

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Business socialising: Women's social networking perceptions**

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**The primary research objective of the study was to investigate the perceptions of the social networking practices of businesswomen. A non-probability purposive voluntary sample, followed by snowball sampling, was used to select businesswomen ( $n = 31$ ) living and working in the Gauteng province for in-depth interviews. Various perceptions of businesswomen of social networking practices were identified. A number of networking challenges that businesswomen experience in their social networking efforts were also identified, as well as the resources they may utilise in order to cope with these challenges. In addition, characteristics essential to successful social networking behaviour, such as respect, integrity and confidence, were identified. Recruiting businesswomen to participate in the study proved difficult owing to their typically full schedules. In addition, it was difficult to ensure a representative sample for the study. Furthermore, owing to the need for a central interviewing point, a coffee shop was selected for this purpose. The nature of such a venue though resulted in disturbances during the interviews, which was disruptive to the process. The study demonstrated that a better understanding of social networking will aid businesswomen with regard to success in their work and personal lives. The study information further provided insight into the specific approach of businesswomen to social network building in the business environment with the objective of excelling in their careers. From a personal point of view, it was concluded that, businesswomen can gain insight into achieving work-home balance through the utilisation of social networks.**

**Key words:** Businesswomen, networking, social networks, social networking, social support.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The role that women have played in society has changed greatly from the middle age perspective that limited women in terms of what and how much they could do and have access to (Bellamy and Moorse, 1996). At that time, typical female activities included caring for children, running the household (Bellamy and Moorse, 1996; McDonald, 2004) and, in some instances, managing agricultural tasks, such as milking and making butter and cheese (McDonald, 2004).

It was unheard of for women to be able to obtain a

formal education, such as to attend a university to become a lawyer, judge, priest or a Member of Parliament; or to join the army (Bellamy and Moorse, 1996).

### **Timeline of the evolution of the working woman**

#### ***Sixteenth and seventeenth centuries***

The role of women during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries remained the same as it was in the Middle Ages, as sketched previously (Bellamy and Moorse, 1996).

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### ***Eighteenth and nineteenth centuries***

The role of women began to change during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Bellamy and Moorse, 1996). From the beginning of the eighteenth century onwards, the industrial revolution (eighteenth to nineteenth centuries) began to change the way in which many people worked. The home was no longer the centre of work and women could earn a higher income outside their homes. As women began to enter the labour force, particularly married women with children, men saw them as a threat in society. The liberated woman was seen as being incapable of caring for her family and working at the same time; and was therefore, viewed as undermining her traditional role. As a result, laws were instated to restrict the type of work that was made available to women. Various typically female professions began to emerge, including teaching and nursing (Beddoe, 1998; Bellamy and Moorse, 1996; Cardinali, 2002).

By 1900, women had achieved much advancement in their education, legal rights and job opportunities with campaigners for independence who challenged the conservative female role, such as Florence Nightingale and Josephine Butler (Bellamy and Moorse, 1996).

### ***Twentieth century***

Further changes took place during the First World War (1914 to 1918). Women had to assume men's work roles whilst men were away fighting in the war, such as working in shipyards and collieries. It became acceptable for wives to perform their husbands' jobs (Beddoe, 1998; Bellamy and Moorse, 1996; Cardinali, 2002). During the Second World War (1939 to 1945), women were expected to fulfil many of the same duties and roles they had performed in the First World War.

At the end of the Second World War, women had demonstrated that they were well able to manage on their own and achieve the necessary quite self-sufficiently in the absence of men (Beddoe, 1998; Bellamy and Moorse, 1996; Cardinali, 2002).

By the 1960s, further changes had taken place. Women were permitted to attend university, reliably decide upon whether and when to have children and could therefore, plan their careers more systematically. Despite these changes, the best jobs remained closed to women. This resulted in the formation of the women's liberation movement, which lobbied for equal remuneration of women and men in the same positions.

In 1975, the Sex Discrimination Act outlawed discrimination in areas such as jobs and housing.

However, during the 1980s, the same arguments that had been used against working women in factories in the 1830s were still being raised. At the beginning of the twentieth century, women continued managing businesses (Bellamy and Moorse, 1996).

Today's modern businesswomen demonstrate clear links with women from the earlier century, as sketched previously, and still experience similar challenges (McDonald, 2004). These challenges include lower remuneration of women in comparison with that of men (McDonald, 2004) and underrepresentation in management, despite equality legislation (Denton and Vloeberghs, 2003; McDonald, 2004).

South African women still occupy an underappreciated place in society (Mathur-Helm, 2005). Although some changes began to take place in the post-election period (1994) that forced South African managers to address human resources in the organisation differently (Denton and Vloeberghs, 2003), white males still dominate top and senior management positions (Department of Labour, 2010).

Although the Commission of Gender Equality was established to monitor gender equality practices in South African organisations (Denton and Vloeberghs, 2003), research conducted by the Businesswomen's Association found that women in South Africa still only constitute 19.3% of executive manager positions and 16.6% of director positions (Businesswomen's Association, 2010). This indicates that it remains difficult for South African women to be employed in senior level positions (Mathur-Helm, 2005).

Over time, many organisations have developed initiatives, such as mentoring programmes and women's networks, with the aim of supporting women's career progression. These organisations recognise the retention of valued talent as a priority. In spite of the aforementioned progress and the increased number of women now employed in senior positions, women continue to leave organisations in higher proportions than their male counterparts at senior levels (Anderson et al., 2010). While many organisations have work-life balance policies, according to Burnett et al. (2010), these have not led to well-balanced, or "gender-neutral", work and family practices.

Gender discrimination is still a reality in the corporate world (Denton and Vloeberghs, 2003). In a study conducted by Ro and Choi (2010) of 752 women, it was suggested that gender discrimination might induce negative coping strategies that may involve drug use. This finding corroborates research conducted by Bennet et al. (2005) and Chae et al. (2008). There is much evidence of the continued perception of the role of women as housewives (Beddoe, 1998; Lips, 2006). Women therefore, experience stress as the perception of their typical role increases demands on their time and level of involvement in their careers, for example (Moen, 1992).

In a study conducted by Moore et al. (2007), it was found that managerial women worked significantly more in the home in comparison with men. It was further, reported that, along with male managers, managerial women tended to have the highest level of work-family

strain and time conflicts. The high stress levels that women experience whilst balancing their dual responsibilities of career and child-care may affect their overall health (Gill and Davidson, 2001).

In a study conducted by Quick et al. (2004), it was found that failure to balance work and family responsibilities can significantly affect all aspects of the individual's life. In instances in which individuals experienced an imbalance, they reported lower levels of general happiness, their psychological distress levels increased and negative health consequences often resulted. Failure to balance the demands of work and family has also been linked with higher levels of depression and increased alcohol use.

Internationally, Crowell (2004) investigated women's social networks with regard to the ability of women to expand their social connections and increase their opportunities, resources and jobs. Much research has also been conducted on the work-home balance (work-life balance) of working women (Doherty, 2004; Woodward, 2007; Eikhof et al., 2007), the networking practices of women and women's networks (Ehrich, 1994; Travers et al., 1997; Pini et al., 2004; Singh et al., 2006), the role of women in society (Lahtinen and Wilson, 1994), the barriers that women experience in organisations (Jackson, 2001; Linehan et al., 2001; Ogden et al., 2006; Tonge, 2008), the differences between men's and women's networks (Brass, 1985; Ibarra, 1992, 1993; Burke et al., 1995; Rothstein and Davey, 1995; Linehan, 2001; Neergaard et al., 2005; Bastani, 2007; Waldstrøm and Madsen, 2007), the business networking practices of women (Farr-Wharton and Brunetto, 2007) and online networking for women (Knouse and Webb, 2001).

In the South African context, the research that has been conducted has focused mainly on issues such as discrimination within the workplace, equal opportunities and affirmative action of women in organisations (Human, 1996; McFarlin et al., 1999; Mathur-Helm, 2002, 2005; Thomas, 2002; Denton and Vloeberghs, 2003; Littrell and Nkomo, 2005; McEwan, 2005): The glass-ceiling effect (Mathur-Helm, 2006); women entrepreneurs and discrimination in employment (Ndhlovu and Spring, 2009); coping strategies utilised by working mothers (for example, seeking social support; Brink and De la Rey, 2001); and the changing role of men in the family (for example, taking care of children and household responsibilities; Smit, 2002).

Research focusing on the social networking practices of businesswomen in South Africa and the supportive nature thereof had not been conducted prior to this study. Therefore, the primary research objective of this study was to investigate the perceptions of the social networking practices of businesswomen in the Gauteng Province.

The findings of the study can contribute to social networking literature through the provision of an improved

understanding of social networking and the utilisation of social networks within the business environment, in order to assist businesswomen to advance their careers.

At a personal level, the information gained from the study can contribute to the achievement of work-home balance in the lives of businesswomen. Furthermore, the information can be utilised to ensure successful social network development amongst businesswomen.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The most pertinent literature and findings with regard to the following are discussed subsequently: business women's networking behaviour, challenges experienced by businesswomen, challenges experienced by business women with children, and successful networking behaviour.

### Businesswomen's networking behaviour

Networking is considered a powerful tool that assists women in becoming more visible in the community and organisation (Boe, 1994). Networking allows women to build relationships that are mutually supportive and empowering (Boe, 1994) and provides them with the confidence required for promotion (Ehrich, 1994). Networking also provides women with learning opportunities, as well as opportunities to develop personal skills expand social contacts and to increase self-confidence (Travers et al., 1997), which is necessary in leadership roles (Pini et al., 2004).

### Challenges experienced by businesswomen

Whilst women are supportive of one another in the provision of business opportunities (Nierenberg, 2005), they experience various networking challenges that impede their career progression (Lahtinen and Wilson, 1994). These challenges appear to be related to the issue of long working hour cultures within organisations and the lack of available networking opportunities (Ogden et al., 2006).

Many women adopt a passive approach in terms of their own perceptions of their remuneration as marginal and temporary and the perception of their traditional role that dictates that women's domestic commitments will take precedence (Lahtinen and Wilson, 1994).

In examining occupational segregation, it is clear that a large number of women have been and still can be found in occupations that are in accordance with these traditionally prescribed roles (McDonald, 2004).

Women experience a lack of support in terms of financial resources, education and training, child-care arrangements, networks, role models, mentors and

domestic constraints. Attitudinal barriers, such as employer biases, negative perceptions of women, sex-segregated jobs, sexual harassment and pay inequalities, are seen as further challenges experienced by business women. Limited advancement owing to the glass-ceiling effect also poses challenges for businesswomen (Jackson, 2001; Mathur-Helm, 2006).

An additional challenge experienced by business women is that women and men network differently; for example, women utilise their networks less effectively than men, which leads to men experiencing more career satisfaction than women (Van Emmerik et al., 2006). Furthermore, women are less likely than men to engage in networking activities when searching for a new job (Zikic et al., 2008). In terms of accessibility and the power of specific networks, women find relying on contacts for job search support difficult (Zikic et al., 2008).

From an organisational perspective, men are still viewed as the dominant group (Lahtinen and Wilson, 1994; Linehan, 2001) and "old-boy" networks are still evident within organisations (Jackson, 2001). Men maintain their dominance within an organisation, which leads to the exclusion of women from male networks (Linehan, 2001; Linehan et al., 2001).

Women also tend to be excluded from social networks that are the most significant component of successful power acquisition (Timberlake, 2005), as informal networks (social networks) provide benefits such as information exchange, career planning and strategising, professional support and encouragement, and increased visibility within organisations (Jackson, 2001; Timberlake, 2005). The result of exclusion from business and social networks leads to the isolation of women managers, which can impede their building of valuable networking relationships (Linehan et al., 2001).

In a study of 31 women who had recently left partner roles within an international management consultancy company, it was found that, the participants felt the company had expected an all-or-nothing approach from them. In this study, little evidence of balance in the sense of division of time between work and non-work or of integration or the blending of work and personal life was found. The aforementioned contributed to the women's decision to leave the company (Anderson et al., 2010). This might be considered a show of non-support by organisations, which poses a great challenge for businesswomen.

### **Challenges experienced by businesswomen with children**

In Tonge's (2008) study, women identified the responsibility of children or partners as a barrier to their networking participation. Time pressures in terms of work or personal commitments were also mentioned as networking challenges (Brush et al., 2004; Tonge, 2008).

Women still have more responsibilities than men in terms of caring for their families and children (Gordon and Whelan-Berry, 2004; Burnett et al., 2010). This leads to women spending less time than men networking after work hours (Linehan, 2001).

Another challenge experienced by working mothers is that they have constant anxiety and stress with regard to sick children, as they are the ones who need to take care of their sick children (for example, taking them to the doctor) and they experience the challenge of deciding whether their children are sufficiently sick for them to be kept home, which implies the women taking leave for the day (Ray, 1991).

Being a working woman takes perseverance, since it involves fostering a loving relationship, caring for children, managing a career, and being a housewife and a mother. Therefore, it is critical for working women to utilise their awake-time effectively and to their best advantage in order to gain a balance between their household, work and social activities (Ray, 1991).

Work-home balance poses a particular challenge to women employed in management positions who have family responsibilities, as they may have to work long hours (Ogden et al., 2006). A positive choice made by women with children in order to have a reasonable work-home balance is to self-limit their careers, which in turn limits their career advancement in organisations (Ogden et al., 2006).

### **Successful networking behaviour**

Essential characteristics that influence an individual's networking success include; trust, integrity, generosity, honesty, respect and credibility:

1. Trust is viewed as a key principle of networking, as it is based on mutually beneficial exchanges (Boe, 1994) between similar or dissimilar people (Travers et al., 1997). In instances in which people trust each other, they will provide the same networking benefits that they have received (Rousseau et al., 1998).
2. Integrity is vital to any networking relationship, as the strength of a network is directly related to the perceived level of integrity of the networkers involved (Lindenfield and Lindenfield, 2005). A networker acting without integrity will evoke feelings of disgust and betrayal on behalf of others in the network (Lindenfield and Lindenfield, 2005), which will lead to a weaker network because the potential of the network to assist someone will have been undermined (Lindenfield and Lindenfield, 2005).
3. Generosity is considered an important characteristic of successful networkers. It is important to first focus on the person with whom an individual is building a relationship, establish his or her needs and determine the manner in which to assist him or her (Bannerman, 2006).

Networkers do not always instantly receive in those cases in which they give, but they give with the knowledge that the exchange will be mutually beneficial (Lindenfield and Lindenfield, 2005). A person in a network should always be willing to give without expecting the exchange to be mutual (Lindenfield and Lindenfield, 2005), as reciprocity is a basic principle of networking.

4. Honesty is another important networker characteristic essential to successful networking behaviour. People enjoy conducting business with honest people because there is then no need for networkers to misrepresent themselves or their businesses (Lindenfield and Lindenfield, 2005).

5. In networking, respect amongst networkers is important in order to act with professional maturity (Lindenfield and Lindenfield, 2005). In order to establish a strong business relationship, sufficient trust and mutual respect are required (Lindenfield and Lindenfield, 2005). Respect needs to be earned in order to gain the trust of people (Bannerman, 2006).

6. Credibility is viewed as the characteristic of being reliable and involves the process by which the networkers involved form expectations of each other. A case in which a person has been reliable and dependable in previous interactions leads to a positive expectation of that person's intentions (Rousseau et al., 1998). A person who keeps appointments and acts upon promises is viewed as credible. Should expectations not be fulfilled or promises not be kept, a weakened network results (Misner and Morgan, 2000).

Moreover, successful networking practices require that when meeting people for the first time, the focus should be on becoming acquainted with one another, building a relationship and establishing common ground (White, 2004). Furthermore, networking requires daily effort (Bannerman, 2006). Setting objectives is another aspect of successful networking behaviour, as it is important to have objectives in mind when networking (Kay, 2004).

To this end, a networker should have a clear objective regarding the reasons he or she is attending a networking event and building relationships (for example, what he or she needs from that relationship), and should be open-minded and not afraid to ask for assistance (Boe and Youngs, 1989; Kay, 2004).

In attending a networking event, a networker should reflect confidence, as this attribute highlights a confident person above others attending the same event (Kay, 2004). In order to be successful in networking, individuals should also attend all available networking opportunities (Kay, 2004). This could assist them in meeting people not part of their daily working environment, for example individuals can communicate with their superiors in an organisation (Bannerman, 2006).

In order to achieve networking success, it is important to avoid poor networking behaviour, such as being impolite, not honouring meetings, disrespecting and

taking advantage of other networkers, and negativity (Misner and Morgan, 2000; Kay, 2004; Tullier, 2004; Lindenfield and Lindenfield, 2005; Bannerman, 2006).

### Research objectives

The primary objective of the study was to investigate the perceptions of the social networking practices of Gauteng businesswomen. In order to attain this objective, the following secondary objectives were formulated:

1. To identify businesswomen's perceptions of social networking practices;
2. To determine the networking challenges experienced by businesswomen in their social networking efforts;
3. To determine the networking challenges experienced by businesswomen with children in their social networking efforts; and
4. To investigate businesswomen's successful social networking behaviour.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology entailed in-depth interviews with the participants. The research design, participants, sampling strategy and interview questions, data collection, data analysis, trust worthiness and ethical considerations of the study are detailed subsequently.

#### Research design

Explorative research in the form of in-depth interviews was used to obtain detailed information regarding the social networking practices of businesswomen in the Gauteng Province and thereby gain insight into their social networking practices (Wilkinson and Birmingham, 2003). Because of the qualitative nature of this study the Grounded theory approach was used in order to gain an in-depth understanding of these social networking practices. An explorative research design was selected, since limited prior knowledge existed on the topic under investigation (Struwig and Stead, 2001; Tustin et al., 2005), and insight into the general nature of the topic under investigation was required (Tustin et al., 2005).

#### Participants, sampling strategy and interview questions

The population in the study consisted of businesswomen in the Gauteng Province ( $n = 31$ ). A non-probability purposive voluntary sample was used to sample the participants. The research focused on the Gauteng province, as it is considered, the economic centre of South Africa (SA, 2009). A well-known networker in the Gauteng Province was contacted in order to assist the researcher in obtaining the names of businesswomen to invite to the interviews. This network was introduced to the researcher by one of the researcher's own networking contacts.

The interviews were conducted between November 2008 and January 2009. Although participants found this a difficult time of the year to schedule interviews, owing to personal and work-related deadlines, five participants were able to attend interviews. Thereafter, snowball sampling was used, as participants were not easily accessible (Daymon and Holloway, 2002). The five original

participants were asked to identify other Gauteng businesswomen who would possibly be interested in participating in the study.

The majority of the participants (73.7%) were White women, whilst 19.6% were Black and 6.7% were Indian. Most of the participants (43.3%) were between the ages of thirty-five and forty-four, 26.7% were between the ages of forty-five and fifty-four, 26.7% were between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four, and 3.3% were under the age of twenty-five.

In the main, the participants held a diploma or certificate (38.7%) or a postgraduate qualification (38.7%); and were thus mostly representative of the sample. The remainder of the participants held a Bachelor's degree (19.4%) or a grade twelve certificate (3.2%). A large percentage of the participants were single (35.5%), whilst some were divorced (25.8%) or married (22.6%) and most had no children under the age of twelve (67.7%). A smaller percentage of women were engaged (3.2%), widowed (3.2%) or in a long-term relationship (9.7%) and had children under the age of twelve (32.3%).

The participants worked in various industries. The majority of the participants worked in the financial industry (40.1%). Others worked in business services (12.1%), education/training (9.5%), human resource consulting (9.6%), information technology (6.3%), property (3.2%), law (3.2%), construction (3.2%), fashion (3.2%), tourism (3.2%), and multiple industries (6.4%).

The same set of questions was used in every interview. The following questions were asked:

1. How do you perceive social networking?
2. What challenges have you experienced in your social networking efforts?
3. As a working mother, what networking challenges have you experienced in your social networking efforts?
4. Which behavioural characteristics do you feel are necessary to ensure successful social networking?

### Data collection

Data collection consisted of in-depth interviews and field notes. The in-depth interviews were audio-taped with the permission of the participants. Field notes, including observational and personal notes, were taken during and directly after the interviews. Field notes were used to record the researcher's experiences during the interviews (Shank, 2006) and to make sense of the research setting (for example, notes were taken on the research surroundings, such as the atmosphere of the room in which the interviews took place; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006).

Field notes were completed after each interview in order to facilitate management of the data and compilation of the research findings (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006). After the completion of a short biographical questionnaire, the participants were thanked for their contribution. Thereafter, the audio-tapes were labelled to ensure the anonymity of each participant.

Data saturation was reached after the twenty-third interview. However, the interviewer continued to conduct eight additional interviews to ensure that no new information would be gained and to gain additional rich direct quotations for the themes identified in the analysis.

### Data analysis

Several steps were followed in analysing the data. These steps included:

1. Organising and preparing the data for analysis: This included typing the field notes and transcribing the interviews from oral language to written text (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006). The textual

data from the different interviews was analysed separately by making use of the theme approach and open coding (Creswell, 1994);

2. Exploring the data: This involved reading through the transcripts several times to gain a general insight into the interviews (Creswell, 2003) and highlighting the most important parts thereof (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006);
3. Grouping the data into three categories, namely the participant's perceptions, experiences and recommendations: This assisted the researcher in coding the data;
4. Coding the data, using open coding: The researcher assigned codes to each section of the text that appeared the most important (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006);
5. Identifying major themes (Creswell, 2003; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006);
6. Identifying sub-themes and additional themes: Relationships amongst the identified themes were then sought (Daymon and Holloway, 2002), following which the identified sub-themes and additional themes were grouped under the main themes;
7. Using a co-coder to ensure that there was correspondence amongst all the identified themes and sub-themes: The direct quotations from the interviews were then used to support the major themes (Creswell, 2003); and
8. Using member checking: This entailed presenting the participants' views and perceptions to them to enable them to correct any misinterpretations or errors (Daymon and Holloway, 2002).

### Trustworthiness

Alternative models appropriate to qualitative designs are required to establish rigor in qualitative research without sacrificing the relevance thereof (Krefting, 1991). Guba's model for qualitative research was used to ensure the trustworthiness of these research findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Krefting, 1991).

The trustworthiness of the research findings was established through the establishment of the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Krefting, 1991). Strategies used to ensure the credibility of the findings were data triangulation (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002) and peer examination.

Various interview techniques (such as summarising and paraphrasing) and detailed descriptions were used to ensure the transferability of the findings. A nominated sample was also selected in order to ensure that the findings are transferable. Strategies used to ensure the dependability of the findings included using a co-coder and auditing, for which all interviews were recorded and field notes were taken. Confirmability auditing, which includes making transcriptions and field notes available for auditing, was used to ensure the confirmability of the findings.

### Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations within qualitative research are important. The interviewing process was conducted in a respectful manner and the privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of each participant were respected at all times. The confidentiality of the sources and the interview settings was not compromised (Shank, 2006) in that only the researcher, supervisor and an independent transcriber were allowed access to the audio recordings, and no participant names were connected to any quotations documented during the interviews.

Before each interview was conducted, the researcher informed the participants about the study, its objectives and the process that would be followed during the interviews. Participants were asked to sign consent forms that gave the researcher permission to use the

collected data and stated that the participation was voluntary, that the participants could withdraw from the study at any point and that all collected data would be handled with confidentiality.

The researcher endeavoured to be honest and fair at all times during the interviews. The researcher did not knowingly discriminate against the participants on the basis of their age, sex, race, ethnicity, religion or language (Struwig and Stead, 2001).

## DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY RESULTS

The study's findings are discussed subsequently with regard to each of the research objectives.

### Businesswomen's perceptions of social networking practices

There are three main findings with regard to business women's perceptions of social networking practices. These are discussed.

#### *Women network differently to men*

Participants felt that there is a difference in the networking behaviour of women and men. This is supported by the following quotation: "I do think that men and women network slightly differently." This is also supported in the literature. Various studies have indicated that the networking practices and the networks of women and men differ (Ehrich, 1994; Rothstein and Davey, 1995; Knouse and Webb, 2001; Van Emmerik et al., 2006; Bastani, 2007).

There are seven findings secondary to this main finding. The first secondary finding is that women perceived themselves as better networkers than men. This finding is supported by the following quotation: "I think in general, women are much better networkers than men." However, this is disputed in the literature.

Studies have found that men are more effective than women in networking in that they use their networking activities more effectively. Men are also more motivated to use their networking instrumentally to achieve career goals (Van Emmerik et al., 2006).

The second secondary finding is that women perceived themselves to be more willing than men to share contacts and to offer their assistance to each other. This finding is supported by the following quotations: "I have noticed throughout my career that women are generally much more forthcoming about sharing contacts and helping other people, especially other women, than men are" and "[...] better than men, who always seem to be thinking what's in it for them". This is supported in the literature.

Women like helping each other in case in which trust has developed (Nierenberg, 2005), as they tend to have a more positive attitude towards the importance of networking in their careers (Rothstein and Davey, 1995), whereas men view their networks in terms of what can be

gained from their membership (exchange of favours and obligations) within the network (Brush et al., 2004).

The third secondary finding is that women felt that they share too much information when they network as opposed to men who are less forthcoming. This is supported by the following quotations: "[...] where women tend to talk too much, they go beyond" and "[M]en tend to do that a lot better than women tend to do. They know which level of information to discuss". This is supported in the literature.

In cases in which women socialise before talking business they share a great deal of personal information with each other; for example when socialising they know each other's life story before refreshments have been served (Nierenberg, 2005) as they have the tendency to incorporate personal information (such as information about their families) into business conversations (Brush et al., 2004). This is in contrast with men, who tend to focus on brief small talk when they network (Nierenberg, 2005).

The fourth secondary finding is that there is a difference in the networking approaches of women and men. Women perceive themselves to be more emotional in their networking approach and men to be more directed. This finding is supported by the following quotations: "I think women can get a bit more emotional, [they] draw on a person because they like this person and not because that person will have the best service. I definitely think that once women trust each other, relationships become quite long and quite deep" and "[...] but I do think men have a more targeted approach to networking and a less of a fluffy approach". This finding is supported in the literature.

In networking, women value emotion highly in cases in which networking decisions must be made, whereas men feel that good decisions are rational, logical and dispassionate and should be governed by an objective and consistent rules. Men are therefore, more focused on their networking objectives and believe that emotions can distort and negatively affect the quality of an individual's decisions (Nierenberg, 2005).

The fifth secondary finding is that women perceived themselves to be more supportive and open than men in networking. This finding is supported by the following quotations: "I think that women are more open and we are more sociable, [than men]. Women see each other as very much supportive and we know that we can be open towards each other and we are not too proud to open up." and "I think men are more shallow and do not get emotionally attached to each other. Men are very proud [and] they do not easily open up towards each other." This is supported in the literature. Women provide support in the form of business opportunities.

Women are more open and supportive in networking in that they tend to interact, bond over a cup of coffee and recount their life stories before talking business (Nierenberg, 2005). Men are less open in that they only become acquainted with one another once a deal has

been struck and mutual respect has been gained; only then might they offer support in recommending each other to their network contacts for business opportunities (Nierenberg, 2005).

The sixth secondary finding is that women perceived men to be more ego-driven than women. This finding is supported by the following quotations: “[W]omen are less proud and ego-driven. We are more nurturing and we support each other on all levels. Women do not want to burn their bridges, while men are too proud and that leads them to burn their bridges.” and “[Men] are very ego-driven”. This is supported in the literature.

Brush et al. (2004) suggest that women are less ego-driven and less likely to brag about their achievements. They tend to keep quiet about these or share the credit. Men are more willing than women to brag about their achievements and the considerable credible part they play in, for example, a growing business. Men are also quick to nominate their companies or themselves for local competitions (Brush et al., 2004).

The seventh secondary finding is that women perceived men to have strong networks. This finding is supported by the following quotation: “Men have a very good network. It is still very strong in the corporate world today and I doubt that it would really disappear”. This is supported in the literature. Men’s networks tend to be more powerful than women’s networks. Men tend to use their networks more successfully, as they promote their businesses and themselves to a greater extent than women (Ehrich, 1994).

Regarding this finding, it was further concluded that men have strong networks built up from school days and that arise from old-boy networks. This finding is supported by the following quotation: “[...] *and that comes from school days and the old boys club*”. This is supported in the literature. Men realise early in life that networks are important to gain career success and thus start to build men-only networks. This is termed the old-boy network or the good-old boys’ networks developed through school ties, fraternity contacts and social organisations, such as country clubs (Knouse and Webb, 2001).

### **Networking is a valuable tool**

Participants perceived networking as a valuable tool utilised by businesswomen. This finding is illustrated by the following quotation: “So I think women are starting to recognise the value of networking”. This is supported in the literature. Ehrich (1994) suggests that networking is a powerful tool for women, as it assists them in becoming more visible in both the community and organisations. Networking further provides women with confidence and the opportunity to learn, develop personal skills and to grow their social contacts (Travers et al., 1997).

There is one finding secondary to this main finding. The

secondary finding is that networking connects and empowers women. This finding is supported by the following quotation: “I see [networking] as something that can connect women and empower them”. This is supported in the literature. Boe (1994) suggests that networking allows individuals to build relationships that are mutually supportive and empowering.

### **Social networks provide support**

Participants concluded that businesswomen utilise their social networks to gain needed support. This finding is illustrated by the following quotation: “There is a great level of support that you require and I think with children, support is always required and this is where social networks come in pretty handy. I mentioned my networking with parents, other parents and the school, you get a lot of support, you get certain benefits [and] you get additional help through that.” This is supported in the literature. It is suggested that social networks (such as family, friends and neighbours) provide individuals with much-needed social support (Walker et al., 1993; Marcinkus et al., 2007).

There are five findings secondary to this main finding. The first secondary finding is that all women (business women with children, businesswomen without children and non-working women) need support. This finding is supported by the following quotations: “I think women generally do need more support.” and “I am one person that believes that a woman is a woman and [at] one point or another all of us goes through certain things. Sometimes it is maybe hard on you as a working mother, but I think it is an individual choice to say what balance do I have in my life? There are single people that do not have balance in their lives and you find that you as a working mother have balance in your life. It is about what creates balance in your life”. This is supported in the literature. All women in whatever role they fulfil, including mothers, employees, bosses and housewives, need support, as it is difficult to fulfil all of these individual roles (Ray, 1991).

The second secondary finding is that working mothers need a support network. This finding is supported by the following quotations: “So especially working moms need someone that understands. So that when you start throwing your toys out of the cot you need the support structure to say, I know what you are going through and I can give you this advice in terms of what you need for performance.” and “Working women with children obviously need a support network to help look after their kids while they are at the office and I imagine it cannot be easy to juggle the demands that both worlds would place on them simultaneously”. This is supported in the literature. The most important objective of business women, once they have children, is to coordinate the activities of the household and office in order to ensure



a good lifestyle for themselves and their family. As a result, working mothers need a support system (Ray, 1991). Working women's support networks (for example partners, family or friends) provide the needed support that serves as a buffer against the stresses that these women experience (McLean, 2002).

The third secondary finding is that working mothers need support from the businesses at which they are employed. This finding is supported by the following quotations: "I think to be a working woman with children nowadays you need support in your family life as well as in your business life. Children do have demands on people's lives and I think it needs to be taken into account and so if the children are sick the workplace or work network needs to be supportive of that person" and "[T]he responsibilities are more when you are a working woman with children, because obviously it is not just focusing on work. As much as you need to focus on work, meet deadlines [and] the bottom lines, you also have a family. You tend to wear more hats. So you need more support. You need support at work in terms of understanding". This is supported in the literature.

Women's lives involve trade-offs between home and work (Lahtinen and Wilson, 1994) and, as a result, it is important for organisations to facilitate working mothers' advancement in management through improving institutional arrangements, such as child-care arrangements, flexible working hours and family leave (Lahtinen and Wilson, 1994).

The fourth secondary finding is that working mothers need support in their personal lives. This finding is supported by the following quotations: "Support at work and support at home [is critical] as well as the sharing of household responsibilities" and "[Y]ou need support at home, because you now need to strike a balance". This is supported in the literature. With the entry of women into the labour force, the need for domestic employment has increased in order to provide women with personal support, such as assistance with child-care and household responsibilities (Tayo, 2007).

A support system for working mothers at home (such as a supportive husband and a housekeeper) means that they can be comfortable in knowing that everyone is working together to make life easier (Ray, 1991). Women are more likely to benefit psychologically when they receive assistance, for example from their husband, in their household responsibilities (Moen, 1992).

The fifth secondary finding is that working mothers require additional support when their children are young. This finding is supported by the following quotations: "Women with children have more on their shoulders than their counterparts especially if the children are younger and still need more support from their mothers" and "I think when children are smaller [you need more support]. When my children were smaller and I first got divorced I needed a friend to help me with the children when I could not be there." This is supported in the literature.

The majority of married women with children under the

age of twelve are employed (Tayo, 2007). Combining family responsibilities with young children is difficult and, as a result, businesswomen need additional support, including equal parenting and responsibilities. This could assist women in their career development (Lahtinen and Wilson, 1994).

Regarding this finding, businesswomen perceive childminders as the source of additional support that working mothers require. This finding is illustrated by the following quotations: "Working mothers who have full-time stay-in childminders have less stress in terms of fetching and carrying kids or necessarily having to stay at home when kids are not well as opposed to a mom who does not have family support and has children in day-care" and "I think it is difficult being, let's say for example if you work for a company and you have to work for nine hours then it is a problem, because in terms of nursery, the crèches and all of those things, you still need to pick up your kids after hours, you need some sort of helper or a nanny you can rely on. A reliable person who can assist with [your] kids." This is supported in the literature.

Working women have various responsibilities (for example, work and child-care responsibilities). Ray (1991) states that working mothers need to have a housekeeper or child-care provider who can be there every day in order to help with these responsibilities. Tayo (2007) suggests that having domestic employment is advantageous for working women in that it provides them with child-care and helps with domestic chores.

Businesswomen also perceive lift clubs as another way in which working mothers can gain additional support. This finding is supported by the following quotations: "It is very difficult for a businesswoman if they do not have flexibility in their jobs, because I just think that if the organisation does not offer them any kind of flexibility then that is a problem. So the support structure there would revolve around things like lift clubs [...]" and "Sometimes you are called on at work to do things at odd hours. You never know when you are going to need someone to help you with a lift club." This is supported in the literature.

When working mothers' children need to be driven around and there is nobody to assist with this, it is seen as a challenge. Working mothers need to find facilities such as day-care centres that provide this function (Ray, 1991).

### **Networking challenges experienced by businesswomen**

The two main findings with regard to the networking challenges experienced by businesswomen are discussed in the following:

#### ***Women do not network well in business***

It was perceived by the participants that women do not

network well in business. This finding is supported by the following quotations: "I do not think women network, from a business point of view well." and "[M]y sense is that I think that women are a little behind in networking". This is supported in the literature. Women are less likely than men to utilise their networks effectively (for example, in organisations). This leads to men experiencing more career satisfaction in this regard (Van Emmerik et al., 2006).

### ***Women do not give as much network support as they are able to***

It was perceived by the participants that in terms of networking, women are not as supportive to each other as they could be. This finding is illustrated by the following quotation: "I do not think women help women in the work place and give network support as much as they could". However, this is disputed in the literature. In terms of networking, women help other women in business in that they provide business opportunities to women above others (Nierenberg, 2005).

### **Networking challenges experienced by businesswomen with children**

The main finding with regard to the networking challenges experienced by working mothers is discussed in the following:

### ***Working mothers miss out on networking opportunities***

Participants felt that working mothers miss out on networking opportunities because of their family obligations. This finding is supported by the following quotation: "I think specifically women with children do not always have the opportunity to network so much at work, because sometimes you will tend to find that women with children will have to come in early and they have to go again to chase back home to go and look after their families, whereas working women who are single will be [able to] work in sessions after work or drinks after work". This is supported in the literature. Working mothers are disadvantaged in terms of networking opportunities, as they have less time than men to network, owing to home and family commitments (Linehan, 2001; Linehan et al., 2001).

There are three findings secondary to this main finding. The first secondary finding is that women perceived themselves to be responsible for caring for their children. This finding is supported by the following quotation: "I think the responsibility nine out of ten times falls on the woman [for example] when the children are sick, school

work, homework, activities". This is supported in the literature.

Women still have more responsibilities than men in terms of home, family life and child-care (Gordon and Whelan-Berry, 2004). The responsibility brought on by children is seen as a challenge that prevents networking participation (Tonge, 2008), as women spend less time networking after work hours than men owing to their additional responsibilities (Linehan, 2001).

The second secondary finding is that working mothers experienced time constraints. This finding is supported by the following quotations: "If you are a working woman and [you have] no children, you have enough time and when you are a working mother you do not have enough time, because when you arrive at home you need to look at their homework" and "I think when you are a stay-at-home mother, although you are not less than a women that is working, you can plan your time accordingly. So you can choose to go and fetch your kids or not. Sometimes as a working mother, you cannot do that, it is not your choice.

When somebody says to you they want an appointment set up then, although that is the time to go and fetch the kids, that is the only time that people got". This is supported in the literature.

Time pressures in terms of work or personal commitments are seen as a networking challenge for women (Tonge, 2008). In order for working women to establish a balance with regard to their household, work and social activities, they must utilise their awake-time efficiently and to their best advantage (Ray, 1991).

The third secondary finding is that the stress levels of working mothers are perceived to be higher than those of stay-at-home mothers. This finding is supported by the following quotation: "In terms of a stay-at-home mom, you do not have the stress levels that a working woman has, so you might be busy with everything else that you do but you might not have the stress levels. I think a stay-at-home mothers do not know anything else. So as a working mom you have two levels that you are trying to work on. One is success of your business and one is the success of being a mother." This is supported in the literature.

Working mothers tend to experience stress as a result of work-home conflict. Working mothers experience great domestic burdens (McLean, 2002) and they have constant anxiety and stress, as they are the primary caretakers of their children (Ray, 1991) although they are employed outside the household.

### **Businesswomen's successful social networking behaviour**

There are seven main findings concerning businesswomen's successful social networking behaviour, which are discussed subsequently.

### ***Networking should be conducted with respect, integrity and love for other people***

Participants perceived respect as an important networker characteristic for successful networking. They felt that individuals should act with integrity and love for the people they network with. This finding is illustrated by the following quotation: "Networking, business and socially, should be operated [with] respect and love of people. If you are trustworthy people feel it and they want to do more with you and for you. So integrity is very important when you create networking relationships." This is supported in the literature.

Mutual respect and integrity are essential characteristics of successful networkers (Lindenfield and Lindenfield, 2005). Friendship, trust, respect and regard for other people are central to networking (White, 2004). In networking, respect amongst networkers is important in order to act with professional maturity (Lindenfield and Lindenfield, 2005).

There are two findings secondary to this main finding. The first secondary finding is that in networking, individuals should build a relationship with the role-players involved before selling their products or services to them.

This is supported by the following quotations: "You need to build a relationship with someone before you can sell something to them" and "the first thing is that when you go to a networking event, people are not going to talk to you on that first time basis. You cannot go to a networking event and think that you are going to sell your product. You are building relationships first before you actually start [selling]." This is supported in the literature.

The only objectives that individuals should have when meeting someone for the first time is to become acquainted with that person, build a relationship and determine common ground. When individuals are attending a networking event, they are there to find and develop contacts, not to sell their products or services (White, 2004).

The second secondary finding is that trust needs to be built before the networking relationship can be utilised. This finding is supported by the following quotations: "You need to gain the trust of the person that you want to do business with and that just does not come the first second you meet someone, that comes with the relationship with that person and you can only do that by engaging in dialogue and collaborating with them." and "there needs to be a personal relationship where trust is built with somebody." This is supported in the literature.

Trust is a key component of networking (Travers et al., 1997). Networking can only take place once individuals have established trust and rapport (White, 2004). Therefore, it is important to earn trust (Bannerman, 2006), as the establishment of trust leads to reciprocation, for example giving the same benefits as received (Boe, 1994).

### ***Networking is a continuous process***

Participants mentioned that ongoing endeavour and participation in a network makes individuals visible and facilitates continuous development of the network. This finding is supported by the following quotations: "I think you need to take ownership of your own networking. No one does it for you, so you got to work at it yourself" and "I think at the end of the day you should spend 80% of the time doing your job and 20% of the time selling yourself and that is the only way that you are going to get noticed and the only way that you are going to get recognised. Networking does not happen by accident. It is hard work." This is supported in the literature.

Bannerman (2006) suggests that individuals need to make networking a way of life and that networking is not something that is done whilst waiting for something to happen. Individuals need to be pro-active in networking and ensure that their networks do not stagnate (Nierenberg, 2005; Bannerman, 2006).

### ***Networking entails reciprocity***

Participants perceived reciprocity to be an important aspect of networking. An individual's networking efforts should consider the possibility of reciprocation. This finding is illustrated by the following quotations: "People should go into networking relationships to give and not really expect anything. The result is that what you give definitely comes back to you." and "You take what you need from [the network] as long as you give back and then people reciprocate." This is supported in the literature.

In networking, individuals may not instantly receive when they give, but they can give with the expectation that the exchange will be mutual at some point in the future, as reciprocity is a basic principle of networking (Lindenfield and Lindenfield, 2005).

There are two findings secondary to this main finding. The first secondary finding was that when individuals meet each other, they should concentrate on the people themselves (for example, their needs and the manner in which they can be assisted). This finding is supported by the following quotation: "It is not about grabbing; it is not asking for deals when you first meet them, you are talking to people to find out what you can do, what their needs are because you need to feed into their needs. You need to feed the people for them to trust you". This is supported in the literature. Networking involves meeting people, talking to them and learning about them. It further involves the networker telling them about herself or himself. Achieving this means that many people become acquainted with the networker and familiar with the manner in which the networker can assist them (Bannerman, 2006).

The second secondary finding is that individuals need

to give to the people in their network without expecting anything in return, as it will be reciprocated in the future. This finding is supported by the following quotation: "I believe in the pay-it-forward concept, to do something for someone else without expecting anything in return. You need to do something for someone else without expecting any payment for it, because in the future it definitely comes back to you and that is where your network starts." This is supported in the literature. Networking is about "paying it forward" and reaping the success of helping others (Bannerman, 2006).

In a typical networking situation, the individual gives generously with the expectation that the receiver will respond at some future point (Lindenfield and Lindenfield, 2005). Therefore, individuals should share information and not question the benefit it holds for them (Boe and Youngs, 1989).

### ***Clear networking objectives should be set***

Participants felt that individuals need to set clear networking objectives. The following secondary findings are discussed as part of the aforementioned theme. There are two findings secondary to this main finding.

The first secondary finding is that individuals need to have clear networking objectives in relationships. This is supported by the following quotations: "You need to put your pride in your pocket and ask people and tell people what you are about and ask people for help." and "So you need to open up and let people into your life, so that they can understand your life in order to support you." This is supported in the literature.

Boe and Youngs (1989) suggest that people have always used their network contacts to gain what they need. Networkers need to be open-minded and not be afraid to ask for something (Boe and Youngs, 1989).

The second secondary finding is that when attending a networking event, it is important to have a clear objective in mind. This finding is supported by the following quotation: "At a networking event you need to make it very clear why you are there." This is supported in the literature. When attending an event, it is critical that networkers have a plan and know their motivations for attending the specific event. If networkers are not clear about their objectives in attending an event, they will not achieve networking success (Kay, 2004).

### ***Confidence should be portrayed***

Participants perceived confidence to be another important characteristic of successful networkers. Participants concluded that confidence is important when attending networking events. This finding is supported by the following quotation: "So if you are going to something like that, you first need to be confident." This is supported

in the literature. Individuals need to be positive and outwardly confident when attending a networking event, as it will make them stand out above the other people attending the event (Kay, 2004).

### ***All available networking opportunities can be utilised***

Participants concluded that it is important to make use of the networking organisations available to women within their organisations. This finding is supported by the following quotation: "I would say that every women in this organisation should join (the internal networking organisation), because that is how you are going to build relationships, there are too many women that sit at their desk that do not know what the person in the next department does day-to-day. There is no appreciation for what people from out their sphere of reference do". This is supported in the literature.

Individuals need to take advantage of every networking opportunity, as it is important to make connections with colleagues on every occasion (Kay, 2004). Within the work setting, individuals need to connect with key individuals, such as human resource managers (Lindenfield and Lindenfield, 2005); therefore, ways to socialise with them (coffee breaks within organisations) need to be found (Lindenfield and Lindenfield, 2005).

There is one finding secondary to this main finding. The secondary finding is that individuals should make use of the networking mechanisms available, as these allow them to meet people outside their sphere of reference. This finding is illustrated by the following quotations: "I would say they need to leverage whatever mechanism that is available. So work hard at it and leverage any mechanism that is available to you to develop your network" and "within business the training initiatives that we have, utilise that." This is supported in the literature.

Socialising with colleagues during coffee breaks, for example, is an informal way of building relationships (Lindenfield and Lindenfield, 2005). It is important for businesswomen to network within their organisation, as it allows them to communicate with their superiors. It also allows them to communicate with the people who will assist them in performing their job successfully (Bannerman, 2006).

### ***Networking behaviour to avoid***

Participants perceived various behaviours that hinder successful networking efforts. These include being impolite, not honouring meetings, disrespecting and taking advantage of other people and negativity. The following quotation is used to support this finding: "Killers of network relationships, socially and business-wise, include being impolite, not honouring meetings and not apologising for being late, disrespect for others, laziness

and taking advantage of others and negativity, for example racial jokes.”

Being impolite is a poor networking behaviour that is detrimental to successful networking efforts. This is support in the literature. It is important to be polite at all times when networking (Kay, 2004; Bannerman, 2006). Participants felt that not honouring meetings is also a poor networking behaviour that hinders successful networking. This is support in the literature.

Bannerman (2006) suggests that punctual people do not make excuses for being late (for example, traffic jams). They allow time for unforeseen difficulties. A person who honours networking meetings is considered credible (Misner and Morgan, 2000). Disrespect for other people was also perceived as a poor networking behaviour in the way of successful networking efforts. This is supported in the literature.

Mutual respect is an important element in networks (Lindenfield and Lindenfield, 2005). Taking advantage of the people with whom an individual networks hinders successful networking efforts. This is supported in literature. Individuals bothering, pestering and using others to further their career, or gain more customers for their business is a challenge in the way of successful networking (Tullier, 2004).

In networking, an individual must not take advantage of the other networkers (Lindenfield and Lindenfield, 2005). Participants felt that negativity is a poor networking behaviour in the way of successful networking. This is supported in the literature. Bannerman (2006) suggests that in networking it is important to be positive all the time.

## Conclusion

In order to fulfil the primary research objective, the first secondary objective was to investigate businesswomen's perceptions of social networking practices. The findings provide background to the social networking perceptions, expectations and needs of businesswomen in terms of social networking practices. The findings indicate that businesswomen may inhibit themselves through their perceptions of their networks and their own networking abilities and opportunities, as opposed to those of their male counterparts.

From the literature review, it is evident that business women need support and from the findings, it is evident that businesswomen can utilise their social networks in order to gain the support needed. The findings further provide businesswomen with background on the types of support they need and the sources of support they can utilise in order to gain this support. This can assist businesswomen to advance their careers and achieve work-home balance.

The second secondary objective was concerned with the networking challenges that businesswomen

experience in their social networking efforts. To date, limited research has been conducted on the social networking challenges of businesswomen. In order to assist businesswomen in gaining work-home balance and in excelling in the business environment, it is necessary to understand the networking challenges that they might experience. The findings provide businesswomen with a background of the challenges they may experience in the business environment.

The third secondary objective was concerned with the challenges that businesswomen with children experience in their social networking efforts. The social networking practices of businesswomen with children have not been researched from a business perspective in particular. The findings provide businesswomen with children with a background on the challenges they may experience in the business environment.

The fourth secondary objective was concerned with investigating businesswomen's successful social networking behaviour. The findings confirm the importance of various networker characteristics that have been widely recorded in the literature, such as respect, trust, reciprocity and portraying confidence when networking. Important aspects of networking that were mentioned by the participants and that are not widely emphasised in the literature include building relationships with other networkers before utilising the network relationship, networking as a continuous process, the setting of objectives in networking and the utilisation of all networking opportunities.

Within the business context, limited research has been conducted on the undesirable behaviours and characteristics that businesswomen should eliminate from their social networking efforts in order to ensure social networking success. The findings are that business women should avoid being impolite, not honouring meetings, disrespect, taking advantage of fellow networkers and negativity.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, two recommendations are made. These recommendations are intended to assist businesswomen in their social networking practices. From a business perspective, it was concluded in the study that businesswomen can benefit from organisations providing support. It is therefore recommended that: (a) organisations develop internal social networking training initiatives; and (b) that businesswomen attend these internal training initiatives that may assist them in developing successful social networking skills (such as being respectful of other networkers). It is also advisable for businesswomen to attend any internal networking opportunities that an organisation might offer. This will help to reduce the business challenges that they experience (such as

businesswomen with children missing out on networking opportunities).

It was observed in the study that businesswomen also need personal support. The use of their social networks and other sources of support (such as child minders and lift clubs) identified in the study might help them in this regard. It is therefore recommended that businesswomen seek and accept assistance from their social networks in order to lessen their burden of singly managing work and home responsibilities. This will contribute to an improved work-home balance.

## LIMITATIONS

The study has demonstrated promising results; however, some limitations have been noted, including:

(a) Owing to their personal and work deadlines, it was difficult to recruit many businesswomen as participants in the study. It was difficult for the businesswomen to fit the interviews into their schedules and they had limited time to participate in the interviews.

(b) With purposive sampling the sample members are chosen with a specific purpose in mind. The aforementioned leads to the sample not being representative (Tustin et al., 2005). This is also the case with snowball sampling. It is difficult to ensure representation of the population when using snowball sampling (De Klerk, 2006). While care was taken to include as much of a representative sample as possible considering the limitation in the foregoing, the sample consisted of mostly white women with no children under the age of twelve and only included businesswomen in the Gauteng Province. As a result, the research findings cannot be generalised to businesswomen in other provinces, for example.

(c) The interviews were conducted during busy and noisy times in a coffee shop and these disturbances made the recording of the interviews difficult. Additional disturbances included the waiter bringing the account, loud music playing at times and a noisy parking lot.

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