

Motivational Factors to Multi-Level Marketing: The Moderating Role of Trust

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Abstract

Despite the numerous works done on multi-level marketing, there is still some light to be highlighted on the role of trust. This article examines the factors motivating adherence to multi-level marketing and the moderating influence of trust in the relationship between these factors and membership. On a sample of 662 distributors in the cities of Cameroon, analyzes of structural equation methods made it possible to realize that monthly income, perceived quality of products and services, organizational mode and personal development are the four factors which motivate adherence to the activity. Trust positively intensifies established relationships; its influence is stronger than the income received monthly. In addition, the Credibility dimension seems to have more effect on adherence 2 factors such as benevolence.

Keywords

Multi-Level Marketing, Trust, Perceived Quality, Organizational Mode, Personal Development, Membership

1. Introduction

Multi-level marketing (MLM) seems to be the most effective sales method today. It represents one of the fastest growing global industries with exponential progression in recruitment (Bosley & Mckeage, 2014). According to World Federation of Direct Selling Associations (WFDSA, 2016), the number of distributors in the world, increased from 10.3 million in 2005 to 117 million in 2018, with an estimated sales volume of more than \$200 billion. Groß and Vriens (2019) identified 500 MLM companies worldwide. Africa and Cameroon in particular, are not

left out. Forever, JMO, Tianshi, Mary Kay, Green Word, Trevo, GN4L and most recently Qnet, represent the companies that have marked the territory (Bosley & Mckaege, 2014). MLM is of interest major for the company and the distributor. The company easily manages to penetrate the market and sell its products while the distributor is remunerated through various bonuses (Gregor & Wadlewski, 2013).

This MLM growth has given rise to numerous works which have lingered on its effectiveness (Bosley & Mckaege, 2014); its difference from traditional marketing (Gregor & Wadlewski, 2013); its development (Wadlewski, 2022; Geevarghese et al., 2016; Njoto-Feillard, 2016); its perception by consumers (Vassileva, 2017); her contribution to the development of society (Hatchaleelaha, 2016); its ethical problems, legal and moral as well as its comparison to pyramid structures (Cardenas & Fuchs-Tarlovsky, 2018; Groß & Vriens, 2019). Recently, work has focused on the economic model of operation of these businesses in competitive and non-competitive markets (Reingewertz, 2021), their compensation plan and the resulting possibilities (Roman et al., 2021), the failure of their marketing strategies (Malshe et al., 2021), the distinct tensions in the hierarchical levels and the mechanisms that can manage them (Malshe & Krush, 2021) some research has been focused on the distributors who represent the main actors. In this regard, the determinants of their satisfaction (Lee & Loi, 2016); the factors explaining their performance and their maintenance in the network (Liman, 2023; Sagarino & Rubi, 2016); the management of conflictual relationships between them and their godchildren (Koroth & Sardana, 2012) are discussed. The authors also sought to understand the reasons that push distributors to integrate MLM (Sourav et al., 2015; Parvin & Kabir, 2011). It includes social responsibility, personal development, personal freedom and professional lifestyle. Along the same lines, Dixon et al. (2023) focused on the personal characteristics that increase attraction and participation in MLM, notably, Amway and Herbalife. Their research reveals that the psychological characteristics such as belief systems, thinking styles and behaviors extrinsic elements are associated with it. This research was limited to the direct relationship between motivating factors to MLM which, however, is mainly based on the relational capital of its members. The distributor is forced to exploit his social network to sell products and attract new members, which supposes a relationship of trust between the latter and his prospect. Confidence is the presumption that in situation of uncertainty, the upline will react in accordance with downline expectations. Some authors have established the influence of trust in the organizations and in direct sales relationships (Andreani et al., 2014). Trust represents a principal vector in favor of relational orientations, and contributes enormously to the stability and guarantee of exchanges (Gatfaoui, 2003). The moderating role of trust has been established in many researches (Shiromani et al., 2017; Randeree et al., 2005) but none of them has studied its influence on the relationship between motivational factors and MLM membership. Indeed, classic, traditional or even transactional mar-

keting is focused on sales and seeks to generate as many sales as possible in the short term. It is based on the 4P model which today is widely called into question. In fact, the consumer is no longer obliged to travel to buy; advice, recommendations and trust are inseparable from consumer decision-making. These findings require multi-level marketing which is a form of relationship marketing and which is based on the idea that it is less costly to retain an existing customer than to generate a new one. It is a strategy of long term designed to encourage interaction and engagement between the product, the seller/customer and prospect. The objective is to develop close relationships with customers by providing them with information and solutions directly adapted to their needs and interests. However, MLM is a practice that does not require intermediaries, and its foundation lies in the relationships, the human interactions which require trust (Koroth & Sardana, 2012). Prospects join MLM mainly due to persuasion by friends, colleagues and relatives. Earning the trust of prospects is crucial for distributors, because trust makes it easier a relationship of exchange while distrust slows it down. Although the role of trust has been established in classic marketing (Shiromani et al., 2017; Gurviez, 2003; Randeree et al., 2005; Gurviez & Korchia, 2002; Gatfaoui & Lavorata, 2001), taking into account the differences presented (see **Table A1**), we believe that in MLM, where trust occupies a primordial place, the debates concerning it remain current. Despite the meteoric rise of MLM in Central Africa and particularly in Cameroon and the opportunities it offers, the sociologized reality leaves appear that, this new form of marketing is struggling to win universal suffrage cause of abundant criticism and limits made to it and which, consequently, lead to not only the reluctance of prospects, but also and above all, the discouragement or the abandonment of many distributors. He flirts too often with pyramid selling considered a scam in which the sale of the product/service serves to mask membership which will promote the enrichment of distributors located at the upper level of the pyramid. Its recruitment practices are linked to problematic behaviors, which probably arise, among other things, from the exploitation and harassment of relationships. At Cameroon, interactions between people raise issues of trust. About it, MLM scandals followed one after another and confidence deteriorated, thus sparking a major debate on the viability of this sales method for practices deemed unfair by some. If network marketing has enabled certain distributors to create a niche of opportunities, others, in this case the “godchildren”¹, admit to having “left feathers”², tired of waiting for the millions and the fallacious promises dangled to them their sponsors. How can we understand that such a widespread, vaunted and recommended by its promoters, cannot achieve unanimous support in Cameroon? It arises from then, a real problem of trust between the godchild or downline and the sponsor or upline which makes him recruit into the activity. The aim of this research is therefore to highlight the moderating

¹New distributor under the supervision of up lines and most often located at the bottom level of the hierarchy.

²Distributor who already carries out the activity, recruits new members and supports them.

influence of trust on the relationship between motivational factors and MLM membership. More precisely, we will provide answers to the following questions: What are the factors that motivate to MLM in Cameroon? Does trust moderate the relationship between motivational factors and membership in MLM? This work will contribute on a theoretical level to fleshing out the literature on factors intensifying the relationship between motivational factors and membership in MLM. On a managerial level, it will allow MLM companies to better direct their strategies and communication on different factors highlighted in order to develop their business and have the most distributors possible. We present the theoretical framework, the methodology as well as the different results obtained.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypothesis

2.1. Motivational Factors

Multi-level marketing refers to a sales network structure in which resellers sell products to customers but also can sponsor new sellers, and be then partly remunerated by a commission assessed as a percentage on the sales of the recruits (Groß & Vriens, 2019; Mehdi Ba, 2016). The uplines or sponsors are the distributors who recruit new distributors into the activity and generate bonuses on the group's collective sales. Downlines that represent new distributors recruited or referrals help to increase overall sales by allowing uplines to access high commissions. MLM marketing eliminates costs and offers businesses the opportunity to promote their products and services using customer relationships distributors. The literature reveals several intrinsic and extrinsic motivators that determine membership in MLM. Many researchers have established that perceived financial rewards, the perceived quality of products and services, the organizational mode and personal development (Choudhary, 2013; Lee & Loi, 2016; Sourav et al., 2015; Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012) constitute the main motivations for membership to network marketing. Which justifies the first hypothesis:

H1. Multi-level marketing membership is influenced by numerous determinants.

MLM Compensation Plan Allows Distributors to Earn Income extra monthly payments and access to financial fulfillment (Choudhary, 2013; Parvin & Kabir, 2011; Coughlan & Grayson; 1998). The latter gives the right to commissions of sales and various bonuses relating to the activity of the distributor and its downlines. This activity is full time for some while for others it is a means of accessing extra monthly income. According to Nga and Soo (2011), young people consider MLM as a permanent career option to supplement their income. For Effiom and Archibong (2015), there is a strong positive link between MLM and income generation. They maintain that it is a real source of income and creation of jobs. The highlight of MLM is that it provides opportunities to income to low-skilled workers, making it attractive to low-skill workers average (Wilson, 1999). MLM can provide access to the complement of income in addition to the main activity. These financial rewards are likely to attract new arrivals into the network hence

the first hypothesis:

H1.1. Extra monthly income perceived has a positive influence on MLM membership.

MLM distributors most often rely on the appeal of their products and services to market them (Koe & Soo, 2011). The perceived value of the product is then linked to the expertise of the sellers and the personal relationship which links them to the buyer. In Indeed, consumers are more and more demanding and focus on the quality of products. According to Shirani et al. (2014); Jumpon et al. (2013), product quality is a factor which leads distributors not only to join the network, but also to join it perpetuate. According to Sourav et al. (2015), consumers want to fulfill their needs by consuming innovative, nutritious and good quality products. Besides, MLM offers the possibility to consumers to attest to the quality of products through tests and demonstrations (Chaubey & Subramanian, 2013) which are generally carried out when presenting the product or activity. Meeting customer expectations is imperative to succeed in any business and not being able to provide them with the right product is considered a death trap (Lee & Loi, 2016). Users who are satisfied with the quality of MLM products become distributors especially when high doses of positive images were shared (Pratt & Rosa, 2003). We therefore propose this hypothesis:

H1.2. The perceived quality of products and services positively determines MLM membership.

Organizational mode is, according to several works, one of the factors of membership and distributor satisfaction. Sourav et al. (2015) discuss personal freedom and work techniques. According to these authors, the possibility of working freely and everywhere, easy entry, access to leadership, being your own boss, are elements that motivate membership in MLM. Lee and Loi (2016) believe that, support from the upline is associated with MLM membership. They claim that the relationship between the two is very important and that the upline must guide and support the downline to hope for income considerable. For Pratt and Rosa (2003), emotional support, information sharing and practical orientation are all elements which determine the support and satisfaction of the prospects. According to Keep and Nat (2014), the recruitment process is the key to MLM growth. The perception network of the recruitment process goes according to these authors, influence engagement in marketing. Organizational training undertaken by MLM organizations is important for distributors and companies because they not only help distributors develop their skills professionals but also to recruit new members (Dai et al., 2011). Perception of the quality of training programs positively influences satisfaction and adherence distributors. For many distributors interviewed, the mode of communication was influenced their membership. All these organizational aspects of MLM company's determine the motivation of distributors to join the activity, which justifies:

H1.3. Organizational mode positively determines MLM membership.

Personal development practices are regularly used in training initial and ongo-

ing of managers in the development of management and leadership (Whetten & Cameron, 2011) as well as in professional support such as coaching (Persson et al., 2011). Personal development then adapts to self-knowledge, self-esteem, interpersonal skills, communication skills, the ability to motivate or mobilize (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). Network Marketing trains and develops its distributors by enabling them not only to become good business people but also better people in society. Regularly, the MLM organizations provide training, subject distributors to mentoring programs; undertake motivating events and sharing sessions which allow distributors to flourish professionally, to mature their projects as well as their skills and to care more about others. These programs training include reading programs that contribute to the development of distributors. MLM not only allows the distributor to expand its social network but also to care more about alters. Sourav et al. (2015) as well as Lee and Loi (2016) argue that personal development is one of the factors that determine multi-level marketing membership, which leads us to propose the hypothesis:

H1.4. Personal development positively influences MLM membership.

2.2. The Moderating Role of Trust in the Relationship between Motivational Factors and MLM Membership

Trust is a crucial concept in marketing and makes it possible to establish, develop and maintain important relational exchanges. It is the set of beliefs reassuring the client that the intentions as well as the behaviors of one's exchange partner will produce the results expected (Frisou, 2000). According to Gatfaoui (2003), it refers to the belief that a partner has, as to the reliability of the written or verbal promises and words of another partner. Let's consider confidence as the belief that the upline is capable of achieving long-term obligations in accordance with the needs and interests of its downline. Trust is the basis of any relationship and any exchange. It represents a key variable in the development of relationships with customers and guarantees the stability of exchanges (Gatfaoui & Lavorata, 2001), reduces uncertainty in an uncertain environment and represents a means of security for customers (Georges & Decock Good, 2004). She contributes to reducing not only the opportunism of actors, their risk of deception, but also transaction costs. It ensures the longevity of social networks, represents a membership mobile. The effects of trust according to Khlif (2014) are of three types: intentions of continuity and cooperation, affective attitudes which relate to orientation in the long term, commitment and satisfaction; finally, economic results. Trust represents a source of information, a quality indicator and a means of guarantee for prospects who wish to join the network. The relational approach (Gurviev & Korchia, 2002; Aurier & N'Goala, 2010) oriented on the relationship with the customer and whose goal is not only to acquire, but above all to retain customers, is part of this logic and a long-term perspective. In reality, by reducing the area of uncertainty, knowledge reciprocity facilitates the establishment of trust which in turn promotes not only adhesion to products but also to MLM activity. In such a relation-

ship, trust is a fundamental element of the life stages of the prospect-relationship distributor, namely the creation, maintenance and termination of relationships. The approach relational seeks stability between the distributor and its prospect based on mutual loyalty. Trust has been established in numerous researches as a moderating variable among others, the adoption of products and services (Shiromani et al., 2017; Randeree et al., 2005). We believe in the context of this research that it can moderate the relationship between the motivational factors and MLM membership. Thus, we predict that:

H2: Trust moderates the relationship between motivational factors and MLM membership.

H2.1. Trust moderates the relationship between extra monthly income perceived and MLM membership.

H2.2. Trust moderates the relationship between the perceived quality of products and services and MLM membership.

H2.3. Trust moderates the relationship between the organizational mode and MLM membership.

H2.4. Trust moderates the relationship between personal development and MLM membership.

This research focuses on six variables: four explanatory variables (monthly income, perception of products and services, organizational mode, personal development); a moderating variable (trust) and a variable to be explained (MLM Membership) (Figure 1).

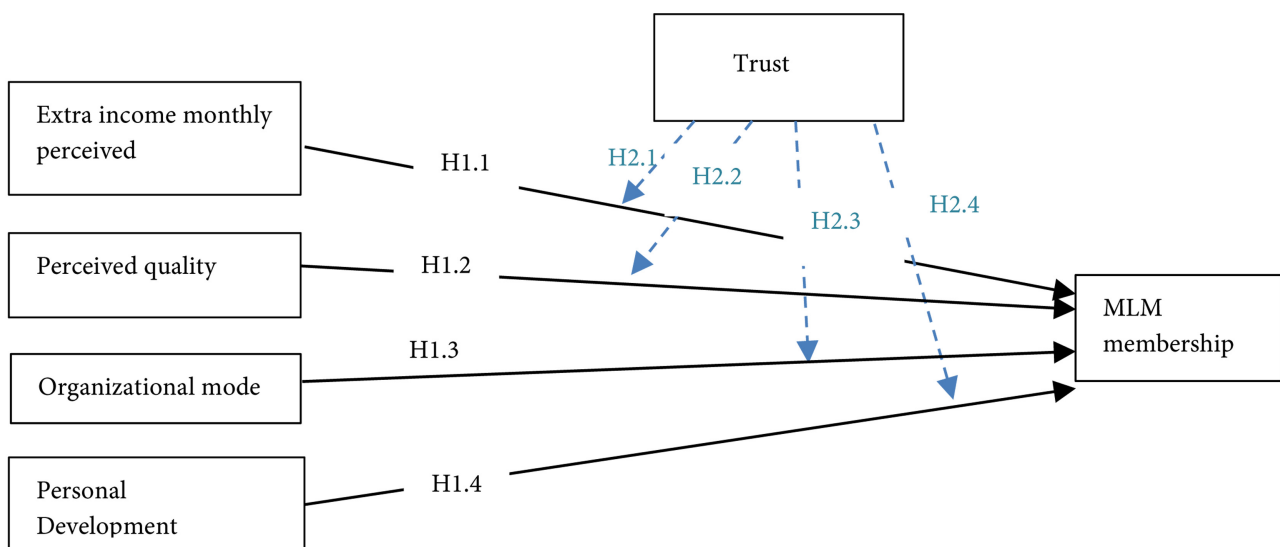


Figure 1. Research model. Source: Ourselves.

3. Method

3.1. Sampling

Our study area is Cameroon. Sourav et al. (2015) highlighted the limit of their research which focused exclusively on distributors when it would be more inter-

esting to also consider consumers. For this, distributors of MLM products who have consumed products constitute the population of basis of this research, due to the fact that they can better perceive the products and services. We used the convenience method to constitute our sample, given the fact that there is no official document indicating MLM members. The methodology used is both qualitative and quantitative. From 10 As of April 17, 2020, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 22 distributors. We reached saturation on 19th and added three others to reassure ourselves of this saturation the information sought focused on two key points: the factors motivating support for network marketing and the trust of the downline or godchild in the upline or godfather. The data obtained from these interviews were the subject of a thematic analysis. Of content which consisted of analyzing the significant elements of the discussions and grouping together the sentences and responses deemed equivalent according to themes. Based on a scale of Three-point Likert ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”, we have built around several items, a questionnaire comprising two parts. The first carried on MLM membership, contributing factors and trust; the second part was based on the socio-demographic variables of the respondents. The choice of this three-point scale is based on the work of Ouattara (1997) on small business managers in Africa. In reality, the general low level of these entrepreneurs and the illiteracy of the majority of populations in Africa do not often allow them to differentiate between expressions like “very good” and “good”, “bad” and “mediocre” or “rather agree” and “agree”. The confusion generally observed in these expressions renders 5 or 7 point scales ineffective. This situation recommends favoring 3-point attitude measurement scales for surveys in underdeveloped countries. The questionnaire was administered in June 2022, in the cities of Douala, Yaoundé, and Bafoussam, with 700 distributors working in various network marketing companies, regardless of their demographic characteristics. Network marketing is much more developed in these three cities, hence their choice. 673 questionnaires were collected, which expresses a rate return of 96.14%. Finally, only 662 were found to be usable. **Table 1** summarizes the characteristics of the sample.

Table 1. Distribution of the sample by age and sex.

Socio-demographic criteria	Size	%
Male	277	41.84
Female	385	58.16
[20 - 40]	269	40.64
over 40 years	393	59.236
unemployed	242	36.56
With employment	420	63.44
Total	662	100

Source: Results of our surveys, September 2021.

Consumer distributors of network marketing products and services are mostly women (58.16%). The majority of them are over 40 years old (59.36%) and with a job (63.44%). We were unable to make a comparison with the overall population of MLM distributors in Cameroon. It is true that there are several MLM companies, but they have not disclosed the number of distributors registered for the activity. Our attempts to access this information, even from some MLM companies such as JMO or QNET where we are a distributor, were unsuccessful. For this reason, we limited ourselves to interpreting the demographic statistics of the study.

3.2. Measurements and Materials

This work focuses on six variables each having one or more dimensions. Each dimension is assessed by a set of items measured on a three-way Likert-type scale points for reasons mentioned by [Ouattara \(1997\)](#). This author established that the low level general of respondents from SMEs in underdeveloped countries and the illiteracy of the majority of populations in Africa do not allow them to differentiate between the five expressions present in the five-point Likert scale.

3.2.1. Motivational Variables

Extra monthly income perceived: Based on the work of [Lee and Loi \(2016\)](#) and our exploratory study, we retained 6 items for this one-dimensional variable.

The perceived quality of products and services: it represents the difference between the expectations of the consumer regarding the performance of the product and service and their perceptions of product and service. We used the [Giordano \(2006\)](#) measurement scale which includes three dimensions: perceived basic quality (05 items), quality of services renderings (03 items) and the sign of quality perceived at first glance (02 items).

The organizational mode: It refers to the different work techniques used by the members of network marketing. We adapted the measurement scale from [Sourav et al. \(2015\)](#) which is one-dimensional and includes 6 items. Two items came from exploration. In total, eight items are used to measure this variable.

Personal development: it is a heterogeneous set of practices, belonging to various currents of thought, which aim to improve self-knowledge, development of talents and potential, improvement of the quality of personal life, realization of his aspirations and dreams. The measure adopted for this work comes from the work by [Jaotombo and Brasseur \(2013\)](#). This measurement model considers the development personal as a second-order factor with 4 dimensions: mental development professional (05 items), private mental development (03 items), positive emotions (04 items) and mastery in the activity (03 items).

3.2.2. Moderating Variable

Trust is understood as a one-dimensional variable by [Morgan and Hunt \(1994\)](#). For other authors, it is two-dimensional and refers to credibility as well as perceived benevolence ([Ganesan, 1994](#)). It is three-dimensional according to [Gurviez](#)

and Korchia (2002) and is based on credibility, integrity and benevolence. We can say within ourselves inspired by the work of Gurviez and Korchia (2002) that credibility represents the evaluation the capacity of the upline to fulfill its obligations concerning the network. Integrity represents the attribution of loyal motivations to the upline, with regard to respecting its promises regarding the term of the exchange. Finally, benevolence allows the downline to consider a less uncertain future given that sustainability of the conditions for a fair exchange is offered. The exploratory study highlighted two dimensions of trust: credibility (3 items) and kindness (3 items). Respondents strongly equated integrity with credibility. For this, we retained the two-dimensional measurement scale proposed by Ganesan (1994).

3.2.3. Outcome Measure

MLM membership is one-dimensional and has been measured through research by Fredette and Guay (2014) through 5 items. The exploratory study ultimately allowed us to generate 4 new items emanating from the organizational mode and monthly income perceived. Table A2 summarizes the measurement of the variables. Table 2 reports the validation of the measurement model.

Table 2. Validation of the measurement model.

Variables	Alpha of Cronbach	Rh� of J�reskog	PVC of Fornell and Lacker
MLMM	0.929	0.88	0.649
OM	0.959	0.926	0.764
EMIP	0.932	0.966	0.727
TR	0.938	0.943	0.782
PD	0.955	0.894	0.805
PQ	0.908	0.927	0.730

Source: Our analysis. MLMM = Multi-level Marketing Membership; TR = Trust; OM = Organizational mode; DP = Personal development; EMIP = Extra monthly income perceived; PQ = Perceived quality.

According to Table 2, the values of the different coefficients Alpha of Cronbach, Rh  of Fromell and Larker's J reskog and PVC establish good reliability, validity and consistency internal of all measurement scales. To examine direct relationships, we used fit indices and three others elements recommended by Kline (2011): determination coefficients; the significance coefficients of determination or statistical tests of the causal links which is given by the value of Student's *t*; the percentage of variance of the endogenous variable or squared multiple correlation (R^2). To estimate the moderating role of trust in relationship motivation factors-MLM membership, we used the analysis multigroup (Kline, 2011). For this, two groups were created for each of the modalities 2 of the moderator (credibility and benevolence), i.e., four groups in total. Each of the groups was divided into absence and

presence of credibility and benevolence. Afterwards, the invariance of the relationships between each of the two groups is tested. We compared the free model to a constrained model and the Chi-square difference test was carried out between the two models. The moderating effect is then proven when the Chi-square difference is significant. Structural equations are used to test structural models and moderation links, thanks to the Amos software. For validation of the measurement model, we used SPSS software to carry out the first-order factor analysis and using Amos software for confirmatory factor analysis.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. The Determinants of MLM Membership

Table 3 presents the results of the hypothesis of the different direct links.

Table 3. Test of the structural model relating to direct links.

Hypo	Relation	Estimate	SE	CR	P	CMIN	CMIN/DF	P	RMSEA	GFI	TLI	CFI	NFI	Decision
H1.1	EMIP-MLMM	0.642	0.075	8.538	0.000	166.780	3.879	0.000	0.089	0.926	0.952	0.963	0.951	V
H1.2	PQ-MLMM	0.811	0.072	11.286	0.000	284.266	3.305	0.000	0.080	0.904	0.947	0.957	0.940	V
H1.3	OM-MLMM	0.288	0.052	5.563	0.000	214.11	6.297	0.000	0.066	0.891	0.935	0.951	0.942	V
H1.4	PD-MLMM	0.669	0.083	8.106	0.000	380.112	2.304	0.000	0.060	0.905	0.969	0.973	0.954	V

Source: Our analysis.

Table 3 reveals that all values of the regression coefficients, as well as the t tests of student are significant; similarly, the Fit indices are all well-adjusted, leading to the validation of all direct links. We can therefore conclude that, extra income monthly income perceived, the perceived quality of products and services, the organizational mode as well as personal development are the factors that determine MLM membership. The effectiveness of the relationship between monthly income and MLM membership corroborates the findings of [Sourav et al. \(2015\)](#) and [Lee and Loi \(2016\)](#) according to which the extra monthly income received is not only a factor in customer satisfaction distributors, but also a motivating factor for the accession of new members. Although mainly made up of employed people (60.77%), our sample reveals that Prospects are attracted to network marketing activity because of the monthly financial extras accessible. The validation of our second sub-hypothesis conforms to the work of numerous authors who have established a link between the perceived quality of the product and the decision of the consumer ([Hasanzade et al., 2018](#); [Lee and Loi, 2016](#); [Osburg et al., 2017](#)). Cameroonians prospects are sensitive to the quality of MLM products which convinces them to integrate the activity. Third, in agreement with the work of [Sourav et al. \(2015\)](#), the mode organizational structure of network marketing companies encourages many prospects to join the activity. They are more join the network work freely, anytime and anywhere, be their own boss, communicate easily, experience fulfilled leadership. According to our fourth sub-hypothesis, the personal

development that network marketing companies share is a factor motivating the accession of new distributors. This result corroborates with the work of [Sourav et al. \(2015\)](#) as well as [Lee and Loi \(2016\)](#) who argue that flourishing and personal development that distributors gain from network marketing motivates prospects to join the network. In fact, many people are increasingly interested more to personal development, considered a factor of business success.

4.2. The Moderating Role of Trust between Motivational Factors and MLM Membership

Results of the moderating effect of trust on established relationships are presented in [Table 4](#) and [Table 5](#).

Table 4. Moderating effect of credibility on the relationships between motivational factors and MLM membership.

Hypothesis	Low credibility		High credibility		Over all effects	Decision
	B	P	B	P	$\Delta\beta$	
H1.1: EMIP → MLMM	0.92	0.000	0.56	0.000	0.36	V
H1.2: PQ → MLMM	0.61	0.000	0.73	0.000	0.12	V
H1.3: OM → MLMM	0.30	0.007	0.22	0.000	0.28	V
H1.4: PD → MLMM	0.73	0.000	0.64	0.000	0.09	V

Source: Our analyses.

[Table 4](#) reveals an upward variation in intensity in both relationships. There difference test value in all hypothesis are greater than the standard (0.05). We infer that credibility has a significant and positive moderating effect on relationships established.

Table 5. Moderating effect of benevolence on the relationships between motivational factors and MLM membership.

Hypothesis	Low benevolence		High benevolence		Over all effects	Decision
	B	P	B	P	$\Delta\beta$	
H1.1: EMIP → MLMM	0.96	0.000	0.68	0.000	0.28	V
H1.2: PQ → MLMM	0.80	0.000	0.71	0.000	0.09	V
H1.3: OM → MLMM	0.57	0.000	0.44	0.002	0.13	V
H1.4: PD → MLMM	0.72	0.000	0.57	0.000	0.15	V

Source: Our analyses.

The results in [Table 5](#) highlight the existence of a significant and positive moderating effect kindness in all relationships. The bond strength represented by the β is well above the recommended threshold (0.05) in all of these. Trust therefore

intensifies the previously defined relationships. The results presented in **Table 4** and **Table 5** lead us to conclude that there is a moderating effect significant and positive confidence on the relationships between extra monthly income perceived, personal development, perceived quality of products/services, organizational mode. and MLM membership, hence the validation of hypothesis H2.1, H2.2, H2.3 and H2.4. These results corroborate with the work of numerous authors who have established the influence of trust in interpersonal, intra-organizational relationships, between the consumer and the distributor; explored the moderating effect of trust in the adoption service. (Gurviez, 2002; Gatfaoui & Lavorata, 2001; Randeree et al., 2005; Shiromani et al., 2017). Indeed, trust is a crucial variable in exchanges which is all the more consolidated, that the prospect demonstrates a certain commitment. Therefore, any behavior confident adopted by uplines contributes to strengthening the confidence of prospects, to lasting winning relationships and their acceptance of network marketing. Trust in upline increases belief in one's honesty and competence. It ensures the continuity of the relationship allows you to better perceive your performance, reassures commitment to the relationship and reducing the uncertainty of conflicts. It promotes the existence of emotional bonds, attachment to MLM, acceptance, satisfaction and good perception products and services.

5. Conclusion

We have highlighted the moderating influence of trust on the relationship between motivating factors and MLM membership. The results obtained thanks to the different analyzes of structural equations have shown that in the Cameroonian context, the extra monthly income received, the perceived quality of products and services, organizational method and finally personal development are the factors which persuade new distributors to join the network. In addition, trust in the upline intensifies positively the relationship between these factors and membership. Our work contributes to the validation of a new moderating aspect which is trust. Highlighting this variable moderator allows us to emphasize the credibility dimension which seems to act strongly on the relationships studied. The ability of the upline to fulfill its obligations towards the downline seems to be stronger in MLM. Likewise, in Cameroon, trust through its two dimensions has a major impact on the monthly income received. Of This fact, prospects seem sensitive to the monthly extra financial benefits received. Our results suggest MLM organizations Focus on Financial Security members, to further develop quality products and services, to promote organizational methods favorable to the activity and finally, to support distributors in their personal development. They should also build relationships of trust between members, based above all on credibility and benevolence, with a view to increasing distributor capital and ensuring MLM growth.

These findings can inform MLM strategies and improve MLM distributors' satisfaction by facilitating understanding of motivations, building trust, aligning motivations with goals, developing incentive programs, and managing expectations.

First, MLM companies can better understand distributors' motivations, such as earning monthly income, perceived product and service quality, organizational style, and personal development. They can also manage expectations and build trust with their distributors by providing them with access to information about products and services and business opportunities. By aligning distributors' motivations with their goals, they can build trust and improve satisfaction. They can also develop incentive programs that match distributors' needs and motivations, such as rewards programs and training and personal development opportunities. Trust between MLM companies and distributors will allow them to put in place effective and fair conflict management processes, or even eliminate them, but also increase retention and develop a solid community of distributors sharing the same values and objectives.

Many Cameroonian cultural aspects can play an important role in MLM business membership in Cameroon. In fact, Cameroonian culture is strongly dominated by collectivism. Individuals are most often concerned with the well-being of their community. So MLM companies that emphasize collaboration and community can be more attractive. Cameroonian culture is strongly characterized by a strong respect for authority. This authority is held by *uplines* and leaders. *Downlines*, who are at the bottom of the distribution chain, are then obliged to show respect towards them. MLM companies whose managers are charismatic leaders can attract the most distributors. In Cameroon, family is paramount and trust is very high. We believe that MLM companies that offer opportunities for families to work together, benefiting from the extra income, can be more attractive. Cultural practices and traditional beliefs can also influence the way Cameroonians perceive this business. For example, some Cameroonians may be reluctant to join MLM because they feel it goes against their traditional beliefs and cultural practices. Level of education can also influence the uptake of MLM companies in Cameroon. In fact, people with a higher level of education are more likely to join these companies even if they believe that it can offer them opportunities for personal and professional development. In this study, we did not take into account these cultural aspects but rather socio-demographic factors, namely age, gender and professional situation.

The limit of this work depends mainly on the chosen sampling method which does not allow a generalization of the results obtained. Trust has been studied from an exclusively moderating angle even though it is the foundation of relationships. Future research can be carried out on its effect directly on membership, which would give way to new avenues relating in particular to its mediating role between motivational factors and membership. In addition, we only retained two dimensions of trust while the most studies focus on its three-dimensionality. Taking into account of the integrity dimension could make it possible to reach conclusions more interesting. We also believe that the failure to take into account the cultural aspects that nevertheless predominate in the Cameroonian context constitutes a limitation. It would therefore be interesting to undertake a study on the

Cameroonian cultural determinants in membership in MLM.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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Appendix

Table A1. Classic marketing vs multilevel marketing.

Classic Marketing	MLM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-term orientation • Interest in isolated sales • Discontinuous customers contact • Highlighting product characteristics • Little importance to consumer service • Limited commitment to customer satisfaction • Moderate customer contact • Quality is first and foremost the concern of production • Trust is not the center of the relationship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term orientation • Interest in Customer retention • Continuous customer contact • Highlighting the value of the product • Much importance given to customer services • Strong commitment to customer satisfaction • Strong customer contact • Quality is the concern of all staff • Trust is the basis of customer relations

Source: Adapted from McDonald & Payne (1996).

Table A2. Measurements.

Variables	Dimensions	Items
Trust (Ganesan, 1994; Boyer & Nefzi, 2008)	Credibility	The promises made by my upline are available
		In case of a problem, I know that my upline will react honestly
	Benevolence	My upline excels in our relationship
		My upline really care about me
Extra monthly income perceived (Lee & Loi, 2016) and exploration one-dimensional		My upline quiet good consider me
		My upline will always be ready to solve my problem
		I am financially fulfilled thanks to network marketing
		Network marketing makes me financially independent (exploration)
		Network marketing allowed me to multiply my source of income
		I access extra income thanks to network marketing
Perceived quality of product and services (Dodds et al., 1991) One-dimensional		Network marketing gives me a lifetime pension
		I ensure my retirement every month thanks to my network marketing activities
		MLM products/services are sustainable (Exploration)
		The probability that MLM products/services will bring me complete satisfaction is very high
		MLM products/services are of good quality
Organizational mode (Sourav et al., 2015) one-dimensional		The probability that MLM products/services will be enjoyable is very high
		The attention paid to manufacturing MLM products/services is very high
		I can anytime and anywhere
		I am my own boss
		I easily integrated network marketing

Continued

		I appreciated the leadership of network marketing
		My network marketing business has a good image
		I like my network marketing company's compensation plan
		I am accomplished in network marketing (exploration)
		I like the network marketing mode of communication (exploration)
		I had the feeling that I was happy in the professional milieu
		I felt that life was interesting in a professional milieu
	Developmental and Professional	I felt satisfied with life in a professional milieu
		I had a feeling that people were fundamentally good in professional milieu
		I felt that I was having experiences that pushed me to develop and become a better person in a professional milieu
Personal development (Jaotombo & Brasseur, 2013)	Developmental and private	I felt like life was interesting in my personal life when I am not at work
		I felt like I had warm, trusting relationships with others in my personal life when I am not at work
		I felt like my life had meaning in my personal life when I am not at work
	Positives feelings	I felt hopeful, optimistic, or reassured
		I felt inspiration, aspiration or uplift
		I felt joyful, happy
		I felt peaceful, calm or satisfied
	Mastaring in the activity	In my activity, my mind is completely clear
		In my activity, my thoughts or actions are fluid
		In my business, I know what to do at each stage
MLM membership (Fredette & Guay, 2014) <i>Unidimensionnelle</i>		I take part in network marketing activities
		I adhere to network marketing
		I respect the standards and value of network marketing
		I share the signs and symbols of network marketing
		I adhere to the rules and rituals of network marketing

Source: Authors listed above.