

Herbalife[®]



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Herbalife and the opportunities within disease prevention knowledge transfer and marketing

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Management summary

The research focuses on how Herbalife, as a food and supplement company with a direct sales organisational structure, can transfer and use scientific knowledge on disease prevention as a marketing strategy. The aim is to identify opportunities for Herbalife to market its products more effectively and promote sales for its distributors.

First, an internal orientation takes place through structured interview interviews. Based on a SWOT analysis and confrontation matrix, potential disease areas are mapped and identified which focus within disease prevention offers opportunities for Herbalife. From the analysis, obesity prevention emerges as the opportunity with the most potential, given the global increase in obesity and associated health problems. By focusing on obesity prevention, Herbalife can address an urgent need in society while increasing its market share.

It then examines the scientific insights on changes within diet and lifestyle that contribute to this specific disease prevention focus. Studies show that diet, exercise, sleep and environment are essential components in preventing obesity. The relevance of Herbalife products in the context of obesity prevention is also analysed. Specific products within Herbalife's product line are considered highly suitable with respect to relevant nutritional properties identified from the literature. This offers potential to market these products to consumers through a marketing strategy aimed at disease prevention.

An important aspect of the study is the regulations surrounding marketing claims. The external analysis shows that Herbalife has to follow strict regulations regarding health claims. This highlights the need for using appropriate marketing communications to avoid legal problems and negative publicity. By using science-based claims, Herbalife can build trust with consumers and meet regulatory requirements. The marketing strategy proposed in collaboration with professionals and literature focuses on a social health contribution. The social marketing strategy should be limited to informing on disease prevention and thereby induce voluntary behavioural changes. The commercial benefit manifests itself through image enhancement. The social relevance offers opportunities for valuable public-private partnerships that also contribute to strengthening Herbalife's identity.

In summary, the study concludes that Herbalife can significantly benefit from integrating scientific knowledge on disease prevention into its marketing strategies. By focusing on obesity prevention, Herbalife can not only strengthen its market position but also contribute to consumer health. This requires a balanced approach that focuses on regulatory compliance (including with respect to distributors), community involvement and collaborations. The study thus provides an informed basis for future strategic marketing focus and implementations.

Layman summary

This research addresses the question of how Herbalife, a well-known health and nutrition product company, can transfer scientific knowledge about disease development. It also looks at how this knowledge can be used to better sell products.

The research first clarifies how Herbalife can best contribute to supporting disease prevention. It turns out that obesity (extreme overweight) is a major problem worldwide. Many people suffer from obesity

and the health problems associated with it, such as diabetes and heart disease. Herbalife can respond to this by offering these people support at the knowledge and product level.

Scientific research shows that healthy diet and an active lifestyle are very important to prevent obesity. This means people need to eat well, exercise regularly, maintain good sleep rhythms and possess the right environmental factors. To evaluate whether Herbalife products are effective within these factors, they were compared for having the right nutritional properties. A number of products meet these properties and may be useful for contributing to obesity prevention. With that, these products can also be used to advertise. An important aspect about this concerns research that deals with the rules for what companies are allowed to say about the health benefits of their products. In doing so, Herbalife has to follow strict regulations on what the products claims in their advertising. As a company, to still convey a disease prevention focus, what they say about the products and obesity prevention must always be based on scientific evidence. By being honest and clear about products and scientific effect, Herbalife can gain their customers' trust and comply with legislation.

Communicating this disease prevention focus, requires an organised marketing strategy from Herbalife. Within this, the scientific information should be conveyed in a simple and attractive way to consumers. A suggested strategy Herbalife can use for this is a social marketing strategy with the main goal of improving overall health. Here, it is important that customers receive the right information to voluntarily change behavioural patterns. The product focus is less relevant in this and will have to follow from image improvement. The benefit of a social strategy for Herbalife is to gain customers' trust and improve the company image. It is also relevant to establish collaborations with public organisations, which is easier to achieve within a social strategy.

In summary, this study shows that through scientific knowledge dissemination, Herbalife can play an important role in contributing to obesity prevention while potentially selling its products better in the longer term. By contributing to information dissemination in a social way, Herbalife supports in health-promoting behaviour change, building a foundation of quality and trust. In doing so, they do need to comply with marketing guidelines on food claims, have a social focus and partner with public organisations. The research provides a good basis for Herbalife to build on while improving their marketing approach and achieving its goals.

Introduction

Herbalife is a publicly traded food company that was founded in 1980 and operates globally. The company's mission is to improve nutritional habits by offering science-based nutritional products to support in ensuring a balanced diet. Besides the main motivation of weight management, the current products also focus on support for fitness, performance, daily nutrition and wellness, and skin and body care. Herbalife has a business model based on direct sales. This means that products are sold through distributors, also called independent members. Through these direct sales, Herbalife offers not only products but also services. Product use is accompanied by personalised coaching and introduction to a community for support in achieving health and fitness goals. After users are introduced to the products, this business model provides a business opportunity for users by allowing them to become independent members themselves.

Nutrition and disease prevention are closely linked, within which healthy diets are essential in preventing risk factors for health problems. Due to the large current supply of food, both healthier and unhealthier options, its influence on related disease formation is increasing. This puts great pressure on the healthcare system and thus has a great impact on society. There is an important responsibility here for people themselves to make good nutritional choices. However, this does not appear to be easy for consumers, illustrated by the high numbers of people struggling with obesity. Nutrition plays an essential role in the occurrence of obesity and all the associated health risks and, therefore, in its reduction. Because of the increased pressure on health, it is important and interesting to act on this from the private sector. Therefore, the aim of this research is to identify ways in which Herbalife can transfer scientific knowledge on disease prevention and use it within their marketing strategies.

Due to the structure of direct sales through distributors, Herbalife corporate does not conduct sales as it does in most commercial companies. This means distributors are given tools at their disposal for sales (likewise as marketing materials) to drive sales. For Herbalife corporate, this means it has little control and less direct influence on sales. An analysis of the past three years from Herbalife's financial statistics worldwide, illustrate a negative financial trend (see appendix [Financial analysis](#)). From a falling current- and quickratio, Herbalife seems to be developing greater short-term risks in liquidity. In addition, profitability has also declined on a gross profit margin basis. Specifically, this includes reduced Net profit, Net sales, total assets and total shareholders from which return on assets declined and return on equity increased negatively. These indicators point to possible long-term financial uncertainty (1,2). It is therefore important to deploy new strategies to mitigate further financial instability within sales. First, leveraging science-based products and knowledge regarding support in disease prevention offers Herbalife an opportunity to make a major impact on society's health. Through promotion and knowledge transfer on products that support in disease prevention, Herbalife can appeal to a wider market and play a vital role in reducing obesity risks. In addition, sales of specific products could increase by generating new scientific insights and transferring them to distributors, putting this literature to commercial use. This marketing strategy could specifically contribute to a lesser decline in sales within Herbalife Netherlands. Herbalife will not be a pioneer within the food industry in terms of more focused marketing on disease prevention. Other big companies like Nestlé are developing more health-related nutrition these days. They themselves claim to have invested hundreds of millions with the aim of contributing to health from biomedically driven research through nutrition. Since 2011, Nestlé has grown a lot in market value through the right strategic choices, illustrating the potential for Herbalife (3,4).

As described earlier, Herbalife offers through direct sales not only the right products, but also the necessary support on an individual level. All this is in line with a new focused focus on disease prevention within its mission to support people in promoting their lifestyle. This direct selling does mean that Herbalife has a complex organisational structure in which distributors also exercise influence. An important group within Herbalife's distributors is the Strategy and Planning group (S&P). They are of great importance because they steer the company's course through monthly meetings with corporate and daily contact. It is therefore necessary, when strategies and perspectives change, to include these influential members in these developments. It is essential that these members remain central, since, as described, Herbalife depends on their sales. Indeed, distributors are the link that can turn the data obtained from this research into action and put it into practice.

The aim of this research is for Herbalife to have scientific insights on disease prevention and know how to transfer and use them for marketing purposes. To this end, the following main question and subquestions have been formulated:

Main question: In what way can Herbalife transfer scientific knowledge about disease prevention and use it as a marketing strategy?

Sub-questions:

- What focus within disease prevention offers opportunities for Herbalife?
- What scientific insights on changes within nutrition and lifestyle can contribute to the specific disease prevention focus?
- Which Herbalife products are relevant according to the scientific evidence for the specific disease prevention focus?
- Which regulations are relevant for marketing purposes regarding Herbalife products and their contribution to disease prevention?
- What (marketing) strategy is relevant for communicating scientific findings on obesity prevention?

To answer the main question, Herbalife's internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats, are first identified. This also answers the first sub-question: which focus within disease prevention offers opportunities for Herbalife? Defining strategies for future expansion and profitability depend heavily on this internal orientation and validation. The influence of nutrition and other lifestyle variables on disease prevention is the main topic of the literature review. Through collecting the latest insights from the disease prevention focus, the following sub-question is answered: What scientific insights on diet and lifestyle changes can contribute to the specific disease prevention focus? It is essential to link the scientific insight and Herbalife products. The primary aim of the internal quantitative research is to evaluate Herbalife's goods and services through scientific data on the disease prevention focus. Which answers the following sub-question: Which Herbalife products are relevant according to scientific evidence for the specific disease prevention focus? Finally, it analyses which possibilities and limitations are attached to knowledge transfer through marketing when it comes to contribution to disease prevention. Which regulations are relevant for marketing purposes regarding Herbalife products and contribution to disease prevention? In combination with preferences of distributors, professionals and marketing strategies from literature, the last sub-question is answered: Which marketing strategy is relevant for transferring scientific findings on obesity prevention? And with this, a conclusion can be formulated to fully answer the main question.

The knowledge from this study will be transferred in the form of advice regarding the form and approach of knowledge transfer and a potential marketing strategy. In addition, the scientific information on obesity prevention and additional marketing materials are also provided to enable Herbalife to implement the disease prevention-focused marketing strategy.

Method

The research question does not limit itself to one discipline and therefore requires a method to broader understanding at an interdisciplinary level. The disciplines within the research are food science, regulatory, marketing and communication. For this business research, a Mixed-method is therefore used in which different methods are used both qualitatively and quantitatively for data collection and analysis. Mixed-method research can help within complex issues to broaden understanding of the topic and formulate a comprehensive and appropriate answer (5). In addition, as required within this research, Mixed-Method can contextualise quantitative data and support this in stepwise research where data builds on each other (6). Indeed, quantitative methods limit themselves in nuances, regulatory constraints and strategic perspective, where qualitative methods limit themselves by subjectivity and in causality. By combining, quantitative methods can provide data relevant to impact and effectiveness of Herbalife within disease prevention and qualitative methods will focus on scientific insights, barriers and implementation.

To answer the main question, which at its base aims to implement scientific disease prevention knowledge, the framework proposed by Ward et al, (2009) for *transferring knowledge into action* is employed. Here five main components are mentioned: 1. Identification of the specific problem (in this case opportunity), 2. Selection of the most appropriate and relevant knowledge/research, 3. Analysis of the internal context and applicability, 4. Selection of interventions to facilitate knowledge transfer, 5. Measurement of whether transferred knowledge/research is also applied in practice (7). As this research is limited in implementation, the method will largely follow the first four components, as described below.

Internal business orientation

Identification of the specific opportunity

For the problem definition of this research, a SWOT analysis and confrontation matrix are used. Herbalife's internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats, are identified with a SWOT analysis of the company in the food and supplement industry. The literature describes a SWOT analysis as an appropriate tool to develop marketing strategies also specifically for companies in the food industry. A SWOT analysis combined with additional qualitative and quantitative research have led to strong strategic choices in previous research and are therefore combined in this study (8,9). To establish the problem definition, personal interviews were conducted as in Trojanowski (2021) with the advantage of high credibility and focus to deepen thematic issues. These interview interviews were conducted with individual colleagues holding management or primary roles within relevant departments, including scientific affairs, ethical affairs, member services, sales and marketing. These interviews are essential to gain a comprehensive understanding of Herbalife's current market position, potential obstacles, opportunities and corporate and consumer needs. Through structured questioning, insights from various stakeholders were gathered and analysed. With this knowledge as a basis, the internal SWOT analysis was developed and also quantified (9). Based on the SWOT analysis, quantification was carried out using a

standard confrontation matrix to assess the different strategic choices (10). From this, the focus of the research and marketing strategy was determined.

Literature survey

Selection of the most appropriate and relevant knowledge/research

To generate a comprehensive understanding of the impact nutrition and other lifestyle factors play in disease prevention, a literature review was conducted. Finding scientific articles and publications relevant to the topic, preventing obesity through nutrition and other lifestyle variables, is crucial for the main question of the study. Because, precisely for marketing-related research, forms of systematic review examination of the literature prove relevant (11).

Data collection: Scientific articles, official documents and other reliable journals and websites were among the many sources from which data were collected for this study. The following techniques were used for data collection:

- Literature search: academic databases, including Worldcat and Google Scholar, were consulted. To arrive at relevant studies, search terms including 'obesity prevention', 'dietary intervention' and 'lifestyle intervention' etc. were used. Articles were selected based on their relevance to the topic of this study.
- Government sources: The World Health Organisation (WHO), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institute of Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) were among the government organisations from which information was obtained. To understand the latest tactics and suggestions of government organisations, reports, guidelines and statistics related to nutrition policy and obesity prevention were examined.
- Reports from non-profit organisations: Sources from organisations such as World Obesity Federation and Partnership Overweight Netherlands were also among the reliable publications and websites also consulted.

Analysis: A qualitative method was used to examine the data collected. To find patterns and trends in the literature and sources, it was analysed by theme.

Validation: Several sources were consulted and different viewpoints were considered to confirm the validity of the data collected. Moreover, reports from credible organisations and cited articles were used to verify the reliability and credibility of the information found.

Internal investigation

Analysis of internal context and applicability

The strength and applicability of the study to Herbalife lie in the close linking of scientific literature with the company's products. A key aim of the study is to compare scientific insights on obesity prevention through nutrition and other lifestyle variables with Herbalife's products (and services). This requires critical analysis of the nutritional value of the products and scoring their relevance within obesity prevention. From this follow recommendations for the deployment of relevant products from the already existing line that contribute to disease prevention and the promotion of a healthy lifestyle. When scientific knowledge and product analysis are closely combined, the research becomes a useful tool that Herbalife can use to make evidence-based choices in marketing strategies.

External research

Selection of interventions to facilitate knowledge transfer

Distributors, often called members, are directly involved in the research context. It is necessary to engage with the S&P to get their input and insights on the needs and challenges in promoting a disease prevention strategy. Within marketing opportunities, it is essential to identify regulations around food and health benefits. Through an interview with Global Regulatory Affairs and the handbook of legislation, these restrictions and useful tools for marketing purposes are inventoried. To then formulate sound advice for a marketing strategy on disease prevention, it is essential to use professional insights for this. Through discussions with a public relations agency, insights are gathered within this and a proper direction for this advice is steered. As forms of systematic review research are relevant for marketing-related research, the literature was also revisited (11). In this way, insights and necessary key principles are gathered, which connect and contribute to the development of an appropriate marketing strategy. This additionally includes developing marketing tools and resources to support distributors in internalising the knowledge and putting into practice this information derived from the research.

Data collection: Data from scientific articles were collected. The following technique was used for data collection:

- Literature research: academic databases, including Worldcat and Google Scholar, were consulted. To arrive at relevant studies, search terms were used, including 'social marketing', 'knowledge transfer' and '(public-private) partnerships' etc.. Articles were selected based on their relevance to the topic of this study.

Analysis: A qualitative method was used to examine the data collected. To find patterns and trends in the literature and sources, it was analysed by theme.

Validation: Several sources were consulted and different views were considered to confirm the validity of the data collected. Moreover, cited articles were used to verify the reliability and credibility of the information found.

Results

Internal business orientation

The internal interview interviews with colleagues from the various departments were based on pre-prepared questions (see appendix [Interviews](#)). From these, the following observations and conclusions emerge.

Scientific affairs:

- Assignments and projects are often marketing-driven. From this marketing potential, the possibilities and constraints within the scientific affairs are advanced.
- When a company works with food products, there are many and obvious restrictions. This includes claims and the possibilities within these are largely defined.
- Herbalife products are based on scientific knowledge behind which there is a wide range of researchers and laboratory. Public literature can be used for substantiation of products and marketing.

Ethical affairs:

- The marketing and information disseminated by members is monitored. However, members are responsible for preventing the dissemination of incorrect information.

Member services:

- Members of Herbalife are given the tools to develop themselves in five different areas: nutrition and lifestyle, protect your business, products, business and personal development
- Herbalife's direction and important choices are made in consultation with members. A composite group of the most successful or emerging members (S&P) have great influence on this direction through meetings.
- The direction of company should not only focus on short-term goals, but also on broader perspective and new target groups (members and users).
- A major complaint from members is that they are overwhelmed by communication and therefore miss important issues.

Sales:

- The sales department has daily one-on-one meetings with members to guide them. As a result, members are in close contact with corporate and it is clear what is going on with members.
- Members do the sales and sell not only the products, but also a service. For this, they get the necessary tools to do their daily method of execution (DMO). So there are many entry points to integrate information into.

Marketing:

- New marketing materials are useful to excite members and promote Sales. New information can lead to marketing materials in the form of packages, advertising, information files or be integrated into existing DMOs.
- Herbalife is in a process where it is shifting its focus from losing weight to a healthy lifestyle. In line with this shift in focus is the "Healthy Netherlands" study in which Herbalife researches lifestyle and health of Dutch people in different provinces.

These insights help in understanding the company's current strengths and weaknesses. This is important when there is a demand to focus on Herbalife's role in disease prevention. Based on this input, a SWOT analysis and a confrontation matrix weighing up the various most common conditions as opportunities follows.

SWOT analysis

Strengths

- Quality of products: Herbalife has quality and effective nutrition and health products with careful handling of claims surrounding these products. These products are based on high-quality scientific knowledge, leading to confidence in these products. In addition, the current range of products largely covers the product need.
- Passionate members: Herbalife has a dedicated community of members who feel a strong connection with the company and its products. A major reason for this connection is the events members can attend and the community feeling that comes with it. Members also like to absorb new information. As long as new information can help them better position and sell the products, they are open to it.
- Communication tools: Herbalife has various communication avenues and tools available to and for members. This offers various possibilities for new information transfer. This is done via e-mail, social media channels, conversations, training sessions, events, DMOs, etc. Within these means of communication there can be a focus and thus direction, equipping members with the necessary skills and ability to internalise information quickly. At the same time, there are fairly short lines of communication with members, allowing questions to be answered quickly.

Weaknesses

- Decline in sales: The company may face a decline in sales, possibly due to competition or changes in consumer preferences. This may be due to high quality associated with high price or have other reasons. New projects or tools need to be deployed to change this.
- Member dependency: Herbalife depends on sales by members and therefore on the commitment and drive of these distributors. Choices made must therefore be supported by the members.
- Cluttered communication: Members are now sometimes overwhelmed by Herbalife's messaging. This results in less interaction with what is sent out and more questions from members. A centralised location for information could lead to more overview and less miscommunication.

Opportunities

Marketing Diversification in Health Direction: There is an opportunity to excite and encourage consumers to make healthier choices through new marketing and information campaigns. There is a growing interest and relevance within the Dutch population in health and nutrition, allowing Herbalife to capitalise on this by providing more information in the area of disease prevention. With this, the relevance of good nutrition and health related to the products can be placed in a broader perspective.

- Obesity: 50% of the Dutch are overweight (15.4% are severely obese) and this is showing a huge increase within predictions. Here, experts argue for a necessary integrated approach to obesity: both prevention and treatment. The link between diet and exercise and obesity is relatively easy to argue. Counteracting obesity can contribute to the prevention of cardiovascular disease and diabetes but also to 13 forms of cancer, joint problems, infertility, depression and serious course of infections. This is partly also indirect via an effect of diet on high blood pressure, high blood

sugar, obesity and high cholesterol. This makes obesity a more overarching cause of many diseases (12-14).

- Osteoarthritis/COPD: Osteoarthritis will be the most common chronic condition in 2040 and therefore relevant to study its link with diet and exercise. However, a link has only been found between obesity and not with counteracting it through lifestyle changes. The prevalence of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease will also increase in large proportions in the coming years, but lifestyle interventions do not seem to be effective for this (15-17).
- Diabetes: Currently, 1 in 15 Dutch people have diabetes, but by 2050, 1 in 7 people will have some form of diabetes, and type 2 diabetes in particular will cause a sharp increase. There is clear evidence that diabetes mellitus type 2 can be prevented and/or delayed by adopting a healthy lifestyle. Examples of right food choices are choosing: foods high in fibre, such as vegetables and legumes. Eat as little saturated fat and trans fat as possible, found for example in meat, biscuits, snacks and sauces (16,18-20).
- Cardiovascular diseases: Together with cancer, cardiovascular diseases are expected to account for the highest burden of disease for patients and also the most deaths by 2040. The focus needs to shift from treating diseases to preventing them. This is about recognising that lifestyle adaptations give people better health and much better quality of life in most cases. For example, risk can be reduced by eating fruits and vegetables, legumes, nuts, whole grain products and dietary fibre, fish, green and black tea, unsaturated fatty acids (such as soft margarines or vegetable oils) and less salt (16,19,21).
- Cancer: It is known that 40-50 per cent of colon cancer is explained by diet and exercise and that 30-40 per cent of the 100,000 cancer cases in the Netherlands each year could be prevented by healthy eating and drinking and exercise. However, much research is still needed in this area and it is difficult to pinpoint the specific links (22).

Threats

- Stringent regulations around medical claims: The company must be careful about making medical claims related to its products to avoid potential legal and reputational risks. Within a marketing strategy, it is therefore important to carefully use existing scientific knowledge, but not link it too directly to the products.
- Member understanding: When introducing these new elements, a good way should be found to communicate this disease prevention focus to members. There should be a good understanding of the new information, where members are not overwhelmed. Members also bear responsibility for dealing with these claims properly.
- Bad publicity: Herbalife's organisational structure makes it relatively more susceptible to negative attention. This can put the company in a bad light and this can lead to decline (engagement) of members/ affect sales. Therefore, careful handling of these claims is essential. In addition, the disease prevention angle can also fold out appropriately and encourage a better image through a broader health perspective.

Confrontation matrix

Table 1 Confrontation matrix using SWOT analysis for disease prevention opportunities for Herbalife. Based on the strengths and weaknesses, the opportunities and hazards were scored, with a minimum score of -2 and a maximum score of +2.

		Opportunities					Threats			Total
		Obesity	Osteoarthritis/ COPD	Diabetes	Cardiovascular diseases	Cancer	Stringent regulatory	Understanding	Bad publicity	
Strengths	Quality of products	++	+	++	++	+	+	0	++	11
	Driven Members	++	+	+	+	+	0	++	+	9
	Communication tools	++	+	++	++	+	0	+	-	8
Weaknesses	Decline in sales	+	-	+	+	-	0	0	--	-1
	Member dependency	++	-	++	+	-	0	--	--	0
	Lopsided communication	0	-	0	-	-	-	--	0	-6
Total		9	0	8	6	0	0	-1	-2	

Based on the confrontation matrix (see **Table 1**), obesity seems to offer the greatest perspective within disease prevention for Herbalife. It seems most in line with its strengths and does not conflict with its weaknesses. Obesity covers a large segment of the population, a wide range of risk factors for disease seem to be associated with it and much is known about it in the literature.

In terms of hazards, the understanding of members is very important when there is a new shift in focus. In this, member dependence and lopsided communication is an uncertain factor. In addition, bad publicity is also a danger and positioning of the company and its claims should be handled carefully.

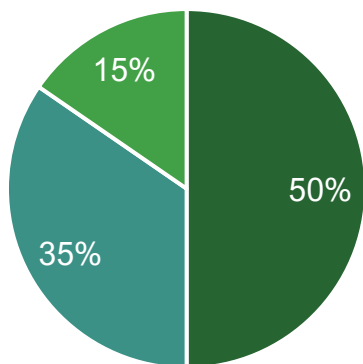
Literature survey

To illustrate why an obesity focus within disease prevention presents opportunities for Herbalife, a picture of obesity prevalence is presented. This also provides an indication of the potential size of the marketing focus group. In addition, it describes how obesity appears in the media and what relevant developments are taking place. Finally, together with the consequences of the condition, to highlight the relevance of the obesity prevention perspective. In-depth insights drawn from scientific literature on which factors cause obesity are available in the appendix ([Literature](#)). In addition, Herbalife's role within the opportunities it has in obesity prevention is mentioned and these are also further highlighted in the same appendix.

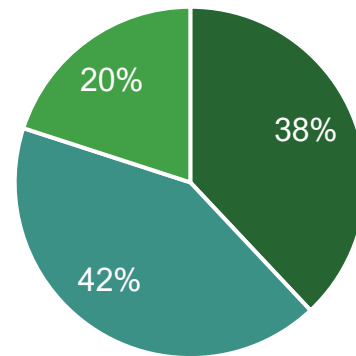
Prevalence

Overweight is an abnormal ratio of height to body weight, often indicated by the measure Body Mass Index (BMI). However, it is important to note that BMI is not always a good measure for determining overweight. This is because ratio of muscle mass to fat is essential and therefore abdominal circumference is a new added parameter for determining overweight (23). The number of overweight people is increasing worldwide and so is the Netherlands. Current figures suggest that by 2023, 50% of adults in the Netherlands will be overweight (see [Figure 1](#)). Of these, 15.4% were severely overweight, called obese (based on BMI). The past 30 years show a percentage increase in obesity in the Netherlands of 9.2% (from 6.2% in 1993 to 15.4% in 2023). This relative increase in obesity is visible in both men and women (24). Given the current increase, the projected percentage of obese people will reach 62% by 2040. With this, the projected percentage of obese men and women in 2040 is 17% and 23%, respectively. Due to change in body composition during the ageing process, people's BMI increases along with it, so ageing will also play a major role in increase in obesity (17).

Percentage of overweight in the Netherlands 2023



Percentage of overweight Netherlands 2040



■ Gezonde BMI ■ Overgewicht ■ Obesitas

Figure 1 Obesity and overweight prevalence in the Netherlands (based on BMI). In 2023, 50% of Dutch people were overweight, of which 15% were obese. In 2040, the projected percentage of overweight Dutch people is 62% of which 20% are obese (24).

Attention

It is important for obesity to be considered as a disease state to ensure that it is brought to attention and thus illustrate its complexity, relevance and severity. The World Health Organisation (WHO) highlights the importance of prevention measures and coping with obesity, as more than 1 billion people are obese worldwide. This approach involves not only personal responsibility, but also that of governments and cooperation from private sectors (25). This includes a responsibility on restorative facilities to promote healthy eating habits. Food producers should also pay attention to what goes into products, what portion sizes are recommended and the labelling thereof (26). According to WHO, there is clarity on the cause and prevention of obesity and therefore have and clear plan to fight obesity. Central to this is providing the right tools and information for people to eat healthy and exercise (25).

The high relevance of obesity is also illustrated by the 2018 National Prevention Agreement. This sets out the Dutch government's goals to achieve a healthier society and includes reducing obesity as one of the three main goals to combat the biggest causes of disease (27).

Impact

A person who is obese is exposed to several health risks. This excessive fat accumulation can be associated with the development of diseases such as type 2 diabetes and via elevated cholesterol and blood pressure with cardiovascular disease (28,29). Besides these two main risk factors that are also associated with little or no physical activity, there are other potential risks (see **Figure 2**). Including 13 different cancers and bile diseases. High weight can lead to sleep apnoea and musculoskeletal disorders (including joint problems), but increased mental issues are also a risk such as depression and anxiety disorders. Finally, the risk of infertility, incontinence and menstrual problems also seems to be increased. The likelihood of these risk factors increases as BMI increases (13,28,29). With this, health-related quality of life also decreases relatively for obese people. Finally, research also shows that body image, physical and sexual well-being are significantly lower for obese compared to moderately overweight people (30).

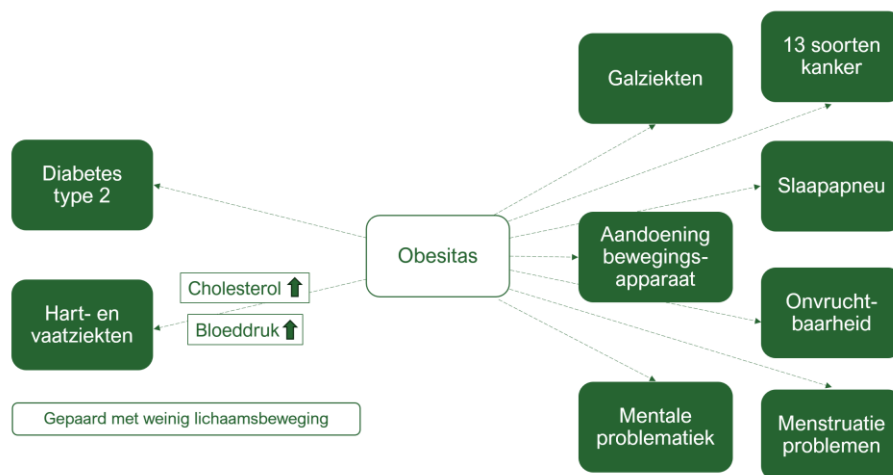


Figure 2 Health risks of obesity. The likelihood of risk factors increases as BMI increases. Herein, Diabetes type 2 and Cardiovascular disease (via elevated cholesterol and blood pressure) are the main risk factors (13,28,29).

The consequences are not limited to the individual level, but also lead to societal consequences. The high prevalence of obesity will drive up healthcare costs and increase demand for care, thus burdening (30,31). Obesity can also lead to increased absenteeism and thus lower labour productivity. At the population level, this can have a major impact (32,33).

Prevention

From the literature, there are many links showing that lifestyle interventions are associated with obesity prevention (see appendix [Literature](#)). It is important to identify how these findings relate to the products and services offered by Herbalife. Herbalife has four principles when it comes to combating the causes of obesity. From the literature, lifestyle factors and environmental factors seem to be mainly involved. Specifically for Herbalife, these opportunities within lifestyle factors involve support in terms of proper nutrition, enough exercise and sufficient sleep. With regard to environmental factors, there is a supporting role in adaptation of the immediate environment. With this, Herbalife can help transform the obesogenic environment into one that encourages healthy choices. Within these four principles from scientific findings, appropriate products need to be identified for commercial translation.

Internal investigation

Relevant nutritional value products

The products offered by Herbalife cover several purposes. As nutrition is an important factor within obesity development, the nutritional properties of products will need to be assessed. From the obesity prevention findings, some important nutritional choices emerge. The following nutritional properties and choices contribute to this or belong to a healthy balanced diet:

- Foods high in protein mainly from plant sources
- Foods low in sugar (of which sugar per day is no more than 10% of daily calories (34))
- Diet high in fibre (men minimum 30 grams, women at least 25 grams (35))
- Diet containing fat mainly unsaturated fats, in addition fats derived from fish are essential including EPA and DHA
- Set portion size
- Drinking tea

Table 2 Scoring table. Different scores are assigned to different nutritional properties.

	High	Medium	Low
Proteins	2	1	0
Fibres	2	1	0
Sugar	0	1	2
Saturated fatty acids	0	1	2
Calories	0	1	2
Vegetable	No = 0	Yes = 1	

To arrive at the most beneficial products that contribute to obesity prevention, it is important to score the available Herbalife products. This scoring is based on the products' compliance with relevant nutritional values, as mentioned above, that contribute to obesity prevention. Points are assigned to each of the relevant categories within nutrition. These are 0 for a poor score, 1 for a medium score or 2 for a good score (with the exception of the vegetarian or plant-based category for which a maximum of 1 point is awarded) (see [Table 2](#)). These scores are based on relative nutritional values of the products compared to each other (see [Table 3](#)).

Table 3 Scoring table products. Points were assigned for all relevant foods by category "Protein, Sugar, Fatty acids, Fibre, Calories and Vegetable" according to the scoring table. From this, a score for each product illustrates the connection to nutritional values that contribute to obesity prevention.

	Product	Protein (grams)	Sugar (grams)	Carbohydrates (grams)	Sugar%	Saturated fatty acids (grams)	Fatty acids (grams)	Saturated fatty acids%	Dietary fibre (grams)	Calories	Type	Score
Shakes	Formula 1 (content)	9	6	9	66%	0.4	2.5	16%	4.7	103	vegan	7
	Protein drink mix	15	0.3	7	4%	0.3	2.3	13%	0.4	108	vega	7
	Protein drink mix V	15	0.2	6	3%	0.3	2.6	12%	0.9	109	vegan	8
	Formula 3	5	0.1	0.2	50%	0.1	0.3	33%	0	23	vega	7
	Tri Blend Select	20	5	9	56%	0.4	2.2	18%	6	151	vegan	9
	H24 Rebuild endurance	10	17	36	47%	0.3	0.4	75%	0	188	vega	3
	H24 Rebuild strength	25	17	18	94%	0.8	1.5	53%	0.8	190	vega	4
Snacks	Express Balanced Meal Bars CRAN	15	10	21	48%	2.7	6	45%	6	209	vega	6
	Express Balanced Meal Bars CHOC	13	8	21	38%	2.7	6	45%	7	207	vega	6
	Protein bar lemon	10	10	16	63%	2.3	4	58%	0	139	vega	4
	Protein bar choco	10	11	15	73%	1.8	4	45%	0.3	139	vega	4
	Protein bar vanilla	10	11	16	69%	1.6	4	40%	0.4	137	Vega	4
	H24 Achieve protein bars pure	21	1.2	22	5%	5.4	7	77%	0	210	vega	4
	H24 Achieve protein bar chip	21	1.9	23	8%	5.4	7	77%	0	212	vega	4
	Protein chips SC&U	12	0.9	11	8%	0.4	5	8%	1.0	135	vega	6
	Protein chips BBQ	11	1.3	11	12%	0.4	4	10%	1.1	134	vegan	7
Extras	Multi-fibre drink	0.2	0.1	2	5%	0	0	0%	5	18	vegan	9
	Beta Heart	1	0	2	0%	0.1	0.7	14%	3	25	vega	7
	High protein iced coffee	15	0.7	2	35%	0.7	1	70%	2.2	80	vega	9
	H24 Prolong	7	18	48	38%	0.1	0.2	50%	0	225	vega	3

Besides scoring products on nutritional values that help provide support within the nutrition category, Herbalife also has products that are relevant within the other categories. These include products that can support during exercise or recovery, as well as products that have their effect during sleep. Finally,

Herbalife can offer support in the area of environment as it has also been shown that community-based prevention strategies are most effective and efficient.

From an obesity perspective, certain products score low/negative. Here, it is important to bear in mind that these products may score well from another perspective. When customers act and buy from their own needs, this need not be a problem.

Relevant products and advice

Obesity prevention requires a multifaceted approach, including a balanced diet and lifestyle. As shown in the appendix ([Literature](#)), Herbalife products can be used as tools to support healthy habits and lifestyle changes, but should not be considered the only means to achieve a healthy lifestyle. Several Herbalife products have been identified as relevant for obesity prevention, based on their nutritional profiles (see [Table 3](#)) and functional properties (see Appendix [Literature](#)). The relevant products support in getting the right (portions of) nutrients, support with sleep and can help with hydration or energy during physical exercise. This implies that these products have an important contribution from the literature and insights about them can be used as marketing information. As already shown in the SWOT analysis and confrontation matrix, it is worth bearing in mind that there are many restrictions on commercial distribution of nutritional and health information.

External research

Regulation

When determining knowledge transfer and marketing strategies on disease prevention, it is first of all important to outline clarity on the possibilities within this. There is a lot of legislation around claims and promotion of food products. To generate insight into the regulations when linking disease prevention with Herbalife products, an interview was conducted with Global Regulatory Affairs (GRA) (see appendix [Interviews](#)). This interview was placed alongside the Nutrition and Health Claims Manual to generate a well-rounded understanding of the regulations (36).

Herbalife's GRA department reports that the company's product claims must comply with the EU Food Information Regulation and the Dutch Food Act. This makes the Dutch regulatory framework very strict and based on scientific evidence. The purpose of these strict regulations is to inform consumers confidentially and thereby prevent commercial abuse about health benefits and disease prevention. A European claims register has been compiled that includes both approved and rejected nutrition and health claims (37). In the case of this study, the relevant claims will be limited to health claims and then specifically health claims on disease risk reduction. Regarding obesity prevention, there is also another important rule. Namely, there is a ban on medical claims for foods. These claims mean that it cannot be implied that the food cures, treats or prevents human disease. However, authorised health claims can be used on commercial communications that inform consumers including on labels, advertising, websites and other information facilities. The GRA stresses that it is precisely these marketing communications by the company that must be based on claims that have been authorised and that they relate to ingredients or constituents and not the product as a whole.

In the context of the study, this highlights the importance of rigorous assessment of Herbalife products in relation to these claims about health benefits and disease prevention. Moreover, it illustrates the need to accurately word product claims in a way that is in line with legislation. Overall, following the

regulations leads Herbalife's marketing strategies to call for a more nuanced approach, with frameworks of claims from scientific evidence leading the way. In the appendix ([Marketing facts](#)) are marketing facts about relevant Herbalife products that may be made from the literature and within the regulations. In addition, the following disclaimer regarding the prohibition of medical claims for food products will need to be attached when disease prevention information is associated with products: "*Products are not intended to diagnose, treat or prevent disease*" (36).

Current marketing strategies

With the knowledge gathered about the obesity disease prevention perspective and Herbalife's role within it, it is essential to make the translation into marketing strategies. Indeed, the aim is not only to internalise this knowledge but also to project it externally as a brand. Within consulting marketing strategy, expertise from a professional party is included. Herbalife works with serviceplan (House of communication) for marketing purposes. They are part of a PR agency and deal with issues such as communication effectiveness and asset production. They have up to the departments of PR, digital transformation, social media and a data research team to approach the right approach from these areas of expertise. In consultation with them, current and potential future approaches are discussed (for minutes, see annex [Minutes](#)). In putting together a marketing strategy, the requirements and preferences of the S&P were also considered. Implementing a disease prevention perspective within a company like Herbalife requires a wide-ranging approach. Despite nutrition and obesity being closely linked, communicating this requires controlled but broad information transfer strategy. First, the current marketing and vision are explained so that this can be built on in the advice.

1. Corporate vision (after COVID)

Herbalife is in a transition period after a period of reorganisation, focusing on better linking specific projects to their commercial results. Current strategies, while effective in generating short-term activation, lack the sustainability needed for long-term success. Therefore, there is an urgent need for an updated approach that is not only activating, but also has lasting impact.

2. Healthy Netherlands Research

To convey a broader health perspective, Herbalife set up a survey in collaboration with Mediaplus Netherlands (a media agency part of the PR agency). This survey aimed to gauge the opinion about the average Dutch person's own health. This involves personal information on nutrition, sleep, exercise, mental and physical health and use of supportive resources. Besides communicating the findings externally, Herbalife is pulling this strategy through an internal challenge among distributors. In this, members within a province can try to collectively achieve the highest growth in distributors to be named the "healthiest province". In doing so, distributors are urged to use the marketing materials from the survey to further activate them.

The Healthy Netherlands Survey has so far provided relevant consumer insights. This survey will continue with a new, broader questionnaire that covers multiple health factors and will involve a larger group of respondents. The launch of this questionnaire is planned for the new year, a strategic timing that capitalises on many people's good intentions.

3. Marketing approach

The current marketing approach uses bylines in articles on external media pages to build brand awareness. Social media is mainly used as a means of initial exposure to Herbalife. Herbalife does sports sponsorships

in which they have a focus on sponsorships with athletes and events such as Strong Viking. Paid channels are used to reach a wider external audience beyond current members. However, the lack of control over members' channel makes it difficult to link the impact of marketing activities directly to sales. New websites will need to provide more insight into how social media posts and other marketing activities contribute directly to sales. In addition, there are tensions between online distributors, who only offer products, and traditional distributors who offer full product-service packages. For these reasons, there is currently less focus on externally focused online product marketing. Product campaigns mainly include introducing new products, new scientific insights about products and package compositions of products.

New marketing strategy

Health driven for Common Good

1. General approach

For the new marketing push, Herbalife needs to address current market needs by creating a programme that focuses on general health promotion, separate from its members and community. This programme offers comprehensive information and practical tips on health, nutrition, sleep and other related topics. In this programme, target marketing is not focused on members, but rather externally. It is crucial that this is non-commercial in the early stages and has a broad health approach. Using a generic URL less prominently linked to Herbalife branding can increase the perception of objectivity and credibility. This strategy can exist in parallel with the commercial business model, with planning to take place in consultation with regional departments, but the Netherlands can be a forerunner in vision and approach.

2. Partnership

Collaborations with well-known personalities can enhance Herbalife's credibility and help build a socially engaged image. A non-commercial approach allows partnerships with reputable organisations, which contributes to authority and PR benefits. Specific collaborations, such as with Wageningen University, are promising and can strengthen Herbalife's brand value. This can be further expanded by involving specific organisations in each category, such as nutrition, sleep and exercise.

3. Distributors and education

Distributors can serve as links for education and outreach, gradually introducing them to the health-driven programme. Use of product experience and sponsorships can be supportive here. Vital distributors can be used for activation, where their knowledge and preparation from Herbalife is essential. Although distributors are not experts, they can be well informed to fulfil their role effectively without directly carrying commercial messages in the campaign. However, it is important that distributors are aware of the commercial opportunities behind the disease prevention approach, without explicitly communicating them in the campaign.

4. Product approach

By not immediately focusing on products, online distributors are prevented from gaining an unfair advantage over traditional distributors. Later, the focus can gradually shift to products responding to disease prevention in order to make the commercial translation. After all, customers often look for products from specific needs.

5. Content and publicity

The launch requires a lot of content that is prepared in full and not shared sporadically. It is important to create interesting and fun content that increases engagement, for example on platforms such as TikTok. Regional materials can be created, translated and shared for wider application. Herbalife needs to work

on building credibility through a less commercial approach. This means not only avoiding to gloss over negative publicity, but sometimes acting guiltily. A socially engaged image can help counter criticism and increase Herbalife's credibility and sincerity.

Marketing strategies from the literature

This potential marketing perspective, besides contributing to information dissemination on health and lifestyle, also requires internal communication. In the short term, it is important that knowledge from this research is efficiently disseminated and available to both corporate and distributors. In addition to availability, accessibility and understanding are also important for organisational knowledge integration (38). The distributor pool is diverse and therefore the resources offered must be clear to all. Only when an obesity perspective is supported company-wide is there room for long-term goals. Long-term goals revolve around expressing the company's vision externally. This involves proper marketing strategy development and specifically therein cooperation with external companies. To arrive at the right advice for knowledge transfer and associated marketing strategies, appropriate organisational knowledge exchange models, components of social marketing strategies and characteristics of Public-Private collaboration are identified with the help of the literature.

Organisational knowledge-sharing models

Within organisational knowledge exchange models, there are two main types of interventions namely the distribution-type intervention and the connection-type intervention. Distribution-type interventions focus on disseminating information effectively and widely within the organisation. To ensure that all employees and participants have access to up-to-date knowledge and optimal procedures, this type of intervention is essential (7,39). Some key strategies for Herbalife are as follows:

- E-learning: by means of digital information facilities, employees and distributors can be and stay informed on obesity prevention and nutrition in a convenient and low-threshold way. A major advantage of e-learning is its free availability until when it suits the individual. Therefore, an online interview/conversation between expert and member will be available, covering obesity prevention research and opportunities for Herbalife (38).
- Updates: the organisation and its distributors can be kept abreast of the latest developments and new perspectives through regular updates. This helps Herbalife spread its message and maintain its emphasis on disease prevention and healthy living. Specifically, this can be in the form of marketing and promotional materials distributed through some digital avenues to avoid information overload. Here, scientific insights from obesity prevention research are used to maintain focus (38).
- Digital library: A central digital repository housing all relevant research findings, tools and materials helps in making information accessible. This supports in daily implementation of the materials and thus the knowledge. This includes making all knowledge files available to distributors in the digital library on Herbalife's internal web interface (MyHerbalife.com). Indeed, to achieve change within health outcomes, it is not only important to convey knowledge, but also to provide the right tools for implementation of the right nutritional choices (38).

Connection-type interventions aim to build relationships and networks between people and groups, both inside and outside the organisation. This method encourages interaction and joint implementation of knowledge (7).

- Community meeting: When distributors and corporate meet regularly, insights and information can be exchanged. Through dialogue with like-minded people, a thorough understanding of knowledge can take place. Herbalife organises a big event twice a year where all kinds of different informative and relational activities take place. Therefore, it works effectively to share the main findings of the obesity prevention research at this event so that members can discuss them.
- Mentoring: Herbalife has an organisational structure whereby distributors with more experience act as mentors for newer distributors. In addition, distributors also mentor users. This mentorship promotes the transfer of information and skills. Distributors can be provided with low-threshold educational materials that support information transfer. With appropriate materials, distributors can help new distributors and users understand and put research findings into practice through this mentorship within Herbalife. This can improve consistency and quality of focus.

Social marketing strategies

For long-term goals, it is relevant that not only distributors propagate the health perspective, but that this also becomes visible to external ones through public education campaigns. In this way, awareness of healthy eating habits is raised (38). If, in line with this externally-oriented vision, the course of the new proposed marketing strategy is followed, this concerns a social marketing strategy. The main aim of this strategy is to achieve voluntary behavioural change in, for example, health and lifestyle, based on scientific knowledge (40). In Herbalife's case, this can contribute to a new educational disease prevention element within Corporate social responsibility, complementing current contributions to hunger reduction, entrepreneurship, diversity, inclusiveness and equality, support for minority communities and sustainability (41). In addition, this helps build customer trust, differentiate from competition by offering information (and also service which is already a competitive advantage for Herbalife) and reduce risk of bad publicity. Because from this social strategy, commercial interest follows social contribution, it differs from most other marketing strategies. A relevant aspect of social marketing is that voluntary behavioural change brings benefits to consumers, within which specific marketing techniques are important (40). Research reveals that behavioural change for food is not limited to specific adaptations, but also affects broader behavioural changes. For a Herbalife strategy focused on obesity, this is a relevant finding and increases the likelihood of effectiveness of social marketing. Specifically, social marketing strategy seems to be an important and potential tool for combating obesity (40,42).

A social marketing strategy can enjoy its full potential when it focuses on the identified core principles (43). There is also a proposed framework for establishing a social marketing programme based on Consumer Research, Segmentation, Design, Implementation, Evaluation and Sustainability (CSD-IES) (44). These core principles have many interfaces with the framework and therefore specifically within a social marketing strategy for Herbalife include the following bundled components:

- Audience orientation through Consumer Research (C)

Understanding the needs, desires, beliefs, attitudes and readiness for change of the target group is essential for target group orientation. This requires conducting thorough consumer research to generate these insights and underlies good programme design (43,44). For Herbalife, this means conducting extensive consumer research to listen to and understand the concerns and motivations of people struggling with obesity. Herbalife has through a wide network of distributors who have a direct/personal relationship with customers. These members and customers are users of the products and therefore a relevant sample of the target audience. This allows them to generate many insights. A first step in this

direction is the former conducted "gezond Nederland" survey, which provided valuable insights into needs, motivations and barriers within the health context. If continued, this could generate the missing relevant consumer insights for social marketing programme content, as well as segmentation and targeting.

- Concept of exchange

The greater value of new actions over current behaviours, is central to the idea of exchange (43). This means for Herbalife to provide the tangible benefits and handles for a healthier lifestyle. How the use of Herbalife products play a role in this is certainly not important at earlier stages, to ensure the social aspect. On the other hand, there is the commercial benefit for Herbalife where offering knowledge can improve image.

- Targeting and Segmentation (S)

It is essential for targeting consumers to divide them into different groups. This segmentation involves splitting the target group into comparably homogeneous groups based on common characteristics, behaviours and motivations discovered from consumer research. This makes it possible to adapt plans for specific groups and, in doing so, develop strategies specific to each group (43,44). Segmentation should meet specific components and herein is based on several criteria including demographic, geographic, psychographic and behavioural variables. Thereby, segments should be identified that are most open and capable of driving voluntary behavioural change. In addition, ethical responsibility is also expected within segmentation by evaluating the vulnerability of segments. A proposed method for segment identification includes a Two-Step Cluster Analysis (44-46). For Herbalife, targeting from segmentation means developing campaigns for specific groups, e.g. young adults, parents and seniors, taking into account their drivers and obstacles to adopting a healthier lifestyle.

- Behavioural focus and Sustainability (S)

Instead of focusing solely on increasing awareness, behavioural focus emphasises specific, measurable behaviours (43). In addition to concretising behaviour, it is important that the intended behavioural changes are not limited to the short term. To ensure that the desired behavioural change is maintained for the long term, strategies should be employed that reinforce and sustain the adopted behaviour in the long term (44). In Herbalife, this may involve setting goals, such as improving daily physical activity or dietary habits, with progress monitored over time.

- Marketing mix (4Ps) and Design of social programme (D)

A social marketing strategy or programme can be designed using data from consumer research and segmentation. This includes creating a marketing mix tailored to specific target groups through product, price, location and promotion. Indeed, product, price, location and promotion are factors that influence behaviour (43,44). In this case, Herbalife views the "product" as the healthy behaviour itself, "pricing" as making this behaviour cost-effective, "location" as making healthy choices readily available and "promotion" as spreading strategic messages through actionable platforms to promote behaviour change (collaborations and campaigns, sponsorships and influencer marketing to prompt action). This increasingly includes (as an additional P) the strategic importance of partnerships in social marketing. Partnerships are recognised in their relevant contributions within social marketing strategies through various benefits such as exchange of skills, resources and network (47).

- Careful planning and testing, Implementation (I) and Evaluation (E)

Implementation of the social marketing plan can be done based on the right segmentation and marketing mix (including partnerships) to reach and influence the targeted segments. However, before full implementation, strategies should be tested through careful planning and pre-testing. This regular evaluation also serves to measure programme effectiveness (43,44). For Herbalife, this means evaluating how information and advice are received and improving plans to maximise impact. Focus groups have also been set up for this purpose. There is also a challenge to build better links between project activity and sales or in this case interaction with knowledge and subsequent behavioural change.

Public-private partnership

As described, a future strategy of Herbalife in obesity prevention should help to further highlight this and add credibility to the company. To this end, it would be relevant to enter into a Public-Private partnership with a research institute or health-related organisation within a social marketing strategy (47). With this, the public organisation is closer to the market and implementation side of the shared goal. Whereby the private organisation can expand their drive-wide as well as strengthen their image and brand. Depending on the right cooperation condition, such cooperation can provide Competitive advantage in the health sector (48). These collaborations are complex and therefore require an extensive process. Within this, core elements include thorough project preparation, feasibility assessment, corresponding values and vision and establishing legal and institutional frameworks (48-50). One potential collaboration, for example, would be between Herbalife and Partnership Overweight Netherlands. This umbrella organisation includes medical, scientific, public and patient organisations to jointly arrive at the best possible approach and advice for obesity control. The Partnership Overweight Netherlands can thereby provide advice and information to Herbalife, this not only supports the achievement of goals, but also ensures relevance in the market. On the other hand, the cooperation Partnership Overweight Netherlands offers an opportunity to influence the private sector and thereby contribute to the implementation of their mission (making impact alongside policy). Thus, the collaboration can lead to social impact on a large scale for both parties. An example of a similar disease prevention collaboration is Herbalife's with The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The organisation recognises Herbalife's lifestyle intervention programme as a certified diabetes prevention programme. This is an evidence-based programme that reduces the risk of type 2 diabetes by more than half in this case (51). Being recognised as a company/programme by a leading organisation offers a lot of value in the form of relevance and credibility. Besides a collaboration for policy purposes, a collaboration can also take place in the scientific field. An example would be to enter into a cooperation with Wageningen University and Research (WUR). This research institute conducts broad research including within the theme of healthy nutrition. With this knowledge, WUR tries to offer various organisations insights to help consumers make conscious choices. By cooperating with a similar organisation, Herbalife gathers useful information and at the same time radiates credibility. An organisation like WUR benefits from transferring knowledge and adjusting the executive units.

Conclusion and discussion

Conclusion

The focus of this research is on how can Herbalife transfer scientific knowledge about disease prevention and use it as a marketing strategy? The answer to this main question is obtained through the analysis of sub-questions leading to the following findings.

The internal orientation drawn out in a SWOT analysis and confrontation matrix make it clear that obesity offers the greatest disease prevention potential for Herbalife, both in line with its strengths and weaknesses. Herbalife has a strategic opportunity to improve public health as a result of the increase in obesity in the Netherlands and globally. The increasing prevalence of obesity and associated health risks support the choice of this focus. Within a marketing focus shift, member dependency and communication are heavy concerns for Herbalife.

Information from reputable scientific databases and reports from government agencies, form the basis for the knowledge Herbalife will integrate. This literature review shows that maintaining a healthy diet and regular exercise, in addition to sleep and environment, is essential to contribute to obesity prevention. Internal reviews link the most relevant nutritional value from the literature with Herbalife products. The analysis shows that some Herbalife products, such as meal replacement shakes and other supplements, match the recommended dietary guidelines that contribute to obesity prevention. In addition, supportive sleep and sports products also offer perspective, as well as community support in changing an obesogenic environment. Promoting the products for obesity prevention purposes thus offers opportunities within marketing strategy. Adhering to strict regulations is a crucial part within executing this strategy. Herbalife must be careful when making health claims in their marketing communications, according to discussions with Global Regulatory Affairs and reviews of laws such as the Regulation on Nutrition and Health Claims for Foods. In order to avoid misleading information and ensure the credibility of health claims.

A social marketing strategy is proposed based on research and consultation with marketing professionals. This calls for a strategy whose goal is positive behavioural change in terms of healthy lifestyles. To better reach and influence the target audience, this strategy includes key strategic steps. In this, it is advisable to collaborate with reputable organisations both at policy and research level and use online platforms to share scientific knowledge widely. This method makes the message both credible and widely accessible and contributes to image enhancement for Herbalife. At later stages of a socially focused marketing plan, supporting Herbalife products through distributors may come into play for commercial interest. In line with this strategy, distributors are offered science-based marketing materials to gradually introduce them to these perspectives and effectively communicate their message. These can also be used by them for Sales of Herbalife products. Indeed, for a disease prevention vision, it is important to convey this as a company. This requires broad and effective internal communication strategies.

In summary, Herbalife is able to contribute to public health by focusing on obesity prevention and using scientific insights. The company can develop credible marketing plans through strict regulatory compliance and cooperation with public organisations. Ultimately, this integrated strategy can not only strengthen Herbalife's market position, but also help prevent obesity and encourage healthy lifestyles.

Discussion

Several elements determine the success of information integration and social marketing. The consistency and accuracy of scientific information is an important consideration. Herbalife must keep its distributors

well informed about the most up-to-date scientific knowledge and accurate use in line with legislation. Strict compliance with regulations increases the brand's reliability and protects it from legal problems. Yet following these rules also imposes restrictions on Herbalife's promotion. This calls for inventive yet responsible ways of shaping marketing campaigns. A key discussion point is the long-term effectiveness of the proposed strategy. The impact of relevant health education and product promotion on weight loss and disease prevention requires research. This requires a lot of investment in generating information based on the latest scientific insights.

Moreover, it is important to strike a balance between social responsibility and commercial goals. While putting an emphasis on preventing obesity may be commercially beneficial, Herbalife needs to ensure that its social marketing strategy actually promotes public health, versus just profit maximisation as a goal. In this, the target audience should not see through the commercial goal and gain confidence in Herbalife's overall interests. Also, this credible social contribution is essential for increasing the feasibility and expands the effectiveness of Public-Private partnerships. These collaborations also require a lot of investment and corresponding goals. In this, partnerships are complex, but benefit Herbalife for acceptance and credibility.

An important aspect of this study is the way identified threats were addressed in the SWOT analysis and confrontation matrix. First, the involvement of the S&P strengthens the inclusion and integration of scientific knowledge into the strategy. Coming to this information strategy in agreement creates more motivation and better understanding about the importance of the disease prevention focus among distributors. In addition, strict regulations on health claims have been thoroughly examined and complied with. This provides a reliable basis for all communicated claims, minimising legal risks. Preventing the spread of misleading information, is crucial to maintaining consumer trust and brand equity. Finally, this positioning can lead to positive media coverage. In this, the reduction of bad publicity can contribute to greater trust and appreciation of the products.

Limitations

The study provides valuable insights and practical recommendations for Herbalife to use scientific knowledge on disease prevention as a marketing strategy. The strengths lie in the broad understanding through a constructive structure, the use of reliable sources and the relevance of the disease prevention focus. However, for implementation of a social marketing strategy, future developments call for deeper consumer research, segmentation, relationship management and long-term evaluations. Expanding these aspects builds on this research to achieve external activation and support in achieving Herbalife's goals.

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Annex

Financial analysis

To map out Herbalife's global financial state, a brief financial analysis was carried out based on the annual report. This analysis illustrates the company's financial health through short-term liquidity and through long-term profitability. Liquidity ratios generate insight into Herbalife's ability to pay off short-term debt. Current ratio is down indicating a reduced ability to pay off debt with assets. The Quick ratio has declined indicating a reduced ability to repay debt with liquid assets, including cash and quick-to-cash convertible assets (see **Table 4**). The Gross Profit margin has declined in three years indicating minimal reduced profits relative to sales. The Return on Assets appears to have fallen significantly and indicates the deteriorating use of assets to generate profits. Finally, the Return on equity has increased negatively, indicating a positive increase in the use of assets to generate profits (see **Table 5**) (1,2).

Table 4 Liquidity ratios Herbalife worldwide (dollars in millions). On basis of Current activia/Current liabilities the Current ratio is calculated. On the basis of (Current assets-Inventry)/Current liabilities, the Quick ratio is calculated. Both appear to have decreased in 2023 compared to 2022.

Year	Current assets	Current liabilities	Inventory	Current Ratio	Quick Ratio
2023	\$ 1,399.30	\$1,277.60	\$505.20	1.1	0.7
2022	\$1,356.10	\$976.60	\$580.70	1.39	0.79

Table 5 Profitability ratios Herbalife worldwide (dollars in millions). Based on Gross profit/Nettosales, Gross profit margin is calculated. Based on Net Profit/Total Assets, Return on Assets is calculated. These both decrease in 2023 compared to 2021. By Total assets-Total liabilities, Total shareholders is calculated which is the basis for Return on equity by Net profit/Total shareholders. This increases negatively in 2023 compared to 2021.

Year	NetSales	Gross profit	Net profit	Total assets	Total liabilities	Total shareholders	Gross profit margin	Return on assets	Return on equity
2023	\$5,062.4	\$3,871.4	\$142.2	\$2,809.4	\$3,869.7	(\$1,060.3)	76.50%	5.06%	-13.41%
2022	\$5,204.4	\$4,030.8	\$321.3	\$2,732.0	\$3,997.9	(\$1,265.9)	77.40%	11.76%	-25.38%
2021	\$5,802.8	\$4,563.5	\$447.2	\$2,966.7	\$4,257.9	(\$1,291.2)	78.70%	15.07%	-34.64%

Literature

1.1 Cause

The development of obesity is linked to an energy imbalance. Here, energy intake (comes in through food) exceeds energy expenditure (the energy a person consumes to function and exercise). This imbalance causes energy storage in the body in the form of fat, which in the long term can lead to development of obesity (52).

In terms of exercise, there seems to be a big deficit here among the Dutch. In 2022, less than half (44%) met the exercise guidelines drawn up by the government. As mentioned earlier, there are clear links between exercise and health risks. For example, a lot of sitting is associated with an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease (53).

Not only behavioural factors play a role in the development of obesity, but also biological and environmental factors. These biological factors or person factors include components such as age, genes, gender etc. and environmental factors involve Living, living and working conditions (31,32). According to the Overweight Netherlands Partnership, the factors that encourage obesity or prevent weight loss fall within 7 different categories: lifestyle, socioeconomic, psychological, medicinal, hormonal, hypothalamic, (mono)genetic/ syndromal (54). These factors can also be classified under the 3 aforementioned categories: behavioural, environmental and person-related. However, studies on differences between populations have shown that mainly increased food consumption and reduced physical activity influence (32). Lifestyle thus has the most influence on the development of overweight and obesity and includes sleep and stress in addition to diet and exercise (31). However, these lifestyle factors are often accompanied by other elements such as psychological and/or hormonal (54). Environmental factors, where many people are in an obesogenic environment, relieves people from making the right choice (52). The choices a person makes in this regard are often driven by routine behaviour. When people make more conscious food choices, values such as health are often weighed against time, money and taste in this (55).

The high prevalence of obesity cannot be explained only by people's food patterns and physical activity. As mentioned above, sleep is also an important factor in the development of obesity. This is explained first by increased food consumption in sleep deprivation (56,57). Also, when food is eaten during that the circadian system (24-hour cycle) promotes sleep, it leads to hunger hormone change. This shifts the energy balance relatively to more intake than expenditure (57). Weight gain is associated with both too little and too much sleep, within which average sleep hours are 7 to 8 hours (58). It is likely that obesity leads to prolongation of sleep duration explaining the link between high sleep and obesity (59).

1.2 Prevention

Among obese people, 78% report difficulty losing weight. While more than half (54%) of obese people say they do want to eat healthier. With the main reason being to reduce the risk of health problems or disease (14). So there seems to be a great need to lose weight motivated by health reasons, but also the help demand for knowledge and support tools. Preventing or reducing obesity revolves around reducing the risk of overweight and obesity-related disorders. Here, overweight and obesity is more a measure of prevention rather than the risk itself (29).

When looking at the cause of obesity, there are four factors within prevention options for Herbalife in which the company can offer people support. These are mainly lifestyle factors and part environmental

factors. Regarding lifestyle factors, support can be offered in terms of proper **nutrition**, enough **exercise** and sufficient **sleep**. Within the environmental factors, there is an opportunity in supporting adaptation of the immediate environment. For instance, Herbalife can help convert the **obesogenic environment** into one that encourages healthy choices.

Nutrition

First, dietary adjustment is essential. This can contribute to the prevention of obesity and thus lower disease burden. In fact, a healthy diet alone can help prevent conditions such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes (12). The Healthy Eating Guidelines, which are government-drafted dietary guidelines and research findings, provide much insight into links between specific foods and their effect on health (26). These prescriptions combined with important findings within a diet for obesity prevention include the following conclusions:

- **Fats:** Most importantly, people should get the right types of fats. In this, (cis-)unsaturated fats are preferred. The advice involves replacing hard margarines and butter, with soft margarines and vegetable oils that contain relatively more unsaturated fatty acids. Indeed, replacing saturated fats with unsaturated fats within a diet lowers blood cholesterol levels (37). Either reduction in saturated fat consumption helps maintain normal blood cholesterol levels. It is also recommended to consume one portion of fish per week, mainly due to the presence of fish oils. The fish oils eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) help maintain normal blood pressure and heart function. The direct link between these omega-3 fatty acids and the prevention of obesity seems positive when combined with other lifestyle interventions (37,60).
- **Proteins:** There are several reasons why a high-protein diet may have benefits namely, proteins contain half the calories per gram of intake compared to fat, a relatively greater proportion of the energy in proteins is used up during metabolising, require relatively more energy from the body to metabolise, protein is an important building block for muscle growth, helps with muscle maintenance (during weight loss) and maintenance of normal bones (37,61). There are also differences between the health benefits of different protein sources. For instance, the advice is to minimise red and processed meat and also applies to cholesterol-raising foods such as eggs. In addition, dairy, fish and poultry are recommended as protein sources along with plant sources such as nuts and legumes.
- **Carbohydrates:** Quality is another important factor for carbohydrates. Here, rapidly digestible carbohydrates such as in white pasta, rice and bread should be minimised. Sugary drinks are also examples of this and also cause insulin and blood sugar levels to rise and hence hunger. A better form of carbohydrates are slowly digestible carbohydrates, which is present in whole grain products and most fruits and vegetables. In contrast, foods that contain non-digestible carbohydrates instead of sugar provide a lower blood sugar increase after consumption compared to sugary foods (37). It is recommended, therefore, to ingest vegetables, fruits, whole-grain products and with this, enough fibre, as not all fibre is digestible.
- **Drinks:** It is also important to limit alcohol and sugary drinks. However, drinking three cups of green or black tea is recommended (26,62,63).

Portion size is also an important factor in excessive food consumption. Indeed, in obesity prevention, it is important to balance energy intake with energy expenditure (52). People who have larger portions at their disposal also seem to consume more. In addition, the advice is mainly to follow a more plant-based diet

(63). A plant-based diet is in line with dietary guidelines in many aspects and is associated with risk-reducing factors for the development of chronic diseases (26). However, there also seem to be consequences to a fully plant-based diet including nutrient deficiencies that can have other consequences (64).

Physical activity

In maintaining this energy balance, in addition to diet, exercise plays an important role. The main aim of the exercise guidelines is to prevent chronic disease development within the Dutch population (65). Indeed, part of the protective effect of physical activity on disease development can be attributed to the prevention of obesity (52). Here, the following is recommended for adults: "Moderate or high-intensity exercise at least 150 minutes per week, spread over several days" combined with "Muscle and bone-strengthening activities (for the elderly including balance exercises): at least 2x per week" avoiding sitting still (see **Figure 3**) (65). It seems that the association between a lot of sitting and the associated increased risk of disease development is almost non-existent among people who meet the exercise guidelines (53). It is also worth bearing in mind that recommended exercise differs by age group.

Forecasts of adherence to exercise guidelines in the Netherlands show a positive increase on average. So people have started to move more, only the restrictive coronary measures have temporarily reduced this. The central government hopes that 70% of the Dutch population will comply with the guidelines by 2040. In addition, meeting the exercise guidelines does not guarantee a healthy BMI when other lifestyle factors do not suffice (17,53).

Sleep and medication

Besides lifestyle changes, many other factors influence the development of obesity. These include sleep and medication, but also the presence of an obesogenic environment. So it is very relevant to adjust this environment within the possible. Regarding sleep, it is important to approach sleep routines that help prevent or lose obesity (56). Here, it is important to get enough hours of sleep, 7 to 8 hours and get this sleep rhythm in order.

For obese patients for whom lifestyle changes lead to little or no weight loss, medication is available to better combat obesity. Most of these medications base their action on reducing appetite by altering the hormone balance. This reduces energy intake and shifts the energy balance. These medications act on the GLP1 receptors and thus belong to the GLP1 agonists (66,67). With GLP1 medication, it is important to combine these medications with proper lifestyle choices. This right lifestyle includes adequate nutrient intake through diet. In cases of decreased appetite, a liquid meal can help to still get sufficient nutrients (68).



Figure 3 Exercise guidelines. The Dutch government promotes established exercise guidelines that should be met with the aim of preventing chronic disease development (65)

Obesogenic environment

Direct adjustments in an individual person's environment create an environment that promotes healthier lifestyles and choices. These direct individual adaptations are spurred by social and physical factors (69). Indeed, obesity and overweight carry a large social component. For example, higher BMI is associated with more daily experiences of discrimination, depression and self-stigma (negative body image). In turn, self-stigma is associated with higher loneliness (70). For obesity prevention, therefore, the most effective and effective approaches appear to be community-based (69). Within a social context, obesity interventions with a component of social connectedness are effective. Success in maintaining a healthy weight seems to differ between forms of social support regarding nutrition and exercise. A social support that focuses on compliments and active participation is on average a better form than instructional support (71).

As mentioned above, environmental factors also influence individual changes towards healthier choices. First, this concerns encouraging more physical exercise through the use of designated public facilities. Indoor environmental factors include in-house food preparation and reducing the availability of unhealthy food (69).

1.3 Relevant products and advice

Nutrition

First, for obesity prevention, it is important to have a proper calorie intake to balance and maintain the energy balance. Therefore, it helps to be aware of portion sizes to prevent overconsumption. A standardised portion size through a meal replacement product is functional here. However, when people want to lose or maintain weight, it is important to get enough nutrients. This concerns both macronutrients (fats, carbohydrates and proteins) and micronutrients (vitamins and minerals). This is only possible through a balanced and healthy diet. Replacing one or two daily meals of an energy-restricted diet with a meal replacement helps maintain weight after weight loss, and also provides the right nutrients (37).

Regarding the nutritional values and properties within herbalife's shakes, Tri Blend Select seems like a very good option. This product is high in protein, is entirely plant-based, is relatively low in sugar, is low in saturated fat, is high in fibre and is relatively low in calories. For the Protein Drink Mix, the same nutritional properties apply only it contains hardly any dietary fibre. The high protein iced coffee is also recommended for its fibre content, high protein content and also low calories.

One advantage to Herbalife products, and specifically the Formula 1 shake and the Express balanced meal bar, is the meal replacement feature. As a result, as mentioned earlier, it is a standardised portion and portion-dependent food consumption is not a negative factor. With this, unconscious overconsumption is more easily avoided, but people still get enough nutrients. If the Formula 1 shake is prepared not with milk, but with the Protein Drink mix, it is high in protein and fibre and relatively low in sugar and saturated fat. Also when supporting GLP1 medication, Herbalife recommends a nutritional combination of Formula 1 shake, Protein Drink mix and additionally the Multifibre drink (68).

Strict crash diets have been shown not to work for the long term due to the feeling of abstinence and thus rapid relapse (72). This illustrates the importance of a more gradual lifestyle change and associated food choices (73). In order to avoid a sense of strict dieting. In this, snacks between meals can play an important role provided they contribute to the balanced diet. Based on the scores, protein chips seem to be a well-

balanced snack. However, it is important here to watch further salt intake because of the associated health risks. The chips contain 1 gram of salt per bag and the recommended maximum amount per day stands at 6 grams (74). Besides the protein chips, the Express Balanced meal bars seem to fit best within a healthy diet. Like the Formula 1 shake, these meal bars can serve as meal replacements and thus remedy portion-dependent overconsumption. Should the bar fit within daily calories, perhaps with the help of adequate exercise, this is also a good snack option.

The minimum daily amount of fibre is 25gr for women and 30gr for men. To get the required daily amount of fibre, it is recommended to take the Multifibre drink. So that the fibre contained in shakes, snacks and other food is supplemented to the minimum recommended intake.

It is recommended to eat one serving of oily fish a week because of the fatty acids EPA and DHA present. Of these, a person should take in 200 milligrams of both per day. To avoid a deficiency and comply with a healthy diet, it is wise to take at least 1 capsule of Herbalifeline Max per day (75).

Hydration

It seems that higher water intake and balance is associated with healthier body composition. In contrast, overweight people seem to consume less water (76). Consumption of water seems to lead to lower energy intake compared to sugary drinks (77). Thereby, it is too advisable to prefer sugar-free and low-calorie drinks over sugary drinks. To promote hydration, a product such as Herbal Aloe drink is useful, it is low in calories and adds flavour to water. This flavour contributes to increased water intake. Herbalife24 Hydrate is also low in calories and also contains important vitamins and minerals. In addition, drinking three cups of tea is also recommended with a healthy diet. For this purpose, the Instant Tea Drink can serve as it is made from green and black tea.

Sleep

As mentioned, it is important to maintain a good sleep rhythm within which 7 to 8 hours are made. This helps maintain the right energy balance and prevent relatively higher energy intake. Despite the fact that Dutch people sleep more than 7 hours on average, 63% are not satisfied with their sleep quality. While more than half struggle with these sleep problems, few seem to take action to improve them (78). Night Mode is a dietary supplement made for the nighttime routine. This product contains saffron extract that improves sleep quality and helps reduce insomnia. Along with the supporting effect on sleep and wake cycle via melatonin elevation (known to help reduce time needed to fall asleep) by this saffron extract, vitamins B6 and B2 help in supporting normal psychological and nervous system functions. In addition, vitamins C and E in the nighttime diet with Niteworks (and Restore when someone is exercising) help protect cells from oxidative stress and reduce fatigue (37). Where Niteworks contains L-arginine, L-citrulline, L-taurine and folic acid and Restore contains the bioactive peptide Lactium. Together, these products can contribute to more optimal sleep conditions.

Physical activity

For a healthy lifestyle, a person will have to meet the exercise guidelines. With DMOs, Herbalife can support this through a fit club or a fit marathon. Here, participants are challenged and motivated to get enough exercise.

When a person moves more, there will be a greater energy expenditure. In return, there will be a greater energy intake to keep the body in an energy balance. In other words, when someone moves more, they can eat more to maintain an energy balance. It is also good to get extra nutrients during intensive endurance sports (longer than an hour). Carbohydrates via the consumption of a sports drink is important here (79). The Herbalife24 Prolong serves as a sports drink and thus provides the necessary carbohydrates. Indeed, a carbohydrate solution is known to help improve physical performance during intense and prolonged physical exercise in trained adults (37). Besides energy, fluid and thus hydration during exercise is also important. Hydration is not just about water intake but electrolytes (essential minerals) play an important role. Besides their importance in other body functions such as muscle contraction and nervous system function, electrolytes are essential in fluid balance inside and outside body cells. Although they are replenished through a healthy diet, supplementary intake of a carbohydrate-electrolyte solution during physical exercise can improve water absorption. Indeed, through sweating during exercise, there can be a loss of electrolytes (80,81). In addition, a carbohydrate electrolyte solution also contributes to maintaining endurance during prolonged endurance training (37). The Herbalife24 CR7 Drive contains these carbohydrates and electrolytes and can thus ensure that your fluid intake is maintained during exercise.

Obesogenic environment

When talking about lifestyle changes, both more exercise and healthier eating and adapting the obesogenic environment, it is important that they are sustainable. Much research shows that small changes are more feasible and sustainable than large changes. These small changes can trigger a stream of changes and thus contribute to combating the obesity epidemic (82). Nudging is an intervention that interferes with people's decisions through minimal changes (83). Within nudging, the sense of choice and prevention of the sense of abstinence are relevant (84). While the government and the environment (beyond individual influence) have the ability to guide people in their choices, so can an individual person. A person can use this choice strategy to his or her advantage. Applying this small change to yourself and directing yourself is called self-nudging.

- A first self-nudging strategy is the use of reminders. Thus, establishing things and getting reminders of them can promote routines and help maintain goals.
- The next strategy is self-directed framing. This involves approaching choices in a way in which the more healthy choice is positively highlighted within a trade-off with a relatively worse choice.
- A third strategy involves changing accessibility to bad choices. When someone makes unhealthy food less accessible and puts healthy food in plain sight, it will encourage better choices. This accessibility may involve the location or convenience of the choice. Not only the accessibility but also the availability of the choice (the product), influences the choice process.

These were three strategies to adapt environmental factors within an obesogenic environment (85). However, as mentioned under the heading of prevention, there is also a social aspect to these obesogenic influences.

- A self-nudging strategy that focuses on this relies on social pressure and comparison with others. By comparing yourself to the norm or comparing yourself to a specific group of better off people, this can be motivating (85).

In addition to self-nudging, a community can also contribute greatly to reducing an obesogenic environment. Indeed, many of the aspects mentioned within the strategies of self-nudging can be accommodated within a community. First, this community at Herbalife can help educate people on what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. Next, a community can remind people of their goals, offer new perspectives on healthy choices, bring people together with similar goals. When this community or coach approaches people in the right way (positive/complimentary and active participation), it can contribute to making better choices regarding diet, exercise, sleep and the obesogenic environment.

Interviews

Internal orientation

Interview questions used in interviews with internal Herbalife departments including scientific affairs, ethical affairs, member services, sales and marketing. These interview interviews aim to provide internal Business orientation and problem definition by integrating answers and insights into a SWOT analysis and Confrontation Matrix.

- What is the department's role within Herbalife and what daily tasks are involved?
- Where is your department's strength within Herbalife compared to competitive companies?
- How does the department relate to other branches of the company (and how does communication go)?
- What are daily obstacles that cause hindrance specifically in your job?
- Where do you see weaknesses within your department and therefore opportunities for Herbalife improvement?
- How does this improvement translate to Herbalife as a whole (in relation to other departments)?
- How does your department integrate scientific insights and knowledge?

Regulation

Interview with Herbalife's Global Regulatory Affairs (GRA) on regulation around food claims and health benefits and their use in marketing.

Interviewer: Can you explain how Dutch legislation on food and health claims is structured?

GRA: Yes, the Dutch regulatory framework is strict and is based on European Union directives. The starting point of drafted regulations is to prevent the dissemination of misleading and confusing information towards consumers. Food information and associated health benefits are thoroughly researched to ensure they do not contain false assumptions and are scientifically substantiated.

Interviewer: How are these claims databases designed?

GRA: All claims related to food and healthcare are stored in a European claims register. This register contains approved and non-approved nutrition and health claims. By using this database, quick insight can be generated into permitted claims about the contribution of certain nutrients and what restrictions

are attached to them. This helps ensure that only scientifically substantiated claims are used in marketing and labelling of products.

Interviewer: Regarding Herbalife products, how can these claims be applied?

GRA: The claims cannot be applied directly to the products themselves. The claims usually relate to certain nutrients or ingredients that have approved health effects. In addition, the presence of an ingredient within a food does not automatically authorise the use of a related health claim. To meet the legal criteria for that claim, the ingredient must be present in certain quantities or forms.

Interviewer: So is it feasible to make true health claims on products?

GRA: Yes it is possible, but it has to be done in an indirect way. First, a link must be made between the claim and the properties of the ingredient, for example. Once this link is established, it can then be stated that the product contains the specific ingredient in the right form and quantity.

Interviewer: Suppose research has been conducted from which specific findings emerge, but these findings are not consistent with current claims. How does the use of this information work?

GRA: Before these claims can be used, they have to be submitted for approval. If the claims that have been approved do not match the scientific evidence, they have probably not been submitted or have been rejected. Then it is not allowed to link this information to the ingredient. All claims must be based on findings that are widely scientifically validated and thus available through the databases.

Interviewer: Is there a strict wording that should be used?

GRA: The wording is somewhat flexible. However, the Inspection Council of the Netherlands has an additional database available, which contains examples of approved health claims and possible alternative wording for each nutrient. This helps ensure that the language used for marketing and labelling is consistent and complies with legal regulations and is consistent.

Interviewer: Is there a difference between the internal and external use of these claims?

GRA: Yes, for internal use the rules are less strict, but when members fall under this it is wise to stick to the approved claims. Even then it is about commercial disclosure and this falls under the regulations.

Marketing facts

Shakes:

- The Formula 1 shake is a meal replacement that is known to replace one or two daily meals of an energy-restricted diet with a meal replacement to help maintain weight after weight loss
- Tri-blend contains 20 grams of protein per serving, which is known to help maintain and increase muscle mass (*also applies to PDM + formula 1 which contains 24 grams of protein and high-protein snacks*)
- Tri blend contains fibre and consumption of drinks containing these non-digestible carbohydrates instead of sugars results in a lower blood glucose spike after consumption compared to sugary drinks
- Substitution of milk for the Protein Drink Mix reduces saturated fatty acid intake and replaces it for unsaturated, which within a diet lowers blood cholesterol

Snacks:

- In the long run, extreme diets almost never work. Therefore, add a healthy snack to reduce the sudden difference in food intake.

Other:

- Herbalifelinemax provides the fatty acids EPA and DHA known to help maintain normal blood pressure
- Herbalifelinemax provides the fatty acids EPA and DHA known to contribute to normal heart function
- Aloe Drink supports water intake which helps maintain normal physical and cognitive functions
- Instant Tea Drink helps meet the recommended intake of 3 cups of tea per day

Sleep:

- Night Mode contains saffron extract that improves sleep quality and helps reduce insomnia. Along with its supporting effect on sleep and wake cycle via melatonin elevation.
- Night Mode contains vitamins B6 and B2 that support normal psychological and nervous system functions
- Niteworks contains vitamins C and E known to help protect cells from oxidative stress and reduce fatigue
- Restore contains vitamins C and E known to help protect cells from oxidative stress and reduce fatigue

Sports:

- Herbalife24 Prolong is a carbohydrate solution and these help improve physical performance during intense and prolonged physical exercise in trained adults
- Herbalife24 CR7 Drive is a carbohydrate electrolyte solution and these improve water absorption during physical exertion
- Herbalife24 CR7 Drive is a carbohydrate-electrolyte solution and these help maintain endurance during prolonged endurance training

Minutes

Half-yearly Meeting PR agency and Herbalife Marketing

Current and Intended Marketing Strategies

1. Corporate vision after COVID:
 - Reorganisation:
 - New phase for Herbalife after reorganisation
 - Expected from a commercial point of view to make results more transparent
 - Be able to link specific project and (sales) effect
 - Current strategies seem to briefly lead to activation but also extinguish again and thus require something new
2. Current strategies
 - Healthy Netherlands Research:
 - Study had great results and will be continued
 - New questionnaire with broader health factors and larger group of respondents
 - Has yet to land with a Member
 - Launch in the new year (due to good intentions)
 - Marketing approach
 - Use of Bylines with articles via external media pages for brand awareness
 - Social media is now a first introduction to Herbalife especially for external
 - Via paid channels more external reach outside members
 - Furthermore, mainly member marketing because they do sales, makes understanding impact difficult
 - New sites will provide more insight into that
 - The more online marketing for products the more online distributors (who only offer products and not service) are favoured over "regular distributors", therefore less focus on this
 - Marketing materials
 - Bylines is long-term no direct results but lots of interaction
 - Content is thin, little new information, good to use new content

New Marketing Slant: Health driven for Common Good

1. General approach:
 - Inset:
 - Focus should be more on what is going on in the market
 - Set up programme from a general (is separate from members and communities) interest with a focus on health, with lots of information and related tips and tricks.
 - Not commercial at first, focus on broad health framework (nutrition, sleep, etc.)
 - Through a general URL less under Herbalife-branding but associated
 - This strategy can live alongside the commercial business model
 - Plan formation in consultation with regional, but if Netherlands has the right vision and approach
 - Partnerships:
 - Good collaborations with familiar faces for credibility
 - Building a socially engaged image
 - Universities and government institutions
 - A non-commercial approach helps to engage in collaborations

- Establish ties with serious organisations for authority and PR benefits
 - Collaborations through interns and close contacts.
 - Building bonding and later genuine collaboration
 - Specific: cooperation with Wageningen University e.g. promising, gives value to Herbalife brand
 - For each category (nutrition, sleep, exercise etc.) have a specific organisation hooked up
2. Distributors and Education:
- Role of Distributors:
 - Distributors are the next step towards the commercial to serve as a link for education and information
 - Slow introduction of members, use of user stories and sponsorships
 - Member Activation:
 - Partnering with vital members for activation
 - Knowledge from quality, members are not experts themselves but well-informed
 - It is important for members to know what commercial opportunities lie behind the disease prevention approach, but not propagate it in campaign
3. Product and Market Approach:
- Products from Obesity Perspective:
 - By not sitting on products, you are not giving online distributors an advantage over "regular distributor"
 - Only later in this strategy will the focus shift to products responding to disease prevention to make the commercial translation
 - Never mind that products from specific perspectives are approached well or less well because customers also look for products from specific needs
4. Content and Publicity:
- Creative Content Strategy:
 - Lots of content needed for launch all ready, not sporadic
 - If currently used content (in bylines) does not fit new strategy then don't share to share
 - Interesting and fun content to increase engagement
 - Content creation for platforms such as TikTok
 - Helps to create region materials that can be translated and shared
 - Publicity:
 - Herbalife is an easy target for bad publicity because of its organisational structure
 - Less commercial approach builds credibility
 - Also not just sugarcoating as is being done now but also being guilty in this
 - On social engagement becoming a key player rather than criticism
 - When credibility and sincerity are high enough, this can tackle criticism

Self-reflection

Through enjoyment and learning gained, I look back with satisfaction on conducting this research for Herbalife. The aim of this research was to determine how Herbalife can transfer scientific knowledge about disease prevention and use it as a marketing strategy. In this reflection, I highlight key aspects of my learning, including the challenges I encountered and the skills I was able to use or develop.

From a scientific focus to business research

At the start of my research, my focus was strongly on the scientific aspect of the task. With a background in biomedical science, I was used to working with medical academic literature to draw conclusions from there. Reading and summarising scientific articles on nutrition and disease prevention was a natural step for me and I felt comfortable at this stage of the research. Also, this was also the focus of the internship assignment from Herbalife. I was able to gather current scientific insights relevant to obesity prevention relatively quickly.

A second more challenging phase of my research included translating these scientific insights into Herbalife's products. This required a creative but quantifiable approach that took shape fairly quickly.

The challenge for me began when the findings had to be translated into a practical and applicable business strategy. It was clear that just presenting the scientific facts was not enough. It required a commercial translation in which to think about how to use this information effectively in marketing and communication. With the starting point being the commercial benefit for a company like Herbalife. With the help of scientific literature and professionals in PR and marketing, I was able to put together a well-considered recommendation. Easier went the very first step of the research, in which interviews were conducted to establish the problem statement. By having clear questions and starting methods such as the SWOT and confrontation matrix as the intended target, the analysis quickly took a concrete form.

Challenges and learning experiences

Because I like to work independently, I sometimes wait a little longer before asking for feedback. This led to me sometimes getting bogged down in my own analysis before getting the necessary insights from others. As mentioned, one of the biggest challenges was integrating the scientific insights into a convincing and strategically sound marketing approach. In this too, I had to learn to let professionals in this field support me and integrate their knowledge. Nevertheless, the independent approach also ensured that I went in-depth and thorough, which ultimately improved the quality of my work.

In addition, the research and internship assignment required turning my scientific findings into concrete recommendations that were not only understandable to marketing professionals, but also attractive and clear to distributors. This required shifting into others and translating my jargon into general concepts. Another learning point was the need to consider many aspects and stakeholders within the execution of a marketing plan for a food company with such an organisational structure as Herbalife. This sometimes caused delays or disappointment when I had to coordinate with different stakeholders and integrate their feedback and input. Science is all about truthful and reproducible results, but in the commercial world there is also an emphasis on the legal implications of what is communicated. I realised how important it is in the business context not only to operate accurately and correctly according to regulations, but also to push the boundaries in this. It was instructive to navigate between the different interests and priorities of all parties involved and their starting points.

Developed Skills

Through these experiences, I have developed several important skills. First, I have learned how to make scientific information accessible and appealing to a wider audience. This includes the ability to translate complex data into clear, concise and compelling messages that are relevant for internal communication and external marketing purposes. Secondly, I honed my strategic thinking skills. Developing a marketing strategy based on scientific insights required an approach in which I had to think about aspects that were newer to me, such as segmentation and communication channels. In addition, as mentioned, I learnt to deal effectively with regulations and guidelines. This included evaluating marketing materials to ensure that all health claims were scientifically based and legally compliant. This skill is useful for many roles in the corporate world. During this process, I also had to present often, which is something in which I am already more in my element from my perspective. Sharing my findings with others, both within the team and with external stakeholders, gave me the opportunity to continue to develop my presentation skills and also adapt them to the audience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this internship has given me insight about my strengths and weaknesses. I realise that I have a strong foundation in communication skills and understanding of scientific knowledge, but I still need to grow in strategically integrating this knowledge in a commercial context. An important value for me is contributing to people's health. Despite the commercial angle of this research, I felt that I actually contributed to this goal. By translating scientific knowledge into materials and practical strategies that can help prevent obesity, I was able to contribute to an important health goal. This is something I hope to continue in the future and bridge the gap between science and business. Finally, I am grateful for the opportunity of this internship within a supportive and sociable team.