The Benefits of Pink Think

A History of the Mary Kay Cosmetics Company in Domestic and Global Contexts

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Despite popular perceptions, Mary Kay Ash’s favorite color was not pink. The color has now become synonymous with the brand due to its hyper-feminine packaging, the pink Cadillacs bestowed upon its top “beauty consultants,” and the pink-stucco house Mary Kay Ash eventually built for herself. Yet, the color for Mary Kay’s eponymous brand was not chosen based on preference, but rather on strategy. Because most homes in 1963 had white bathrooms, she theorized, “I wanted containers that would be so attractive that women would want to leave them out on display. We considered many colors and ultimately decided that a soft, delicate pink would look best with those white-tile bathrooms.” Such a seemingly trivial decision had deep implications for the Mary Kay brand. The color pink became an emblem of the company’s espousal of traditional femininity.

Mary Kay Ash founded her company in September 1963 after twenty-five years as a door-to-door saleswoman. Her dream was to create a company that would provide economic opportunities to women, while still granting them the flexibility to care after their families. Even before she found a product to sell, she knew how she wanted to sell it: by creating a multi-level marketing scheme that would allow women to work on commission and receive rewards for achieving sales goals and recruiting new saleswomen. A similar sales model had been adopted by Avon in 1886 for door-to door sales; however, Ash revolutionized the direct-selling model through the home-party method. In this model, the Mary Kay “beauty consultant” would seek out a party host to gather friends for a make-up lesson (sometimes marketed as a facial). After demonstrating the products on the partygoers, the consultant would ask each woman privately if she desired to purchase any of the products or if she was interested in becoming a Mary Kay consultant. The consultant had to purchase all of the products up-front, but she earned a sizable commission based

1 Mary Kay Ash, Miracles Happen: the Life and Timeless Principles of the Founder of Mary Kay, Inc. (New York: Quill, 2003), 146.
on each sale. The party host would also receive either a small commission or a gift. The company incentivized recruitment by giving saleswomen a percentage of the commissions of the women they recruited. Ash purposefully did not assign territories for her consultants so that women would have greater freedom to recruit from anywhere.

Although in many ways Mary Kay Ash was innovative in her approach to business and in advocating for women to join the workforce, her brand was closely associated with traditional conceptions of gender roles and femininity. Her trademark phrase was “God first, family second, career third.” Gina Maria Grumke describes this ideology as a “Mary Kay metanarrative” which promoted traditional social constructs such as the nuclear family, capitalism, Christianity and the woman as the family caretaker even as it also recognized that women were disadvantaged economically compared to men.2 This metanarrative is problematic when examining the effect the Mary Kay brand had on women both domestically and abroad because it raises questions about the mutual exclusivity of feminism and femininity.3

This conundrum is most evident in the Mary Kay brand, but it is one that plagues the cosmetics industry as a whole. Women were able to become successful entrepreneurs in this industry because of its ties to femininity. Historian Kathy Peiss describes it as an arena in which “women turned the cultural basis of their exclusion from the general pursuit of business—their femininity—into a resource for entrepreneurship, ownership and profit.”4 Joan Scott points to the irony of this phenomenon in that it empowered women entrepreneurs who “escape stereotypes of femininity as they market the very products that depend on and reinforce those stereotypes…”5 Thus, the cosmetics industry is particularly gendered both because of its links to female entrepreneurship and in the ways in which it produces conceptions about gender for the female consumer.

The cosmetics industry came under fire by feminists in the 1960s and 1970s because of this perpetuation of gender norms and “femininity.” Writing in 1984, Susan Brownmiller attacked the concept of femininity as “a nostalgic tradition of imposed limitations.”6 She lumps cosmetics in with bras, girdles and high heels as devices meant to marginalize

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3 In this paper, I use Nancy Cott’s definition of feminism outlined in The Grounding of Modern Feminism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 4-5, that the ideology advocates sex equality, it presupposes that women’s condition is socially constructed and it leads to a gender group identity.


women, indicating that cosmetics are proof of “female insecurity.”” Although Peiss credits the cosmetic industry with pioneering female entrepreneurship, she also critiques the cosmetics industry for limiting women, arguing that “the act of beautifying, though it seems enticing and freely chosen, is really compulsory work, so narcissistic, time-consuming and absorbing as to limit women’s achievements.”

That a single historian can have multivalent and contradictory views on the industry’s effect on women is suggestive of the challenges this subject poses for scholars, but also indicates it as an important area of focus.

Historians of the cosmetics industry have focused on the female entrepreneurs who gained success as well as the consumers who are influenced by its perpetuation of certain feminine stereotypes. Yet, there is not much scholarship dedicated to the women who sold the products themselves. Direct-selling companies like Avon and Mary Kay brought many women into the workforce who would not have been able to gain jobs in other industries due to lack of education or because of their familial obligations. There is even less scholarship dedicated to the effect that direct-selling had on women in other countries once Avon and Mary Kay expanded to Asia, Europe and South America beginning in the 1970s. A transnational perspective brings to light important commonalities amongst women in different cultures. It highlights the seemingly universal traditions of women as guardians of the domestic sphere as well as the ubiquitous influence of conceptions of femininity. However, the introduction of new economic opportunities also provided women with justification to re-evaluate these assumptions and contest the ideology of separate spheres.

An examination of the discourse surrounding the sales of Mary Kay products both domestically and abroad highlights these universal aspects of gender constructions. However, it also reveals the ways in which women contested these conceptions in culturally specific ways.

The appropriation of physical space is one lens for exploring this negotiation. In the United States, Mary Kay saleswomen utilized domestic spaces as sites of economic activity.
gain, social interaction and as respites from the drudgery of daily life. Through the direct-selling method, these women introduced new meanings and purposes for the domestic sphere. The global sales force, however, eschewed the domestic model, due to safety and cultural concerns, in favor of public network building. These networks were especially significant in “proto-feminist” societies because they allowed women a greater presence in the public sphere. In both the domestic and the global contexts, these re-negotiations of gender norms were accepted by husbands and other males because they were couched in traditional conceptions of femininity and thus deemed as non-threatening to the established gender hierarchy.

In this paper, I will examine the effect that Mary Kay cosmetics had on women in the United States, Russia and China. I will begin by highlighting the role Mary Kay cosmetics had in bringing American housewives into the economy in the 1960s. Then, I will examine how these saleswomen appropriated domestic space in novel ways, defying traditional norms. After Mary Kay cosmetics established a foothold domestically, they turned their attention to global expansion. Because the direct-selling model did not require a significant amount of infrastructure, Mary Kay had a competitive advantage in gaining a foothold in countries recovering from political and economic instability. Using case studies from Russia and China, I hope to demonstrate the commonalities in gender discrimination in all three societies and the ways in which Mary Kay created new economic opportunities for women, their families and their communities. In Russia, Mary Kay cosmetics not only allowed women economic empowerment, but also encouraged women to become more active civically. Mary Kay achieved success in China because it provided opportunities for young women to interact with individuals beyond their kinship networks. As China was experiencing rapid economic and social transformation, direct saleswomen were able to participate in the global economy and benefit from the changes taking place. However, they also demonstrate the powerful results of women’s economic advancement, both on the women as individuals and on their communities.

The practice of employing women for direct sales was already in place long before Mary Kay Ash founded her company in 1963. Avon cosmetics employed its first female representative in 1886 and companies like Stanley Home Products and Tupperware relied also on a robust female sales force in the mid-twentieth-century. In the post-World War

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11 This term is borrowed from an article by Martin Booe entitled “Sales Force at Mary Kay China Embrace the American Way” in Workforce Management; Apr 2005; 84, 4, and used for the purposes of this paper to describe societies which did not experience a feminist movement on the same scale as did the United States in the 1960s and 1970s.

12 Case studies are drawn from western newspaper articles. Acknowledging that there may be journalistic bias, I focused on the quotations in these articles from the saleswomen themselves.
II era, married middle-class women entered the workforce in greater numbers in order to supplement the family income or earn “pin” money. Direct sales was particularly attractive for the young housewife because she was able to dictate her own schedule as well as earn more income than she would have earned in some clerical positions. However, due to generous commissions and a multi-level marketing structure, some women began earning more than their husbands. Although some husbands expressed discomfort that their wives were becoming the primary breadwinners, others adopted the attitude, “As long as we’re playing a tune, I don’t care who’s got the fiddle.” Despite the shift in gender norms in these particular relationships, the wife’s earnings were always phrased as a support for her husband and family, not as a means for economic gain for her as an individual. Thus, though direct selling empowered women economically, their spouses did not consider their advancement to be a threat to the existing gender hierarchy within their marriage.

Direct selling also enticed women because of the social aspects of the business. The Mary Kay Company worked to foster these social relationships through weekly regional meetings and a yearly seminar in which beauty consultants from across the globe would gather to celebrate the company’s top saleswomen. This company culture appealed to women who viewed it as “fun, safe and a source of new friends.” Mary Kay Ash also eliminated assigned territories, which fostered greater support, caring and mentorship between women. Competition was encouraged on an individual basis in order to set new goals, but “the values of the traditional male dominated world of sales such as territories and cutthroat competition among sales staff” were discouraged.

Because of its very “feminine” business culture, employees, as well as the media, regarded Mary Kay cosmetics as a sorority of sorts.

This social environment and culture extended to the interactions between the beauty consultants and her clients. The cornerstone of the Mary Kay model was the “skin care class” or party. Mary Kay Ash passionately believed that consumers were best suited to learn about products in a natural, relaxed environment, which translated to their homes.

The concept of the home party offered an escape for female consumers from childcare,

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13 The term ‘pin money’ is referenced in Sal Nuccio, “Fuller Brush Hiring Women, Taking Cue from Avon Products,” New York Times, October 11, 1966. It is used to describe a small amount of money that women earn that can be spent on discretionary purchases.
15 Mary Kay’s autobiography stressed this belief that women should have economic opportunities in order to support her husband and her family. This point is also stressed in newspaper articles from the 1960s and 1970s. See Beth Nissen. “Woman to Woman.” Wall Street Journal, Sep 28, 1978 and Sal Nuccio, “Fuller Brush Hiring Women, Taking Cue from Avon Products,” New York Times, October 11, 1966.
16 Grumke, 40.
17 Ibid.
18 Ash, 28.
husbands and the obligations of their home life. It also provided an opportunity for women to see friends who they would not otherwise have had time to see.\textsuperscript{19} The process of making-up was a comforting ritual for many women. Peiss described it as “a gesture bound to perceptions of self and body, the intimate and the social—a gesture rooted in women’s everyday lives.”\textsuperscript{20} Each beauty consultant followed a sales script to help enhance the ritual process while women applied the products on themselves. The domestic environment of the skin care class provided a social haven for partygoers, as well as comfort in the individualistic process of makeup application. The domestic space was also a site of economic profit for the saleswoman. This marks an important departure from the ideology that identified the domestic sphere as a separation that denigrated women and kept them subordinate.\textsuperscript{21} Under the Mary Kay business model, the domestic space became a site of female empowerment both for the saleswoman and the consumer.

Social changes in the 1970s and 1980s threatened the growth potential of direct sales companies. As more women began to enter the workforce in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the direct-selling model became more appealing. By 1985, 64 percent of all women aged 18 to 44 were employed. Workingwomen could buy necessary items from the comfort of their own homes (or office spaces, children’s schools and nurseries for that matter).\textsuperscript{22} However, this phenomenon proved to be a double-edged sword for direct-marketing companies. Improvements in the economy enticed many women to quit their part-time jobs in direct sales for more lucrative positions. Working women also had more discretionary income for higher-priced beauty products found in luxury department stores. Direct-selling companies like Mary Kay witnessed a slow-down in the recruitment of new saleswomen and in product sales. The direct-selling model relied on networks of relationships both to replenish its sales force and to generate new sales leads. The “breakdown in some social ties due to divorce, relocation and changing life styles”\textsuperscript{23} experienced in the mid-1980s strained the marketing efforts of these companies. Given the slowdown in the domestic market, Mary Kay cosmetics began to focus its energies on global expansion.

International markets offered tremendous opportunities for growth. Avon entered the international marketplace in the 1950s, beginning with South America then Europe before breaking into the Asian market in 1969. Mary Kay cosmetics began expansion much later, first entering the Australian market in 1971 before entering Canada in 1978.

\textsuperscript{20} Peiss, \textit{Hope in a Jar}, 270.
\textsuperscript{21} Kerber, 12.
and Argentina in 1980. The direct-selling model achieved the most success in post-Communist societies and emerging markets. The ample supply of unemployed women in these countries provided a strong potential workforce. Just as in the United States, Mary Kay cosmetic brought many individuals into a wage-labor economy for the first time. The direct-selling method proved to be even more efficacious in these markets because it required very little formal infrastructure to operate. In fact, other companies that normally sold their products through typical distribution centers often adopted the direct-sales model in order to infiltrate third-world markets. As Ara Wilson argues, the direct-sales model succeeded in these markets because of its ability to employ disenfranchised individuals, provide flexible opportunities for entrepreneurship and to respond to the cultural specificities of local markets.

Just as in the United States, women constituted the bulk of the sales force in these new markets. These women also experienced the same economic benefits as beauty consultants in the United States did in the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, these achievements gain even more significance in light of the cultural norms of many of these societies, which stressed female deference to men. Many of the countries in Europe, Asia and South America in which Mary Kay cosmetics gained success had not yet experienced a women’s liberation movement like that of the United States. In these proto-feminist societies, women were able to defy traditional gender norms through direct selling. In many of these countries, the business model had to be adapted because selling door-to-door was not a viable option due to cultural or safety concerns. The following case studies reveal how through the creative appropriation of public space and the formation of extensive social networks, these women were able to gain new empowering experiences as well as economic autonomy.

Some of the most dramatic stories of Mary Kay cosmetics’ transformative power come from post-Communist Russia. By 1996, the country had over 25,000 sales representatives for Mary Kay. These numbers are staggering given that the brand had only entered the Russian market in 1993. Russia is a particularly interesting market for direct sales because during the communist regime, door-to-door-sales were both “illegal and socially taboo.” Despite regulation against private enterprise during the communist era, many women would wait in line to purchase products in bulk and privately barter cosmetics for other necessary supplies. Even in 1996, vestiges of the communist environment remained.

Avon and Mary Kay saleswomen did not sell door-to-door due to security fears and cultural norms that discouraged Russians from opening their doors to strangers. The national sales director in Russia, Mariya Gerasyova, indicated that Russian women felt shame about “the lack of repair, the dirt” in their apartments. While beauty consultants in America in the 1960s and 1970s commandeered domestic spaces for their own economic gain, saleswomen in Russia hosted events in rented-out factories, airports, beauty parlors, laboratories and even playgrounds. Thus, these sales women had to rely on network-formation beyond the confines of their homes. This appropriation of public space also indicates a certain comfort level these saleswomen had to achieve in the public realm. Whereas the domestic space has traditionally been defined as a woman’s arena, especially in these pre-feminist societies, this conquest of public space for personal economic gain is proof of a transformation in conceptions of gendered spheres.

Mary Kay cosmetics also re-defined gender norms between husbands and wives in Russia. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, 65 percent of the unemployed were women. Women who had previously worked for the state under communist rule were often the first to be laid off and many jobs in the private sector were specifically or even legally slated for men only. Many of the women who turned to direct sales had advanced training in areas like engineering, physics and teaching, but were unable to find employment in the depressed economic environment after the Soviet Union’s collapse. Not only did Mary Kay cosmetics provide new job opportunities for women, but they also paid their sales force better than some male-dominated industries. Svetlana Morosova, mother of two with advanced degrees in mathematics and economics, described her husband’s anger that she was making more money than his policeman’s salary. He was also upset that she had become “more self-assured and independent.” Eventually her husband’s irritation subsided and Morosova claimed he had even learned how to cook. Thus, Mary Kay cosmetics provided new opportunities for women disenfranchised by the new post-communist economy. As these beauty consultants began to surpass their husbands’ annual income, they were able to defy typical female expectations and thus gain greater equality in their marriages.

Despite this re-negotiation of gender norms, these Russian saleswomen did not describe themselves as feminists. Tatyana Navrodskaya, a Mary Kay consultant, remarked, “This kind of independence has changed the way we live; it changes our relationship

27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Neela Banerjee, “For Mary Kay sales reps in Russia, hottest shade is the color of money.” The Wall Street Journal, Aug 30, 1995, A8
30 The average Mary Kay saleswoman earned between $300 and $400 a month.
31 Stanley, D1.
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with men, but it’s not feminism. You can still remain feminine.” The implied negative connotation of “feminism” demonstrates the traditionally rigid structure of expectations for men and women. Like American saleswomen in the 1960s, these women’s actions could be viewed as “masculine” for seeking economic independence; however, in couching their activity as “feminine” they were able to escape scrutiny. Thus, their actions were deemed by their husbands to be non-threatening to the established gender hierarchy.

Although these Russian saleswomen did not consider themselves revolutionaries in their approach to marriage, achieving economic independence empowered some to venture into other arenas in which they could affect change. One such woman was Anya Vanina. For eleven years, she worked as a detective for the police department in Plyussa. Eventually she resigned out of frustration at the corruption that permeated her local government. Prior to her resignation, she was introduced to Mary Kay cosmetics through a friend and decided to start selling the products herself, establishing a salon that also functioned as a women’s center in her community. According to Vanina, “That American company made a revolution in my life. It exudes a tender care and value for people that amazed me.” The empowerment she received from Mary Kay inspired her to found a civil liberties center in 1999 in order to advocate for the rights of impoverished Russians.

The direct-selling model was extremely successful in fledgling market economies like Russia with large numbers of unemployed women looking for economic opportunities. Based on their successes in this country, these companies looked towards the Asian markets as areas for large growth and a large population from which to recruit. China was an especially attractive market. The post-Maoist society was hungry for American products. As one author described it in 1992, “If rampaging Red Guards symbolized the revolutionary spirit of China in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, then the equally tenacious “elegant and fragrant ladies” capture the bourgeois spirit of China in the 1990’s.” Despite the demand, these companies had to adjust to cultural norms of the socialist state before they could succeed. For one, Mary Kay had to change its motto from “God first. Family Second. Career Third.” to “Principle First…” given that China was an officially atheist state. Other employees had a hard time placing career after family in this prioritized list.

The most daunting hurdle for all direct-sales companies was cooperating with heavy government regulation. The success of companies like Avon and Mary Kay spawned a furious stream of illegitimate sales companies who hocked everything from fake diamonds

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32 Ibid.
to AIDS medication. In October of 1995, the China Administration of Industry and Commerce issued an edict stipulating that all companies had to undergo a review before their sales licenses could be approved and new applications would not be considered. They also dictated that direct-sellers could earn commission for their own sales, but not from the sales of their recruits. This severely damaged the Mary Kay business model in which women gained a significant portion of their incomes from the recruitment of other saleswomen. Furthermore, the government dictated that companies were required to have a factory in China and an investment of at least $609,000 U.S. dollars in the country. They also issued regulation to hamper the industry’s growth decreeing that firms had to undergo a year of consolidation before applications to branch out to other cities would be approved.36

In addition to restraints on corporate expansion, the government also placed parameters on what types of individuals these companies could recruit. Distributors were required to be Chinese citizens over twenty years of age. Full-time students, party members, government officials and military personnel were barred from the sales force. Even though it proved more difficult to actually sell products due to government regulations, companies had no issues with sales force recruitment due to the lack of employment options for most Chinese, especially women. Furthermore, beauty consultants could still earn many times the salary of an average Chinese employee. As more individuals began to join the sales ranks, the Chinese government also began to worry about “group empowerment” and the “ideologically charged networks”37 that were fostered in direct-sales companies. To prevent an increase in mass public gatherings, the government required approval for all seminars and classes that were held and also prohibited these companies from selling training books and tapes to distributors. These regulations reflect the same level of paranoia that the Mao regime displayed.

Despite these stringent regulations, Mary Kay was still able to foster the economic empowerment of women in China. Just as in Russia, hiring practices were especially discriminatory against women as the economy underwent massive restructuring and state-owned enterprises were reformed. Mary Kay created part-time and full-time opportunities for Chinese women as well as opportunities for advancement. The direct-selling model allowed Chinese women who had historically been restricted to the domestic sphere and whose only previous interactions were with their families to establish networks beyond their own kinship ties. The company was also attractive to women because it offered free training of its sales promoters. Women with the best sales records received training in management

36 Lily Tung. “A foot in the door.” Asian Business, Jan 1997; 33, 1; ABI/INFORM Global, 61
as well as basic business development and leadership skills. Upper management even received free access to local executive MBA programs. This type of training was important because it allowed women to advance in a market economy that was rapidly becoming a major global power. Because of these powerful incentives, the sales force in China was comprised entirely of women and the turnover rate was extremely low. By 2001, there were more than 10,000 independent Mary Kay sales force members in China. However, the brand still had to struggle to regain legitimacy amongst consumers because the ban painted direct-sales organizations in a negative light. Despite these challenges, Mary Kay was able to gain a strong foothold in the Chinese market and continue its mission to empower women with economic opportunities.

The global expansion of Mary Kay cosmetics allowed for the exportation of capitalism to countries like Russia and China recovering from political and economic instability in the 1980s and 90s. These forms of enterprise were more palatable to these markets because of their “anti-corporate” nature, encouraging individual entrepreneurship by its sales force instead of creating overly bureaucratic employment structures. These companies also saw themselves as “compassionate capitalists,” by bringing marginalized individuals into the workforce, paying generous wages and by passing on discounts to the consumer by avoiding the retailer-middleman. This business model also benefitted the corporation by significantly reducing overhead costs, creating accessible means for the company to receive feedback on its products and creating a system through which the sales force could be constantly replenished. Women were the clear beneficiaries of these business models. Mary Kay allowed women the opportunity to achieve competitive pay and significant training in societies where they otherwise suffered from discriminatory hiring practices. Through economic advancement, these women became empowered to seek other arenas to effect social change, whether it was through political means or in re-negotiating expectations in the household.

Despite the ostensible achievements of the Mary Kay Company, it did not always receive glowing reviews from prior employees. Some described the company as a cult and objected to what they deemed as “manipulative tactics and ‘God abuse.’” Others reported that the pressures of trying to meet sales minimums actually increased the stress in their lives and kept them away from their families more. Mary Kay Ash prided her company for providing higher incomes to saleswomen so they would be able to afford nannies and housekeepers to relieve some of the household burden. However, some women opposed

38 Hulme, 41.
39 Wilson, 405.
40 Ibid.
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this view, claiming that they derived pleasure from these responsibilities and that their business took too much time away from their family. There were also many objections to the conservative dress code and prohibition mentality that seemed counter to conceptions of the “modern” woman.\(^\text{42}\) While the Mary Kay ideology was empowering for some saleswomen, it was also repressive and restrictive for others.

Despite these challenges, it is important to look at the company’s influence holistically in order to assess its impact. Both domestically and in foreign markets, the Mary Kay Company provided unprecedented economic opportunities specifically for women. They provided women with the training and encouragement to surpass limitations in all aspects of their life. Most importantly, in both the United States and abroad, through financial accomplishment, women were able to subtly re-negotiate hierarchical gender relations in their own marriages. Their husbands rarely viewed these negotiations as threatening or revolutionary because their wives’ economic endeavors were always positioned as an effort to earn “supplementary” income to help support their family’s needs and the practice of selling cosmetics was deemed “feminine” and thus acceptable work for wives and mothers. At the same time, the direct-selling model allowed women to appropriate physical space in new ways. In the United States, domestic spaces took on new meanings under the Mary Kay business model as sites of economic profit as well as safe havens for ritual. Owing to cultural restraints abroad, saleswomen were encouraged to seek out public venues as well as expand their respective networks beyond their kinship circle. This allowed some young women a welcome respite from familial pressures and expectations at home.

The social transformations taking place within the home provided an impetus for larger social changes. Women in Russia, empowered from economic advancement, were able to turn their attentions to bettering their communities. Women like Anya Vanina gained inspiration from the “can-do” messaging of direct-sales companies and utilized community-mobilization tactics borrowed from direct sales in order to spread their messages of civil liberties and civic action. In China, direct sales companies provided women with the tools to traverse the rapidly changing economic and social landscape. Through training and economic empowerment, these women were able to expand their networks beyond their kinship ties. Thus, Mary Kay cosmetics brought women into the market economy who otherwise would not have participated and created a veritable army of self-confident, financially secure and socially balanced women across the globe.

Although Mary Kay continues to experience tremendous growth abroad, it has lost some of its luster domestically. It is now perceived as an “older” brand and mid-market

\(^{42}\) Ibid.
due to its lower price points. The Internet has rendered the direct-sales model somewhat obsolete since women can now easily purchase products from the comfort of their homes. In order to remain relevant, Mary Kay stresses education and the proper application of its products. Thus, you cannot buy directly online from its website, but instead must locate a beauty consultant in your area before making online purchases. It has also introduced a less expensive line of cleansers designed for teenagers. Despite their recent slowdown, Mary Kay’s unique “party method” of selling has inspired a slew of new direct-marketing companies. Now, everything from lingerie, to sex toys to wine is sold using the Mary Kay model. Sequoia capital recently invested $37 million in Stella & Dot, a direct-sales jewelry company that allows partygoers to purchase jewelry via a unique URL and allows for promotion via Facebook and Twitter. Stella and Dot’s founder and CEO, Jessica Herrin, calls it “social selling.” There may not be a pink Cadillac waiting for the top salesman, but the company’s success is homage to the great empire that Mary Kay Ash built.

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