

DSEF Research Priorities 2018-2019

Research is a primary vehicle through which DSEF builds relevance and credibility, to advance understanding of the direct selling channel. The Foundation's Research Priorities offer our Fellows numerous opportunities to obtain actionable data, produce publishable articles, white papers, company case studies, and drive other important research.

1. Strategic Marketing Success Across Industries

Purpose: Produce a direct selling company case study highlighting a business, sales or marketing success that is applicable across industries. Case studies or academic journal articles.

Status: Available/ongoing

2. Direct Selling as an Engine of Opportunity in Underserved Communities

Purpose and Partners: The report will document the positive impact of entrepreneurial opportunities created for Hispanics by direct selling companies. In producing and promoting the paper, the Foundation will seek a partnership with appropriate organizations such as the Latino Coalition, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce or the National Council of La Raza to produce and promote the paper. The Foundation will also work with partner organization(s) to plan companion events to publicize study themes and results.

Status: In progress

3. Economic Impact of Direct Selling Entrepreneurial Opportunities In Less Populated Markets With Limited Economic/Employment Options

Purpose: The report will document the positive economic impact of entrepreneurial opportunities created in rural or economically disadvantaged areas by direct selling companies.

Status: Available

4. Unique Benefit of Direct Selling Channel of Distribution as a Path to Market for Innovators/Products

Purpose: The study will document how direct selling companies and their independent salesforces drive product and training innovation. Direct selling companies have made a tremendous impact on industries that are commonly viewed as the biggest influencers behind economic growth and recovery in the U.S. These include clean energy, business services, health and wellness education, telecommunications services and Internet technologies. Direct sellers remain a driving force in the rebirth of U.S. innovation. Direct selling companies have rolled out unmatched products and services, transformed what it means to promote eco-friendly practices and incorporated top-of-the-line technologies into their businesses to provide distributors and employees alike with invaluable business tools and education.

Status: Available

5. Business Challenges/Case Studies

Purpose: Produce multiple academic study products by partnering DSEF or DSA board member companies and with DSEF Fellows to engage professors and MBA or other graduate students to conduct research/data analysis or work on projects to address specific business challenges. These interactions will advance understanding of the direct selling business model, leverage the Foundation's academic partnerships to address key industry challenges, and provide valuable experiential learning opportunities and exposure to corporate opportunities for students and faculty.

Status: Under discussion.

Additional Research Topics for Consideration:

Direct Selling Channel Strengths and Core Competencies

1. DSA's Code of Ethics and Company Compliance Practices as a Model for Social Media Risk Management

Background: Direct selling is unique among retail channels because of the way in which products and services are marketed to customers. Instead of relying on traditional retail outlets or online marketplaces, direct selling companies maintain a salesforce of millions of independent workers. In an age of instantaneous communications, how do companies protect consumers and ensure that their salespeople are upholding the highest standard of ethics? From adherence to DSA's Codes of Ethics to internal compliance technology and processes, direct selling companies are leaders in social media risk management business ethics best practices.

2. The Code of Ethics as an Ethical Framework for Gig Economy Companies

Background: The gig/sharing economy is a regulatory-disruptive business model. The rapid growth of gig economy companies like Uber and Lyft and steady increase in the number of independent workers

has led to number of high profile lawsuits. Industries that adopt self-regulatory practices or collaborative approaches to regulation of the marketing channel are more likely to avoid legal action, stakeholder distrust and an unattractive business environment for innovation. See DSA's Code of Ethics for details.

3. **The ExPat-Preneurs: Transfer of US Entrepreneurial Knowledge and Skills to Emerging Markets**

Background: Expatriation is a tool by which organizations can transfer and maintain a base of knowledge across borders. Direct selling companies and their independent salespeople transfer entrepreneurial knowledge and skills in the countries in which they operate. This transfer occurs at the organizational level, when companies formally open in new markets, as well as at the distributor level, through a soft transfer of skills from sales leaders through their downlines.

4. **Back-Office Operations Management and the Independent Salesforce**

Background: While the direct selling industry is almost synonymous with “field work” (sales), the more behind-the-scenes operations are what truly make the model run. The company invests in R&D, creates the products and brand, implements the compensation plans, runs giant IT systems, develops websites used by distributors, maintains call centers for their salesforce as well as inventories, ships and controls quality. Back-office operations empower the distributor to build a business with minimal start-up time and cost.

5. **Direct Selling, Corporate Social Responsibility and Social Entrepreneurship**

Background: Social entrepreneurship and corporate social responsibility are twin drivers of positive social change. Direct selling companies and the independent salespeople that represent them are a quintessential example of the power of networks as a force for social good. Many US companies have Corporate Social Responsibility programs in place, but direct selling companies are in a unique position to scale those efforts through their independent salesforce.

6. **Direct Selling Channel Core Competencies: Networking and Relationship-Building**

Background: Relationship-building is at the heart of any direct selling business. People like to do business with people they like, trust and know who care about them. It's not only because they can rely on their products, but they can also rely, depend and trust on their service and honesty. Direct selling companies train their independent salespeople to build lasting connections with customers and how to lead, motivate and support their downlines.

7. **The Evolution of Code the Ethics**

Background: DSA's Codes of Ethics, a robust series of policies that every DSA member agrees to follow as condition of membership, represent the channel's commitment to the highest level of business ethics. Compare and contrast DSA's Code of Ethics, the role of the Code Administrator and our long-standing history of self-regulation vis-a-vis other industries.

