

Marketing Motherhood: Analyzing the Recruitment Media of LuLaRoe

Anneliği Pazarlama: LuLaRoe'nun İşe Alım Medyasını Analiz Etmek

Stefanie Elizabeth
DAVIS KEMPTON 

Penn State Altoona University,
Faculty of Communication, Altoona,
PA, USA

ABSTRACT

Multilevel marketing is a billion-dollar industry. LuLaRoe is a successful multilevel marketing that uses mass media to recruit women to sell its products. However, LuLaRoe has been accused of being a pyramid scheme. Through a textual analysis of LuLaRoe's website and social media pages, this study analyzes the recruitment media of LuLaRoe. Findings suggest common themes: an ideal retailer is a young, white, mother; LuLaRoe promises women the control to be successful entrepreneurs and attentive mothers; and LuLaRoe perpetuates a before-and-after identity.

Keywords: Gender, marketing, race, recruitment communication

ÖZ

Çok düzeyli pazarlama milyar dolarlık bir endüstridir. LuLaRoe, ürünlerini satmaları amacıyla kadınları işe almak için kitle iletişim araçlarını kullanan başarılı, çok düzeyli bir pazarlamadır. Ancak LuLaRoe bir saadet zinciri planı olmakla suçlanmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, LuLaRoe'nun işe alım medyası olan web sitesi ve sosyal medya sayfaları metinsel analizi aracılığıyla analiz edilmektedir. Elde edilen bulgular ortak temalara işaret etmektedir: ideal bir perakendeci genç ve beyaz bir annedir; LuLaRoe, kadınlara başarılı girişimciler ve özenli anneler olma kontrolünü vaat etmektedir; LuLaRoe öncesi ve sonrası kimliğini sürdürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Cinsiyet, pazarlama, ırk, işe alım iletişimi

Introduction

Multilevel marketing (MLM) is a \$36 billion industry in the USA. According to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), multilevel marketing companies (MLMs) are defined as "businesses that involve selling products to family and friends and recruiting other people to do the same" (2021). The FTC notes two main ways MLM participants can make a profit: by selling products to consumers not involved in the MLM and by recruiting new retailers and earning commission based on their sales. However, according to research by the AARP Foundation, 74% of MLM participants reported they either lost money or made no money (DeLiema et al., 2018). Thus, most MLMs survive and grow through recruitment, and so recruitment messaging is vital to their success. Today, successful MLMs use mass media like websites and social media platforms to share marketing messages and recruit individuals.

Research shows that 60% of MLM participants in the USA are women and 74% are married (DeLiema et al., 2018). This number is even higher in other countries. In Canada, for example, 82% of MLM participants are women, and women make up 96% of MLM retailers in the UK (Direct Selling Association, 2021). Some of the most profitable MLM corporations like Mary Kay, Avon, and Amway sell products that target women, especially women homemakers, wives, and mothers. These companies primarily sell cosmetics, kitchen products, and skin care.

LuLaRoe is one of the newer successful MLMs in the USA. The company sells leggings and other women's fashion, and encourages its retailers to recruit other women to join. In fact, according to LuLaRoe's own public policies, promotion within the MLM is based primarily on recruitment of other individuals. Marketing communication through digital mass media like websites, video testimonials, and social media are key in the recruitment efforts of LuLaRoe, and therefore play a critical role in the overall success of the company.

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Corresponding author/Sorumlu Yazar:
Stefanie Elizabeth DAVIS KEMPTON
E-mail: sed5067@psu.edu

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Due to its reliance on recruitment to make money, LuLaRoe has been accused of being a pyramid scheme. Washington State Attorney General Bob Ferguson filed a lawsuit against LuLaRoe in 2019, alleging the company violated the Anti-pyramid Promotional Scheme Act and the state Consumer Protection Act. Ferguson claimed LuLaRoe “tricked consumers into buying into its pyramid scheme” (Aho, 2019). LuLaRoe was required to pay \$4.5 million to resolve the lawsuit and ordered by the court to “be more transparent with retailers to avoid future deception.”

The accusations of deception and trickery against LuLaRoe, coupled with the company’s reliance on recruiting mainly women is concerning. As such, this study investigates LuLaRoe’s recruitment communications through a textual analysis of its mass media, including text, photos, and videos on LuLaRoe’s website and social media pages. Findings suggest three common themes across LuLaRoe’s recruitment media. These themes are as follows: an ideal retailer is a young, white, mother; LuLaRoe promises women the control to be both successful entrepreneurs and attentive mothers; and LuLaRoe perpetuates a before-and-after identity for women. A discussion of how these recruitment messages are damaging for women follow.

Background

According to LuLaRoe’s website, the MLM company was founded in 2013 by husband and wife team Mark and DeAnne Stidham. The company’s slogan is “Apparel with a Purpose,” and it presents itself as an entrepreneurial opportunity for women who want to give back to their families and their communities. LuLaRoe sells women’s apparel and their signature products are leggings that come in a variety of colors, patterns, and sizes.

According to LuLaRoe’s Leadership Compensation Plan, which is available to the public online, there are six levels within the MLM. Individuals begin as “retailers” where they sell LuLaRoe apparel and attempt to recruit other individuals to join the company. Once a retailer meets certain sales and recruitment numbers, they are able to advance to upper levels. These levels (in ascending order) are: retailer, sponsor, trainer, coach, mentor, and ambassador. An ambassador, for example, must have at least 10 mentors and five coaches “underneath” them. That means they have recruited these individuals and earn commission based on each of their sales. While sales are counted, advancement within LuLaRoe is based primarily on recruitment of other individuals.

Literature Review

Identity, Persuasion, and Multilevel Marketing Companies

Kenneth Burke, in *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1969), was one of the first scholars to link the idea of identification with persuasion in rhetoric. While the concept of “knowing your audience” had been well understood in rhetorical scholarship and practice alike, Burke expanded upon this idea, explaining that “a speaker persuades an audience by the use of stylistic identifications” (1969, p. 46). That is, a speaker should do more than just know their audience, they should identify with their audience, and have their audience identify with them. Thus, understanding and tapping into an audience’s unique identity can be used as a tool for successful rhetorical persuasion.

Charland (1987) applied Burke’s theory of identification to analyze the rhetoric used in the movement for the independence of Quebec, Canada in the 1960s. Those in favor of Quebec’s independence, called the *Mouvement Souveraineté-Association*

(MSA), employed persuasive strategies to convince the citizens of Quebec to separate from Canada and form their own sovereign nation. Their rhetorical strategies, according to Charland, focused on appealing to the unique identity of French Canadians in Quebec. Through rhetorical discourse, the MSA was creating a new national identity, the “people Québécois,” and thereby simultaneously creating justification for the creation of a new sovereign state of Quebec (Charland, 1987). The MSA’s use of identity politics in their persuasive techniques revealed a strategy in which “a subject is not persuaded to support sovereignty. Support for sovereignty is inherent to the subject” (Charland, 1987, p. 134). As such, the MSA used identity politics to create an elaborate communications campaign to remind the people of Quebec that secession from Canada was only natural.

Andres (1992) noted how Burke’s (1969) theory of identification and persuasion can be successfully applied to business communication, and Mather et al. (2017) argued that no business model is more reliant on persuasion for its success than MLMs. Historically, MLMs recruited individuals through word of mouth and intimate in-person events like Tupperware parties (Bax, 2010). Here, individuals could practice their persuasive techniques in an attempt to recruit their friends, neighbors, and church members into their MLM. However, as new communication technologies emerged, MLM recruitment efforts shifted from word of mouth to electronic word of mouth (eWOM) through new digital platforms like websites and social media (Deviacita, 2022). As such, both individual retailers and the MLMs themselves could use digital media outlets to recruit interested parties.

Winter (2021) noted the connection between research on identity and persuasion and the recruitment tactics of Mary Kay, one of the top MLMs in the USA. Using the work of both Burke (1969) and Charland (1987) as guides, she conducted a textual analysis of Mary Kay’s website to analyze how Mary Kay used identity to recruit individuals, especially women. Winter (2021) argued that Mary Kay used societal and cultural constraints placed on women’s identities to guide its recruitment communications, specifically, the MLM exploited women’s gendered roles as wives and mothers. “By positioning themselves as one of the only options that women have to experience these feelings while ‘having it all,’ Mary Kay Inc. has both exploited and empowered women in the same stride” (Winter, 2021, p. 60).

D’Antonio (2019) conducted a similar study on the recruitment communications of Mary Kay and Scentsy (MLM that sells candles) and found that their recruitment media also focused on women’s identities. Findings suggested that these MLMs assist women in constructing self-worth and identity solely through their new role as a direct sales retailer. That is, being a Mary Kay or Scentsy retailer becomes the main identity of the individual, replacing prior, and possibly unwanted, identities constructed for them by society, like stay-at-home moms or housewives. These MLMs also include God and Christianity as part of their recruitment, suggesting that those who participate in the MLM will become better people and be closer to God. In doing so, these women are constructing new identities as “moral marketers” (D’Antonio, 2019, p. 7).

While MLMs are popular in the USA, many of these companies are expanding their reach around the world and entering markets in new countries. Dolan and Scott (2009) conducted interviews with Avon retailers in South Africa. Findings showed that women

viewed Avon as “a passport to personal transformation and social upliftment” (Dolan & Scott, 2009, p. 211). Dolan and Scott (2009) argued that Avon used women’s constructed identities in South Africa as a way to recruit retailers. Women in South Africa face gender inequality, exclusion, and disempowerment, and these inequities are culturally accepted and normalized. Avon presented itself as an opportunity for women to break down these barriers and earn higher social status and social inclusion by joining and succeeding within the MLM (Dolan & Scott, 2009). Through Avon, women could earn their own money, earn higher social status and acceptance, and build their new identities as powerful women.

Women Entrepreneurs and Work–Life Balance

MLMs present themselves as entrepreneurial opportunities because they allow individuals to create their own network of consumers and recruits. Multilevel marketing companies promise women, especially, the chance to build their own business. In general, the number of women entrepreneurs is growing. According to a report conducted by American Express, the number of women-owned businesses has grown by 21% since 2014, with women-owned businesses now making up 42% of businesses in the USA (American Express, 2019). However, as research shows, there are specific and unique challenges facing women entrepreneurs that do not impact their male counterparts. Specifically, work–life balance and managing a family are challenges primarily faced by women entrepreneurs. The term “momprenuer” was coined by Patricia Cobe and Ellen H. Parlapiano in the 1990s (Nel et al., 2010). The exact definition of momprenuer varies but generally refers to a woman who is balancing the role of motherhood with running her own business (Jean & Forbes, 2012).

Shelton (2006) argued that work/family conflict directly impacts the well-being of a woman entrepreneur, which in turn, directly impacts the success of women-owned businesses. Shelton (2006) suggested strategies to minimize work/family conflict, including: role elimination (no family), role reduction (smaller family/defer family), and role-sharing (delegating familial tasks to others). It should be noted that these obstacles and proposed strategies apply only to women, as men are not culturally expected to manage the same level of work–life balance. Women entrepreneurs face challenges that are unique to their roles as wives and mothers. They face obstacles that are often times not obstacles faced by their male counterparts (Shelton, 2006).

Qualitative research suggests that women are well aware of these gendered challenges, and these challenges can influence their decisions to become entrepreneurs. Through in-depth interviews, Gill and Ganesh (2007) found that balancing a business and a family was the most significant constraint faced by women entrepreneurs. Cesaroni and Paoloni (2016) also conducted interviews with women entrepreneurs and found that family was seen as both an obligation and a form of support. More specifically, married women faced tremendous pressure to accomplish a socially acceptable work–life balance, but at the same time, leaned on family for support in running their businesses. Single women, however, felt starting a family was a form of “giving up” on their entrepreneurial dreams. They knew they’d be culturally expected to spend more time tending to family and less time tending to their business (Cesaroni & Paoloni, 2016).

Ufuk and Özgen (2001) compared women and men entrepreneurs who held a master of business administration degree to control for education and experience. They found that women

became business owners in an attempt to better control their work–life balance, while men became business owners in an attempt to make more money. The difference in motivation between women and men entrepreneurs increased if the women were married with children, but there were no differences between unmarried men and married men with children. That is, both unmarried men and husbands/fathers were both motivated by money and not by family. Findings suggested that women thought significantly more about family when starting their businesses than men, even though both held the same levels of education and professional experience (Ufuk & Özgen, 2001).

Eddleston and Powell (2012) also conducted a comparison of men and women entrepreneurs. Through surveys with men and women business owners, they found that women obtained personal satisfaction with work–life balance by creating schedules and routines that involved both their professional and their personal lives. Men, however, obtained this satisfaction by relying on family support at home. Women entrepreneurs relied on themselves for creating balance and happiness, while men relied on their wives and children to provide nurturing and satisfaction (Eddleston & Powell, 2012).

While there is valuable literature in both the arena of persuasion and identity and that of women and entrepreneurship, there is a lack of current literature connecting the two. This study attempts to fill the gap in the literature by analyzing how LuLaRoe uses persuasion and identity in its recruitment media to enroll women entrepreneurs. As a newer MLM, LuLaRoe relies heavily on digital media for its recruitment communications. LuLaRoe’s use of websites and social media platforms to recruit women, along with their reputation for deception, makes the company a valuable point of study for feminist communications research.

Methods

The goal of this study is to understand and analyze LuLaRoe’s recruitment communications, especially as pertaining to identity and persuasion. In order to accomplish this goal, a textual analysis was conducted on LuLaRoe’s recruitment media, including the company’s website and its social media pages.

LuLaRoe’s main website (www.lularoe.com) is broken up into five segments: Women’s Collection, Find your Retailer, Join LuLaRoe, About Us, and Income Disclosure Statement. As this project focuses specifically on recruitment communications, two of the five segments were chosen for analysis: Join LuLaRoe, and About Us. The About Us tab included a subsection titled “Why LuLaRoe,” specifically targeting potential retailers. All text, photos, and videos on these websites were included for analysis.

LuLaRoe’s social media pages were also included as part of the analysis. Specifically, the “My Story as a Retailer” video series on Facebook and the “Retailers” highlight tab on Instagram were analyzed. These short videos feature current retailers explaining their decision to join LuLaRoe and encouraging others to join as well. There were 29 video testimonials on Facebook and 18 video testimonials on Instagram. All were included in the analysis for a total of 47 videos. Each video was less than one minute long.

This study’s textual analysis followed the guidelines of Winter (2021) who conducted a similar analysis on the recruitment media of Mary Kay. Winter’s (2021) framework was slightly adjusted for this project and, in conjunction with the aforementioned

literature, developed into three main research questions that guided the analysis:

RQ1: Who appears to be gathered as the target audience for LuLaRoe recruitment?

RQ2: How is LuLaRoe encouraging the target audience see themselves? What “second persona” are they being encouraged to adopt?

RQ3: How is LuLaRoe calling the target audience to act? How does this perpetuate the continuation of the identity LuLaRoe is encouraging them to adopt?

Results

A textual analysis of LuLaRoe’s website, Facebook page, and Instagram page was conducted for this study. The textual analysis of LuLaRoe’s recruitment media revealed three overarching themes. These themes are: an ideal retailer is a young, white, mother; LuLaRoe promises women the control to be both successful entrepreneurs and attentive mothers; and LuLaRoe perpetuates a before-and-after identity for women.

Young, White, Mothers Are ideal

RQ1 asked: Who appears to be gathered as the target audience for LuLaRoe recruitment? Findings suggest that the target audience for LuLaRoe recruitment are young, white, mothers. LuLaRoe’s website uses visual cues to portray its ideal retailer. The background page of the “Join LuLaRoe” website tab is a photo of a group of women, the majority of whom are white, in full dress and makeup, and all appear to be of child-bearing age. Retailer testimonials include a family photo of a woman, man, and two children with the text: “Right before I started with LuLaRoe, I had just quit my job to be a stay-at-home momma.” Another testimonial features a photo of a woman with the text: “A huge boost to my own confidence as a woman, wife, mom.” The “Why LuLaRoe” website tab features six photos of solo women or groups of women. They are all in full dress and makeup and appear to be of child-bearing age. All of the women are white, except one who has brown skin but is racially ambiguous. All of the photos where the women’s hands are visible show a wedding ring, signifying they are wives.

While visual cues are used to exemplify LuLaRoe’s recruitment of young, white, mothers, the text on its website reinforces this preferred archetype. The importance of mothering presents itself multiple times in multiple texts, including, “more time for the ones you love the most,” “spend more time doing the things that matter to you, like spending time with your family,” and “improve lives and strengthen families.” “Family, fun, freedom” is a common slogan across LuLaRoe media. The intense and sometimes overwhelming focus on family suggests that LuLaRoe only wants wives and mothers to join its ranks. The photos suggest the MLM is especially interested in young mothers whose children are still in their care.

The video testimonials on LuLaRoe’s social media pages reiterate LuLaRoe’s preference to recruit young, white, mothers. The “My Story as a Retailer” series on the company’s official Facebook page included short video testimonials from retailers, describing their experiences with LuLaRoe. A common theme in the series is motherhood. Chelsea testified that since joining LuLaRoe she is “a happier mom, a happier person, a happier version of me.” Erin said because of LuLaRoe she can now work while being able to “stay home with our four beautiful daughters.” Elly said LuLaRoe has allowed her to “to grow as a parent.” Julie said, “being a

LuLaRoe retailer has allowed me to strengthen my family.” All of these women were white and appear to be between their late 20s and early 40s. A second coder was brought in to confirm the perceived age range of the women.

Video testimonials on LuLaRoe’s Instagram page reflect a similar theme, as many of the retailers mention their roles as mothers. Stacy said what she loves most about being a LuLaRoe realtor is “being able to spend time with my kiddos.” Jessica, who is visibly pregnant, says “the LuLaRoe community, to me, means family.” Courtney, who is also visibly pregnant, gives LuLaRoe the credit for allowing her to “get over serious postpartum depression.” Chelsea said LuLaRoe enabled her to “stay home and raise my kids exactly how I’ve always dreamed.” All of these women were white and appear to be between their early 30s and mid-40s. A second coder was brought in to confirm the perceived age range of the women.

Take Control to “Have It All”

RQ2 asked: How is LuLaRoe encouraging the target audience to see themselves? What “second persona” are they being encouraged to adopt? Findings suggest LuLaRoe encourages the target audience to see themselves as successful entrepreneurs who are in control of their businesses and their personal lives. The “second persona” they are being encouraged to adopt is a mother who can have it all: her business and her family. Women are encouraged to become successful “mompreneurs.”

Text on the LuLaRoe website encourages women to see themselves as independent business owners who control their own destiny. Statements like “Support to run YOUR business” and “Build YOUR business with us” emphasize the ownership role of LuLaRoe retailers. The LuLaRoe website highlights entrepreneurial identity with text like, “LuLaRoe was designed to offer you, the entrepreneur, an opportunity to build a business your way,” “Become a fashion entrepreneur,” and “a community of driven entrepreneurs.” Control is a key factor in a LuLaRoe retailer’s sense of identity. Website text like, “Take back control of your time and your life,” “You’re in charge” and “Run your business the way you want” give potential recruits a sense of attainable control and power. LuLaRoe notes that “every individual is powerful and important.”

However, findings suggest that controlling a successful business is only valuable if women are also attentive mothers. LuLaRoe tells women the MLM allows them to “have it all.” Through selling LuLaRoe, women can be both working moms and stay-at-home moms at the same time. Website text like, “You need to balance your career and family life,” “Have more time for what matters,” and “Have a happy ending to your story,” call women to perfect their work-life balance. By doing so, LuLaRoe tells women they will be able to “achieve your dreams” and “live your best life.” This is a work-life balance only attainable through LuLaRoe.

The social media video testimonials serve to reinforce the constructed identity of mompreneurs who are in control. Courtney said LuLaRoe allowed her to “be what I want and do what I want.” Janice said she joined LuLaRoe because “I wanted a career that allowed me to make my own schedule.” Kristy said LuLaRoe allowed her to “walk away from a toxic work environment and create my own environment.” LuLaRoe promotes its flexibility for women to work on their own terms and make their own money, however this control is only valuable if it’s in the context of also being a loving and present mother.

Being a good mom who is active in the home is a main identity point for LuLaRoe recruits. Jamie said, "I went from working outside of the home to being home every day. I have my business and can be home." Chelsea said LuLaRoe allowed her to live out her dreams by "being able to stay home and raise my kids exactly how I've always dreamed." Stacy exclaimed, "I want to shout from the rooftops how thankful I am to be able to do this business and spend time with my family."

LuLaRoe frames working at the MLM as a way for stay-at-home moms to give back to their families. Its messaging suggests that being a stay-at-home mom is good, but not good enough. Women should also strive to contribute to their families financially and doing so is an act of service. Allie said, "I get to serve my family and my community as well." Jamie said, "I am so thankful for the ability to work when I want how much I want based on my families schedule."

Before-and-After Identity

RQ3 asked: "How is LuLaRoe calling the target audience to act? How does this perpetuate the continuation of the identity LuLaRoe is encouraging them to adopt? Findings suggest LuLaRoe perpetuates a before-and-after identity for women. The MLM calls women to act and live differently than they did before. LuLaRoe's recruitment media suggests that before joining the MLM, its retailers were not living up to their potentials, but after joining the MLM, women achieved new identities as "boss babes" who act strong and confident. Thanks to LuLaRoe, these caterpillars transformed into butterflies.

Messaging on LuLaRoe's website emphasizes the before-and-after identity. Mottos like "create and live a life worth living" and "live your best life" suggest that women's pre-LuLaRoe lives were incomplete and subpar. LuLaRoe promises women that joining the company will allow them to "grow as a person and influence as a leader...make new friends. All of this while having fun living your best life." Website text like, "the magic of LuLaRoe is that it...empowers women to grow to their fullest potential" and "we want them to life each other up" again emphasize the transforming power of LuLaRoe.

The website text is supported by women who recorded video testimonials explaining how LuLaRoe changed their identities and their lives for the better. These video testimonials appear on LuLaRoe's social media pages. Perhaps the boldest testimonial came from Devin who said, "My favorite thing since becoming a LuLaRoe retailer is finding my own identity. I went from being my father's daughter to my husband's wife, but who was I on my own?"

Most of the women in the video testimonials also credited LuLaRoe with their newfound confidence. Savannah said, "I was timid, scared...and the confidence I have today I owe all to LuLaRoe." Whitney said, "I am truly blessed to have LuLaRoe..it's allowed me to come out of my shell." Jamie said, "I feel so much better about myself." Many of the video participants compared themselves before LuLaRoe and after becoming a retailer. Brandy said, "Before LuLaRoe, I would walk out the door and feel uneasy about myself." Julie said, "I've changed. I get more animated. I get more excited about things and have come into my own skin." Casey said, "Being a LuLaRoe retailer has made me more trusting. I'm usually a closed off person."

Some of the video participants said LuLaRoe changed their lives dramatically and substantially. Chelsea said, "Everything is

happier." Savannah said, "If you looked at me before being a retailer and now...completely different person." A few of the women testified how LuLaRoe not only changed their own lives, but changed the lives of their customers.

One video participant, Karen, told the story of a troubled mother she recruited to join LuLaRoe and actually credits that recruitment to saving the woman's life. Karen said, "One of the girls I signed up this year had a really hard 2020. LuLaRoe was able to bring her community and friendship and she said that it saved her life."

Discussion

Major MLMs like Mary Kay, Avon, and Amway target women as consumers and as potential retailers. Historically, MLMs recruited retailers through word of mouth, by women inviting their friends to not only buy their products, but join the ranks of the company. This was done through one-on-one conversations or intimate settings like neighborhood Tupperware parties (Bax, 2010). Recent advancement in communication technologies has shifted MLM recruitment away from word of mouth and toward eWOM (Deviacita, 2022). LuLaRoe, one of the newer successful MLMs, predominantly uses digital mass media like websites and social media to implement its recruitment communications strategies.

The current study investigates LuLaRoe's recruitment communications through a textual analysis of its digital media, including its website, Facebook page, and Instagram page. Findings suggest three common themes: an ideal retailer is a young, white, mother; LuLaRoe promises women the control to be both successful entrepreneurs and attentive mothers; and LuLaRoe perpetuates a before-and-after identity for women.

LuLaRoe's recruitment media target a very specific demographic: white, young, mothers. Findings of the current study compliment previous research that the entrepreneurial self, especially the entrepreneurial woman, is normed white (Gill & Ganesh, 2007). The vast majority of the women who appear on LuLaRoe's website and in testimonial videos on social media are white, echoing the findings of Byrne et al. (2019). These researchers analyzed a communications campaign highlighting women entrepreneurs and found that the "role model" being promoted exuded white privilege (Byrne et al., 2019). The whiteness of LuLaRoe was also briefly called to attention in a now-viral interview with one of the few black LuLaRoe top retailers. She was awarded a luxury cruise as a prize for her top sales, but turned it down saying, "I love white people to death, just being on a boat in the middle of nowhere? I'll see y'all when y'all get back" (Nason & Furst, 2021). She then discussed the uncomfortableness of being one of the only women of color in the top ranks of the company.

The exclusionary nature of LuLaRoe speaks to the broader issue of barriers to entry in entrepreneurship. Research shows black entrepreneurs face increased barriers to financing and customer service when starting or attempting to start a business in comparison to their white counterparts (Edelman et al., 2010). Institutional discrimination from banks, credit unions, and other financial entities is one of the biggest barriers faced by black entrepreneurs as access to capital is critical in starting a business (Howard et al., 2020). LuLaRoe's reinforcement of its preference for white entrepreneurs perpetuates the unjust cycle of racial challenges of running a successful business. LuLaRoe's visual representation of its ideal retailers in its recruitment media is so

predominantly white that it serves to discourage people of color, especially women of color, from joining the company.

In addition to recruiting predominantly white women, findings of the current study suggest that LuLaRoe also targets young mothers, especially “stay-at-home” moms. Dillaway and Paré (2008) investigated the cultural devaluation of the identity of a stay-at-home mom. They noted that the lack of public acknowledgement of the importance of running a household and the difficulty of taking care of children leads to the perception that the identity of mother is lesser than that of a paid worker. Stay-at-home moms may then regret giving up their careers to raise children or feel inadequate to their partner who earns the income for the family (Dillaway & Paré, 2008).

Findings from the current study suggest that LuLaRoe is well aware of this gendered perception as its recruitment communications work to convince stay-at-home moms that they can be valuable again. They can serve their families financially and in the home. LuLaRoe presents itself as giving women back control over their lives and sets itself up as one of the few, if only, companies that gives women that agency. The MLM company tells mothers that if they join the company they will be able to “have it all.” They will be able to not only contribute to their family in normalized motherly ways, like taking care of the kids and doing the housework, but they’ll also be able to contribute to the family financially. LuLaRoe insinuates that before LuLaRoe, women had to choose between being attentive mothers or being breadwinners, but with LuLaRoe, they can be both. They can control their own destiny and have it all.

The “have it all” mantra is a common one among influencers on social media. Celebrity mothers like Khloe Kardashian and Jennifer Lopez serve as examples of individuals who use this messaging. Through their social media, they show the world how quickly they are able to “bounce back” after childbirth. They almost instantaneously return to their pre-baby lives: working as hard as ever and looking as good as ever. Yet as Martínez-Jiménez and Gálvez-Muñoz (2019) explained, celebrity mothers like these have an army of support that most new mothers do not have; they have trainers, chefs, nannies, and plastic surgeons. However, this army is not advertised, in fact, it’s typically purposefully hidden. Findings of the current study suggests that LuLaRoe promotes women who “have it all.” They highlight women who made a lot of money at the company while also having the flexibility to take care of their families. The MLM promises women that success, both professionally and personally, is highly attainable through LuLaRoe. In reality, success stories are few and far between (DeLiema et al., 2018), and many women are left with debt, unsold products, and broken relationships.

Confident, powerful women in MLM are marketed as “boss babes,” described by Winter (2021) as “smiling, beautiful women that are in the arms of their loved ones...and imagery related to luxury including the esteemed pink Cadillac, designer handbags, and golden office décor” (p. 55). Winter (2021) noted the prominence of the boss babe archetype in Mary Kay recruitment tactics. Findings of the current study suggest the presence of the boss babe archetype in LuLaRoe recruitment media. LuLaRoe’s video testimonials feature women saying how much more confident and powerful they feel after joining the company. They were once weak and introverted and now, thanks to LuLaRoe, they are strong and outgoing.

While the boss babe rhetoric may seem empowering for women and an ode to feminism, some scholars suggest it is quite the opposite. Wrenn and Waller (2021) called the boss babe rhetoric “predatory” and “faux feminist,” noting the high success of failure among women in MLMs. LuLaRoe uses the boss babe rhetoric to entice women into a career that is statistically almost impossible to be successful in. Even after LuLaRoe’s lawsuit where they were deemed a pyramid scheme, women still joined the company. This speaks to the power of persuasion and identity in LuLaRoe’s recruitment media.

LuLaRoe’s recruitment media are problematic in that they exploit the insecurities of women for the company’s monetary gain. Stay-at-home mothers, especially those who worked outside the home before they had children, can suffer from insecurities and low self-esteem due to their devalued place in culture (Cohen & Rabin, 2008). LuLaRoe presents itself as a golden opportunity for mothers to reclaim their voice, demonstrate their value, and regain their confidence that was lost after having children. However, LuLaRoe does so in a way that excludes women of color, makes false promises, and exploits and perpetuates unequal gender roles.

Limitations and Future Research

Although considerable thought was invested in the planning and execution of this study, there are limitations that should be noted. Although these limitations should be discussed, they do not invalidate the findings of this study. Rather, they should be used to better understand the findings and inform future studies.

Only LuLaRoe’s public recruitment media were analyzed. According to LuLaRoe’s website, once an individual joins LuLaRoe, they are given access to entrepreneurial educational media and marketing materials. Perhaps these materials offer a different insight into the company, given they are only accessible to LuLaRoe retailers who have paid the \$499 start-up fee. In the four-part television docuseries, *LuLaRich* (Nason & Furst, 2021), many individuals attested to the toxic insider culture of LuLaRoe, so it is possible communication materials given to retailers are different than what the company provides to the public at large.

Future research would benefit from the continued analysis of MLMs, especially those that focus on social media recruitment. The popularity of social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok have allowed a space for more MLMs to emerge. Multilevel marketing companies that sell everything from vacations to fitness plans primarily use social media to recruit women, especially women with families. Hashtags like #AntiMLM have emerged with tens of thousands of posts and call attention to the problematic fashion of these companies. Continued research on social media-centric MLMs and the movements against them will benefit not only scholarship on the topic but serve to inform the public of the potential dangers of being targeted by an MLM company.

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