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DIRECT SELLING AND MULTILEVEL MARKETING - ITS IMPLICATIONS ON BOUNDARY MANAGEMENT AMONG MOMPREENEURS

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ABSTRACT

Management comes naturally to women be it home or work place. The initiatives and leadership, which lead to the embodiment of business ideas, are termed as entrepreneurship and the individual who promotes the unit, organizes the factors of production, and manage the business is called an 'entrepreneur'. Thus, the process or activities behind the search and exploitation of business opportunities are rightly referred as entrepreneurship. Many a time's women are forced to quit their careers to take care of family commitments. In this context, today we come across women who handle multiple tasks from being full time mothers to successful entrepreneurs. The present study is an attempt to understand how Direct Selling or Multi Level Marketing has helped women find their space in business while handling multiple things in various life domains. The study further explores how Multi Level Marketing has made women pursue a career for them while attending to their familial responsibilities and how they maintain good work life balance. The MLM effect in empowering women from becoming confident to influential and the extent to which they are able to balance both work and family.

KEYWORDS

boundary management, multi level marketing, women entrepreneurs, mompreneurs, work life.

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INTRODUCTION

Direct selling refers to the selling of goods and services to consumers who are away from a fixed retail outlet, generally at their homes, workplace, etc., The product sellers directly explains and demonstrates the product to the customers. The introduction of the multi-level marketing (MLM) compensation plans (MLM plans) opened another chapter in the evolution of direct selling. Introduced in the mid-twentieth century, the plan for the first time enabled consumers to benefit from the success by providing them the option to become a direct selling partner of the business. MLM plans became widely accepted and a large number of companies adopted the same including global majors like; Avon, Tupperware and Amway. Today, direct selling is a US167 billion (2012) industry globally, engaging over 89 million direct sellers. Asia-Pacific forms the largest direct selling market with a share of 44 per cent followed by North America, Central and South America (20 per cent share, each) and Europe (15 per cent). The direct selling market in India has grown at a CAGR of 16 per cent over the past five years to reach INR75 billion in 2012-13. The market grew at a lower rate of 4 per cent in 2013-14 due to slowdown in the industry.

MLM is a type of business opportunity that is very popular with people looking for part-time, flexible businesses. MLM, also known as direct selling or multilevel marketing, is a system wherein a manufacturer pays people outside the company to sell its products and services directly to consumers (Harris, 2004). In return, each salesperson is given the opportunity to build his or her own independent sales force, by recruiting, training and motivating others to sell the same products and services (Vander Nat & Keep, 2002; Harris, 2004). MLM gives several advantages, such as, securing distribution and sales quickly at a relatively low fixed cost, gaining consumer acceptance for a new product particularly when this involves a new entrant in that product industry, gaining entrance to a market with minimal promotional and advertising expenses, lower potential price wars and higher rate of return on sales by eliminating large outlays and expenditure on media advertising (Granfield & Nicols, 1975).

The concept of direct selling has been there with Life Insurance Corporation of India much before globalization, and post 1990s New economic policy and the opening of the economy, various MNCs such as Amway, Avon, Oriflame and tupperware entered the Indian market with product offerings ranging from nutrition, beauty, storage products etc. The Direct Selling Industry has registered growth rate of about 12% in 2012 -13 and is expected to be over Rs 11, 543 crore by 2015-16 (FICCI, 2012).

MULTI LEVEL MARKETING AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Entrepreneurship has received increased attention in the last 10 to 15 years. It is now widely recognized that small- and medium-sized new businesses are very important for the economic welfare as they contribute significantly to innovation and job creation. Direct selling provides additional income opportunities to a large number of people and promotes micro- entrepreneurship. Currently, over 5 million direct sellers are estimated to be engaged with the industry, and are projected to grow further with the growth of the industry. In addition to providing income opportunities, direct selling also imparts transferable skills in sales and management, which can be used outside the direct selling industry.

In India, the government has launched a number of initiatives to support new venture creation. Politicians and bureaucrats have thus placed entrepreneurship at the centre of their political vision. The amount of research devoted to the study of entrepreneurship has also increased substantially during the same period. The purpose of entrepreneurship research thus becomes to understand and facilitate new venture creation and growth. Growth thus becomes one of the key concepts in entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurship at the individual or firm level is seen as an instrument to generate economic growth in society as a whole. Many direct selling companies rely on SMEs for manufacturing their products. The direct selling companies impart the manufacturing know-how, technology and processes to enable the SMEs to produce excellent products. Many direct selling companies also invest in providing the right equipment and machines to the SMEs for production. Driven by these initiatives, several SMEs have now developed capabilities to cater to the needs of other MNCs and have commenced supplying to them, in the process promoting India as a manufacturing destination.

Entrepreneurship according to Onuoha (2007) is 'the practice of starting new organizations or revitalizing mature organizations particularly new businesses generally in response to identified'.

Female entrepreneurs have also received increasing attention over the last decade or so, as the percentage of female entrepreneurs has increased consistently during the period. This would indicate that women constitute an untapped resource in relation to new business creation. In regard to growing their businesses it is often argued that women tend to have smaller businesses than men, so many studies of female entrepreneurs are centered on the questions of why there are fewer female entrepreneurs and why they perform differently than their male counterparts. It is assumed that female entrepreneurs will score lower on the traditional measures of success, namely survival and growth. A number of different reasons are given for this. These include a desire to balance family life and entrepreneurial life, difficulty in obtaining financial capital, lack of ambition, and lack of managerial experience. Direct selling / MLM is an alternative to following their entrepreneurial career in this regard. According to KPMG report the southern region of India. With 30 per cent share and 14 per cent growth rate and Bangalore, Chennai and Hyderabad are the largest direct selling markets in South India. (Source: IDSA).

MOMPREENEURS

The direct selling industry offers self-employment opportunities to a large number of people, specially women. Direct selling gives women the flexibility to manage their time and balance their work and personal lives. The industry also offers women financial independence and the improved ability to take care of their families. The industry in FY-13 provided self employment to nearly 60 per cent (3.4 million) female distributors which increased 1.5 times from 2.2 million in FY-10. Also many companies work towards the empowerment of women.

The women folks have always had an inherent appeal for direct selling business due to the nature of the business. Women join the business with part time vision in mind but over a period of time, as business grows, it is seen that primary bread winner of the family also gets involved to build the business making it a full time business. The most run businesses through direct marketing are cosmetics, food, health, education, kitchen, financial products, spices, stationery, sanitary napkins, garments, agricultural additives, aphrodisiacs, weight loss supplements, home care etc. Today, the industry is successfully booming with over 40 lakh distributors (almost 70 percent of them are women).

Momprenuers are female business owners who are balancing the roles of mother and entrepreneur. A mompreneur is a newly coined term for women who establish businesses at home while also catering to the requirements of full time parent of their children. The mompreneur movement is one steadily growing in the US as mothers try to find ways to make money, express their creativity or business acumen, and also to parent their children. Precise figures are difficult to find regarding exactly how many mompreneurs make up the current business world.

Momprenuership is rooted in the everyday existence of the mompreneurs. Entrepreneurial activity is always entangled in all kinds of other activities. It necessarily unfolds in and across social spheres there by it becomes one of many expressions of the creative and problem-solving nature of human beings. Hence, mompreneurs represent a new generation of entrepreneurs. Or rather a kind of entrepreneurs that has probably always been around, but is now emerging as an interesting social phenomenon, staking a claim for public recognition. The thing about mompreneurship is that it makes things visible and viable to a great degree. Dedicated motherhood and entrepreneurship seems to be at loggerheads at conceptual level. But by creating continuity between the two concepts, mompreneurs bring to light the notion that the two concepts are inherently entangled and expressed side by side in practice. By their actions they demonstrate that entrepreneurship is inherently democratic. During 1990s, many women entered in the field of entrepreneurship to avail economic competence and independence, but many of them are observed to be not succeeding well as they had planned. Main reasons often are placed on the lack of enabling and sustaining facilities of entrepreneurial environment in general. Even then, there are success cases of women-run business units, details of which can motivate the women entrepreneurs in the scene. (Sindhu S. Narayan and P.S. Geethakutty, 2003). In short a mompreneur is a multi-tasking mother who can balance both the stresses of running a home-based business as an entrepreneur, and the time-consuming duties of motherhood at the same time.

MOMPENEURSHIP AND GROWTH

Growth is the very basic need to survive in the long run hence with full time mothers entering business it is very important to understand how mompreneurs perceive growth and how they want to grow their business.

The question to be uncovered is whether mompreneurs perceive the same thing as entrepreneurship researchers by the term growth; it is easy to see that growth is not that important for the mompreneurs. Or at the very least, that it is less of a priority for this group of entrepreneurs than succeeding at the tasks of motherhood. This means that by the mainstream standard of entrepreneurial success, namely growth, mompreneurs are simply not good entrepreneurs. They don't expand their businesses rapidly enough, they don't hire employees to any significant degree, nor do they present massive increases in sales. But are they really bad entrepreneurs, do they lack ambition and ability? I would argue that no, this is not the case.

The analysis of the mompreneurship phenomenon reveals that entrepreneurship is not just an economic activity that takes place only in the business sphere. Rather it occurs in and across different spheres of life. In India there has been a lot of upheaval in empowering women and educated women who are unable to pursue a career due to multiple responsibilities have successfully turned entrepreneurs whereby they have proved their creativity and business acumen.

BOUNDARY MANAGEMENT AND MOMPREENEURS

Essentially, women in the business world must always be prepared to construct some kind of identity that is able to adapt to the existing systems already set into place in an entrepreneurial setting (Diaz & Welter, 2011). Mompreneurs are a combination of female, mother and entrepreneur. They draw on experience beyond cultural norms and try to create a type of ideal image which successfully balances the three domains without compromising too much of the self, or the family.

Work and family linkage presents integration trend if the boundary between work and family are more legible and defined. Boundary theory was first brought forward by Sue Campbell Clark (2000) who believes there is a boundary between work and family. Three forms of boundary exists mental boundary, time boundary, physiological boundary. Many individuals, then, are border-crossers who make daily transitions between the domains of work and home. Boundary theory is widely used in work and family issues such as work at home, flexible time, etc. (Desrochers, Sargent, 2002). Individuals try to find a suitable boundary between work and family.

Boundary theory examines the different approaches, or boundary management styles, by which individuals establish, maintain or alter boundaries around a domain or a role so as to create order. A role is defined as the expectations placed on members of a social system. A key challenge many working individuals face today is how to manage the balance between the responsibilities of the work role and those of the family role (e.g., providing care for family members from child care to emotional support to carrying out other domestic chores). The relationship between work and family roles are defined through boundary management, which entails the active steps that individuals take to determine the boundary between their roles through psychological, physical or time borders. Characteristics of Boundary theory are given below:

Permeability - Permeable boundaries are such that one role may spill over the other, such as behaviors or emotions, so that one may be physically located in one "role's domain, but psychologically and/or behaviorally involved in another role (Ashforth et al., 2000: 474)." For example, W-F permeability may be enacted through involuntary interruptions, as when a work colleague may call during evening hours. We assume that not all interruptions are involuntary. An individual can play a role in W-F permeability by giving out one's home number to a colleague or one's work email to a family member. Permeability also extends to include choices an individual may make to allow thoughts, feelings or demands from one role to be assimilated into another role. For example, enrolling a child in an on-site daycare may enhance permeability if it means that the worker will think more about the child while working.

Flexibility - Role flexibility is the degree to which the boundaries of a role are elastic and mutable, so that it may be enacted in many different places or at different times. It answers the 'when and 'where' a role can be enacted while permeability tells us "what" the role is, at least in terms of the extent to which a "role allows elements of another role to integrate and assimilate with it. Flexible roles tend to allow for greater ease of transitions between roles (Kossek et al, 1999). For example, the job of university professor would be viewed as relatively high on role flexibility because many tasks (e.g., writing, grading) could be set aside if necessary to meet the demands of another role (e.g. taking a sick child to the doctor). In contrast, the job of a waitress would be relatively low on boundary flexibility as it might be more difficult to restructure and set aside job tasks of taking and delivering food orders to take a child to the doctor during a shift. It would be harder to flexibly restructure the job role to make it up later in the day.

Nippert-Eng (1996) outlined how boundary theory can provide a lens for understanding the interface between work and home. She used work and home as examples of domains that can be treated as integrated or segmented to varying degrees. Since boundaries are co-constructed accomplishments, how individuals perceive their work-home boundary vis-a-vis others' perceptions of those boundaries can be critically important.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study focuses on the extent to which Direct selling/Multi level marketing has contributed to economic independence for mompreneurs. Secondly to find out the extent to which MLM concept has been successful in empowering women in terms of providing economic stability and flexibility in being entrepreneurs

especially to mothers, the study also tries to find out the extent of familial support extended to women in conducting their business. Finally to examine how women are able to manage their boundaries of work and life through MLM. The study is confined to Urban Bangalore.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The study covers mompreneurs who are actively involved in multi-level marketing/direct selling. The extent to which direct selling has given them economic stability and confidence with the flexibility which they require to attend their domestic chores. The study also attempts to find out the extent of familial support enjoyed by mompreneurs in being successful entrepreneurs.

The empirical study was conducted using non probability sampling technique where snowball sampling was administered. A sample size of 450 women entrepreneurs who are involved in direct selling through social media, Tupperware agents, Amway and Avon agents, Oriflamme and Herbalife who are full time mothers were considered for the study. A structured questionnaire was used keeping the objectives and hypothesis in place. Secondary data was collected from books, articles, web resources and material available from previous research. Data collected was tabulated and analyzed using descriptive statistics, t-test and f-test for interpretation of results.

HYPOTHESIS

- H0: Economic independence does not have a significant influence on mompreneurs choosing direct selling venture.
- H1: Economic independence has a significant influence on mompreneurs choosing direct selling venture.
- H0: Quality of time spent does not have significant influence on work- family conflict of women entrepreneurs
- H1: Quality of time spent have significant influence on work- family conflict of women entrepreneurs

EXTENT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH DIRECT SELLING PLATFORMS

Finding time of domestic chores and investing time in business and making it profitable is a tedious and challenging journey for mothers. In this view the extent to which respondents have been into business before is reflected in Socio-economic characteristics.

TABLE 1.1: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Description		n	%
Age	25-34	16	3.56
	35-45	144	32.00
	46-55	201	44.67
	above 55	89	19.78
Marital Status	Married	445	98.89
Having children	Adopted	24	5.33
	Biological	426	94.67
No. of children	1	154	34.22
	2	263	58.44
	More than 2	24	5.33
	More than 3	9	2.00

TABLE 1.2: BUSINESS CHARACTERISTICS

Prior experience in business	yes	132	29.33
	No	318	70.66
Source of customers	Friends	186	41.333
	Residents association/clubs	80	17.77
	Social media	145	32.22
	Flea markets	30	6.666
	others	9	2
No. of hours spent on business	2-3 hrs daily	270	60
	No specific time	159	35.333
	As and when required	18	4
	others	3	.6666

Source: Field survey

Demographic factors and business characteristics of women entrepreneurs were considered for the study. Majority of respondents i.e., 44.67% belonged to the age group between 46 years to 55 years. A 32% belonged to 35-45 years age group, while 19.78% were women who were above 55 years. A meager 3.56% belonged to 25-34 years age group. The sample of the women entrepreneurs were married with 98.89%. 58.44% had two children, a 34.22% had only 1 child while a 7.33% had more than two children. Experience in business reveals that 70% of women had no prior business experience, while 29.33 % were into business before being a Tupperware member. In which majority had done dress material sale from home and network marketing of Amway and oriflame products. Out of the 450 respondents who were part of the sample 68% of Tupperware members are in business for more than 3 years, it's interesting to note the level of confidence and social circles these women has gained through the business and the support extended by Tupperware India in training them has gone a long way in empowering them. 25% have been into this business for about 1 -3 years, while a 7% of the respondents had been into business recently still find it very promising and are enthusiastic about the Party concept of selling in Tupperware. The fact that a majority of the respondents are people who have been into the business for more than three years, it was interesting to understand that docile homemakers have emerged confident decision makers and strategist in the course of their association with Tupperware India. 42% of the entrepreneurs find their customers through friends. The Tupperware Party is a concept where women are invited to party and introduced to Tupperware products in the comfort of someone's home is the strategy that endures till date. Most mompreneurs find their customers through friends in these parties and friends also finds customers for the member. While a few find social media and internet resources as a major source of finding customers. Though Mompreneurs have multiple responsibilities to handle 60% of them invest daily 2 to 3 hours in their business which indicates the level of involvement of women in business.

There are multiple factors which influence a woman to take up entrepreneurship especially taking to Direct selling can be an influence of various aspects. T-test was conducted to analyse the data and find which are the major factors influencing woman.

TABLE 2: MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS FOR WOMEN TO START MLM/DIRECT MARKETING VENTURE

Parameters		Not at all	Low	Moderate	High	Extremely High	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Mobility	n	5	66	157	222	0	3.32	0.76	9.034	0.000
	%	1.11	14.67	34.89	49.33	0.00				
To support family	n	6	49	187	208	0	3.33	0.72	9.620	0.000
	%	1.33	10.89	41.56	46.22	0.00				
Encouragement by father/husband/family	n	7	81	131	231	0	3.30	0.82	7.858	0.000
	%	1.56	18.00	29.11	51.33	0.00				
To make money	n	4	17	104	310	15	3.70	0.64	23.291	0.000
	%	0.89	3.78	23.11	68.89	3.33				
Convenience to operate	n	19	34	183	214	0	3.32	0.79	8.489	0.000
	%	4.22	7.56	40.67	47.56	0.00				
To be engaged/occupied	n	73	228	117	32	0	2.24	0.81	-19.989	0.000
	%	16.22	50.67	26.00	7.11	0.00				
Others	n	112	255	59	24	0	1.99	0.77	-27.817	0.000
	%	24.89	56.67	13.11	5.33	0.00				

Source: field survey

From the analysis of the various variables relating to motivation of mompreneurs in their entrepreneurial career we can infer that the value relating to making money has a score of 3.70 which is significantly above others, making money is an important aspect which influences women in choosing business venture. It is undoubted that any business is primarily indented to make economic gains which would ensure its sustainability and social relevance. Hence, a woman entrepreneur also chooses a venture which would be profitable and give her long term return on investment. Convenience to operate(3.32), mobility(3.32), to support family(3.33) have values which do not significantly vary from each other hence these three has same level of importance and influence in the choice of entrepreneurial career by women. Hence we can infer that profitability of the venture have a significant influence in motivating women in their choice of entrepreneurial career. The extent to which encouragement from family, husband or father has motivated women (3.30) as well as need to be engaged(2.24) and other(1.99) in motivating women in choosing entrepreneurial career is significantly low which indicates that these variables do not have any influence on woman’s decision and choice of a business venture. Hence we reject the null hypothesis that Economic independence does not have a significant influence on mompreneurs choosing direct selling venture. Though women has multiple responsibilities and priorities women enter business primarily with the intent of making a successful and profitable career which relates to generating profits which would ensure economic independence for women.

TABLE 3: EXTENT OF FLEXIBILITY EXPERIENCED BY MOMPREENURS

Opinion	No: of responses	Percentage
Excellent	19	4.222
Very good	111	24.666
Good	320	71.1
Average	NIL	0
Poor	NIL	0
Total	450	100

Source: Field survey

According to 71% of the respondents the kind of flexibility they enjoy being direct selling members have helped them to maintain a healthy work life balance. Meeting domestic and personal commitments have never been a problem doing this business which is highly profitable. Getting customers is not difficult with strategies like Party plan hence they don’t feel stressed out being entrepreneurs. A 25% of them rated it as very good as they are able to equally devote time according to priorities and 4% said the flexibility they get is excellent as they have been able manage the boundaries between home, work well.

H1: Quality of time spent with family have significant influence on work- family conflict of women entrepreneurs

TABLE 4: QUALITY TIME SPEND WITH FAMILY AND WORK FAMILY CONFLICT INDICATORS

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: Work – family conflict

(I) qlty_tme_fly	(J) qlty_tme_fly	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
not spefecic	weekends	-1.73029*	.37689	.000	-2.7879	-.6727
	on vacation	.26971	.37689	.916	-.7879	1.3273
	daily	.08744	.06181	.573	-.0860	.2609
weekends	not spefecic	1.73029*	.37689	.000	.6727	2.7879
	on vacation	2.00000*	.52972	.003	.5135	3.4865
	daily	1.81773*	.37733	.000	.7589	2.8766
on vacation	not spefecic	-.26971	.37689	.916	-1.3273	.7879
	weekends	-2.00000*	.52972	.003	-3.4865	-.5135
	daily	-.18227	.37733	.972	-1.2411	.8766
daily	not spefecic	-.08744	.06181	.573	-.2609	.0860
	weekends	-1.81773*	.37733	.000	-2.8766	-.7589
	on vacation	.18227	.37733	.972	-.8766	1.2411

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

There is a significant relation between the qualities of time spend with family and the extent of work family conflict experienced by mompreneurs. An analysis using one way ANOVA and Post hoc test using scheffee to find out the differences between the various ways mompreneurs spend quality time with family and whether it has a significant influence on work family conflict showed interesting learning. There is a significant difference between spending time on weekend and having no specific time (.000 <.05),on vacation(.003<.05),and spending time daily(.000<.05), which means there is a significant impact of time spend with family on work life conflict based on how they choose time and spend with family. Hence we reject the null hypothesis Quality of time spent with family does not have significant influence on work- family conflict of women entrepreneurs.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Though mompreneurs who are direct selling members do not have any prior experience in business the kind of business turnover they are able to make in their spare time is quite impressive. Majority are into this business for creating an identity for themselves being independent as well as supplementing the family income. The respondents being full time mothers, being direct selling agents have given them flexibility in managing multiple task as well as earning a decent

income without compromises. The fact that the family of Tupperware members is very supportive is a positive step towards empowering women. *Advantages of MLM over other industries for mompreneurs* are flexi-timings where women can devote time for their family and at the same time provide economic support, at a personal domain it promotes self-development and personal growth. The business also allows women folks to build healthy social circle, besides helps them enhance their leadership and sales skills, in terms of Investment, it is Minimal or No investment and No specific education criteria to join the business. The extent of time spend with family is crucial in determining the work life balance and work life conflict among mompreneurs. Boundary management is possible through prioritizing and balancing the permeable boundaries through proper communication and prioritising of duties and responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

Mompreneurs are trying to balance a business with family and most of them are work from home moms hence it is hard to find time for managing multiple tasks in this context MLM has made inroads to empowering and making women independent and self-confident in running a business without feeling guilty of not able to fulfill their family commitments. As CEO Rick Goings of Tupperware India puts it; the whole process of empowering women right from educating her, training her about the business and handholding her to become successful has been acclaimed in the World economic forum.

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