of the message compared to those from non-celebrities (Amos, 2008; Arora et al., 2019). These factors influence the relationship between celebrities and potential distributors. It changes depending on brand/product categories, level of consumer involvement, and perceived risk (Schimmelpfenning & Hunt, 2020).

The use of celebrities as a marketing technique is unique. They are perceived as

trustworthy figures because their information looks more natural than companies, which seems more intentional (Febrian & Fadly, 2021). Celebrities are recognized personalities who have the power to pursue potential customers either by their likeliness, attractiveness, and trust or by using their congruency with a brand, which leads to a strong brand image and value in the minds of potential customers (Hassan & Jamil, 2014). This is important since consumers replicate the actions of celebrities when they feel related to them. With the emergence of social media, these celebrities' influence became even more prominent (Nouri, 2018). Individuals are no longer limited to the influences of traditional celebrities; there is the added influence of social media influencers (Nouri, 2018).

2.1.2 Social media influencer marketing

The usage of social media accounts has grown exponentially in the last decade (Nouri, 2018). This ever-increasing user base tremendously influences our day-to-day lives and significantly impacts consumer behavior (Naylor et al., 2012; Nouri, 2018). With this growing social media influence, a new form of influencing has arrived: 'social media influencers' (Nouri, 2018). With this new form of influencing, individuals are no longer limited to traditional celebrities, such as actors, musicians, and models, to influence our desires. Consumers are exposed to the masses of influential 'micro-celebrities' or non-traditional celebrities who have become famous through online media usage (Nouri, 2018). These "micro-celebrities" are seen as ordinary people who have gained thousands or even millions of followers on these social media platforms, known as social media influencers (Nouri, 2018). Social media influencers can be described as follows: 'Social media users who amass larger-than-average groups of followers, receive likes, shares, or comments on their activities' (Piehler et al., 2022, p. 408).

Social media influencers can be divided into micro-meso- and macro-influencers (Joshi et al., 2023). Research illustrates that micro-influencers are more potent than traditional celebrities, and micro-celebrities are perceived as more credible and relatable (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Nouri (2018, p.2) states that micro-influencers are: 'non-traditional celebrities who have become famous through online media usage.' To make the concept of micro-influencers applicable, the research of Boerman (2020) states that a micro-influencer is somebody with less than 10,000 followers. By using this number, the research hopes to capture the group of MLM distributors who are not famous and who act as influencers to promote the MLM company and socialize through social media.

The growth of Instagram continues, with young women as its majority users (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). The research of Djafarova and Rushworth (2017)

demonstrates that celebrities on Instagram are influential and related to the behavior of young females. Additionally, it illustrates that micro-influencers are more potent than traditional celebrities because micro-celebrities are perceived as more credible and relatable (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Thus, micro-influencers hold a lot of power. Therefore, it is essential to understand their role in portraying the image of MLM companies and how they can make these companies attractive to recruit new distributors. As stated before, social media is a highly used channel for accessing information for people during their employment searches (Kissel & Büttgen, 2015). Social media offers new possibilities for direct communication (posts, live chat, pictures, private messages) and is an excellent tool for communicating the brand's meaning to potential new distributors (Kissel & Büttgen, 2015). Social media and micro-influencers can thus influence the perception of a brand and make it more attractive to new distributors who potentially want to join an MLM. After portraying the influence micro-influencers have on individuals, it is essential to look at the factors examined in this context, namely brand attractiveness in the recruitment process of MLMs. The research combines the existing literature on brand attractiveness and socialization processes used by MLM organizations.

2.2 Brand attractiveness of multi-level marketing organizations

To understand what could influence brand attractiveness of multi-level marketing companies in the recruitment process, the research first elaborates more on the organizational structure of MLMs and the risks and controversies linked to these organizations. After this, the concept of brand attractiveness is explained, and lastly, the socialization processes of MLM used in the recruitment process are explained.

2.2.1 MLMs and the risks associated with them

The most common business structure in direct selling is a multi-level marketing organization (Dixon et al., 2023). This business structure is defined by Groß and Vriens (2019, p. 340) as an organization that: 'markets their products and services using self-employed distributors who typically work from home, sell products to end consumers, and recruit, motivate, and educate new distributors to do the same.' MLMs are linked to risks and controversies (Dixon et al., 2023). The critical risks associated with MLMs are legal and ethical, such as pyramid schemes and harming customers (Groß & Vriens, 2019). Another risk is financial risk. The financial risk of joining an MLM organization is that 47 percent of the MLM distributors lose money, 27.3 percent will break even, and only 24.7 percent will profit (DeLiema et al., 2018).

However, to reverse this negative image related to MLM organizations, the company uses specific tactics to make the brand more attractive.

2.2.2 Brand attractiveness

Brand attractiveness can be described as the positive evaluation of a brand’s central, distinctive, and enduring associations and characteristics about how it helps consumers fulfill their self-definitional needs (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Currás-Pérez et al., 2009; Elbedweihy et al., 2016). It represents an essential aspect of the identification process (So et al., 2017). This is because research illustrates that symbolic attributes impact brand attractiveness (Lievens et al., 2007). These symbolic attributes can be described as: ‘subjective, abstract and intangible attributes that convey symbolic company information in the form of imagery and trait inference that applicants assign to the organization’ (Lievens et al., 2007, p. 48). This fulfillment of self-definitional needs can be linked to the extrinsic and intrinsic life goals defined by Kasser and Ryan (1996). These goals focus on individuals' motivation, which is linked to success and fulfillment. Extrinsic life goals are personal motivational factors focused on external approval and rewards (Kasser & Ryan, 1996, p.280). These can be divided into three subgoals, namely, financial success (money), social recognition (fame), and an appealing appearance (image) (Kasser & Ryan, 1996, p.280). However, these extrinsic life goals do not provide satisfaction for themselves; they are focused on the power and sense of worth that can be derived from attaining them (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Therefore, there are intrinsic life goals to satisfy basic and inherent psychological needs (Kasser & Ryan, 1996, p.280). These intrinsic life goals can be divided into four subgoals, namely affiliation (relatedness), community feeling (helpfulness), physical fitness (health), and self-acceptance (growth) (Kasser & Ryan, 1996, p.281). The following table (Table 1) defines Kasser and Ryan's definition.

Extrinsic life goals	
Financial success	Be wealthy and materially successful
Social recognition	Be famous, well-known, and admired
Appealing appearance	Look attractive in terms of body, clothing, and fashion
Intrinsic life goals	
Affiliation	Have satisfying relationships with family and friends

Community feeling	Improve the world through activism or generativity
Physical fitness	Feel healthy and free of illness
Self-acceptance	Achieving psychological growth, autonomy, and self-regard

Table 1: Extrinsic- and intrinsic life goals (Kasser & Ryan, 1996, p.281)

Thus, when a company portrays these extrinsic and intrinsic life goals, they can be perceived as positive and help consumers fulfill their self-definitional needs. Additionally, brand attractiveness is not only focused on attaining goals; it can influence consumer behavior differently. Brand attractiveness can be seen as an essential predictor of brand loyalty and resilience to negative information about the brand (Elbedweihy et al., 2016). Brand loyalty can be defined as customers' preference and attachment to a brand due to a long product use history; trust has developed over this period (Ishak & Abd Ghani, 2013). In the case of MLMs, resilience to negative information about the brand is strongly related to it. As previously mentioned, MLMs are associated with many negative consequences. When individuals perceive brands as attractive, they will thus be more likely to be resilient to this negative information about MLMs. In conclusion, brand attractiveness can be achieved in different manners, and it is essential to know how MLMs use this in the recruitment process. Current literature has found multiple socialization processes used by MLM companies; this research focuses on the one linked to attracting new distributors in the recruitment process.

2.2.3 Socialization in MLMs

MLMs use socialization processes to promote a strong culture of influence in which critical thinking is discouraged and potentially promotes unethical behavior (Dixon et al., 2023). The socialization processes of MLMs are researched on multiple subjects, such as 'Coercive tactics' used by MLMs for recruitment (Brooks, 2014) and tactical dimensions of 'organizational socialization' (Van Maanen & Schein, 1977). This research focuses on the socialization concepts of 'sense-breaking,' how MLMs actively change how people view themselves to the MLMs (Pratt, 2000), and 'psychological traits,' the attraction of new individuals to join an MLM organization (Dixon et al., 2023).

Pratt (2000) offers a deeper understanding of the socialization process by explaining different types of identification among MLM distributors. For this research, only the concept of sense-breaking is relevant. Current MLM distributors use a sense of seekership to attract new members through sense-breaking (Pratt, 2000). Sense-breaking is a form used to break down the meanings of individuals. The current state of the lives of individuals is devalued and

linked to the 'ideal lives and possessions' of MLM distributors, such as flashy sports cars, having a beautiful daughter, or a public service award (Pratt, 2000). Pratt (2000, p. 464) describes sense-breaking's primary goal as: 'disrupt an individual's sense of self to create a meaning void that must be filled.' The most prominent form of sense-breaking is: 'dream building.' A definition of dream building stated by Pratt (2000, p.464) is plural: 'It creates a meaning void by 1) linking one's sense of self to possessions, 2) creating motivational drives by comparing current and ideal identities, and 3) perpetuating these motivational drives'. The most common dream used to influence potential new distributors is the perceived financial independence of current MLM distributors (Pratt, 2000). Financial independence means other dreams, such as being a good family member, helping others, and physical possessions, can be achieved (Pratt, 2000, p.465). Identifying and teaching these dreams by the potential new distributors is executed as a form of mass customization process to fit the individual needs of MLMs (Pratt, 2000). Sense-breaking is an active method MLMs use to influence potential new distributors (Dixon et al., 2023). Sense-breaking can also be seen as the portrayal of MLM distributors' extrinsic- and intrinsic life goals and attracting new distributors by doing this. Dixon et al. (2023) demonstrate that the most significant influence on new prospects of MLM organizations is the motivational factor of 'extrinsic life goals,' defined by Kasser and Ryan (1996, p.280), as an emphasis on becoming rich, famous, and maintaining an appealing image. Another successful influence on new MLM prospects is 'thought-action fusion.'

Thought-action fusion is related to positive thinking and hope, which positively influence the brand attraction of an MLM company and make it more likely to participate in MLM companies (Dixon et al., 2023). This is about the law of attraction, in which MLM distributors claim that all the success in their lives is due to their distributor job at MLMs (Dixon et al., 2023). Promoting an attractive worldview influences new prospects to want the same lifestyle as those MLM distributors.

In summary, this research combines our existing knowledge of brand attractiveness with the literature on recruitment strategies used by MLM, executed in the context of social media micro-influencers, a potential game-changer in brand attractiveness. Using micro-influencers to promote a lifestyle and life goals can be seen as a powerful tool to promote a brand (Sadiq et al., 2019). Their use can make an advertisement more lively, attractive, and engaging, gaining attention towards the brand (Sadiq et al., 2019). The role of celebrities has been mentioned in the context of recruiting and socializing MLM distributors (Brooks, 2014).

However, a profound analysis of the influence of social media micro-influencers needs to be included. This research aims to fill that gap and illuminate their potential impact.

2.3 Conceptual model

A conceptual model is formed for the research based on all the theories discussed. The conceptual model can be seen below (Figure 1). This research has explored how the dimensions of literature on brand attractiveness and socialization processes of MLMs are related to the factors influencing brand attractiveness in the recruitment process of multi-level marketing organizations. The dimensions of brand attractiveness include concepts from existing literature (extrinsic life goals, intrinsic life goals, and brand loyalty) and the influence brand attractiveness has (resilience to negative information). This is combined with existing socialization literature of MLM organizations (sense-breaking and thought-action fusion). By combining these concepts, the research provides a new perspective on brand attractiveness in the recruitment process of MLM companies.

This research is held in the context of social media micro-influencers. Social media micro-influencers are expected to have a significant influence, and their online data illustrates multiple manners in which the brand is more attractive. The existing literature has supported the expectation that extrinsic life goals (used as sense-breaking) will significantly influence the brand attractiveness of MLM organizations in the recruitment process.

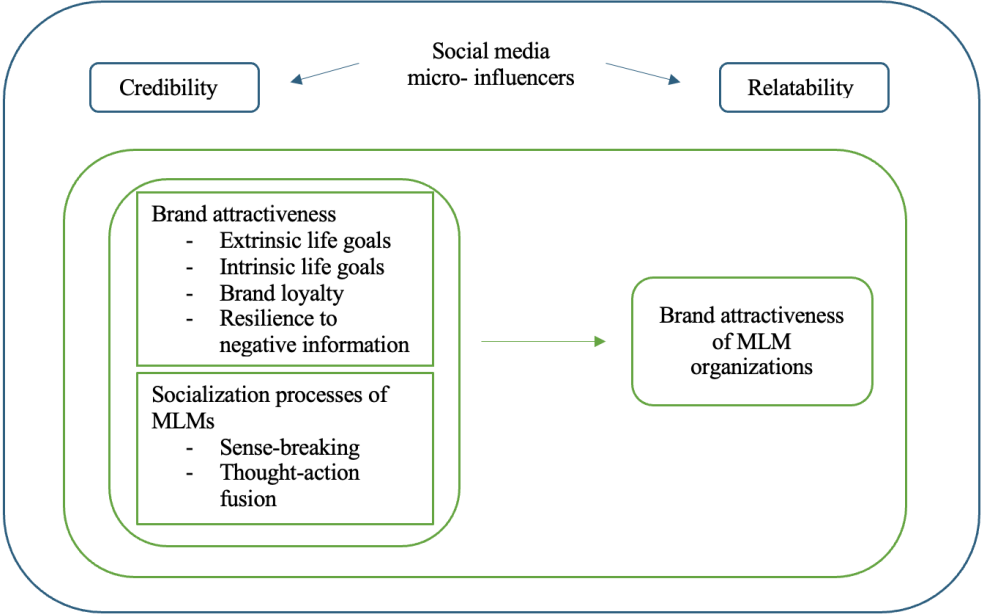


Figure 1: Conceptual model

3. Methodology

The following chapter presents the methodology used to investigate how MLMs use social media micro-influencers to improve brand attractiveness in their recruitment process. It entails an elaborate overview of the research philosophy (3.1), research design (3.2), research focus (3.3), data collection (3.4), data analysis (3.5), and research ethics (3.6).

3.1 Research philosophy

The research utilized a critical epistemology perspective. Critical epistemology focuses on power relations, ideological influences, and the social creation of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The qualitative research design is used to study how social media micro-influencers influence brand attractiveness in the recruitment process of MLM organizations. It is recognized that from a critical epistemology perspective, knowledge is socially created and affected by power dynamics (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, the research has acknowledged that brand attractiveness in the recruitment process of MLM organizations is shaped by societal forces (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Critical epistemology has allowed this research to examine how the power structures of social media micro-influencers influence brand attractiveness in the recruitment process of MLM organizations.

3.2 Research design

The research opts for a qualitative exploratory research design by using netnography. The research aimed to investigate the factors influencing brand attractiveness of MLM companies in the recruitment process. This has been researched in the context of social media micro-influencers. The research goal was to gain insights into the factors that improve brand attractiveness of MLMs by doing a social media analysis at Avon. This goal has been reached by answering the following research question:

How do social media micro-influencers influence brand attractiveness in the recruitment process of MLM organizations?

An abductive approach has been taken to formulate an answer to the research question. This is because the approach fitting a netnography needs to be flexible to adapt to changing circumstances (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024). An abductive approach enabled access to known theoretical concepts related to social media micro-influencers, the socialization processes of MLMs, and brand attractiveness. Additionally, it facilitated the incorporation of new findings from data analysis into these theoretical frameworks (Van Maanen et al., 2007). This further elaborated on the knowledge factors influencing brand attractiveness of MLM organizations

in the recruitment process and added to the current literature on socialization processes used by MLM organizations.

As stated before, the chosen method was 'netnography'. Netnography is a qualitative research approach for gaining a cultural understanding that involves the systematic, immersive, and multimodal use of observations, digital traces, and elicitations (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024, p.1). It is a tool for digital communication and allows the researcher to generate valuable insight into the norms, trends, and shifts that continuously shape the MLM field (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024). Conducting a netnography involves the following steps: first, determining a research question and focus; second, collecting data through investigation, immersion, and interaction; third, analyzing and interpreting this data; and lastly, representing the findings (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024). Netnography is an appropriate method because it has been found advantageous to 'reveal interaction styles, personal narratives, communal exchanges, online rules, practices, and rituals, and discursive styles' (Kozinets, 2015, p. 3). This method deals with words, images, sound files, website creation, and other digital artifacts (Kozinets, 2015, p. 5). It requires 'interpretation of human communications under realistic context, in situ, in the native conditions of interaction, when new technologies shape those human interactions' (Kozinets, 2015, p. 5). Netnography can help understand the new social forms of social media micro-influence on brand attractiveness of MLMs in the recruitment process and the old forms of the socialization process it replaces (Kozinets, 2015). The following part provides more insight into the focus in which this netnography has taken place.

3.3 Research focus

The research focus lays the foundation for the data collection operations (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024). The research focuses on the MLM company Avon. This company was chosen for several reasons. First, Avon is one of the oldest MLM companies specializing in women's products. It has existed for more than 135 years and, as described on its website, has 'been leading the way in direct beauty sales' (AVON, n.d.). Second, a study by DeLiema et al. (2018) found that more females tend to join multi-level marketing (MLM) schemes than men. Given that Avon focuses on women's products, it is unsurprising that the company captures the largest group of MLM distributors. Third, Avon features women in its social media campaigns. This is relevant because research on celebrity endorsement has illustrated that female celebrities are perceived more favorably in advertisements than male celebrities (Klaus & Bailey, 2008). Lastly, influencers and celebrities have the most impact on the beauty and

lifestyle habits of the public (Nouri, 2018). Its influence can be seen in the typical audience of beauty content on Instagram, which consists of females between 18-30 years old. It demonstrates that the attainability and desirability of the products promoted are essential factors in their decision-making (Nouri, 2018).

Avon is a multi-national company operating worldwide. Researching the whole company was not feasible. Instead, Avon UK was chosen as an appropriate focus because Avon has a large market in the UK, has a significant presence on social media and, in contrast to other countries with a significant social media presence, such as Poland or Turkey, posed no language barrier. In the UK, there are over 160.000 representatives (Bates, 2016). This number is from 2016 and is known to be higher because the number of representatives at Avon UK is increasing (Martin, 2024).

3.4 Data collection

In netnography, three types of data are used: immersive data (3.4.1), investigative data (3.4.2), and interactive data (3.4.3) (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024). The research employed data source triangulation by combining these data sources, which enhances the research’s validity, strength, and interpretative potential (Denzin, 2017). The three types of data are discussed in the following paragraphs.

3.4.1 Immersive data

Immersive data ensures human-centered research engagement and is mandatory for all ethnographers (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024). It involves exploring the studied phenomenon to capture reality through, for example, experiences (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024). In this research, the immersive data included the experiences of customers and representatives. In total, 61 reviews have been collected, of which 37 were analyzed. The reviews were collected from 6 websites, such as Consumer Affairs and Trustpilot, to broaden the perspective. The following table (Table 2) illustrates an overview of the websites used and how many quotes are retrieved from each website. These six websites provide helpful reviews. However, not all websites offer equal amounts of valuable reviews. This is because sites such as Reddit and the Better Business Bureau provided many reviews of the products and less on individuals' experiences. Appendix 2 includes all the 63 quotes that were collected.

Consumer Affairs	23 quotes
Trustpilot	16 quotes

Reddit	10 quotes
Quora	6 quotes
Better Business Bureau	4 quotes
Sitejabber.com	2 quotes

Table 2: Immersive data

3.4.2 Investigating data

Investigating data involves searching for and collecting informative and revealing digital traces, events, and opportunities to experience (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024, p.10). The investigated data collected consists of social media posts on Instagram from micro-influencers. This choice is grounded in research indicating that micro-influencers have more influence than traditional celebrities, attributed to their perceived credibility and relatability (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Micro-influencers were individuals with fewer than 10,000 followers (Boerman, 2020). The investigating data involved 116 Instagram posts from 9 different micro-influencers out of the UK. Out of these 116 posts, 210 quotes were derived, found in Appendix 3. Table 3 illustrates an overview of the micro-influencers, the number of followers, and the number of posts retrieved from each micro-influencer. The micro-influencers were selected on multiple fronts. They needed to be from the UK, active on their account regarding Avon, and provide at least ten valuable posts in the last 1.5 years.

IG1	2241 followers	10 posts
IG2	598 followers (UK head of Sales)	12 posts
IG3	592 followers	13 posts
IG4	721 followers	12 posts
IG5	713 followers	13 posts
IG6	975 followers	19 posts
IG7	771 followers	14 posts
IG8	1102 followers	12 posts
IG9	3595 followers	12 posts

Table 3: Investigating data

3.4.3 Interactive data

Interactive data is conversational and can potentially uncover previously obscured topics or enhance understanding of the research topic (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024, p. 10). The interactive data has been collected through an in-depth interview with Hannah Martin, an expert in multi-level marketing organizations. Conducting an in-depth interview has been chosen because the interview has been used to gain the perspective on the influence of social media marketing tactics on brand attractiveness of potential new distributors towards MLM organizations (Boyce & Neale, 2006). The interview provided detailed information about Hannah Martin's in-depth thoughts on exploring the research problem (Boyce & Neale, 2006). The interview was semi-structured because this method proved flexibility and versatility (Kallio et al., 2016). A detailed interview guide based on theoretical knowledge was developed to ensure the interviews are structured and comprehensive. These are only a few pre-determined questions that allowed the interviewee to explore issues brought forward by the expert (McGrath, 2019). This detailed guide can be found in Appendix 1.

3.5 Data analysis

The data analysis involved contextualizing, organizing, interpreting, sensemaking, and presenting the collected data (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024). To ensure this, the collected data was systematically coded. The research followed an abductive approach, which entails a continuous interplay between coded concepts and data (Van Maanen et al., 2007). As Van Maanen et al. (2007, p. 1149) stated, 'Coding and classifying may transform data used for one purpose to another in ways that guide and reflect the evolving concepts of the analyst'. Therefore, this approach has allowed the researcher to analyze the interactive data, code it, and analyze the immersive and investigating data with these concepts derived from the interactive data. This was useful because Hannah Martin, for example, introduced the concept of the 'illusion of intimacy,' which was afterward used to analyze the immersive and investigating data.

As mentioned, the collected data has been coded, which involves taking raw data and assigning names to the concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The immersive, investigating, and interactive data have been coded separately but similarly. The coding process consisted of Three steps following the concepts of Strauss and Corbin (1998): open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding can be defined as the process through which concepts are identified from the data and their properties and dimensions are discovered (Strauss & Corbin,

1998, p. 101). After the open codes were formed, they were categorized at the level of properties and dimensions called axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 123). Selective coding was the final process involving integrating and refining categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). An example of this process is that the open code 'Representative for 20 years' was coded to the axial code 'Representative loyalty' and fitted the selective 'brand loyalty' code. After these three codes were given to the data, a fourth one was added. This structure came up after writing the results. The findings were organized into four main dimensions to organize this chapter: distinguished characteristics of Avon, extrinsic life goals, intrinsic life goals, and intimacy. The fourth code can be seen as an extra-selective code. The whole coding process is done in an Excel sheet to work organized and can be found in the external attachment 'Data analysis'.

During the analysis and writing of the results, it became clear, from a critical perspective, that the negative information found in articles could invalidate most social media data. Therefore, the negative information found that could invalidate data, described in the four dimensions, was written in the last part of the results 'resilience to negative information'. This was chosen because brand attractiveness builds resilience to negative information about the brand (Elbedweihy et al., 2016). Portraying this information in one part prevents repetitive argumentation in the four dimensions and demonstrates the influence of brand attractiveness portrayed by social media micro-influencers.

3.6 Research ethics

The research ensured a structural approach to address ethical considerations. Therefore, the research used the five principles of ethics from the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (NWO, 2018). These five principles are honesty, scrupulousness, transparency, independence, and responsibility.

Honesty can be seen as the accurate reporting of the research process (NWO, 2018). To ensure this, the research focused on social media data, primarily written data rather than images. This is because images can be refrained from, while written data ensures more honest data reporting. The images used in the research have a supporting purpose instead of an explainable purpose. Different data collection methods have been used in this research to present various perspectives, and the expert perspective has provided counterarguments against the theories used. All the data collected is portrayed systematically and demonstrates the research process.

Scrupulousness refers to using scientific or scholarly methods (NWO, 2018). This has

been ensured in the following manners. First, the research objectives were clearly defined to align with scientific or scholarly goals. Additionally, to answer this research question, the research uses well-established literature methods that are widely used in multi-level marketing, brand attractiveness, and social media.

Transparency can be described as a straightforward process of how the research is conducted (NWO, 2018). The research methodology is very detailed and demonstrates how the research is conducted. The data collected online are accessible to the public. The micro-influencers that are used all have open Instagram accounts. Lastly, the researcher provided the full transcript of the interview with Hannah Martin in the external attachment 'Transcript interview Hannah Martin'. Because of these factors, the research can be replicated by another researcher and yield the same results, thus promoting transparency. Regarding the interviews that have been held, the researcher has followed consent procedures to protect the expert and ensure confidentiality.

The independence of the research ensures that non-scientific considerations are not considered (NWO, 2018). This has been the most important part of the research's data collection and data analysis. This has been ensured by using theoretical considerations from existing literature to form the basis for these research processes.

Responsibility refers to the fact that researchers do not operate in isolation (NWO, 2018). Therefore, the research has acknowledged the multiple stakeholders involved. This can be seen in the data used. The immersive data demonstrates experiences from individuals, the investigating data includes the perspective of the micro-influencers, and the interactive data gives the perception of an MLM expert.

4. Results

The following chapter presents the results of the study. The research explored the factors influencing brand attractiveness of MLM companies in the recruitment process. This is researched in the context of social media micro-influencers. As explained above, the findings are organized into four main dimensions: distinguished characteristics of Avon (4.1), extrinsic life goals (4.2), intrinsic life goals (4.3), and intimacy (4.4). The dimensions and sub-dimensions influencing the brand attractiveness of MLMs in the recruitment process can be seen in Figure 2. Brand attractiveness supports resilience to negative information about the brand (Elbedweihy et al., 2016). Therefore, insights into the negative information around Avon are given at the end of the results to illustrate the influence of brand attractiveness on individuals (4.5).

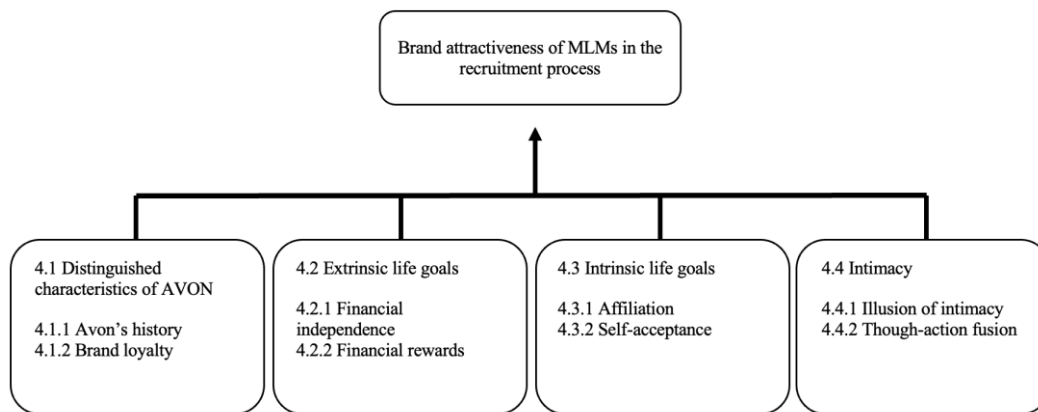


Figure 2: Dimensions of brand attractiveness

4.1 Distinguished characteristics of Avon

Established in 1886, Avon is the oldest multi-level marketing organization in the world. Avon's approach to cosmetic sales is why the brand has stood out for over a century (Reps-R-Us, n.d.). Therefore, Avon has specific distinguishing characteristics that provide the company with perceived added brand attractiveness. The analyzed data illustrate that Avon has two distinguishing characteristics that help the brand to increase brand attractiveness, namely Avon's history and brand loyalty.

4.1.1 Avon's History

Avon's history and 138 years of existence led to some deep-rooted traditions and beliefs about the company. These traditions and beliefs can be divided into two subgroups: changed policies and women's orientation.

Explaining the changed policies starts with the automatic assumption of the brand's credibility because of age. Micro-influencers portray this as:

'The oldest side hustle ever! The best know. The most rewarding' (IG4)

'You may already be aware of this iconic 138-year-old company' (IG3).

From a critical perspective, the portrayal is not necessarily the problem; it is about the perception linked to the company's age. Reviews illustrated that *'A company that lasted this long says something good'* (R29) and is seen as iconic by the customers. This assumption can be challenged because the company has changed throughout the years. In contrast, the company first was traditionally focused on face-to-face sales and emphasized product sales over downline recruitment (Engelbrecht, 2022). The company changed its focus in 2005 to recruitment rather than sales (Martin, 2024). It can thus be said that Avon may have started as a more traditional direct sales business. However, it has moved towards what the respondent calls 'a more die-hard MLM model' in which recruitment is the priority (Martin, 2024). The company has existed for 138 years and has made significant policy changes. Therefore, from a critical perspective, the promotion of the age of the brand does not make the company great. On the contrary, it might even be seen as misrepresenting the brand image. This policy change is not the only policy change made. The second policy change of the company is focused on how Avon is sold. The traditional manner of selling at Avon is face-to-face selling. However, the company has changed its policy to a more digital focus. Bates (2016) states: 'While door-to-door will continue to be how people think of Avon, the company is increasingly going online.' The paper brochure is traded for a digital brochure, and face-to-face selling and recruitment have been shifted to social media platforms. The digital switch makes it possible to reach more people and is perceived by many representatives as positive. Quotes used by representatives on Instagram are:

'Selling Avon has never been so easy... Online, Face to face, using your social media' (IG6)

'Social Selling: Leverage the power of social media to connect with customers, Avon works across all of the special media platforms'(IG6).

Representatives see the digital focus as a way to contact people more easily and connect with people. However, the positive image of digital selling that representatives demonstrate on Instagram is opposed to the reaction of customers. Reviews indicate that loyal customers who are used to the traditional brochure and manner of selling prefer to avoid this new digital policy and quit buying from Avon. Additionally, some of the representatives are critical of

themselves. The following review describes the digital transition's effects: *'Not only have you alienated the loyal customer but are also putting your Avon "Ladies" in a terrible position with far less ability to sell their products and make any money themselves'* (R41). The representatives portray the new digital policy and online selling through social media as something positive, as a form of recruiting. It illustrates how easy and successful social media makes the life of a representative. This contradicts the perception of the customers and some of the representatives, who are critical of the digital policy. Despite all the changes Avon has made in the last decade, one thing that has stayed the same at Avon is the women's focus, which has been the company's core since its founding.

In addition, the data analysis demonstrated that the company portrays itself as a company for women and empowering women (Bates, 2016). As the article by Bates (2016) explains, Avon is synonymous with housewives and stay-at-home mothers selling cosmetics and perfumes directly to their friends and neighbors. Representatives of Avon online use women's orientation to promote the brand. Quotes from online posts of the micro-influencers state:

'Join a company with a legacy of empowering women and transforming lives'(IG3)

'Super proud of Avons history. Empowering women' (IG4)

'The company that launched in 1886 offering women financial independence before they even had the vote!!'(IG8).

In these cases, this distinguishing characteristic of Avon is used as a form of brand attractiveness. Additionally, the following review illustrates that the customer perceives it as positive, as it describes, *'I like the fact that they are ethical in this business by supporting women's causes/charities'* (R38). However, Hannah Martin challenges this positive perception regarding women's support of Avon. Avon supports women's charities on the one hand; however, it has a pattern of lawsuits against them for deception and discrimination against women (Martin, 2024). It demonstrates that these deep-rooted beliefs and traditions can be challenged when taking a critical perspective. Avon's history not only led to deep-rooted beliefs and traditions but also to different forms of brand loyalty at Avon.

4.1.2 Brand loyalty

As is known from the literature, brand loyalty can be seen as an essential predictor of brand attractiveness (Elbedweihi et al., 2016). The first form of brand loyalty observed is that Avon has many loyal customers. Reviews illustrate that many customers had been Avon customers

for over ten years or even up to 20 years. Not only were their many loyal customers found in the reviews, but they also demonstrated that Avon is a family tradition. The tradition of selling/buying Avon is passed on through generations, as can be seen in the following reviews of Avon,

'My mother also ordered Avon and I was hoping to pass this "tradition" to my three girls'
(R1)

'I have so many fond memories of Avon. My mom and sisters loved it and we used to have a ball' (R3).

Customers were found to be very loyal however, the representatives additionally demonstrated loyalty to the brand. Here, reviews illustrated that representatives have been doing it since 2002 or for 20 years. In addition, this loyalty is shown online, as seen in the Instagram post in Appendix 5. The post portrays an Avon event held for the most loyal representatives of Avon. The picture illustrates an estimated 25 people in a group:

'Celebrating our most loyal and long service Reps. 1000 years of services between them #avonloyaltyroyalty' (IG2). Demonstrating that loyal representatives for Avon are rewarded with these events, and as the hashtag states, loyal representatives are seen as royalty. Being loyal to Avon is used to promote the job of being a representative and is linked to the rewards they get.

The distinguished characteristics are specific data found related to Avon. Avon representatives use these characteristics to make the brand more attractive to join. Social media micro-influencers' portrayal of brand attractiveness goes beyond the distinguished characteristics of Avon. Personal motivational factors of individuals are additionally used. These personal motivational factors are split between 'extrinsic life goals' and 'intrinsic life goals'.

4.2 Extrinsic life goals

Extrinsic life goals are personal motivational factors focused on external approval and rewards (Kasser & Ryan, 1996, p.280). These can be divided into three subgoals, namely, financial success (money), social recognition (fame), and an appealing appearance (image) (Kasser & Ryan, 1996, p.280). These extrinsic life goals are most associated with the attraction toward MLMs (Dixon et al., 2023). Social recognition can be defined as: 'being famous, well known and admired,' and appealing appearance can be defined as: 'looking

attractive in terms of body, clothing and fashion' (Kasser & Ryan, 1996, p.281). These two goals did not significantly contribute to Avon's brand attractiveness. However, financial success was found in many forms in the data. Defined by Kasser and Ryan (1996, p.281) as 'being wealthy and materially successful'. Specifically, financial motivation is the most crucial reason people join MLM companies (DeLiema et al., 2018). Financial success was found in two different manners: financial independence and financial rewards.

4.2.1 Financial independence

Financial independence can be defined as earning enough money to have the financial freedom to accumulate possessions, go on vacation, and other financial aspects of a person's lifestyle (Pratt, 2000, p.465). The extrinsic life goals of financial success in the MLM field are most linked to financial independence. This is because financial independence is the most used tool of current MLM distributors to influence potential new distributors (Pratt, 2000). It is a recruitment tool because it promotes financial success, which can be achieved by becoming an Avon distributor. Formulations of representatives on Instagram are for example:

'Not many "jobs" where you can double what you earn in a month!!!!' (IG4)

'I can't help but shout about the Avon earning opportunity!' (IG4)

'On a daily basis, we have a business that pays more than I earned in my corporate sales role!!'(IG8)

This illustration of the Avon representatives is interesting because, from a critical perspective, Avon and almost none of the representatives on Instagram publicly share any real information about their income opportunities (Martin, 2024). Representative information about their income is *'Unlimited earning potential: The more you sell, the more you earn'* (IG3), which does not include real information, only a suggestion of unlimited earning potential. In the interview, Hannah Martin, as a critical observer of the industry, raises the question of why they do not illustrate it. If your business model is that successful and leads to financial benefits, why not publicly share this information? It is expected that because of the knowledge, the percentage of those who achieve financial success is tiny and limited to the people at the top of the pyramid (Taylor, 2011). As stated before, almost none of the representatives included in the research illustrated a real income number, except for one. She posted the following things in different posts:

'I've hit 100K INCOME !!! 100,00.00 QUID !!! SMACKEROONIES !! THE DOLLAAAA!!'

Unlocked full multi generational pay !!, Top 1% of the company !, A 40% Payrise

100k In 1 Month !! 13 incred leaders !! 14 promotions !! WE DID IT !!' (IG1)

People see the Instagram posts and consider this income an attractive reason to join Avon. These sorts of cases are the ones demonstrated online and encourage more women to become Avon representatives. However, these Avon representatives on Instagram are the exception rather than the rule (Bates, 2016). The financial success of people joining an MLM company and making Avon an attractive brand to join goes beyond the idea of reaching financial independence and looking for an income opportunity. It is about illustrating the financial rewards that the Avon representatives get.

4.2.2 Financial rewards

The second form of financial success is financial rewards. Avon and the representative on Instagram promote the financial rewards that can be earned by becoming a representative. The first one promotes discounts and products, as seen in the following Instagram quote from a representative: *'Exclusive discounts, free products, and perks: Enjoy special discounts on Avon products'* (IG3). This first financial reward is most easily achieved. However, it is not the reward that Avon representatives promote the most. By looking at the data collected, two forms of financial rewards stood out and were promoted the most: incentive events and paid incentive trips. The system at Avon works so that when earning a certain number of points, these representatives will be rewarded with these events or trips. It is unclear how many points are needed for these events or trips. The only thing found is that more people attend these events than people who can join these trips.

The incentive events are about specific events that Avon UK rewards to representatives. One of these paid-for events was going to the Mamma Mia Party in London. Avon representatives posted the following content for example:

'What an awesome afternoon yesterday at Mamma Mia The Party! Another epic Avon celebration' (IG2)

'Just achieved the mamma Mia live experience in London 🎟️ paid for by Avon. We do get spoilt at our Avon events 🎟️' (IG5)

It needs to be determined how many representatives were invited to this event. Another exciting event that was found in the data was a Champagne Reception at the yearly Avon conference, to which the top 30 Sales leaders of the UK were invited, as seen below;

'Excited to be one of the Top 30 Sales Leaders in the U.K. and achieve a Champagne Reception at this year's conference Avon' (IG7)

'Guess who just hit the jackpot?! ? 🌟 Today, I won a VIP Drinks Reception at Avon's Conference!' (IG9)

These quotes illustrate that the top representatives are rewarded for the number of sales they have made in a year. These events work motivationally for individuals and current representatives, as people want to participate in them. The incentives are not limited to events. Additionally, Avon rewards representatives with incentive trips for its top representatives.

The paid incentive trips are all-expense-paid trips that Avon UK organizes multiple times a year, and the company invites a select group of representatives to go on these trips. Last year, the 'Avon Circle of Excellence Trip' went to Iceland. Appendix 5 shows the group of Avon representatives that went last year. The trip to Iceland is one of the things that was posted many times on the Instagram feeds of the Avon representatives. Note that the data only includes their Instagram posts, not the Instagram story they made when they were there. Posts of the representatives include the following:

'4 days of exciting adventures, laughing, learning, listening, brainstorming, sharing ideas to turbocharge our growth over the coming months and years. The Power and impact of recognition is huge. Iceland Avon UK are coming for you' (IG2)

'This time next week I'll be on my way 🍷 5 trip to Reykjavik all for doing a job I love ❤️ thanks Avon' (IG5)*

'Achieving an all expenses paid trip with Avon to Iceland' (IG4)

In addition, the Instagram content of the representatives includes praise for the organization and what a great business it is, as seen below:

'Why Avon How many other companies these days send you away on Short Breaks & 5 Star Holidays ?' (IG7)

'Thanks to their fantastic Avon business, they're not experiencing a trip of a lifetime for FREE!!!!' (IG8)

Other places that were visited last year were Sofia and Lisbon. The UK offers many incentive trips. The following Instagram post illustrates the trips that the top representatives of Avon UK have been on:

'The past 5yrs has been pure insanity with incentive trips to Vegas, San Francisco, Warsaw - twice, Berlin, Bangkok, Dubai, 5 boat trips, dinners at high class restaurants as well as 3 tickets to Mauritius, 2 tickets to Marrakech that were cancelled due to Covid!!!' (IG8)*

As all the data before shows, these trips are portrayed as once-in-a-lifetime, all-expenses-paid, 5-star vacations, and just amazing trips to go on. The representatives praise Avon for these opportunities and post a lot about all these trips. What happens is that people see these representatives online, see their stories and posts about these rewards, and want to get these rewards. These incentives make the brand attractive and lead to recruits.

Extrinsic life goals are an essential factor in Avon's brand attractiveness. However, these extrinsic life goals do not provide satisfaction for themselves; they are focused on the power and sense of worth that can be derived from attaining them (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Therefore, there are intrinsic life goals to satisfy basic and inherent psychological needs (Kasser & Ryan, 1996).

4.3 Intrinsic life goals

As stated above, intrinsic life goals are focused on satisfying basic and inherent psychological needs (Kasser & Ryan, 1996, p.280). These intrinsic life goals can be divided into four subgoals, namely affiliation (relatedness), community feeling (helpfulness), physical fitness (health), and self-acceptance (growth) (Kasser & Ryan, 1996, p.281). In the data, the physical fitness and community feeling, as defined by Kasser and Ryan (1996), did not factor in Avon's brand attractiveness. However, affiliation and self-acceptance did.

4.3.1 Affiliation

Affiliation is 'having satisfying relationships with family and friends' (Kasser & Ryan, 1996, p.281). The first thing about affiliation that stood out was that many representatives on Instagram promoted the job's flexibility and combined it with a social life. In the following quotes, this form of affiliation is demonstrated:

'Flexible hours: Work when it suits you best' (IG3)

'Being an Avon Rep gives me the flexibility to work on my terms, my own timelines, and my own schedule. I'd say I'm a pretty big fan of that' (IG9)

'As an Avon Rep, you'll enjoy the freedom to work around your schedule' (IG3)

The image promoted of being an Avon representative as a flexible job goes even a step further than displayed here. The flexibility is used many times in combination with having a family and children, as can be seen below.

'Being a mum to two amazing adult children (who definitely keep me on my toes!) while leading a thriving Avon team has been an incredible journey' (IG9)

'Avon empowers you to set your own hours, giving you the flexibility to be the boss of your time. 🕒 Whether it's school pickups, family dinners, or bedtime stories – you decide when and how you work' (IG3)

'We have for families who want to work from home without work compromising on being parents' (IG7)

As already highlighted above, all these quotes portray the concept of affiliation. The representatives use social media to promote the idea that having a job and a family with enough free time is feasible as an Avon representative. Having time for your family and combining work and family is assumed to be an attractive lifestyle. Linking this lifestyle to the job of Avon representatives supports brand attractiveness. Next to affiliation, Avon representatives also use the intrinsic life goal of self-acceptance, as explained next.

4.3.2 Self-acceptance

Self-acceptance, which plays a role in Avon's brand attractiveness, can be defined as achieving psychological growth, autonomy, and self-regard (Kasser & Ryan, 1996, p.281). In the data, two forms of self-acceptance have been found: training and development on the job and promotions that could be reached. The first one, training and development, can be linked to the psychological growth people seek. Avon representatives promote this intrinsic life goal as follows:

'Receive ongoing training and support' (IG3)

'If that's not enough, my business has given me the opportunity to continue to learn and develop' (IG3)

'Full training and support given, no experience required' (IG5)

In the first instance, training at a job and developing yourself is not inadequate. However, looking at this from a critical perspective, the description of what the training includes and when this training is received needs to be included. The online posts show that they get a starting guide and training videos, which can help new representatives. What these both entail needs to be clarified. However, in the posts, it is seen that Avon provides exclusive master classes:

'Very excited to be prepping this am with this fabulous inspirational lady who is going to be hosting a 4 week exclusive master class series for our Avon reps and leaders to focus on their business growth this year! What an opportunity and exclusive to Avon Community Sara Davies' (IG2)

What can be assumed from this information is that there is a primary training platform provided for all representatives. However, to get to these master classes, the representative will need to be in the higher ranks of Avon. The promotion of receiving ongoing training when being a representative does not seem accurate. Self-acceptance goes beyond this growth and focuses more on self-regard, which is here used in the form of promotion on the job.

As stated before, the second form of self-acceptance is a promotion on the job. Almost all of the representatives who are followed on Instagram are showing off their promotions on their accounts. The following quotes portray these promotions they got:

'I am fortunate to have been selected to be 1 of 70 Insiders from 19 countries around the globe to represent Avon' (IG3)

'I'm delighted that I've been chosen to be one of the 30 thirty UK Avon Training Ambassadors for 2024' (IG3)

'Today we come together with a 130 of our amazing Representatives to certify them as our first ever Avon Beauty Advisers' (IG2)

What can be seen in these posts is that Avon has specific titles that they award to a selective group of representatives within the company. Not only are their titles given when reaching a certain level, but there is also the possibility of receiving a Beauty Rewards pack, as one of

the Instagram posts illustrates (Appendix 5). Representatives show off their intrinsic life goals online, making the brand Avon more attractive. As stated in the following quote, this representative illustrates that she has achieved personal goals: *Achieving the Avon VIP Star status in all four quarters of 2023 was one of my personal goals, and I am thrilled to have accomplished it! (IG7)*. What makes these kinds of statements attractive is that people want to achieve the same intrinsic life goals, and these kinds of posts link these goals to being an Avon representative. The micro-influencers thus use their community and credibility within this community to influence them to make the brand more attractive and recruit. Micro-influencers create intimacy between them and their followers to attract them to the brand.

4.4 Intimacy

The literature illustrates that micro-celebrities are perceived as more credible and relatable than traditional celebrities (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). In the expert interview with Hannah Martin, the concept of intimacy came forward, and she gave interesting insights into it. Micro-influencers have a strong community and have a lot of influence over their followers (HM16). Additionally, in the case of MLMs and representatives of Avon online, they use their community and online friendships as a recruitment thing (HM15). The feeling of intimacy they create online is used for the wrong intentions. Hannah Martin, a critical observer of the industry, said that social media has so much deception that they have to create intimacy (HM18). Therefore, it is essential to illustrate how they create intimacy. Social media is a weapon with a huge potential to cause damage (HM9). Out of the data, two ways intimacy is created have been found. The first is creating an ‘illusion of intimacy’, and the second is related to the formulation of the online posts and is called ‘thought-action fusion’.

4.4.1 Illusion of intimacy

In our interview, Hannah Martin describes the illusion of intimacy as encouraging a parasocial relationship (HM12). A parasocial relationship is defined by Duszynski-Goodman (2023) as a one-sided connection in which an individual imagines a personal bond with someone in the public eye. Individuals increasingly connect with social media influencers through screens in the digital age. These relationships can bring a feeling of connection and admiration while having the potential to risk and impact an individual’s emotional well-being, as described by Melissa Gentry in the article of Duszynski-Goodman (2023). Additionally, people want a connection, and a community and representatives create the illusion that they can help achieve these things (HM10). Portraying a community and a sense of support within

their community is what Avon representatives illustrate. It can be seen in the following quotes:

'I have stuck by my team every second of the way and will continue to do so FOREVER.'
(IG1)

'Avon is more than makeup; it is a community that supports your dreams' (IG3)

'I have never experienced anything quite like this; the support and the community are just incredible' (IG3)

As can be seen in the following quotes, the Avon representatives additionally promote within their community to become part of a family and making an emotional connection:

'DM me to be part of the Avon family. Here is to a year filled with growth, empowerment, and endless possibilities!'(IG3)

'Join the Avon family and embrace the freedom of being your boss!' (IG3)

These representatives thus create the feeling of intimacy by illustrating that new representatives will join a family and community and receive unlimited support. As stated before, social media plays a large role in creating this illusion of intimacy. Hannah Martin explains this role: 'We can manipulate more people by using social media and promoting ourselves more' (HM8). Additionally, social media gives the possibility of being anything and accessing anyone in a far bigger and more accessible way (HM11). In line with these critical statements of Hannah Martin, Avon representatives use the concept of thought-action fusion online.

4.4.2 Thought-action fusion

Thought-action fusion is related to positive thinking and hope, which positively influence the brand attraction of an MLM company and make it more likely to participate in MLM companies (Dixon et al., 2023). A form of this is the law of attraction, in which MLM distributors claim that all the success in their lives is due to the MLMs they joined (Dixon et al., 2023). This law of attraction is used by many Avon representatives, as can be seen in the following Instagram quotes:

'AVON has already changed my life in so many ways for the better In just 12 weeks!!!!' (IG6)

'Don't wait for the perfect moment – create it. Whether it's a personal goal, a dream project, or a new adventure, take that first step now. Your future self will thank you for the courage to begin'(IG3)

'I'm not saying your bank balance will grow overnight, I'm not saying your mindset will instantly shift, but together we can work on that, and I absolutely promise you, once you've seen the light, you'll never live in the dark AGAIN!' (IG1)

These representatives praise their success in these quotes and encourage others to follow them. These quotes are positive and give people the hope that anything is possible when becoming an Avon representative. This is another deceptive way of formulation used by representatives online to make the brand more attractive and focus on positivity. When used correctly, it could negatively affect objective financial and business decision-making (Dixon et al., 2023). These negative consequences can also be seen in the 'resilience to negative information' due to brand attractiveness.

4.5 Resilience to negative information

Brand attractiveness can be seen as a predictor of resilience to negative information about the brand (Elbedweihy et al., 2016). The four dimensions illustrate the factors portrayed on social media, making Avon attractive. When these are used in the recruitment process, individuals will become resilient to negative information about Avon. However, taking a critical perspective, there is enough negative information about Avon to invalidate the social media data. The image created by the social media micro-influencers is far from the reality. The research will not portray all the negative information. However, focus on the ones linked to the four dimensions of brand attractiveness found in this research.

The extrinsic life goals are focused on financial success while being an Avon representative is not a business or income opportunity (Taylor, 2011). In addition, the company is a direct-selling company, and most of the money goes to top of the pyramid representatives at the expense of the other representatives further down the line, of whom 99 percent lose money by joining an MLM (Taylor, 2011). To illustrate the limitation of income opportunity at Avon, Bates (2016) uses the example of Debbie Daves, who became the first in the UK to earn 1 million dollars in 2010. Debbie Daves built up a team of 8000 members (Bates, 2016). A large team is needed to have serious income opportunities at Avon.

Hannah Martin (2024) elaborates on the current Avon earning program. Avon representatives need a minimum sales of 250 euros monthly to earn a commission (Martin,

2024). So, if representatives do not hit the target, they do not earn any money, and when brochures for that month have been bought, they lose money (Martin, 2024). The brochures are changed every three weeks, adds Hannah Martin (2024). Representatives are buying stuff themselves to reach the targets set by Avon. If representatives reach the target of 250 euros, this does not mean earning 250 euros that month. The current commission plan of Avon is to earn 25% on 40 euro-plus orders and save this percentage when buying for yourself (Martin, 2024). So when a representative only gets 40 minus orders, they earn nothing that month. To complete the story, when all the above targets are not reached, the promised discount for representatives expires (Martin, 2014). Thus, *financial independence* is hard to achieve as an Avon representative, while social media micro-influencers portray the opposite about Avon. The social media micro-influencers not only show financial success as achievable.

In addition, the social media portrayal is about all the benefits the job gives individuals, while most of these benefits are limited to an exclusive group. To show this exclusivity, it is essential to know that in the UK there are over 160.000 representatives (Bates, 2016). This number is from 2016, and it is known that the number of representatives at Avon has been increasing (Martin, 2024).

The exclusivity can be seen in the extrinsic life goal *financial rewards*. As seen in Appendix 5, approximately 40 people got to go on the Iceland trip. This is 0.025 percent of the UK representatives. To the rewarded event Champagne Reception, only 30 people got invited (IG7). These trips and events illustrate that the percentage of the representatives who get these rewards is almost zero. At the same time, the online content is massive and gives the feeling that it is achievable. The same exclusivity and online promotion can be seen in the intrinsic life goal of *self-acceptance* and distinguished characteristic *brand loyalty*. To illustrate this some examples from the data, 70 people were promoted to the title ‘Insiders’ of 6 million representatives worldwide (IG3), and 25 of the 160.000 UK representatives were invited to the UK Avon loyalty event (Appendix 5). Looking at these numbers of representatives demonstrates how selective these promotions are.

The intrinsic life goal ‘*affiliation*’ is focused on relations with friends and family, and the ‘*illusion of intimacy*’ concentrates on support and a community, both promoted online as achievable. However, to reach affiliation the representative needs to have financial success and be part of the exclusive group which, as illustrated above, is hard to achieve. The illustration of having unlimited support and community can additionally be challenged. The social media micro-influencers researched are at the top of the pyramid. They will have

thousands of representatives in their downline (see example, Debbie Daves), which makes it impossible to have an intimate community. Lastly, social media gives these influencers a chance to use the formulation of their content in a deceptive manner known as *'thought-action fusion'*. This supports the resilience of negative information.

In conclusion, micro-influencers portray many dimensions on social media, making MLMs more attractive in their recruitment process. This display of the micro-influencer is biased, while it is from people at the top of the pyramid. When taking a critical perspective, the facts show us that almost all social media content can be invalidated by looking at the facts. However, due to brand attractiveness influence on individuals, they become resilient to this information regarding Avon.

5. Conclusion and discussion

This chapter provides a conclusion and discussion of the research. The conclusion focuses on answering the research question by looking at the results (5.1). The discussion analyzes the interpretation of the findings and reflects upon the implications and connections to existing literature (5.2).

5.1 Conclusion

The research aimed to investigate the factors influencing brand attractiveness of MLM companies in the recruitment process. This has been held in the context of social media micro-influencers. The research question addressed was: *How do social media micro-influencers influence brand attractiveness in the recruitment process of MLM organizations?*

After conducting an extensive literature review and the analysis of three forms of data, namely immersive data (reviews), investigative data (social media data), and interactive data (interview Hannah Martin), this study identifies four dimensions of factors that significantly influence brand attractiveness of MLM companies in the recruitment process: distinguish characteristics of Avon, extrinsic life goals, intrinsic life goals, and intimacy. These four dimensions were divided into eight sub-dimensions. To help conclude, the following table (Table 4) demonstrates the frequency of the sub-dimensions used by the micro-influencers on social media.

Financial rewards	Number of quotes: 43
Illusion of intimacy	Number of quotes: 41
Avon's history	Number of quotes: 36
Affiliation	Number of quotes: 22
Self-acceptance	Number of quotes: 21
Brand loyalty	Number of quotes: 19
Thought-action fusion	Number of quotes: 16
Financial independence	Number of quotes: 15

Table 4: Social media presence of the sub-dimensions

The dimension of Avon's distinguished characteristics illustrates that *Avon's history* influences its attraction to the brand. Individuals perceive the company's age as something that makes the brand credible. However, the company made multiple changes in policies. They went from selling to recruiting and from face-to-face selling to online selling. This is not

the information portrayed by the Avon micro-influencers online. Additionally, Avon is a company that is women-orientated and portrays itself for women and empowering women. However, there have been multiple lawsuits against them from women. Micro-influencers use Avon's history to gain credibility, support the digital changes, and promote being women-orientated.

The results demonstrate that Avon has many loyal customers and representatives. The brand rewards loyal representatives with events. These events were limited visible on social media accounts. Avon's *brand loyalty* was most visible in the reviews as it, for example, had been passed on to families. The literature demonstrates that brand loyalty influences brand attractiveness. Therefore, brand loyalty is expected to affect brand attractiveness when it is portrayed on social media, and that portrayal is currently limited.

The dimension of extrinsic life goals are personal motivational factors focused on financial success, external approval, and rewards. These are portrayed by social media micro-influencers as financial independence and financial rewards. *Financial independence* is the social media portrayal that being an Avon representative is an earning opportunity and could make individuals wealthy. Micro-influencers often use this financial motivation as a form of job promotion. However, all these Instagram quotes demonstrate only some of the images of the honest earning opportunities at Avon. As facts illustrate, earning real money from being an Avon representative is hard. Therefore, individuals are falsely informed during the employment search and will perceive Avon as a manner to reach financial independence.

Financial rewards is a sub-dimension that social media data have formed. Avon gives representatives rewards in the form of incentive trips and incentive events. The micro-influencers portray these incentives on their social media accounts. These micro-influencers are top representatives in the UK and therefore get the chance to achieve these incentives. It takes a lot of work to get to this level within Avon. However, by showing off these incentives, they influence individuals in their employment search. Getting these kinds of financial rewards fits the extrinsic life goals individuals want to achieve, making the brand more attractive.

The dimension of intrinsic life goals was focused on satisfying individuals' basic and inherent psychological needs. The data illustrated that combining being an Avon representative and having a flexible social life around family and friends was a strongly promoted benefit of the job, known as the sub-dimension *affiliation*. The reality of this flexibility is entirely different from what is portrayed online.

The sub-dimension of *self-acceptance* has demonstrated that micro-influencers frequently use promotions and training to make the Avon representative job more attractive. They portray this online as easily achievable, while the reality proves otherwise. The online portrayal is used deceptively, the positive side will affect brand attractiveness in the recruitment process.

The dimension of intimacy focuses on the role of social media. Social media gives micro-influencers the chance to reach more people than in the traditional manner. The micro-influencer creates the *illusion of intimacy* online by portraying all the support and connection received when becoming an Avon representative. People want a connection and a community, and linking these things to being an Avon representative makes the brand more attractive to individuals in the recruitment process.

Thought-action fusion is a specific positive sub-dimension focused on how social media micro-influencers write their posts. It demonstrates that if the notation of these posts is very positive and appreciative of Avon, it portrays the company as more attractive.

In conclusion, multiple dimensions and sub-dimensions of brand attractiveness in the recruitment process of MLM companies were found in the context of social media micro-influencers. Brand attractiveness leads to resilience towards negative information, while most social media data can be invalidated by looking at the facts. When taking a critical perspective, the social media portrayal of Avon representatives does not include a factual representation of the reality behind the job. Therefore, these micro-influencers greatly influence individuals and use this influence to recruit individuals as Avon representatives and make them resilient to negative information. The research demonstrates that eight sub-dimensions were portrayed most by social media micro-influencers and defines these sub-dimensions. Figure 3 illustrates this conclusion and the extent to which micro-influencers promoted the sub-dimensions. This shows that Avon's history, financial rewards, and illusion of intimacy are most visible on social media.

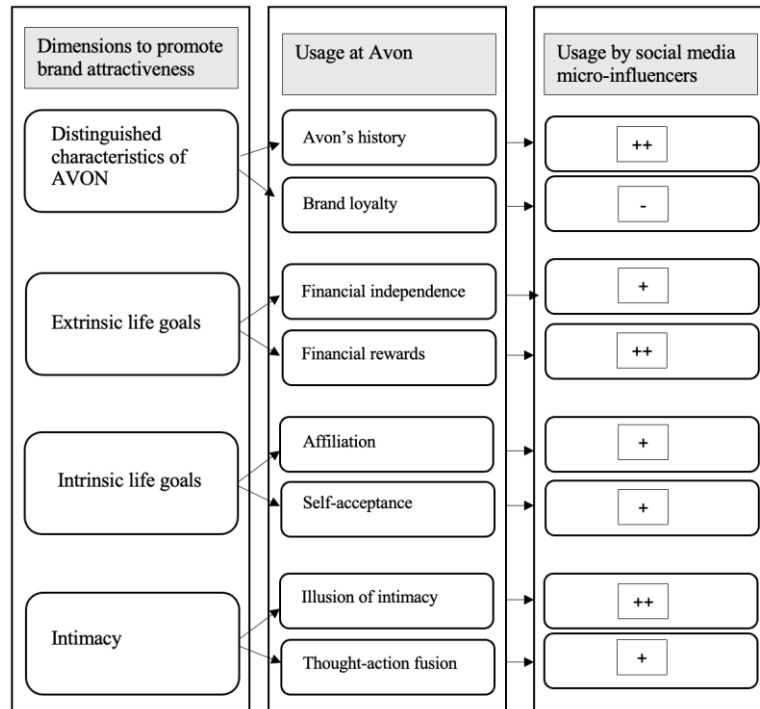


Figure 3: Visual representation of the conclusion

5.2 Discussion

This part will analyze the interpretation of the findings and reflect upon the implications and connections to existing literature. After this, limitations and further research are discussed, and lastly, choices made and the potential influence of the researcher on the research process are considered.

5.2.1 Theoretical and practical implications

The implications of this research can be divided into theoretical implications and practical implications. Both are discussed in the subchapters below.

5.2.1.1 Theoretical implication

The literature on the MLM industry argues for multiple methods that support the recruitment process of MLM companies (Dixon et al., 2023; Pratt, 2000). However, this literature does not consider the role of social media and influencers. While the role of celebrities has been mentioned in the context of recruiting and socializing MLM distributors (Brooks, 2014), a profound analysis of the influence of social media micro-influencers needs to be included.

Therefore, the research adds a newly explored context of micro-influencers to the knowledge of tactics used in the recruitment process of MLM companies. Specifically, which factors make a brand attractive in this recruitment process and how this brand attractiveness

influences the resilience of individuals to negative information.

Furthermore, extrinsic life goals are seen by Dixon et al. (2023) as the most significant influence on new prospects of MLM organizations. In the literature on MLM recruitment, Pratt (2000) states that financial independence is the most used to sense-break and influence potential distributors. The extrinsic life goals of financial independence align with current literature on becoming rich. However, the extrinsic life goal of financial rewards is newly found in this research. The current literature focuses more on material success while going on vacations and events simultaneously influences individuals. It is an added financial motivation for individuals to achieve these things and go on these trips and to these events. This research adds new dimensions to extrinsic life goals and how they are portrayed in the social media context. Not only do extrinsic life goals illustrate significant results, but intrinsic life goals also have a considerable influence. Intrinsic life goals of affiliation and self-acceptance influence brand attractiveness in the recruitment process at Avon. The intrinsic life goals and their influence are not commonly used in MLM literature, but this research has demonstrated significant results.

Another new insight from this research is that intimacy is an essential dimension in brand attractiveness, especially in the context of social media micro-influencers. Social media gives micro-influencers the chance to reach more people. Additionally, it gives these people the feeling of intimacy and being part of a community with unlimited support. This feeling is created by how they promote themselves on their Instagram account and use the law of attraction in their notation. These factors are specifically for the social media micro-influencer context because micro-influencers are perceived as more credible and relatable, so they have the power to create this feeling of intimacy (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

In addition to current literature on brand attractiveness, the characteristics of a company can make an organization more attractive in the recruitment process. Avon is an old company that focuses on women's products, leading to added brand attractiveness in the recruitment process. The existing literature on brand attractiveness does not include this element in their definitions of brand attractiveness (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Currás-Pérez et al., 2009; Elbedweihy et al., 2016; Lievens et al., 2007). Brand loyalty was an expected sub-dimension for brand attractiveness in existing literature (Elbedweihy et al., 2016). This research demonstrates that it has an influence when it is portrayed on social media. However, Avon's social media micro-influencers show limited data on brand loyalty.

Overall, the literature on MLM company recruitment does not include a social media micro-influencer context. This study highlights the importance of taking this context into account. New factors influencing brand attractiveness have been found and can be added to the current literature. Additionally, this research has validated and disproved literature on brand attractiveness and the recruitment processes of MLM in the context of social media micro-influencers.

5.2.1.2 Practical implications

In addition, this research entails practical implications. The research contributed to a better understanding of how social media micro-influencers influence brand attractiveness in the recruitment process of MLM companies. This research can illustrate Avon the manners in which individual Avon representatives promote themselves. It demonstrates to them that the truth is twisted in many social media posts. Additionally, it can give Avon insight into the perceived reception of policy changes. Most of the reviews were pessimistic about becoming more digital, and Avon lost many loyal customers and representatives because of this change. The interview with Hannah Martin illustrates the same and states that this makes the business more unethical and is expected to perform poorly. Avon can learn from this knowledge and improve their working manners.

The research is focused on the MLM company Avon. However, most of the results can be generalized to the MLM industry. Out of the four dimensions made, the distinguishing characteristic of Avon is the dimension that portrays results related to Avon. The other three, extrinsic life goals, intrinsic life goals, and intimacy, can be generalized. These three factors are portrayed by social media micro-influencers, which enhance brand attractiveness in the recruitment process of MLM companies. MLM uses the same recruitment methods. Therefore, the factors likely resonate with other MLM companies' social media micro-influencer practices.

They are addressing the factors influencing social media micro-influencers during the recruitment process in MLM companies. The research adds knowledge for individuals who are searching for employment. By adding more information on MLM companies' deceptive manners to recruit, individuals are better informed and hopefully think twice about becoming an MLM distributor. This research demonstrates how brand attractiveness can make individuals resilient to negative information and what the negative information around Avon

includes. Current MLM representatives can be informed about the companies they work for and the financial and ethical risks associated with them.

5.2.2 Limitations and further research

The limitation of this study is that it does not fully capture the dimensions of social media on brand attractiveness in the recruitment process. The research had limitations on its format; therefore, only 11 influencers from the UK were followed. There were only 210 quotes from social media used. This research gives a good indication of the dimensions used by social media micro-influencers. However, an elaborate and longitudinal analysis needs to be included. With a longitudinal analysis, the dimensions could be improved, and the effects of these dimensions can be taken into account, illustrating the perception of individuals in the recruitment process. Additionally, the focus is on one country, giving a biased view of these dimensions.

Another area for improvement in the research is that only one interview with an expert was conducted. This limited the perspective of experts, while this was intended to be two or three interviews. However, it took more work to realize interviews with experts than initially thought. To the extent the interactive data and interviews with MLM representatives active as micro-influencers were considered, the data found was already too much; thus, these interviews did not fit the research size.

Lastly, the focus was on micro-influencers because they are perceived as more credible and relatable (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). However, the influence of meso- and macro-influencers is not considered. These influencers have more followers, so they play a role in brand attractiveness in the recruitment process of MLM companies.

Aside from limitations, the research additionally demonstrates opportunities for further research. The first suggestion is to continue the research in the MLM field in the context of social media. Social media plays a significant role in the recruitment process and new policies of MLMs. However, the literature in the MLM field is behind. More research within this context is needed to understand MLM practices better. An example could be measuring the effects of the dimensions found in this research to see which dimensions, portrayed by the social media micro-influencers, have the most significant impact on individuals in the recruitment process.

The context of meso- and macro-influencers is an opportunity for further research in the MLM field. It is, for example, expected that looking at meso- or macro influencers, the subgoals of social recognition and appealing appearance have an influence. Meso- and macro

influencers have more followers and will add even more knowledge to the role of social media in the recruitment process of MLM companies.

In this research, the concept of intrinsic life goals and intimacy significantly impacts the research question. However, there has yet to be a profound analysis of the MLM field. Further research could be done on these topics in the context of social media to gain more insights.

Another suggestion for further research is to look at the intrinsic and extrinsic life goals that did not illustrate significant results in this research. These subgoals that could have had more substantial results were social recognition, appealing appearance, community feeling, and physical fitness. Expected is that these subgoals have an influence; however, interviews with potential distributors or individuals are needed to gain these insights.

5.2.3 Reflection and Reflexivity

After conducting this qualitative study on the factors influencing brand attractiveness in the recruitment process of MLM organizations in the context of social media micro-influencers, it is essential to reflect on the choices made and the potential influence of the researcher on the research process and findings.

The decision to employ a qualitative research design and specifically do a netnography was driven to capture experiences, social media data, and interviews. Conducting these three forms of data facilitated a deep exploration of these different perspectives, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing brand attractiveness in the recruitment process of MLM companies. Using three forms of data ensured triangulation to enhance the research's validity, strength, and interpretative potential.

The research was conducted in an abductive manner. This allowed the research to adapt the theoretical knowledge and use knowledge found in the data. The research focus changed after the data was collected to brand attractiveness and concepts, such as characteristics of Avon and intimacy, which were added to the coding process due to the data on these topics.

The perception of the researcher played an essential role in this research. The researcher, therefore, deliberately chose to analyze only written data. By analyzing social media data, the research could analyze visual data. However, the research includes written social media data to have an objective view. Visual data is only used in a supporting form.

Lastly, the researcher did not anticipate the number of dimensions that were found in the data. This makes the whole research process very complex as the researcher needed to

deal with many elements. When reflecting on this process, some of the elements could be excluded. This has been a learning lesson for the future.

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