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The Chance for a Perfect World in Multi-level Discourse. The Cases of Three Companies in Manizales in 2018

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Abstract

The present article contains investigative results that respond to the question of what multi-level sales discourse is like in Manizales. Said question is answered with the delineation of two specific objectives, regarding the exploration of *networker* languages and the creation of legitimacy in sales. For this, a case study was implemented with three companies from Manizales as a study corpus. Research on this topic is scarce, especially in Colombia, where this type of business model abounds. As such, it is vital to delve further, into the creation, transmission, and development of discourse for consumption, as existing investigations address this problem only from the standpoints of publicity, *marketing*, and administration. A work focus is not registered from the communication perspective. This object of study merits the attention of discourse.

Considering that the topic of interest involves new work strategies, which incentivize network company creation and teamwork, via the *networker* figure, or individual who consumes, appropriates, and disseminates discourse about products, it may be specified that the language of networkers in Manizales is based upon persuasion, through visualization of the benefits of their products, which is legitimized

by incentivizing individuals to join the network with dialogical communication.

Key words: Language; Advertising discourse; Multi-level marketing; Marketing; Organizational; Business model.

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1. Introduction

In Colombia, among the best-known cases of network creation structure is the business of David Murcia Guzmán (DMG), who positioned himself as a marketer and generated the prepaid card sales model. Today, there are various companies that function with multi-level structures. These include: *Herbalife, Gano Excel, Fénix Life Premium, Xango,* and *Vemma*, among others. They all sell products or services that are distributed by way of a teamwork scheme that promises monetary earnings.

Here, the term *network marketing* emerges. This functions as a chain between consumers and product or service distributers. Said companies, brands, and their roles in the market are emphasized, as follows: "Multi-level companies are characterized by having a marketing system based on two fundamental aspects: direct sales and network creation" (Maisterrena-González, 2014, p. 5). The objective of multi-level discourse is to attract the attention of those with nutritional, economic, labor, personal, and self-improvement needs, among others, and thus position the brands, dynamize the companies, and expand their work nuclei.

The objective of the present investigation was to study *discourse* and analyze the following question: How does discourse operate in multi-level sales in Manizales, based on two categories of analysis: language and legitimization? Language is understood as human beings' ability to express thoughts and feelings with words. Legitimation is understood as knowledge, justified with the intent to show that expressed as both authentic and credible. Said categories give an account of the way in which discourse construction, and the form in which multi-level salespeople express themselves, enables 'the other' to be convinced.

2. Conceptual reconfigurations

2.1. Same structure, different model

The multi-level sales structure, also known as network marketing, is a business model focused on direct sales, which permits members to sell products to final consumers and recruit additional individuals, so as to obtain commissions for the sales of those they recruit. These companies, many times, have been associated with *pyramid schemes*, which are illegal, as they generate massive resources of those who authorize from the financial superintendence.

Author Richard Poe, in his book on *network marketing*, explains that: "Multi-level marketing is not defined in any dictionary [...] I propose the following definition: any marketing mechanism that permits an independent salesperson to recruit others to obtain a commission from their sales" (1995, pp. 7-8). Another definition for this term is proposed by Ziglar and Hayes:

> Multi-level marketing is a system by which to distribute goods and services via networks of thousands of distributors and independent salespeople. The distributors receive money from the sale of goods or services, and from the

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recruitment and sponsorship of other independent salespeople who join the structure. The principal basis of multi-level schemes is not the offering of goods and services, but rather the option of independent salespeople to receive income for the sale of products and commissions for marketing network creation and expansion (2001).

Multi-level companies, in addition to functioning within a network scheme, consist of members known as associates, or independent salespeople, and classified as *networkers*, who perform company activities. In Law 1700 of 2013 (Congreso de la Republica, 2013), these salespeople are defined as: "A natural business person or legal entity who performs business activities, and who has exclusively commercial ties to the companies described in the second article of the present law". This indicates that, in order to form part of a multi-level company, specific registries that explain that their activity is that of a businessperson are not required. In other words, anyone may form part of a business with these characteristics. The *Superintendencia de Sociedades* states that:

> ...individuals who form part of these companies do so willingly, and with the goal of profit <as a way of life, and their activity, in the majority of cases, is transient and/or temporary> (in compliance with law 1700 of 2013) this activity is purely business [...] there is no labor relationship between the independent salesperson and multi-level companies, it is merely business (2014, p. 4).

From the above, it is understood that members do not receive payment for belonging to the multi-level company, if they do not obtain earnings from the activity performed therein, product sales, or the affiliation of more individuals to join their network and perform the same activities. For this, 'clarity' is considered an important part in compensation plans, in terms of that which one who decides to join the company will earn, and how members benefit or are rewarded for the performance of the above-mentioned activities (Cf. Congreso de la Republica. Law 1700 of 2013).

'Personal sales' are key in multi-level marketing, which, as indicated by Kotler and Armstrong, implies: "... bi-directional communication, which is personal between salespeople and individual clients, whether face-to-face, by phone, video conferences, online, or by other means" (2013, p. 514). *Networkers*, it is understood, may learn a bit more about their possible clients, which permits them to become more tuned-in to their needs, ideas, or dreams, and adjust their proposal and make it more attractive to these individuals, and more viable that their recruitment and sales possibilities will increase. For the authors, this teamwork permits mass sales and movements, as members may help each other, from various areas, toward a common goal.

Apart from personal sales, *networkers* also use direct *marketing*, or direct sales, which consists of direct relationships with clients, who are carefully selected with the goal of creating lasting ties. In marketing terms, this is known as segmenting and defining a target public, as it affects a specific audience, one with needs that the product or service may resolve. As proposed by the above-mentioned authors, today's salespeople are different from the ideals of yesteryear. Today, they are professionals with broad knowledge of the topic at hand. With

these strategies, the goal is to recruit more individuals, make them loyal, and link them to the network.

Network marketing (multi-level marketing) emerged in 1939, when Carl Rehnborg created a company called Nutrilite in the United States. This company distributed a multivitamin product that he had created five years before. The sales system functioned such that distributors also consumed products, recommended them, and brought more individuals to the company, which enabled them to receive a commission for each individual that became a member, in order to "... perform the same distribution process" (Maisterrena-González, 2014, p. 3).

In order to achieve this goal, salespeople must tailor their discourse, based on an unconscious observation exercise, and based on Carosio (2008). They must reflect, and demonstrate the discursive intentions that exist behind this sales model, when they offer products using tools that will convince clients to participate in this chain, and invite others to do the same.

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of companies that work with this network-creation model. In addition to DMG, which is no longer on the market, there are others, such as *Gano Excel, Scopetroleum Inc, Amway, Vemma, Herbalife,* and *Bitcoin*, to name just a few. In 2017, approximately 150 new companies with pyramid schemes were detected in Colombia. In accordance with the Superintendence of Finance and Companies, the speed at which their is discovered has become worrisome (García, 2017).

Today, there are many opinions for this type of work and investment. There are those in favor, and who work toward financial freedom, and those who see this model as a scam that offers no work stability. On this point, there is a dearth of investigations that pose and contrast opinions of the established model and discourse use. There is also insufficient analysis of the effects that discourse has on individuals who become new network members, and the way in which they appropriate this. It places in the limelight a group of people who, apart from making an investment, must also invite other individuals to form part of the 'structure', in order to form a chain and obtain a certain percentage of money from the investments of these others.

2.2. Background

The analysis of 13 articles (selected from communication and marketing approaches and specific topics including: persuasion, publicity, and rhetoric, among others) provided a panorama of the state of the art, specifically with the following components: a research question, theoretical framework, methodology, results, and conclusions.

The majority of the questions that guide investigations propose the discourse relationship with some other item. In some cases, this is with marketing and publicity, or that which permits the union of these two, and its result. Also, interest in recognition of the other is made clear, as are its needs. To a lesser extent, certain questions are related to political and digital activities. The questions that will be used for the present investigation highlight the form of discourse employed and the way in which this develops, based on language and legitimation.

Herein, key terms include: discourse, entrepreneurship, publicity, consumption, marketing, and persuasion.

On examination of the theoretical support in these articles, it was found that *critical theory*, with emphasis on *cultural industry* predominates (Wendel and Lesmes, 2017; Carioso, 2008). Further, the presence of *semiotics* and *discourse analysis* approaches are shown (Galmés, 2015), owing to their affinity for the object of study. Other frequently-applied theory in these investigations is *rhetoric*, as it relates to persuasion (Martínez and Toula, 2018; Ángel, 2016). In this case, Casaqui (2017) is mentioned, in *Discourse of investigations on entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship in digital media,* in which entrepreneurial rhetoric works as support for capitalism. Further, the study *Connotation and denotation in advertising messages of 'luxury articles',* by López (2006), is underscored. Therein, denotation is shown to be among the principal tools utilized in the construction of advertising messages.

Lastly, it is important to mention the relationship between critical discourse studies and communication studies, as explained by Martínez and Toula (2018), in *Critical Discourse Studies and/in communication: theories, methodologies, and pedagogies at the intersections*. Therein, the way in which two fields of study may come together, and which have the potential to be explored in future research in this area, is explained.

The methodologies used in the majority of *discourse analysis* methodology articles, which were identified through the means by which discourse occurred, include interviews, market studies, movies, conferences, blog and videoblog content, and articles.

Discourse that relates to other concepts that connect communication to *marketing* and social representations are also addressed. The relationship between these concepts is important to the analysis of multi-level companies and their communicative model. Comparative analyses were found in investigations that created relationships between different objects of study. For example, Carosio (2008), in *The genera of consumption in the consumption society,* discusses the way in which consumption relates to the civilizing model of the female consumer. For this, market studies are used as a methodology, and an analysis of the target audience is implemented. This serves as a reference for the present investigation, in terms of the target audience, and the way in which this is selected.

The results show that the majority of articles identify the way in which different persuasion tools are employed to create false needs in consumers, promising luxury, status, and financial freedom. It is vital to highlight the advertising message in this discourse, as it is used as the first tool of denotation, later a sense of connotation is used, with the promise of material icons, and later, these become emotional and symbolic achievements.

Further, the way in which multi-level companies may relate to dystopias is of interest. To paraphrase Fernández-Buey (2007), there are similarities between the discursive model used in multi-level companies and social representations in the dystopic model, from the ideological control, based on domination.

The analysis of multi-modal discourse, understood as the way in which different types of discourse join to mutually enhance each other: "saying the same thing in different ways"

(Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001), aids in the comprehension of the way in which levels of meaning are established, based on units of meaning of the electoral spot. In the case of Ahuactzin & Meyer (2017), in *Televised electoral publicity and persuasion in Puebla 2010,* An approach from critical discourse analysis indicates that the image of candidate Rafael Moreno Valle presented a thematic axis: "commitment". This suggests that this theory implies the development of a social construction process, to generate meaning. New digital tools permit the creation of social spaces in which discussions are supported by multi-modal discourse, in order to promote online participation. As a corollary, critical discourse studies have a great deal of potential in the communication field, which is relatively new, and which has grown. More and more academics in the communication field have begun to perform studies from this perspective.

For the comprehension of entrepreneurship, Casaui (2017) is applied, in *Discourse from investigations on entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship in digital media: a critical analysis*. They relate entrepreneurship with capitalism, which in turn, renews its rhetoric to define entrepreneurs as those who transform the world. Multi-level companies, then, leverage reports and studies to reinforce their discourse and take advantage of digital media to disseminate the ideal of entrepreneurship as a benefit.

In general, certain articles provide points of view of the discursive models applied by companies to recruit and create loyalty in clients. Discourse is analyzed, and those strategies applied to reach target audiences are exposed. These studies also mention various theoretical communication approaches, which aid in the performance of an analysis of advertising discourse creation and the meanings employed, from emitter to receiver. Advertising campaigns may be shown to create common ground with those involved, or use representations of normal people, such as students, housewives, and hair stylists, just as multi-level discourse does.

The rhetorical model should be considered a material resource by which to create meaning in discourse. The concept of terministic screens, as proposed by Burke (1996), is notable given the way in which messages are perceived and disseminated. He states that terministic screens are understood as a synthesis of reality, as described from each individual's view thereof, as it represents that perceived in reality, without being entirely real, as these individuals "select reality", and any selection functions, in certain circumstances, based on reality".

With all this, it is clear that different theories and concepts prevalent in research show that *discourse analysis* and *multi-level marketing* are current topics in various branches and fields of study. Various publications exist on these two topics, from Brazil, the United States, and Mexico. However, in Colombia, studies which analyze the discursive strategies of multi-level businesses do not exist, as the topic has been addressed from administrative and marketing theories, and importance has not been attributed to discourse, an important action in communication.

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2.3. Theoretical framework

2.3.1. Discourse

The most commonly-studied theories, by researchers in the communication field, are rhetoric and discourse analysis. Previously, the DMG case was named as a pioneer of the *network marketing* model in Colombia. This implemented promotor and salesperson training for those who worked in municipalities and townships. They earned 50% of their sales, and Murcia the other part, as he considered this a bonus for personalized publicity, since the individual was to disseminate the brand and bring on more people. "In the discursive activity of those who transmit a message with the goal of expanding the business, a credibility practice, by way of language is shown, which contains persuasion tools that allude to consumption, and create legitimation for possible clients and multi-level network participants" (Guerrero, 2010).

One theory directly involved in discourse is semiotics, which studies verbal and non-verbal language. Semiotics is understood as a theory of codes for the way in which human beings employ signs to communicate. The way in which these are used and how they arrive to others is the object of study.

For this, it is necessary to apply code theory, as posed by Eco (2000), in which the code is understood as a culturally-defined norm that permits the relation of expressions and content, in order to enable semiotic function, or the establishment of the relationship of an object to represent this. The code functions, then as a series of related information that is established by agreements, which later are granted a value, in accordance with their interpretation.

Codes, as they are accepted by society, constitute the way in which that it thinks and speaks. In some cases, improper of these codes results in laughter, and this is viewed as something comical, owing to the collateral effect and encounter of an internal code contradiction. In this situation, laughter occurs because, although that said was understood to be 'impossible', its content is understood. As Eco explains: "The code does not impede the comprehension of a proposition that is commonly considered false. In fact, it permits its comprehension, and understanding is, culturally speaking, false" (2000, p. 107).

On mention of the semiotic function, this refers to the correlation between interpreted information and that which is lent value, thanks to the relationship defined by the code, and so, is able to represent that interpreted by the code. Thus, that which makes way for semiotic function is the code, as a this works within a system of signification. The semiotic function, in turn, permits communication.

Eco also discusses denotation and connotation, understanding the former as a primary codification, or a direct relationship between expression and content. The latter is understood as secondary codification, in which expression is another semiotic function. This means that, on connotating, another code, or relationship based on a base code which has been represented, is established.

Other important elements proposed by Eco include hyper-codification and hypo-codification, which may be defined as follows: hyper-codification occurs when the code establishes a strong relationship between expression and content, which tends not to change, from existing codes to more analytical sub-codes. Hypo-codification, conversely, occurs when the code establishes a weak relationship between expression and content. It is more subjective, and moves from non-existent codes to potential or generic codes. Herein, hyper-codification constitutes part of an existing code, and in hypo-codification, the code-formation process is assisted. Elements proposed by Eco are then highlighted, on understanding that codes permit the establishment of the relationship between objects, so as to interpret and represent them. Based upon these representations, one may later create messages and communicate.

Another theory that permits the discussion of discourse is that of Searle's speech acts (1969), known for their contribution to the philosophy of language. They propose that the symbol, in itself, is not a unit of communication. Communication, as such, occurs with language use, and in that which Searle calls speech acts. If one pays attention to the day-to-day, one encounters an infinity of messages and communicative intentions. However, since this does not occur, there is only communication when a message is emitted, and it arrives to its receiver.

Where discourse analysis is discussed, rhetoric should be mentioned. According to Plato, this is the art of persuasion, and is based on disguising that which one wishes to say, in order to make it credible, but not true. Discourse understood in rhetoric is related to interdisciplinarity, defined as the cross between conceptual contributions from different disciplines or subjects, which help in the activation of argumentative thought, so as to defend that said (Perelman and Olbrechs-Tyteca, 1958). Discourse is understood from a rhetorical perspective, as a mechanism for communication, in which ideas and arguments are provided, so as to connect with the person to which the message is directed.

An important author to mention, at this point, is Neyla Graciela Pardo-Abril (2012). She proposes that Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) are principles and theories that permit the interpretation of micro and macro discursive analyses, expressive discourses in which sign systems are joined to produce meaning. These two types of analysis permit recognition of the forms of domination expressed in discourse, based on the recognition of diversity in the social problems that occur from day to day in human forms of interaction.

Another author who stands out in the discourse discussion is Van-Dijk (2003), who works with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and states that, in discourse, expressions are supported by ideological bases, for which reason discourse seeks to be effective, based on its construction, with an argumentative structure, as discursive structure has an important relationship with social structure. Foucault (1970) poses discourses as knowledge of the socially-constructed reality and which develops in specific social contexts. In his own words: "Discourse production is simultaneously controlled, selected, and redistributed by a certain number of procedures, whose function is to conjure power and danger, dominate random events, and avoid its heavy, fearsome materiality" (p. 5).

Another definition of discourse is offered by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001), who propose that this is knowledge, constructed socially, by way of reality. Said knowledge may apply to

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both broad and specific social contexts. Therein, community interests are crucial to the analysis of the way in which these dictate discourse.

Pardo-Abril (2007a; 2007b), who poses that CDS investigate human interactions which affect illegitimate mind control, by way of discursive tools that modify ways to understand reality. Finally, the position of Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) is notable, as they propose that discourse is socially constructed, reality-based knowledge. Said knowledge may apply to both broad and specific social contexts. In addition to this, they also repurpose the contributions of Van Dijk and Pardo-Abril, which permit a definition and clear comprehension of the way in which to analyze discourse, based upon its production and socialization. As indicated in the sections below, the basis for discourse may be found in two key categories, simultaneously: language and legitimation, both of which are categories of analysis for the present study.

2.3.2. Language

Language is understood as humans' ability to interpret, analyze, signify, and produce symbols related to tangible and intangible elements in the world, and by way of this, express their perception of reality with signifiers. This occurs via the creation of representations of the world and reality, thanks to descriptions that allow for the comprehension of references with relationships to the real world, or perceptions. According to Berger and Luckmann: "The language used in daily life provides me with indispensable objectivations and provides order, within which these acquire meaning, and within this, daily life holds meaning for me [...]. Thus, language marks the coordinates of my life in society" (2003, p. 37).

Firstly, Saussure (1945) defines language as an activity which permits the expression and comprehension of ideas or concepts regarding the use of language and speech, which depend on each other to form language. This is revealed to be the social part of language which permits communities to create and articulate words with objects or ideas, provide them with a value, and speak as an individual party with the ability to create words, sounds, or images. Language, then, may be understood based upon Saussure's definition, as the ability to express oneself by granting value to objects, defining them, and creating a relationship between that which they are and that which they represent.

Another definition of language is given by Potter (1998), who, based upon the principal theories, explains that none focuses on language from the standpoint of practice. He says that this must be the principal focus of language studies, and uses the metaphor of the mirror, in which he affirms that "Language reflects things by way of descriptions, representations, and stories" (p. 130).

Through the use of descriptions, language not only reflects, but also constructs individual perceptions of the world, from a context. For this reason, it is understood as a social practice, because meaning constructed with descriptions may vary, based on the context in which the individual is immerse, or their interpretation of reality. In addition to understanding several of the functions of language, and the way in which it is conceived, one must understand the way in which publicity influences this, from the standpoint of *marketing*, in the language of *networkers.*

Within this framework, it is important that language be spun with publicity, which makes use of rhetorical tools for the creation and diffusion of its messages. These, via communication, seek that the consumer recognizes the brand and that this generates greater acceptance. The characteristics of a good or product, then, represent the meaning of acquiring a given object or service, based on the creation of a symbolic world that: "...generates a large number of stories, which include: everyday fantasies, urban legends, reminiscences of a better past or an ideal future" (Suárez, 2012, p. 30), with a marked emphasis toward experience and desire. Language may be transmitted by way of ideas, aspirations, and dreams that represent concepts and achievements. Publicity promises happiness and success, by way of the elements it highlights. Bucci and Kehl state that:

> Publicity sells dreams, ideals, attitudes, and values to society as a whole. Although it does not consume any of the objects displayed in publicity, as if consuming the image thereof were the key to happiness. The desire to possess them becomes consuming. Identification with the «good», as the life ideal that they supposedly represent, becomes consuming (2004, p. 61).

The advertising trade discovered the way in which peoples' interpretations, in accordance with the world that they wish to 'present'. This functions with the immediate logic of desires that incite individuals to be robust consumers. Several of these brands have sold concepts, not products, and it is there that needs are created, as Barthes proposes: "In publicity, the meaning of the images is, doubtless, intentional" (1992, p. 32). *Marketing*, and its relationship to language and communication, should be noted, as Barón describes it as an activity in which "...processes by which to communicate, exchange, and provide offers of value, in accordance with client needs and desires" are created (2017, p. 11).

Companies, then, can make their businesses more understandable, and communicate images that encompass a given objective audience, and thus generate trust and greater credibility in the client. This focuses on a more satisfactory experience, as "...the company becomes a science, not an empirical experiment" (Alonso and Arébalos, 2011, p. 21). Finally, the *marketing* language takes advantage of adjectives and exaggerates its positive characteristics, in order to "...supposedly generate more attention, with very little real value, from the point of view of communication" (Alonso and Arébalos, 2011, p. 197).

Another important factor, in this sense, is that people move en masse. They, on purchasing a product, if it satisfies a need, also seek collective approval. López & Restrepo indicate that: "The projection of individual identity on the masses that consume, in the search for recognition, works based on the possession of objects, and this includes those which allude to luxury and its derivatives" (2017, p. 65).

Considering that communicated through signs, it may be indicated that these are linguistic elements that condense ideas or concepts, and which are materialized by way of the representation of significant elements that seek to lend meaning to that expressed. There is an arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified. The function of language then, in summary, is the ability to construct, express, and disseminate ideas by way of descriptions that represent a reality. In this case, said reality is the way in which discourse is created and communicated,

or crystallized. Language creation may be considered by way of the same. According to Saussure, who created the sign concept, this is composed of a meaning, such as a mental concept or characteristic of the elements represented. These, in turn, are associated with a signifier, which refers to the perceptible part thereof, the material component. As Saussure explains: "between all individuals thus linked by language, a type of average is established: everyone reproduces - not exactly, of course, but approximately - the same signs, tied to the same concepts" (Saussure, 1945, p. 41).

There will always be a relationship between signifier and signified, which lends meaning, in reference to the world. This relationship, in the majority of cases, is established in accordance with the value granted, and on other occasions, occurs directly with that which it represents and signifies.

2.3.3. Legitimation

Legitimation is understood here as the action of wishing to demonstrate that said as both authentic and credible. According to Pardo-Abril (2012), legitimate society, through the use of signic expressions and technological resources. Thus, in terms of that proposed by Weber, both the legitimate and illegitimate depend on beliefs in the community in which the individual that provides the value lives, from three points of view: domination, as a form of achieving obedience, power, as a social imposition, and social relationships, as interaction between two or more individuals. For this, in the proposal of Berger and Luckmann, the background is the concept of reality that is meditated upon. On this topic, said thinkers indicate that, for men, there are multiple realities, that these are represented differently in each individual, and understood with each person, their thoughts and actions creating a coherent world.

Legitimation thus maintains a symbolic universe, which is created based on the subjectivations of individuals with specific interests, and who seek to establish realities. As Berger and Luckmann (1966) state: "It is insufficient to construct an esoteric sub-universe of medicine. One must convince the profane that this is both just and beneficial" (p. 112).

In accordance with the above, it must be understood that legitimation, beyond the subjective, possesses a component that makes it powerful: knowledge, as everything is achieved by way of social constructions present in stories, as legitimation is a human creation that seeks to 'explain itself', justify itself to establish a reality. These become stronger as long as they are disseminated to and understood by the masses.

To say that something is legitimate is to justify an expression or discourse related to a common interest or good, which for Serrano (1994) implies that "legitimacy presupposes that individuals assume the norms that constitute a social order as obligatory or as models, or as something that should be" (p. 12). Legitimation, then, has the ability to indicate to a person what to or not to do, and also why they should or should not do it in a certain way. An absolute reality is thereby created in individuals, one which is difficult to modify.

Another viewpoint of legitimacy is that of Habermas (1970), who defines legitimacy as a quality that accompanies an order to be recognized as true, which provides certain guarantees

and social identities via norms. Added to this is Weber's stance, which is that legitimation may be understood from three points of view: domination, as a way to achieve obedience, power, as a social imposition, and social relationships, as interactions between two or more individuals. Similarly, part of Berger and Luckmann's postulate is applied when they refer to the creation of symbolic universes, in order to reinforce the idea that that expressed is both beneficial and worthwhile.

Lastly, legitimation uses the mechanism of influencing the decisions of another as a crucial point in persuasion (category of result analysis, selected here). One is consequently able to influence the way of thinking, feeling, or acting of another person. This, in discourse, is very important, because different tools are created, based on self-fulfillment needs. Persuasion needs may be 'deficient' or 'self-development' (Maslow, 1991). The former refer to a lack of something, and the latter to personal realization. These, similarly, are classified in accordance with their importance in a pyramid, in which the most important needs are situated at the base, and the least important at the apex.

In order to motivate possible business members, persuasive strategies are applied, in which the speaker's gestures, the need for a problem, solution thereto, or demonstration of future effects directly influence the decision to be made, by way of the manipulation employed in discourse. For this purpose, language develops and evolves social processes when persuasion is used to achieve business effectiveness. In order for the message to be effective with the language used, and thus bring the receiver clear points, one must first transmit assurance, power, and make potential clients feel that they share commonalities with the source of the discourse.

Saussure (1945) states that communication occurs by way of signs, for which reason multi-level discourse relates to the production of significant elements that seek to lend meaning to that expressed. However, they agree with that posed by Potter (1998), as it is important to understand the way in which language, as a human social practice, constructs and is constructed from the interpretation of the world and the descriptions made of it.

In order for persuasion, as an ability, to influence receivers of discourse, to adjust their view of reality, and convince them to act or not in a certain way, or convince them of certain ideas, to be effective, one must consider that, in multi-level, the audience requires guarantees that the investment to be made is effective, and will not generate losses. This certainty is lent via the language used.

3. Methodology

As mentioned, the present study addressed language and legitimation categories as its work axis. These categories are materialized by way of the sign and persuasion concepts, which show the way in which language, with the use of these elements, construct and express discourse. Veracity and authenticity, from the standpoint of legitimation, explain the need for these components in discourse, for it to be socialized successfully.

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For the implementation of this investigation, three multi-level companies were considered, each of which were active in Manizales in 2018: *Herbalife, Gano Excel,* and *Fénix Life Premium* (study corpus). Said organizations employ various strategies to interest their prospects, but are similar in construction and use of discourse. Specifically, in research on this topic, comparative analyses are used and communication is connected to different objects of study. For example, Carosio, Alba (2008) discuss the way in which consumption is related to the civilizatory model of female consumers and the methodology used concerns market studies. Later, an analysis of the target audience is performed.

Within this framework, the study applied a methodology based on a transversal design, with a qualitative focus, as a case study, in Critical Analysis Discourse (CAD). With the intention of addressing discourse characteristics, and based upon this, language is legitimized and given, which explains how, based on meanings identified in this language, they are enclosed in a social reality. This was done with a transversal-interpretative design, so as to focus on specific discourse analysis during 2018.

4. Discourse analysis findings

In order to discuss discourse in multi-level sales, recall that two categories of analysis were defined above: *language and legitimation*. These categories of analysis were selected owing to their capacity to perceive the way in which multi-level salespeople express themselves, as well as the terminology that enables prospects to be convinced. Similarly, each one is supported, as indicated, by two sub-categories: *signs and persuasion.* It should be noted that the following constitute emergent sub-categories (in the same analysis process): *veracity and authenticity*.

The general objective of the present investigation was to analyze *networker* discourse, and reveal the way in which legitimacy is created through language. In order to achieve this objective, three multi-level companies in Manizales were selected: *Gano Excel, Fénix Life Premium,* and *Herbalife*, given that these were, in 2018, the multi-level companies with the most activity and largest presence in the city. The following table presents the selected companies together with their distinctive traits.

Following the presentation of these companies, the discourse of certain members, with different ranks, will be explained. For this, analysis, language, and legitimation categories will be applied.

Table 1. Companies examined

Rasgos	Empresas		
	Gano Excel	Herbalife	Fénix Life Premium
ESTABLISHMENT	Healthy coffee company founded in 1995 by Leow Soon Seng, in Malaysia. Following a study of mushrooms, six varieties of *Ganoderma Lucidum* were discovered, a mushroom that has been cultivated for thousands of years in Asia, and which has long been used in traditional medicine. This company was founded with its first product, coffee, and uses the word of mouth, or multi-level marketing distribution method. Currently, Gano Excel is present on five continents, in over 60 countries. These include Colombia, where it has offices in Bogota, Medellin, Cali, Barranquilla, Bucaramanga, and Pereira.	This is a multi-level marketing corporation that develops, promotes, and sells products related to nutrition, weight control, sports diets, and personal care. The company was founded by businessman Mark R. Hughes, in 1980, in the United States. Currently, the company operates in over 90 countries, including Colombia.	Colombo-American company founded in 2017 and directed by Óscar Andrés Vargas Hoya. Its objective is to lead the market in *cryptocurrencies*, such as *bitcoin* and *triskel*, by way of the purchase, sale, creation, and development of technological tools that serve to perform transactions with digital money. It is headquartered in Bogota, Colombia, and it has several branches and franchises both nationally and internationally.
PRODUCTS	These are based on Ganoderma Lucidum, a mushroom known for its beneficial effects for the health of those who consume it. The company has a total of 14 products, which include body soap, toothpaste, coffee, chocolate, dietary supplements, and beverages, among other things.	*Nutrition*: These products promise health improvements. They include: smoothies, aloe, protein bars, protein powder, multivitamin complexes, and herbal beverages. *Personal care*: Cleansers, tonics, serums, gels, creams, exfoliants, masks, soaps, shampoos, and conditioners.	*Investment bot*: This is a software with which to automate exchange tasks related to the purchase and sale of *cryptocurrencies* or virtual money. *Mining vaults*: a virtual place connected to a system of servers that permit the extraction of virtual currencies and the performance of transactions with *Triskel* (Fénix's virtual currency). *Fénix store*: a virtual store in which to make internet purchases with virtual currencies. *Fénix wallet*: Electronic wallet in which to store and transfer *cryptocurrencies*.
ASSOCIATION	*Direct sales*: On product purchase, as a wholesaler, one earns 40% from sales to the public. *Immediate bonus*: Bonus of between 10% and 20%, obtained from all those recruited personally. *Infinite bonus*: One may earn 10% of the initial package, when these new members are not personally recruited. *Team commissions*: As it is binary, the team is divided in two. The power line, which is the line with the greatest volume, and the payment line, with the least volume. Gano Excel pays 10% of the payment line, provided that a minimum of 500 points of volume is ordered.	Prospects are invited to join the company, firstly as consumers, so that they may attest to product attributes. Later, they are invited to join as partners and networkers. When one joins the company as a *networker*, profits start at 25%. When the individual begins to recruit others, this profit percentage rises, as it does if these others recruit more people.	The company offers users physical money investment options to become owners of a product and generate profit with virtual currency.

Source: author elaboration

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4.1. Language

On comprehension of language as the way in which the world is represented by way of descriptions constructed by humans, in accordance with the context in which they are immerse, the analysis showed that motivation is a recurrent element in *networker* discourse to express to the prospect that joining the company may have work and financial benefits. It is also important to distinguish variations in networker language, in accordance with rank. Motivation, as a predominant element in discourse, may be viewed from different fields. Those mentioned with the greatest frequency are increases in financial capital and improved personal health care. The networker presents these to possible clients, as benefits of joining the company.

Higher-ranking members refer to their experiences and appeal to personal improvements, as presented in the following case of a high-ranking member who states that *Gano Excel* gave them: ...*the ability to begin to construct a second financial pillar and have a very powerful vehicle with which to implement a project that would permit them to achieve all of their dreams* (testimony 1). According to another *networker*: *In 2010, I was fired from my job. Thankfully, I was with Herbalife, and today, it is my full-time job. Fortunately, in the past seven years, I have not had to send a single resume* (testimony 2).

Further, these *networkers* pose questions to their possible clients that involve aspects of daily life. The objective here is to make the person feel the way that they once did, and question them about whether the way that they are doing things is best. Similarly, referring to the health benefits of *Herbalife*, one participant emphasizes the need to eat well: *Our company says that a person should consume 114 nutrients every day at breakfast. Check to see whether, in your traditional breakfast, there are 114 nutrients. It would require a minimum of four carrots, a chicken breast, and a salmon every day. So, to eat a breakfast containing 114 nutrients, the cost would be astronomical. You, with Herbalife, for just $4,500 pesos, can consume all of these nutrients. It is simply incredible* (testimony 3).

According to Van-Dijk (2003), in discourse, expressions are supported by an ideological basis. In the above quotes, speakers use health and financial success as their bases. *Networkers* place greater emphasis on the earnings provided by the company for the achievement of their dreams, and in terms of health, the benefits that the consumption of their products brings, on demonstrating that healthy eating can be both easy and economical.

Networkers, when they join a multi-level network, seek the opportunity to generate income and better themselves (business model, different from traditional work and earning practices). The business is explained to the prospect as an added value to the money that they already receive for their work, clarifying that little effort and time is required, just one short-term investment will yield fruit, and the most important thing is to have the initiative to start something new, different. They say that:...*it is incredible, here you'll hear facts about the company and an opportunity that could generate additional income for you without interfering with your current activity* (testimony 4).

Observe also the way in which the importance of members is mentioned when company membership is discussed, as on joining...*you are the representative, that's why we don't look*

for Herbalife salespeople. We simply look for distributors that yield results, with aspirations, good attitudes, so that the people out there will see you differently (testimony 5).

Depending on the company type, the language may vary. In the case of *Fénix Life Premium*, technical economic terms are used, when comparing the way in which the price of the dollar increases the possibilities of earnings, or the ease of changing one's life to take advantage of the business opportunity. They comment: *The first product is Fénix's cryptocurrency, which today costs one dollar, and which is estimated to rise to a value of 20 dollars, minimum, next year. This means that here, there will be excellent capitalization. If you acquire Triskels, 10, 100, 1,000, or however many you want, the capital you invest will valorize quite well* (testimony 6).

In order to appeal those motivated by personal improvement, the activity is described as extraordinary. According to another middle-ranking *networker* with *Fénix,* individuals are invited to:...*be extraordinary, to step out of their comfort zone, and simply make an investment or become Fénix members, in order to see that the world of cryptocurrencies can change their lives* (testimony 7).

The above quotes show that proposed by Alonso and Arébalos (2011), who explain that *marketing* language exploits adjectives and exaggerates positive characteristics to generate additional attention. This is present in *networker* discourse, as they periodically express themselves with characteristics such as 'incredible' and 'extraordinary'. Here, these are emphasized to describe their experiences in multi-level companies. Low-ranking members refer to the business with more simple, less detailed information, and speak more about that which they have achieved with the company in little time, in terms of economic activity: *I started to generate more income, my company had been around for 25 years, and did not generate the capital that I needed...I work from a wellness club, part time, and the company has taught me to generate over a million pesos* (testimony 8). Beyond the importance lent to income, low-ranking *networkers* mention other types of benefits, as is the case of one *Herbalife* member, who euphorically expressed:...*I weigh fifteen kilos less than before, have more energy, and have been able to remedy a digestive problem. I do this full time, and the company has taught me to generate over a million pesos* (testimony 9). This identifies the way in which need satisfaction is the main element of discourse for low-ranking *networkers*. The elements described to represent low-ranking and high-ranking networker experiences in their companies are different.

To bring the language section to a close, one notorious element must be underscored: that individuals who are just beginning multi-level activity, in their discourse, emphasize earnings or results obtained with the company, and higher ranking individuals appeal to experiences of self-improvement and the benefits provided by the company. For example, one low-ranking member comments: *I have been with the company for four months, and with over 130 people, we have generated over $1,200 dollars per month in earnings with the entire work team* (Testimony 3). In contrast, a high-ranking member opines: *Opportunities present themselves every day, but sometimes we let them pass by. We took this one in July of last year, and today, our lives are completely different* (testimony 10).

These examples show that each rank views the situation differently. Following an analysis, from the standpoint of language, and the way in which *networkers* represent their activity in its description, language use's characteristics, which reveal *networker* strategies to make their discourse seem true, will be analyzed.

4.2. Legitimation

Legitimation, here, misunderstood as a way to validate knowledge in discourse, is presented as an element of domination and power, with the ability to indicate to a person what to or not to do, and also why they should or should not do something in a particular way. In this case, *networkers* make use of references to strengthen and disseminate their discourse so that it seems true. In the majority of cases, they refer to the way in which the business is supported, so as to demonstrate that it is solid and safe.

One element mentioned frequently is work independence, which is justified by the testimony of those whose affiliation with the multi-level company has *changed their lives* (testimony 11) and has become their plan A. Whether this is legitimate or illegitimate depends upon the beliefs of the community in which the prospect is immerse. For members of the multi-level network, explaining that they have made the business their main economic activity demonstrates that the activity provides financial security, with ease, and offers them time, choices, and income.

One very common *networker* strategy is analysis. As the conversation progresses, networkers analyze their potential client, considering elements that may provide valuable information about them, such as their clothes, whether they work or study, have children, and future plans, among other things. With this information, they can steer the discourse more effectively to achieve their objective: that the prospect joins the company, whether as a *networker* or a consumer.

In the story of one high-ranking *Herbalife networker,* they say: *...I don't have to be in an office for 48 or 50 hours a week. I can do what I want, when I want* (testimony 12).

The above-mentioned fragments describe and complement the posture of Berger and Luckmann (2003), in which they explain that: "...one must convince the profane that a universe created with descriptions is fair and beneficial" (p. 113). N*etworkers* demonstrate that what they say is real, and represents positive work and personal actions. This is solidified under the premise that traditional jobs are insufficient (one must answer to a superior for an unfair salary), as such, this type of entrepreneurship adjusts to times and rhythms which enable the development of abilities and desires to manage a business, so as to obtain one's own earnings.

Mid- and high-ranking members who dedicate the majority of their time to working for the multi-level company, as is the case of Attestor 13, a mid-level *Gano Excel* worker, they affirm: *There are those who have spent over three years developing it, and are 100% dedicated to this. They did not see the need to leave their careers and send out resumes because here, they realized that they could be free.* The testimony of Attestor 14, a high-ranking *Herbalife* member, is similar: *In 2010, I was fired from my job. Thankfully, I was with Herbalife, and today, it is my*

full-time job. Fortunately, in the past seven years, I have not had to provide a single resume or ask to exchange time for money.

The pyramid structure is very clear in the discourse of each company. The majority use word of mouth or events that are not directly related to the company to invite individuals to participate and invest in them. They propose that, in order to advance and become successful in the company, one must bring more people into the network, group, or work team. Said structure is a way to develop a business idea that consists of participants recommending and recruiting more clients, with the objective of the new participants producing benefits for the original participants. Attestor 15, a mid-rank *Herbalife* member explains: *You start in the company with 25% earnings or profit, and every time you help more people to change their lifestyles, this increases, up to 50%. That decision is one that you make with your work, your dedication.* One high-ranking member of *Fénix* comments:...*I just created a 100-person team. I earn $1,000 dollars per month, just from my network of referrals* (testimony 16). Another low-ranking member of *Gano Excel* clarifies that: ...*each time someone buys from the company, we have to take a code, which allots us points that are later translated into money, and in this way, I have created a network of 300 people, of which I only invited five, because they recommend others* (testimony 17).

It is thus clear that the affiliation of additional people, through referrals of others, becomes financial padding for those on the top level, at the apex of the triangle. The pyramid structure is evident, and comparisons which sometimes are made between these two business structures are accurate. In said structure, social knowledge is present in discourse, when the needs of others are exposed, and which could be resolved by way of affiliation with the company. This also depends upon the economic situation, as explained by a diamond-ranked member of *Gano Excel*: *In accordance with the DANE, the number of unemployed individuals in Colombia surged from 26,000 to 27,000 in the month of February, but the number of employed also increased by 3,000...* (testimony 18). On this topic, one attestor, a low-ranking *Gano Excel* member, opined that: *Those in the upper ranks generate a reference for the entire country, and earn between 5-20 million pesos per month because they have many referrals. This is much more than an executive in a traditional company would earn* (testimony 19).

It is emphasized that the products acquired by the person, or those in which they invest, become their property, and that any profit from the products belongs to their owner. *If I am the owner of this master node, the commission is mine. I can obtain three separate incomes then: as the owner of these currencies, via master node productivity, and via production profit and valorization* (testimony 20). It is also very common that they use themselves as examples, saying that before, they were in the same situation as the prospect. *We all trade. Have you ever bought something cheap to sell it for a higher price? That's trading. I did trading in high school, and didn't even realize it* (testimony 21).

The resource most often utilized by high-ranking *networkers* is that of work independence, as they completely abandoned their previous jobs to dedicate themselves to *network marketing*, while those in lower ranks focus more on recruiting more people to the network to increase their incomes.

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In order to understand legitimation within multi-level discourse, one must comprehend social interaction, and the way in which, via this interaction, a position of power may be achieved with multi-level activity. This is identified when *networkers* compare their work, implying that it is an attractive, safe option in which to invest money. *I got tired of my boss. I got rid of them and decided to be an Herbalife businessperson full time, okay? I had to make decisions and leave fear to the side, step out of my safety net for something called freedom, freedom of time* (testimony 8).

On various occasions, the company's scope (the number of countries in which it is present, its branches in Colombia, member numbers) is employed to create legitimation and generate security in possible clients. *Herbalife is present in over 94 countries, has been on the market for over 37 years, changing lives, more testimonies globally. What comes is incredible, what comes in products* (testimony 22). *Networkers* legitimate their activity, based upon social knowledge, work independence, the pyramid structure that the network possesses, and teamwork services. For this, in many cases, they themselves are the examples used, so as to demonstrate that what they say constitutes experience, and not just words.

5. Conclusions

In answering the question 'What is *networker* language like in Manizales?', one may say that it focuses on the description of benefits that joining multi-level networks brings. This occurs by way of the representation of reality with which one seeks to convince prospects that a perfect world is one in which they earn money, work independently, and can improve themselves, triumph as a person, and achieve everything they desire, in reference to the opportunity to generate additional income without leaving their current job, or mentions that describe the experiences of other network members. It is thus demonstrated that: "Language reflects things by way of descriptions, representations, and stories" (Potter, 1998). It is important to mention the relationship of language with publicity, as in multi-level discourse, various advertising language characteristics are observed, as explained by Bucci and Kehl, which sell dreams, ideals, and attitudes that incentivize one to possess them.

The concept mentioned by Potter, which references the importance of understanding language beyond just a system of codes, and which is demonstrated herein is emphasized. Said codes hold no value if they are not put into practice. *Networkers* do this by way of language, communicating and disseminating their view of a perfect world through discourse legitimation. It is clear that *networkers* create legitimacy via language, based on recent studies or the experience of network members who have achieved something.

Thus, regarding the question of how multi-level salespeople construct legitimation in their sales, it is clear that, *networkers* appeal to situations that cause people to feel identified with them, and which spur them to begin the process. They also tell stories of the ways in which networkers have advanced in the network, and the amounts they earn from month to month. Thus, *networkers* legitimate their sales to make them appear sustained sales activities in network jobs. For this reason, that proposed by Poe (2013) regarding *network*

marketing aids in the comprehension that this is a marketing mechanism that helps people to become independent salespeople, and thus recruit others, so as to obtain a commission from recruits' sales.

That proposed by Berger and Luckmann (2003), in terms of the creation of symbolic universes, also reinforces the idea that that expressed is beneficial and worthwhile. What networkers do to legitimize these things is a representation of power to justify multi-level activity and thus convince others that their business is legal, beneficial, and novel. It was revealed that they often recur to the negative aspects of traditional jobs, so as to highlight points in favor of multi-level sales, such as managing one's own time, not having to answer to bosses, and continuous income growth.

Definitively, the general research question, which asked what multi-level sales discourse was like in Manizales is echoed by an understanding of discourse as human interactions that modify modes of reality comprehension found in multi-level discourse with a very defined structure. The majority of multi-level sales strategies are focused on capital increases and self-improvement. From Burke's (1996) point of view, this is a synthesis of reality, which is described by way of each individuals' view of reality. Thus, it is emphasized that multi-level discourse is characterized by that described by Maisterrena-González (2014), as it responds to a "...marketing system, based on two fundamental aspects: direct sales and network creation" (p. 5).

Other motivations mentioned in this discourse, to catch the attention of prospects, are improvement in quality of life, health, and time with family, which implies that context is one of the principal factors that influences the creation and dissemination of discourse. It was also found that *networkers* identified the needs of possible clients or *networkers*, and placed emphasis accordingly, so as to make proposals and tell people exactly what they want to hear.

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