

1-1-2012

# Extreme Branding: Examining Brand Devotion of Fashion Companies by Customers Using Social Media

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EXTREME BRANDING: EXAMINING BRAND DEVOTION OF FASHION COMPANIES BY  
CUSTOMERS USING SOCIAL MEDIA

by

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A Major Research Paper  
presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in the Program of  
Fashion

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

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Author's declaration page

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## Abstract

Extreme Branding: Examining Brand Devotion of Fashion Companies by Customers  
Using Social Media

Master of Arts in Fashion, 2012

Caroline Czajkowski

Fashion

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This paper looks at how social media is used as part of company branding to encourage customer loyalty. The research presents a case study of lululemon and its Facebook page and customer product review page to illustrate the importance of social media, using content analysis to interpret the data gathered. The case study shows evidence that a brand community exists on lululemon's Facebook page, illustrating the importance of social media to customers. The paper concludes that because customers have a high level of involvement in social media, companies would benefit from maintaining a high level of involvement in that same media. The paper suggests that further research could determine whether the involvement of companies via social media does affect their level of loyalty.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to those who helped me with my research and in writing my paper by editing, commenting, going through pages of data, and offering guidance and support when I needed it.

My advisor, Dr. Tasha Lewis  
and second reader Joseph Medaglia

Family and Friends  
Liliana Czajkowska  
Romuald Czajkowski

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## Introduction

Brand logos and images are the most visible aspects of the retail world. Having a brand that stands out among the rest is one of the keys to success. The same idea applies in apparel retail, where companies want to be easily recognized by customers. Many customers have brands they prefer, and in some cases this preference can turn into a fierce devotion. Those loyal consumers are repeat buyers, constantly purchasing new items from the company. They are vocal about their love for the brand and will defend the brand and their devotion to it. These customers will sometimes form online communities in which they discuss the brand and its products, ask questions, and offer advice and answers. This paper explores the phenomenon of this devotion through the case study of lululemon athletica, a brand experiencing this trend, and examines this company's use of social media to encourage and maintain a brand-devoted community.

Lululemon began as a yoga apparel company. Its first store opened in 1998 in Vancouver, Canada, and from there the company's popularity exploded. Lululemon now has stores in Canada, the United States, Australia, and Hong Kong ("about us"). In 2011 lululemon had 122 stores in North America and the company's revenue reached CAD\$212.3 million (Taylor). While these numbers show the financial success of the company, this study aims to look behind the numbers and learn from the customers—those who are propelling lululemon's success. From the gym to the street, from yoga to grocery shopping, lululemon has expanded its line of apparel. What started as yoga wear, targeting a niche yoga market, has become sports wear and casual wear, with a growing number of women spending increasing amounts of



money on lululemon products (Urstadt). Lululemon's increasing popularity is in large part due to its customers and rising sales, and the company seems to be aware of the importance of its customers' experience in its stores: customer service appears to entice the clients, making them feel more comfortable. For example, customers are referred to as "guests" (Nelson) and the customer service centre is referred to as a Guest Education Centre (GEC) ("contact us"). When customers are trying on clothes in the fitting rooms, employees write their name on the door so that they can address them directly, making the experience more personal. The popularity of the company's products is visible on the streets of Canadian and American cities, with many customers wearing the fitness apparel as casual wear (Urstadt; Walker, "Marketing Pose"). While Lululemon's customers believe that the product is high-quality yoga wear that is superior to its competitors, they also enjoy how stylish the items are and the image they portray when wearing the brand: that is, of people who are into yoga and a healthy lifestyle (Urstadt).

Accompanying lululemon's presence on the streets is the company's popularity online. The clothing company hosts warehouse sales that have hours-long line-ups to get in, there seems to be a growing demand for their products, and there are blogs dedicated to the company ("lululemon addict"; Urstadt). Customers of lululemon are so loyal that they fervently promote and defend the brand online. As of September 2011, lululemon's Facebook page had over 300,000 people who "like" them ("lululemon athletica"). In comparison, competing Canadian fitness apparel company Lole has just over 4,300 "likes" on Facebook (Reuters; "Lole Women on Facebook"; Lole Women). Gap Inc.—another competitor with their new

line of athletic wear, Athleta (“Athleta”)—has just over 37,000 “likes” on their Facebook page (“Athleta Clothing”). These numbers show how large lululemon’s online community is compared to some of its closest competitors. This paper’s case study of lululemon will explore what creates a strong customer devotion to a brand—specifically, how social media is used to create an online community for brand-devoted customers to foster this zeal.

Observations of lululemon’s growing consumer popularity led to this study’s first research question, approached from the perspective of the consumer: *How do customers create loyal followings around a certain brand using social media?* This research focuses on social media because lululemon’s Facebook page seems to have evidence of a brand community, with customers discussing products and answering each other’s questions. To find an answer to the research question, this study will look at lululemon’s online community, focusing on the customer reviews on its website and on its Facebook page, to find the answers to the following sub-questions:

- i) Do customers assemble around a brand due to the level of customer service received in the online community? A quick glance at lululemon’s Facebook page reveals that the company responds to customer posts, suggesting an affirmative answer.
- ii) Do customers assemble around a brand because of the brand’s popularity? Is there a crowd effect occurring? Is there conspicuous labelling with brand or logo visibility that customers want to display?

iii) Do customers assemble around a brand because of a perceived or actual quality or functionality of the product? Looking at whether customers are discussing lululemon's product quality online may reveal an answer.

iv) Do the customers feel involved in the brand? Does this increase customer loyalty?

The second research question looks at branding via social media from the company's perspective: *What role, if any, does the company play in encouraging extremely loyal customer behaviour via social media?* To find the answer to this question, we will look at the following sub-questions:

i) What is the company's level of involvement in maintaining an online community? The company's frequency in posting on Facebook and responding to customers on both Facebook and on their own site to the customer product reviews may provide insight to the answer.

ii) What kind of customer service, if any, does the company offer, and is it promoted to the online community? What policies do they offer in terms of customer service (return, warranty, repair, alterations, etc.)?

iii) Does the company try to involve customers in the brand image? If so, how?

Looking at the types of responses lululemon gives its customers may help to answer these last two questions.

## Literature Review

An abundance of literature can be found on the topics of branding and brand loyalty, such as articles by Kevin Keller, Pamela Alreck, and Robert Settle. Rather than looking at the traditional ideas that marketing and business schools of thought hold about branding, such as fashion marketing that is “focused on the styles” of the garments and “on their quality and newness” (Manlow, 86), for this study it seemed better suited to focus on more non-traditional forms of branding, such as emotional branding and social media as a form of branding. Lululemon’s success is increasing without the aid of traditional means of advertising; therefore, looking at non-traditional forms of branding may be helpful in better understanding how its customer base is growing. This includes examinations of branding based on emotions, brand communities and social media, and what is being said about lululemon in news articles and magazines.

While discussions of fashion branding can be found in the research available on the topic of branding, there is very little mention of lululemon. This could be due in part to the fact that the brand is relatively young: no research has been done on it yet. One book that does mention lululemon is Bridget Brennan’s *Why She Buys*. Brennan discusses some of the selling aspects that have made lululemon successful with women—who make up the majority of the company’s target market (Brennan 257-261). An article in *New York Magazine* discusses lululemon’s popularity in terms of sales, using anecdotes about how much money some women spend in one trip and how much an older lululemon item sells for on eBay (Urstadt). Rob Walker writes about lululemon’s rising popularity and its expansion beyond yoga gear, and

mentions a few things lululemon has met criticism over (Walker “Marketing Pose”). It has been claimed, for example, that a certain lululemon garment would “release marine amino acids, minerals and vitamins into the skin upon contact with moisture”; this was later proven to be false (Lazarus). Also discussed in the media was Christine Day’s challenge as CEO to increase the number of stores and company’s success while staying true to the company’s culture and avoiding the feeling of a chain store (Lazarus). The company culture is reflected in its manifesto, which can be found on its website and includes such sayings as, “Do one thing a day that scares you,” “Friends are more important than money,” and “The world is changing at such a rapid rate that waiting to implement changes will leave you 2 steps behind. Do it now, do it now, do it now!” (“our manifesto”). Some articles have compared the company’s customer following to a cult, stating that “a cult following is the most coveted accessory in retail,” and these articles also discuss how the company has managed to create such a devoted group of customers without using any traditional advertising (Sacks and Berlin 94). Others have pointed to lululemon’s offer of free clothing to local yoga instructors in exchange for product feedback (Shiffman). When these various elements are put together, it becomes easier to begin to visualize lululemon’s branding method. It seems that non-traditional branding and marketing is gaining popularity in today’s competitive markets.

Rob Walker provides a straightfoward definition of branding: it is the “process of attaching an idea to a product” (Walker *Buying In* 8). The author then writes, “if a product is successfully tied to an idea, branding persuades people—

whether they admit it to pollsters or even fully understand it themselves—to consume the idea by consuming the product” (Walker, *Buying In* 8). Walker’s book *Buying In: The Secret Dialogue Between What We Buy and Who We Are* examines the marketing behind some of the more successful brands and their campaigns, and looks at why consumers purchase certain products. Moving forward in more non-traditional ideas of branding, Kevin Clark writes about brand loyalty with a new term, “Brandscendence.” The author describes this as “a brand that exceeds; a brand that is superior or supreme over time” (Clark xvi). In his book, Clark writes about what makes an enduring brand and what gives it the quality that makes it “brandscendence.” Walker’s and Clark’s works help move branding beyond its traditional definitions to encompass the newer ideas that companies have been using to find success. In general, most companies want their brands to be enduring and want their customers to buy into the brand lifestyle. One way that companies have been attracting lifelong customers is through the use of emotions.

Neil Duffy and Jo Hooper write about the new form of branding as “passion branding,” and they discuss how to create it in their book of the same name. In the authors’ words, “passion branding is about harnessing the power of people’s passion to build strong brands and drive the bottom line” (Duffy & Hooper 2). They discuss the fact that consumers do not just want a product these days, they want a whole experience to go with it (Duffy & Hooper 6). The authors write how passion branding can be used to build brand loyalty, which can result in “influencing purchase behaviour” (Duffy & Hooper 38). Passion branding is more of an act that marketers and branding managers can engage in to create passion in their

consumers. But there are also passion brands. Kate Newlin writes about what makes a brand a passion brand, which is “one with which we have a relationship more powerful than those we have with many human beings” (Newlin 18). She writes how “a passion brand is a brand you form such a personal attachment to that it becomes an indelible aspect of your identity, even when no one is looking,” and how the relationship a person has with that brand can lead them to re-evaluate their relationships with others (Newlin 18). This type of attachment, where consumers are intimately tied to their preferred brands, can be seen as brand love.

Some studies have in fact looked into these kinds of attachments. Barbara Carroll and Aaron Ahuvia define brand love “as the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name” (Carroll & Ahuvia 81). They show that “brand love is a meaningful mode of consumer satisfaction that is linked to desirable post-consumption behaviour” (Carroll & Ahuvia 86). Marc Gobé’s book *Emotional Branding* is about how consumers can attach emotion to products, and how emotional aspects can be used to set a company’s products apart from others and to attract customers and retain customers’ loyalty. In discussing the fact that products have emotional aspects, the author writes, “by emotional, I mean how a brand engages consumers on the level of the sense and emotions; how a brand comes to life for people and forges a deeper, lasting connection” (Gobé xviii). Consumers can make emotional attachments to brands, sometimes even forming a type of relationship with them.

A recent study by Hye-Young Kim and Yoo Jin Kwon from 2011 looks at whether the relationships college students in the United States form with brands are

similar to those formed among humans. They write in their findings that while students' relationships with brands are not the same as those they have with other humans, "they may behave with retailer brands as if they have a relationship with them" (Kim & Kwon 78). If customers are forming relationships with their brands, it is easy to see how that would affect brand loyalty. The authors found that students who classified their relationships to brands as "soulmates" do, in fact, simulate "single-brand, exclusive loyalty" (Kim & Kwon 78).

Just as customers can form relationships with brands, companies understand the need to form relationships with their customers. Many companies have some form of customer relationship management in place to keep their customers happy. Customer relationship management encompasses how companies create, maintain, and strengthen relationships with their customers (Vence 12). Customer relationship management may be a contributing factor to why customers are so devoted to certain brands. More and more companies understand that keeping customers happy and satisfied is part of the key to success. An article by Kevin Keller discusses various ways to manage brand equity and customers in a "multichannel, multimedia retail environment" (Keller 58). In the article, Keller mentions the "customer-based brand equity model," which states that the "power of a brand lies in what customers have learned, felt, seen, and heard about the brand as a result of their experiences over time," and that to create a strong brand, "marketers must ensure that customers have the right type of experiences with their products and services" (Keller 60). This model can be seen as a type of customer relationship management, where it is essential to keep the customer



satisfied with the brand. Pamela Alreck and Robert Settle provide guidelines on how to attract and keep customers that are also based on the idea of building a “durable relationship between a specific brand and a particular customer group” (Alreck and Settle 130).

While companies do what they can to manage and shape the relationships customers make with their brands, customers can also form relationships with each other. These types of relationships can start with a small group of people and grow into a larger community that can be labeled a “brand community.” Extensive literature can be found on communities in general, and more specifically on brand communities. One such study places the emphasis on the customer, stating that the community exists and revolves around the customer experience rather than the brand (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 39). Another study focuses on communities that form around a brand. Albert Muniz, Jr. and Thomas O’Guinn discuss the idea of a brand community in which the community members come together because of the brand they share in common. The authors describe a brand community as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand. It is specialized because at its center is a branded good or service” (Muniz, Jr. and O’Guinn 412). Muniz, Jr. and O’Guinn found that brand communities had “three essential markers of community,” including “consciousness of kind,” “rituals and traditions, and “moral responsibility” (Muniz, Jr. and O’Guinn 418-424). What is interesting to note is the authors’ observation that “brand communities carry out important functions on behalf of the brand, such as sharing information, perpetuating the history and

culture of the brand, and providing assistance” (Muniz, Jr. and O’Guinn 427). These last examples are the types of activities that can be seen on lululemon’s Facebook page, with users answering questions that others post and sharing information about sales or where to find hard-to-find items. It is possible to speculate, then, that lululemon customers who use its Facebook page have formed a brand community. This may also mark the beginnings of a brand community wherein users of the page create their own rituals and traditions and form a moral responsibility to one another and to the brand.

Brand communities are abundant on the Internet, especially in social media. The term social media encompasses some of the many ways people connect with each other on the Internet, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google+. One study defines social media as “a broad range of online platforms, such as social networking sites, brand-sponsored virtual worlds, open virtual worlds, video and photo communities, and social news” (Petrescu and Korgaonkar 212). The same study also specifies that social media is focused on the social aspect, such as “communication, information sharing, keeping in touch with friends, and finding new friends” (Petrescu and Korgaonkar 212). Blogs are one example of social media (Akar and Topçu 36).

There are several blogs dedicated to lululemon and its products, and a Google search of the term “lululemon blog” produces a vast number of results (although these hits include blogs with a single post about lululemon or any other page that includes the words “lululemon” and “blog,” so this number is not an accurate representation of how many blogs there are). Two such examples are “lululemon

addict,” which posts reviews, photos, and comments about the company’s products, and “lulumum,” which discusses products along with the author’s physical activities and training; (“lululemon addict”; “lulumum”). These two blogs are good examples to consider because they are updated on a regular basis with new posts about lululemon products. The existence of blogs that focus on the company and their products illustrates another form of media that is being used as a way for customers to express their loyalty to the company.

While social media may have started with the general public using them to stay connected, companies quickly saw the benefits of being involved in those conversations. Whether for updating customers with information or sharing inspirational ideas, companies are using social media in different ways. Many brands have begun to understand how social media can be used to generate customer loyalty (Kimberley). Among the companies using social media in the United Kingdom, those with the largest followings are fashion brands: Burberry, ASOS, and Topshop (Kimberley). Lululemon has a web team as part of its GEC that works on the company’s Facebook page, responding to customers and sharing information about new products (“behind the wall”; “what’s up at the GEC”). The titles held by employees include “Online Community Manager” and “Director of Digital Guest Experience” (“fresh faces Friday”; “lululemon is”).

The popularity of fashion brands in the social media market may be explained by “the increasingly important role that such sites play in influencing consumers’ online purchasing decisions” (Kimberley). It has been noted that of the consumers shopping online, 50% will read the customer reviews on an item, and

16% “have actually been influenced by this information when making a purchase” (Kimberley). A customer’s opinion of an item can change for the better or worse when reading these reviews, and more and more companies are beginning to understand the importance of this type of information. Product reviews can be posted anywhere, from the company’s own website, to its Facebook page, to a third-party site, to a personal blog.

But it is not only reviews that customers are writing about; social media is increasingly being used as a way for customers to leave feedback and suggestions on their favourite products (“Social Media Is Fashion’s Newest Muse”). These types of posts have opened the door for communication between companies and their customers, and many companies have begun to listen. For example, lululemon uses Facebook to discover what customers want, such as which sizes and styles are most popular (Strauss). Rather than waiting to see which items have been selling in the stores, lululemon can find out directly from the customers what they want (Strauss). Using customer feedback from social media, the company has made changes to clothing items, from “where pockets sit on pants to the placement of waistbands on running shorts” (“Social Media Is Fashion’s Newest Muse”). News articles have quoted lululemon CEO Christine Day stating that the company uses Facebook and social media to learn about customer demands (Strauss; “Social Media is Fashion’s Newest Muse”). Lululemon is thus using social media to gauge feedback from customers and manage their brand. By adapting to customer requests and fulfilling their demands, the company is keeping its customers happy, which is likely to foster customer loyalty. Also, the customers who are happy are likely the ones who are

posting positive comments on the company's Facebook page and writing positive product reviews on lululemon's website, which can be seen as reinforcing lululemon's brand.

However, there is always the possibility that a dissatisfied customer will post a negative review. On lululemon's product review pages, negative reviews are mixed in with the positive, and lululemon leaves the negative reviews for customers to see. One study suggests that companies that choose to have an area for discussion on their site should leave up the negative comments, or even respond to them, in an effort to portray the area as being "unmanipulated" (Bickart and Schindler 38). Lululemon not only leaves the negative reviews up, it also responds to some of them, offering to help the customer through customer service. While positive reviews can influence others who read them into trying lululemon's products, seeing lululemon offer customer service to dissatisfied customers can also positively influence potential customers. If a customer sees that they will be taken care of when they are dissatisfied with something, they may feel that there is less risk to trying it—or may even develop an appreciation for a company that gives the impression of caring for its customers. Customers who have had their concerns addressed by the company may also spread positive word of mouth about how they have been treated. Thus, the customers who post product reviews and share their opinions about the company can benefit building that brand's equity.

Some marketers are now encouraging brands to venture beyond their own websites and put their messages on third-party sites, such as Facebook or blogs (Strugatz, "Untangling the Web"). A study conducted by Barbara Bickart and Robert

Schindler found that participants who read online forums generated more interest in a topic than participants who read about that topic on a corporate website (Bickart and Schindler 36). Brands are also urged to encourage customers to post their opinions on third-party sites, rather than simply posting on the company's website (Strugatz, "Untangling the Web"). For example, fashion brand Tory Burch has a Facebook page, a Twitter account, and a Tumblr blog that are updated regularly to connect with its customers (Strugatz, "Untangling the Web"). US department store Macy's has Facebook pages for its individual locations to connect on a more local level with its customers, in the same way that lululemon has individual Facebook pages for each of its stores (Strugatz, "Next Step"). Taking Facebook to the next level, fashion brand Rachel Roy initiated "F-commerce," or "Facebook commerce," which is essentially online shopping of a brand's products through Facebook rather than through a traditional online store (Strugatz, "Next Step"). While it is still a relatively new venture, having only begun in early 2010, F-commerce is being touted as "the next big thing in digital for 2012" and Facebook is being predicted as the "medium that will have the most impact in the coming year" (Strugatz, "Next Step").

## Methodology

### *Facebook*

This research paper undertook a content analysis of social media to determine what customers post online about lululemon and also how lululemon responds to its customers online. Because customers post many opinions on lululemon's Facebook page—including comments on products, service, and the brand overall—an analysis of the Facebook posts provides a way to evaluate the various elements of brand loyalty and community. Lululemon employees from the company's head office often respond to customer questions and comments on the Facebook page. The Facebook page is host to opinions and reviews of lululemon products, as well as user questions about the company's products. Therefore, this study performed a content analysis of customer comments on Facebook and lululemon comments and replies posted in response to those customer posts. The company's web team tends to post most comments on weekdays, with fewer comments posted on weekends, in accordance with their customer service hours. Therefore, examining comments that occurred over the weekend would not yield the same results, as they occurred less frequently. The results of this study agree with Thomas, MacInnis, and Park's statement that there is "a need for fashion marketers and retailers to closely monitor communication within virtual communities" (Thomas, MacInnis, and Park 587), and this is what lululemon seems to be doing by monitoring and replying to Facebook posts.

### *Questionnaires*

Questionnaires were to be completed by several lululemon employees who work on lululemon's online presence and respond to the comments on the company's Facebook and review pages, such as the Director of Digital Guest Experience. The focus of the questionnaires was to determine what, if anything, lululemon does to encourage or keep the behaviour of their devoted customers. For a working list of questions, see Appendix A. The decision was made to use questionnaires for several reasons: first, the participants would be able to respond to questions in their own words and their answers could be used word for word as examples, if needed (if clarification of an answer were needed, the researcher could send follow-up questions); second, participants could take as little or as much time as they needed to answer questions (providing that they returned the questionnaires by the specified date); third, as the questions relate to the company they work for, participants who were unsure how much information they could divulge had time to consult with their supervisor/manager.

Initial contact with the lululemon head office occurred via e-mail. An employee was invited to participate and was asked to send the researcher the names and e-mail addresses of three employees who may also be willing to participate.

### *Analysis*

This research analyzed the comments posted on lululemon's Facebook "wall" on Thursdays over a three-month long period. Lululemon posted new products on its own website each Thursday; they also posted images or links on their Facebook



page, directing customers to the new products on their website. Many users commented on Facebook on the same day about the new items that appeared on lululemon's website. It was thus because of the number of comments spurred by the popularity of new product arrivals that the sample comments used for analysis were taken from comments posted on Thursdays. The three-month period analyzed was from September to November 2011, which included the end of the back-to-school sales period and included the very beginning of the holiday sales period ("Census Bureau News Facts"; Holmes). Including the end of one popular sale season and the lead-up to another yielded plenty of traffic on lululemon's Facebook page and provided a large amount of data to analyze. During the three-month study period, an average of 35 comments were posted on lululemon's wall each Thursday, ranging from general comments to questions and concerns, to wanting to find/trade/sell an item. Over these three months, a total of 36 comments were posted by lululemon and 454 comments were posted by customers on Thursdays.

Data was collected from Facebook using the following method. On lululemon's Facebook page, the setting for the comments was changed to show posts from everyone (the default setting on lululemon's Facebook page is to show only comments posted by lululemon). Lululemon's Facebook page shows only the most recent comments when it is first opened; to see more comments on the page, the option at the bottom to view more comments must be selected to reveal all the comments from a given date. Facebook shows the most recent week's comments with only the day of the week (e.g., Monday): for this reason, the researcher had to wait until the following Wednesday to gather the comments from the preceding

Thursday, so that the date (and not simply the day of the week) appeared underneath the comment. Once all the comments from the given date were fully visible, the pages were saved as a PDF file to be used for analysis.

A content analysis was performed on the data from the posts. Content analysis determines how often certain themes or words are found within the content being examined (Bouma 80); the comments were thus analyzed to determine if any recurring themes linked them. The comments were first categorized into “general comments” and “questions.” They were then categorized according to the topics they addressed, such as products, customer service, or general expression of opinion of the brand. It was also noted what types of posts, comments or questions, and what topics lululemon responded to.

Two researchers coded and compared the data independently and compared results. One researcher’s coding was more general, looking at whether posts were comments or questions and determining their topics, while the other’s focused more on the topic of the post. The first researcher’s results gave a broader analysis, while the second researcher’s results were more detailed and complemented the first set of results. For example, one researcher split the posts into questions and comments, and made note of the category to which the comment referred, such as quality or a specific item. The other researcher grouped comments in terms such as customer inquiry and product info, and general comments and customer service, which in many cases were easily aligned with the first researcher’s questions and comments categories. Because similar categories were used by both researchers, the two sets of data were used together—as the breakdown of categories showed similar results

in terms of which topics were seen most frequently and which topics lululemon responded to.

### *Product Reviews*

The customer product reviews on lululemon's website were also analyzed. The study used the top three most rated products for both women's and men's clothing, and analyzed the reviews posted from the most recent three months (the same three-month period that was used to analyze lululemon's Facebook comments). The reviews were categorized to see whether they provided i) a simple opinion of the product or a customer's personal experience about it or ii) a more detailed review. A review was considered to be a detailed analysis if it seemed to offer advice to other readers that influenced whether they would purchase the product, such as describing the fit of the garment (for instance whether it is true to size or not) or the way it wears over time. A review was classified as a simple opinion if it only stated whether the reviewer liked the garment or not. This category also included reviews based on personal experience: these focused on elements such as the reviewer's colour preference or purchasing experience, which were not considered to be helpful advice on whether to purchase the item.

Another element analyzed was lululemon's response to the reviews. Lululemon employees monitor the reviews and often post responses to customer's concerns. The responses were categorized according to whether the response was to a positive, neutral, or negative review. Lululemon does not remove negative reviews, but rather responds to them and leaves them up for other customers to see.

This analysis will provide information about lululemon's customer service and how it treats customers who post concerns they have with an item.

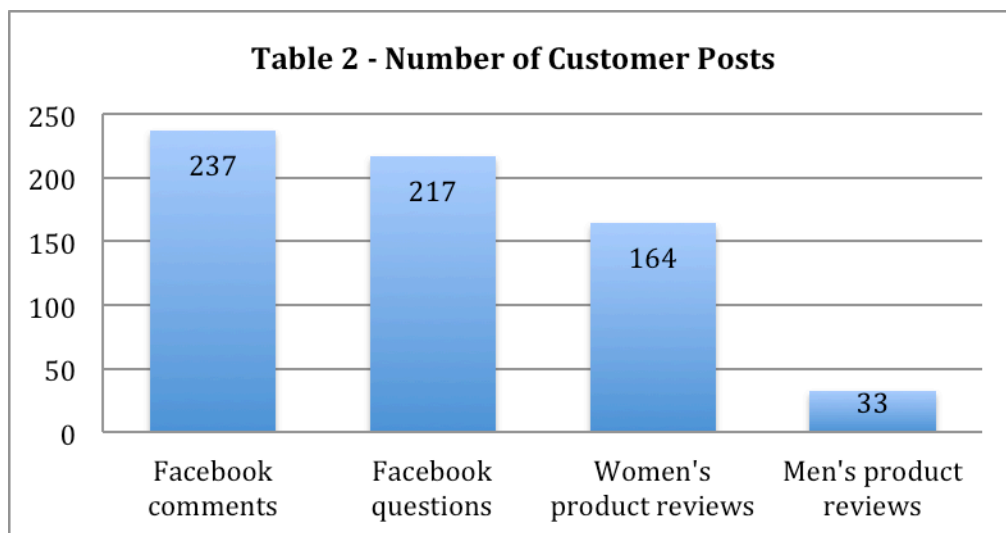
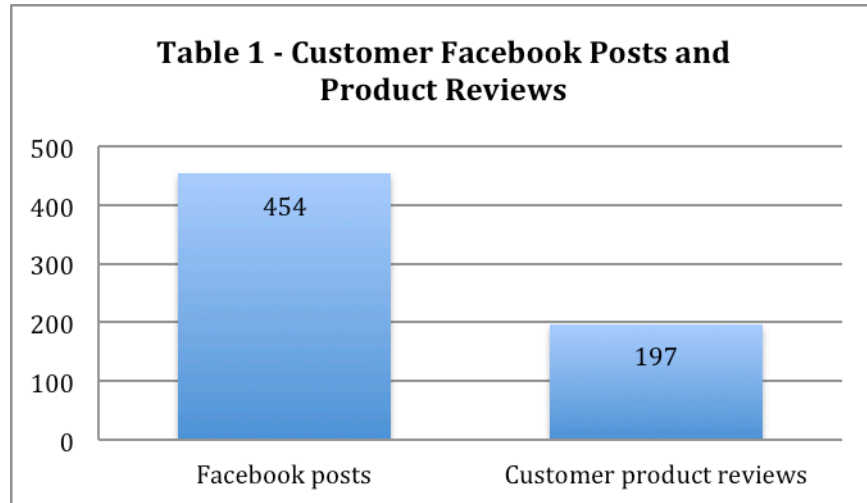
## Findings

### *Facebook Data*

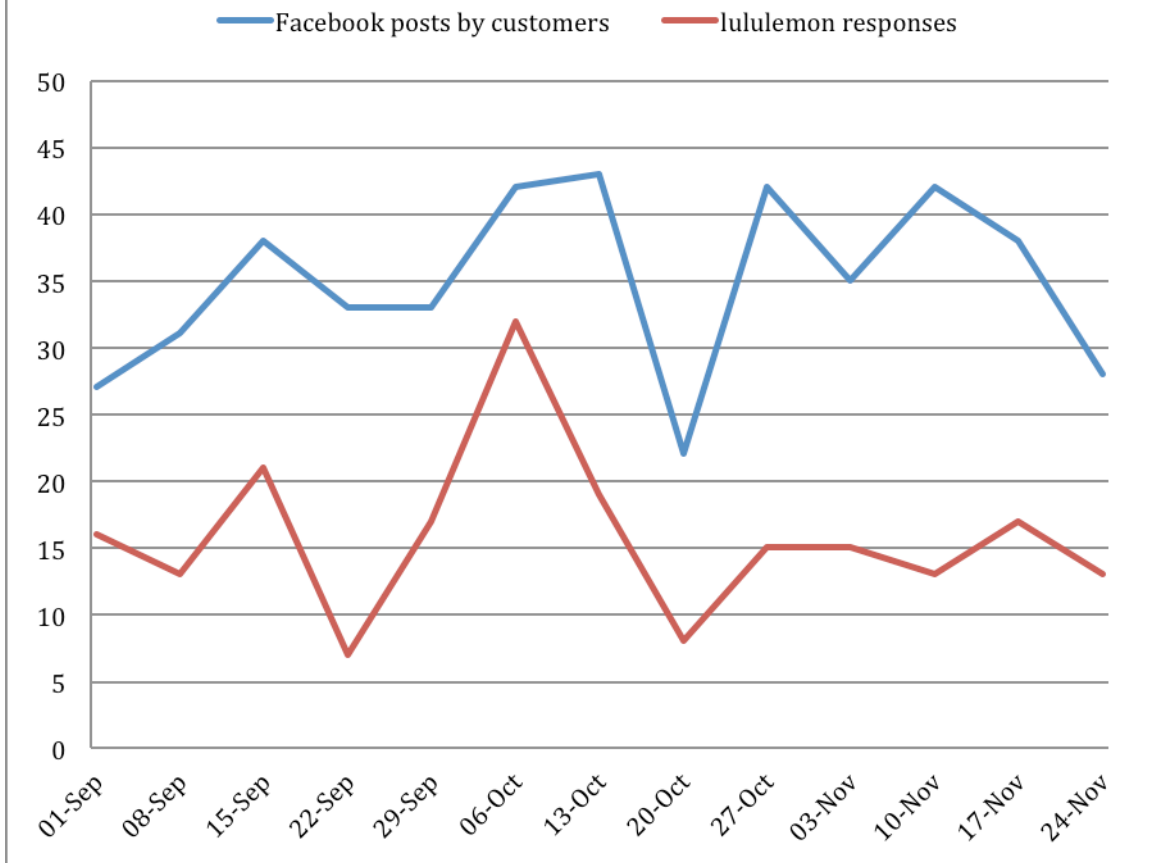
This study examined the Facebook posts from each Thursday between September 2011 and November 2011. This three-month period was chosen because it encompasses two popular sale seasons, the end of the back-to-school sales season and the very beginning of the holiday sales season (“Census Bureau News Facts”; Holmes). Only the main posts on lululemon’s “wall” were examined, leaving out customer comments, or cascades, that were generated in response to those posts. The comments were excluded from the data count because the cascades varied in topic and oftentimes became unrelated to the original post; however, they are useful as examples when discussing the results, especially the outcome of “conversations” between customers or between customers and lululemon employees. The total number of customer posts during the study period was 454, averaging 35 customer posts per day. Any responses to posts from lululemon were also looked at in the study. Only the first response from the company was looked at, as other comments to the post were excluded, as were lululemon responses to comments within a particular post (as, again, without the original post there would have been no responses). The total number of lululemon responses to customer posts was 206. This shows that a little under half, 45%, of all customer posts received responses from lululemon.

Lululemon’s Facebook page had more new posts during the three month study period than new product reviews posted to their website: 454 Facebook posts versus 197 customer product reviews (see Table 1). There were 237 comments and

217 questions posted on Facebook, and 164 reviews posted for women's products and 33 reviews posted for men's products (see Table 2).



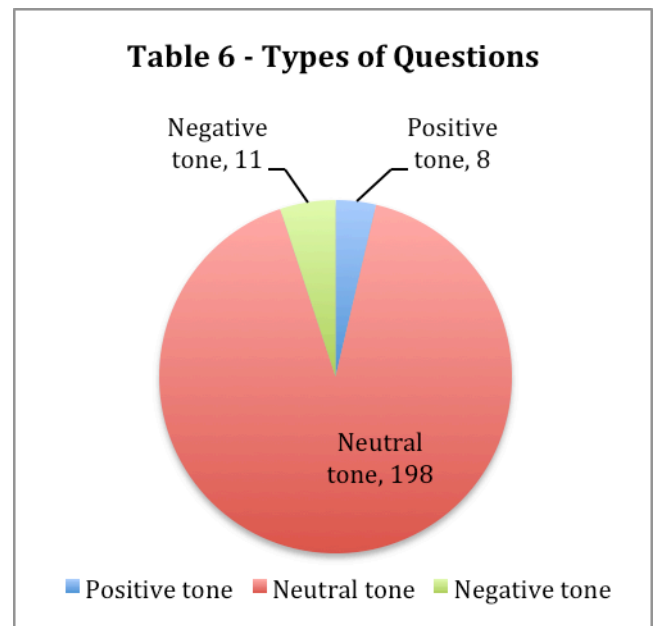
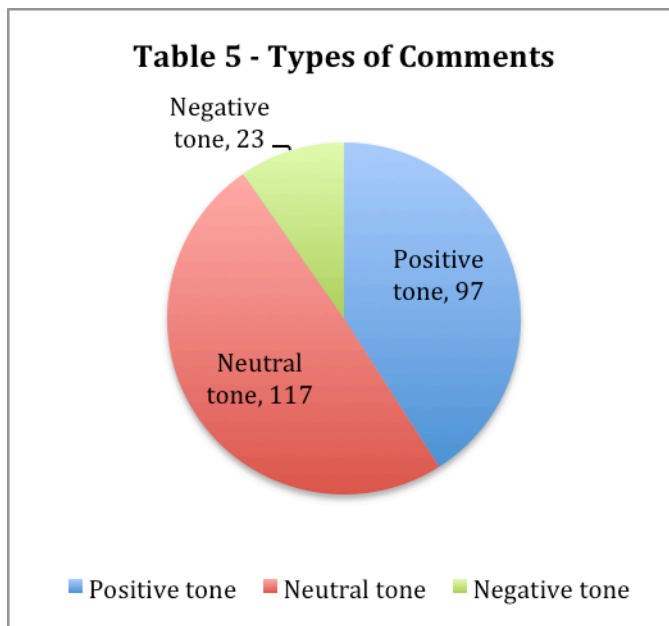
**Table 3 - Customer Posts and lululemon Responses**



**Table 4 - Facebook Posts and lululemon Responses**

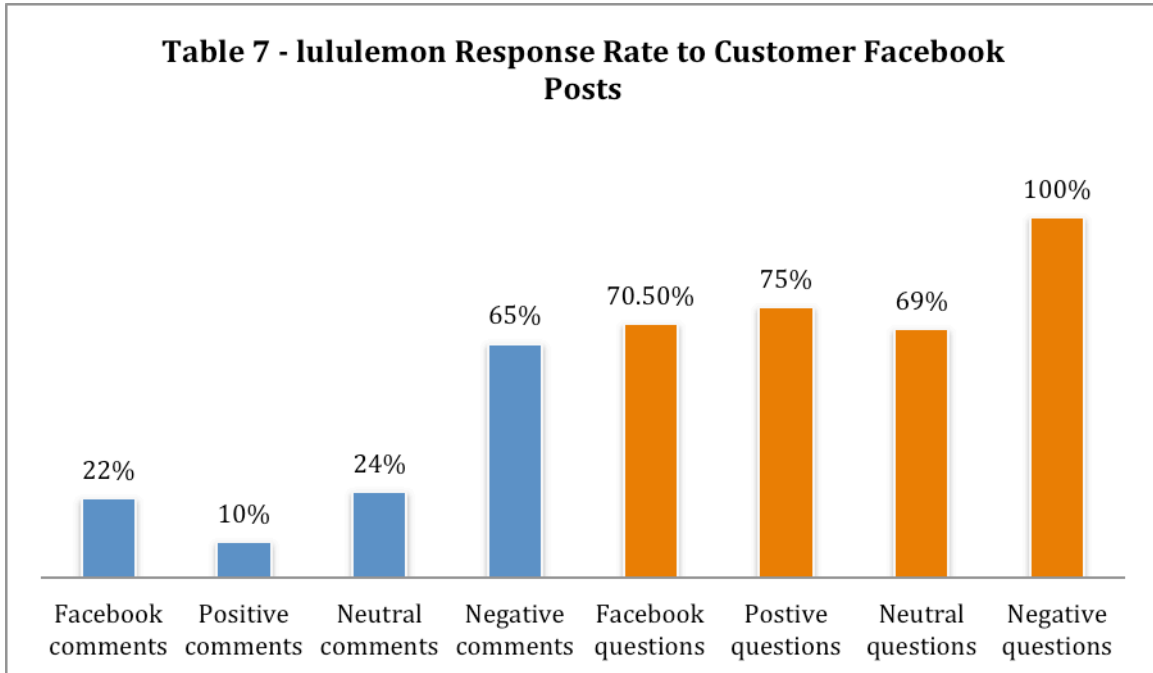
Date	Facebook Posts by Customers	lululemon Responses
September 1	27	16
September 8	31	13
September 15	38	21
September 22	33	7
September 29	33	17
October 6	42	32
October 13	43	19
October 20	22	8
October 27	42	15
November 3	35	15
November 10	42	13
November 17	38	17
November 24	28	13

Customers posted more comments than questions on lululemon’s Facebook page (see Table 2). Both comments and questions were sorted into whether the tone was found to be positive (e.g., “I love this” or “I really like this”) to neutral (non-emotional statements) or negative (e.g., “I’m disappointed” or an overall negative statement). Overall, the majority of both comments and questions were neutral in tone (see Table 5 and Table 6).



While lululemon’s average response rate was 45%, this can be broken down into further detail. Comparing comments posted on the wall versus questions posted on the wall, lululemon’s response rate for questions was 70.5%, while for comments it was 22%. Furthermore, in considering what types of comments or questions lululemon responds to, the results showed that lululemon responded to 100% of the negatively toned questions posted by users (see Table 7).



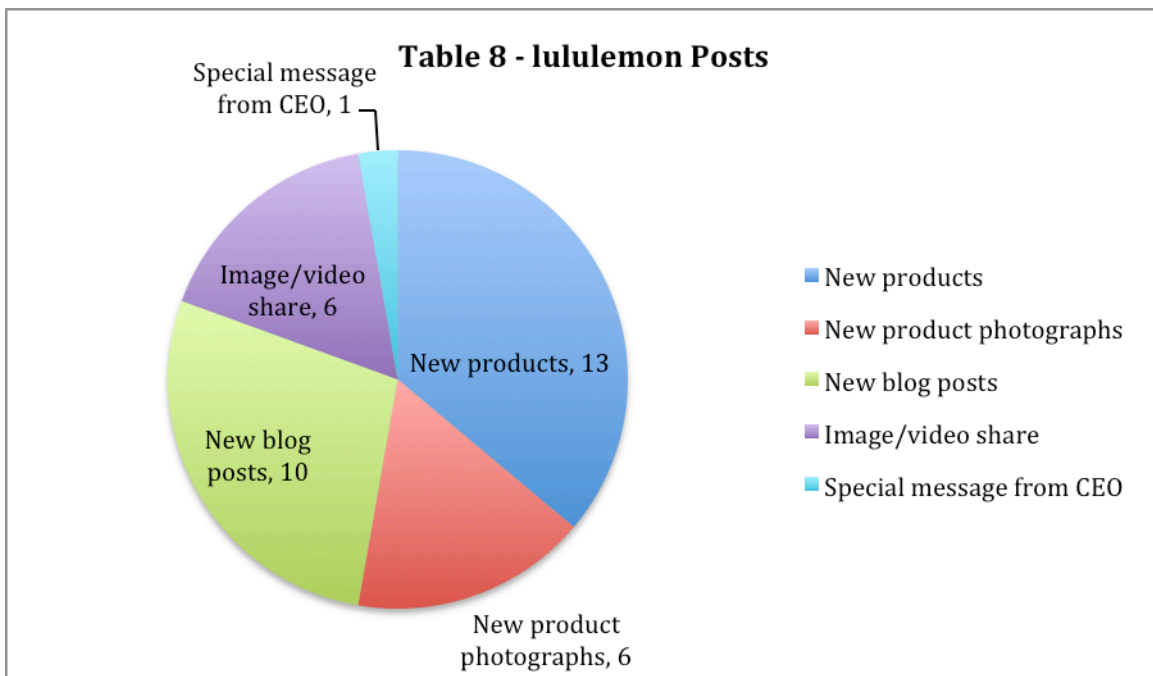


In considering the topics that lululemon responded to most often, the results show that customer questions and inquiries about a specific product were responded to most often. The second most responded to topic was entitled “miscellaneous” by both researchers and included a variety of questions and comments, which separately created very small categories and were therefore grouped together.

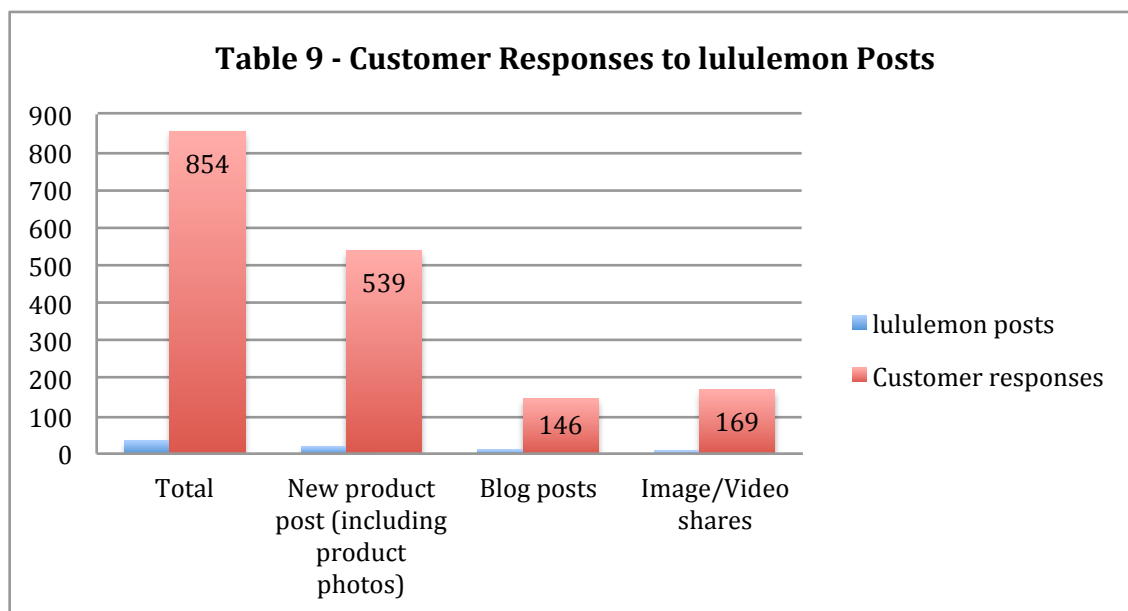
In addition to responding to customer comments and questions, lululemon also posted their own comments on Facebook. The total number of posts by lululemon during the study period was 36 (see Table 8).

- Lululemon most frequently posted about new products available on its website, with one new posting for new products each week, for a total of 13 postings.
- Next were posts about new blog updates, for a total of 10 posts.

- Photographs of the new products were posted a total of 6 times.
- Random posts of images or videos were posted a total of 6 times.
- One, atypical, post was a special message from the CEO of lululemon in response to a case ruling over an event that occurred at a lululemon store. This post received a total of 53 customer responses; but as this was not a usual lululemon post, the customer responses were not included in the data addressing lululemon's typical posts.

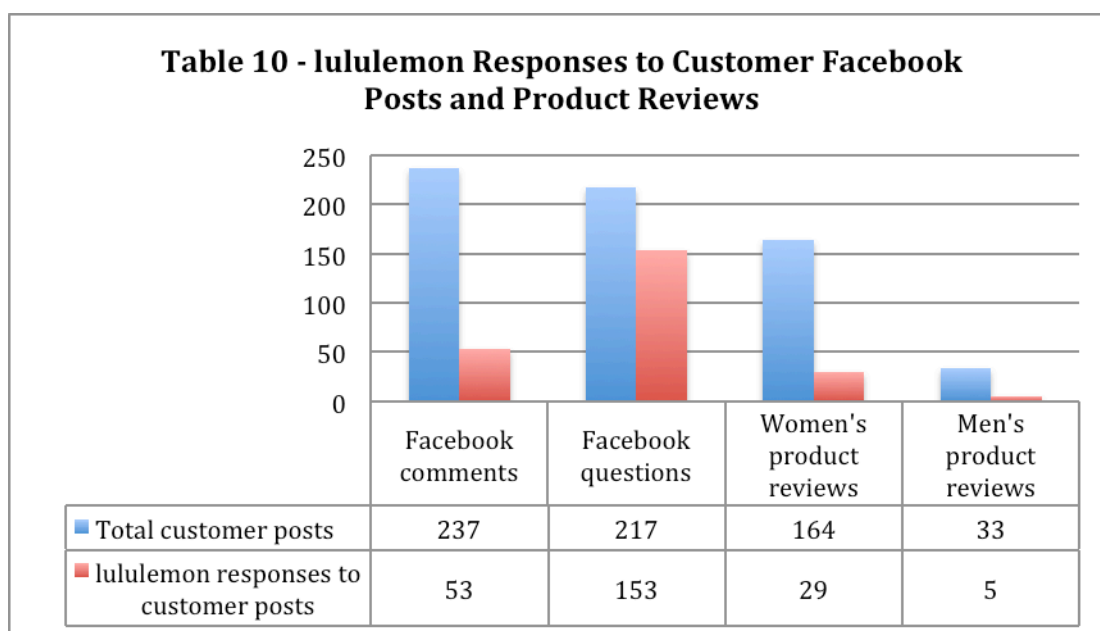


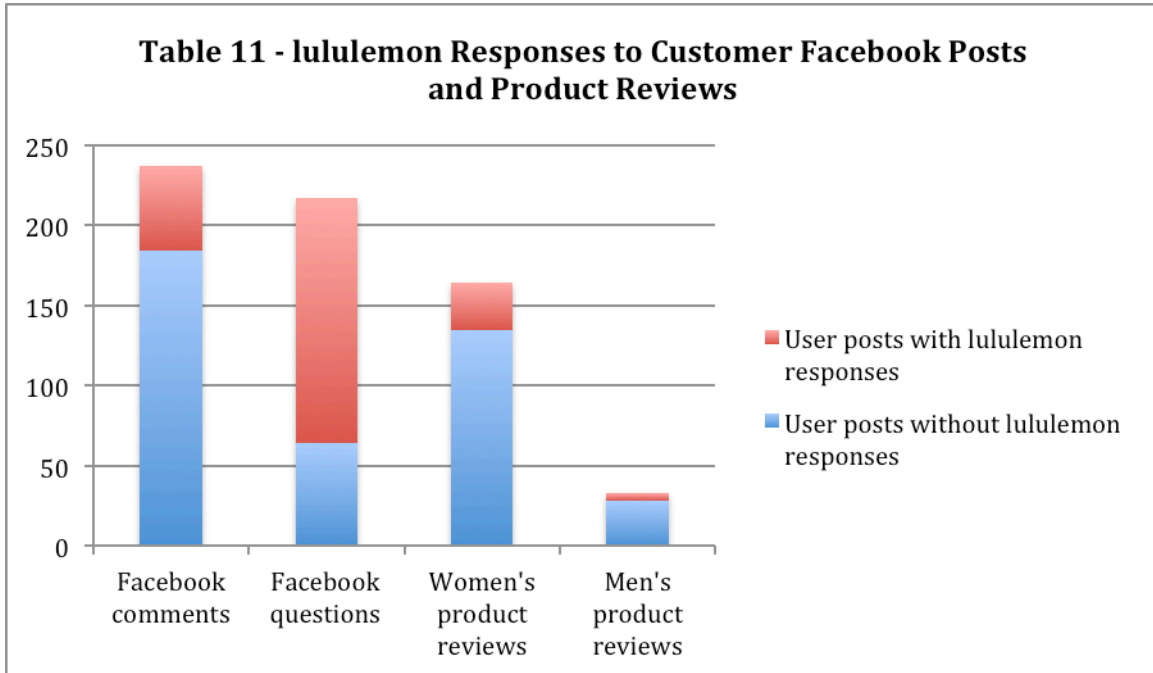
The most frequent type of post by lululemon was about new products available on the company's website, which included links to the site and/or photographs of the new products. Customers responded most often to this type of post by lululemon. Customers responded to lululemon's posts a total of 854 times during the study period (see Table 9).



### *Product Reviews*

As well as Facebook, this study examined the customer product reviews on lululemon's website, along with lululemon's responses to those product reviews. There were more responses by lululemon to customer posts on Facebook than to the product reviews during that time (see Table 10 and Table 11).



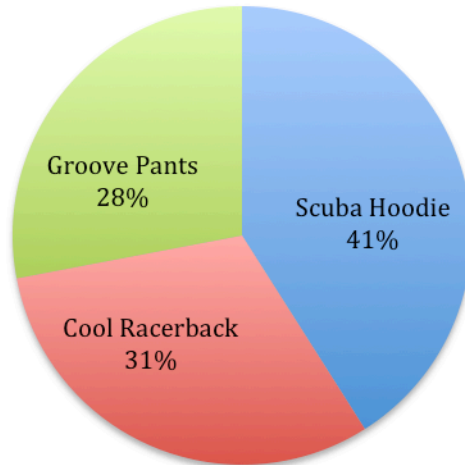


Customer reviews were posted with less frequency than comments and questions on lululemon's Facebook page, so product reviews from the top three most rated women's and men's products were looked at for the entire time period of September 2011 to November 2011. The study evaluated only clothing item reviews in order to separate them into men's and women's clothing categories more easily. The accessories and other non-clothing items that were sometimes listed within one gender's category often contained reviews by the opposite gender (for instance, yoga mats listed under men's top rated reviews also had reviews that seemed to be written by women). The top three most rated women's products were, as of December 4, 2011:

- Groove Pant (Regular) – 626 reviews – overall rating 3.9/5 stars
- Scuba Hoodie – 496 reviews – overall rating 4.5/5 stars
- Cool Racerback – 492 reviews – overall rating 4.6/5 stars

A total of 164 reviews were written during the study period for the top three most rated women's products; 67 reviews for the Scuba Hoodie, 51 reviews for the Cool Racerback, and 46 reviews for the Groove Pants (Regular) (see Table 12).

**Table 12 - Women's Product Reviews Breakdown**

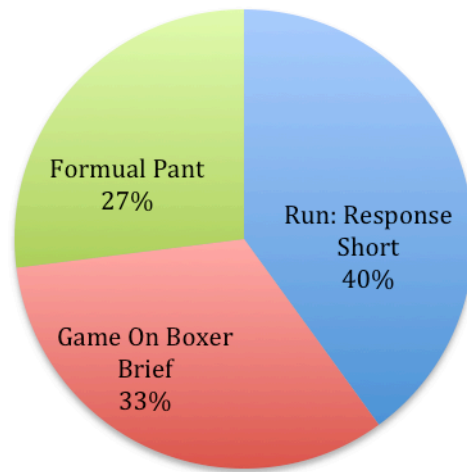


The top three most rated men's products were, as of December 4, 2011:

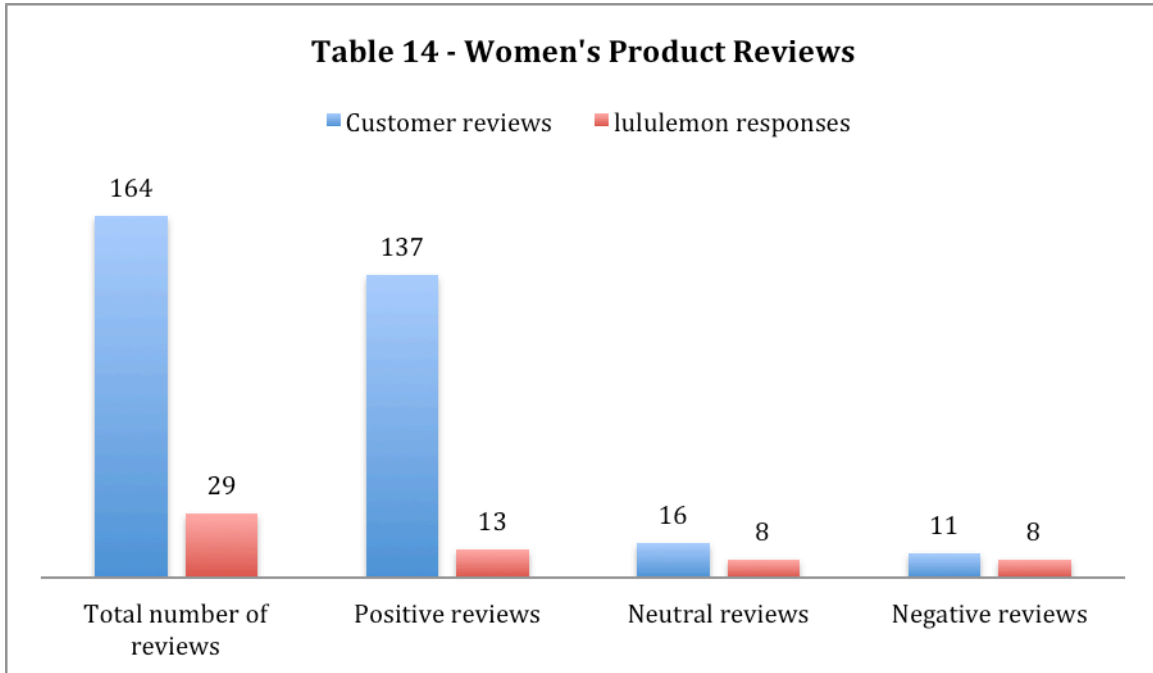
- Run: Response Short – 75 reviews – overall rating 4.6/5 stars
- Game On Boxer Brief (Final Sale) – 45 reviews – overall rating 3.3/5 stars
- Formula Pant (Final Sale) – 37 reviews – overall rating 4.1/5 stars

There were a total of 33 reviews written during the study period for the top three most rated men's products; 13 reviews for the Run: Response Short, 11 reviews for the Game On Boxer Brief, and 9 reviews for the Formula Pant (see Table 13).

**Table 13 - Men's Product Reviews Breakdown**



The reviews were also divided into whether they were positive (rated as being 4 or 5 out of 5 stars), neutral (rated as being 3 out of 5 stars), or negative (rated as being 1 or 2 out of 5 stars) (see Table 14 and Table 15). It is important to note that one review gave an item a rating of 1 out of 5 stars, but in the written portion of their review stated they loved the item and wanted to know the difference between the item and its predecessor. As it is not possible for the researcher to know what rating the reviewer intended to give, the original rating was left in the research as is, since in its current form it affects the overall rating on lululemon's webpage, not whatever rating was intended.



Also noted were which reviews lululemon responded to. Women's product reviews contained the highest number of positive reviews, as well as the highest number of responses from lululemon (13 responses). However, the reviews with the highest frequency of responses in terms of a ratio of reviews to responses were negative reviews, which had the highest response rate from lululemon (showing that a negative review was more likely to receive a response than a positive one).

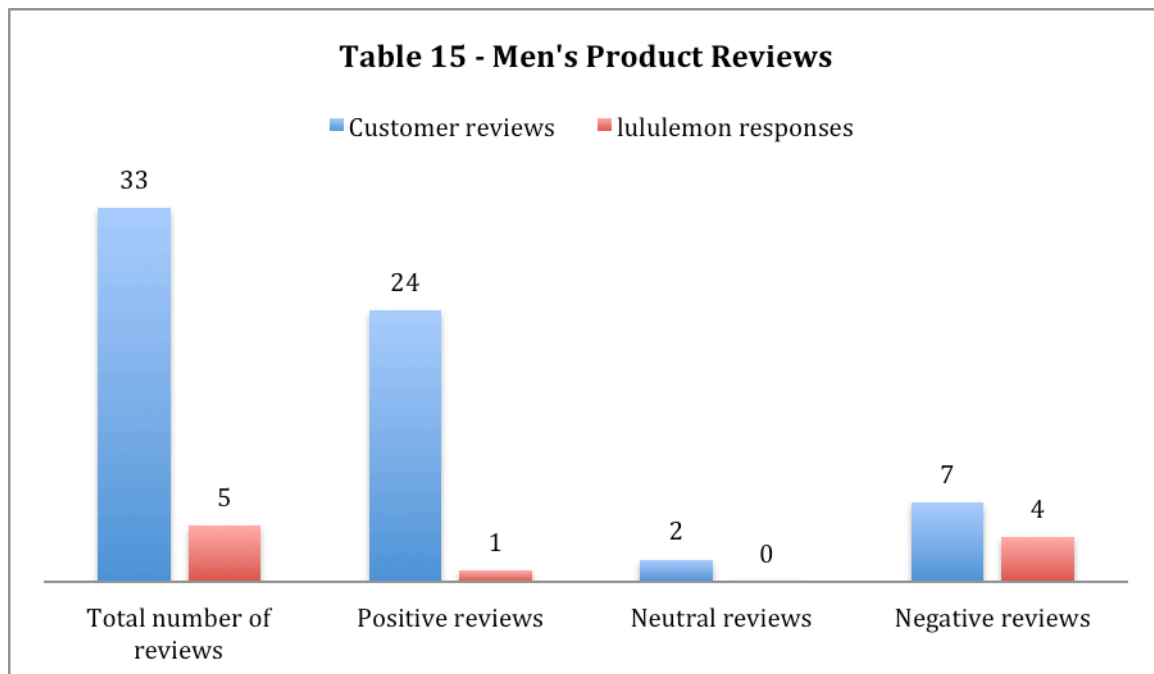
Lululemon's response rate for women's product reviews were as follows:

- Positive reviews had a response rate of 9%
- Neutral reviews had a response rate of 50%
- Negative reviews had a response rate of 73%
- Overall response rate was 18%

In terms of men's product reviews, lululemon responded most often to negative reviews. The company's response rate for men's product reviews were as follows:

- Positive reviews had a response rate of 4%
- Neutral reviews had a response rate of 0%
- Negative reviews had a response rate of 57%
- Overall response rate was 15%

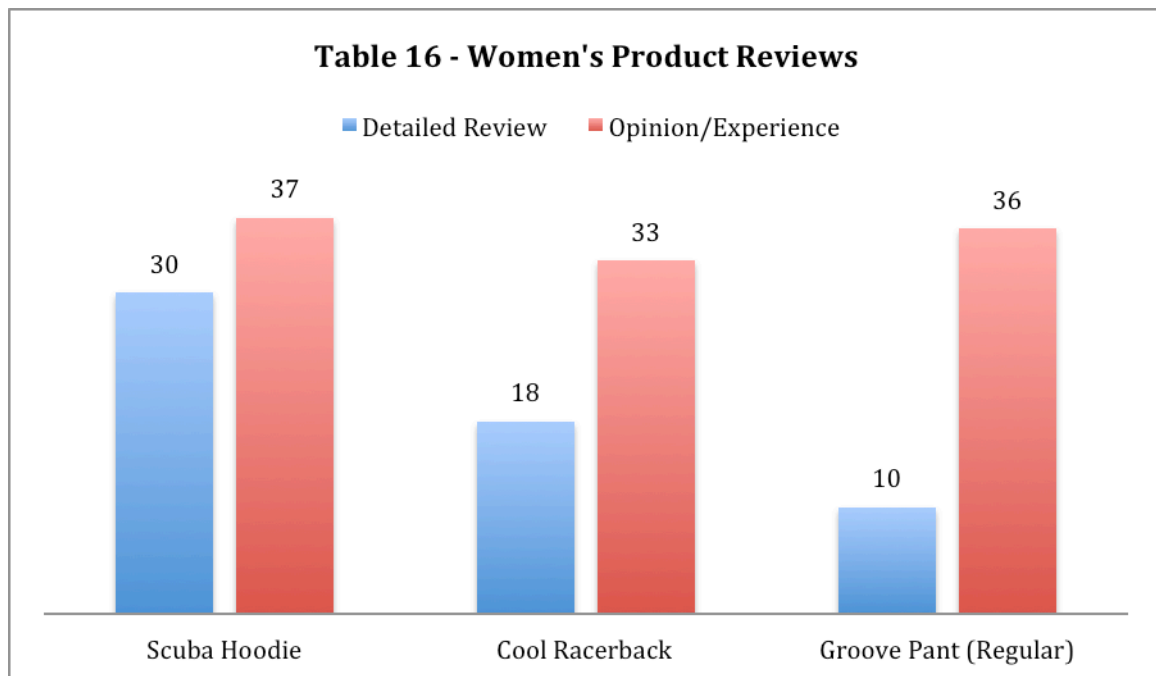
It appears that both women's and men's product reviews are responded to at a relatively similar rate. The response rates for women's and men's product reviews are fairly close, at 18% and 15% respectively.

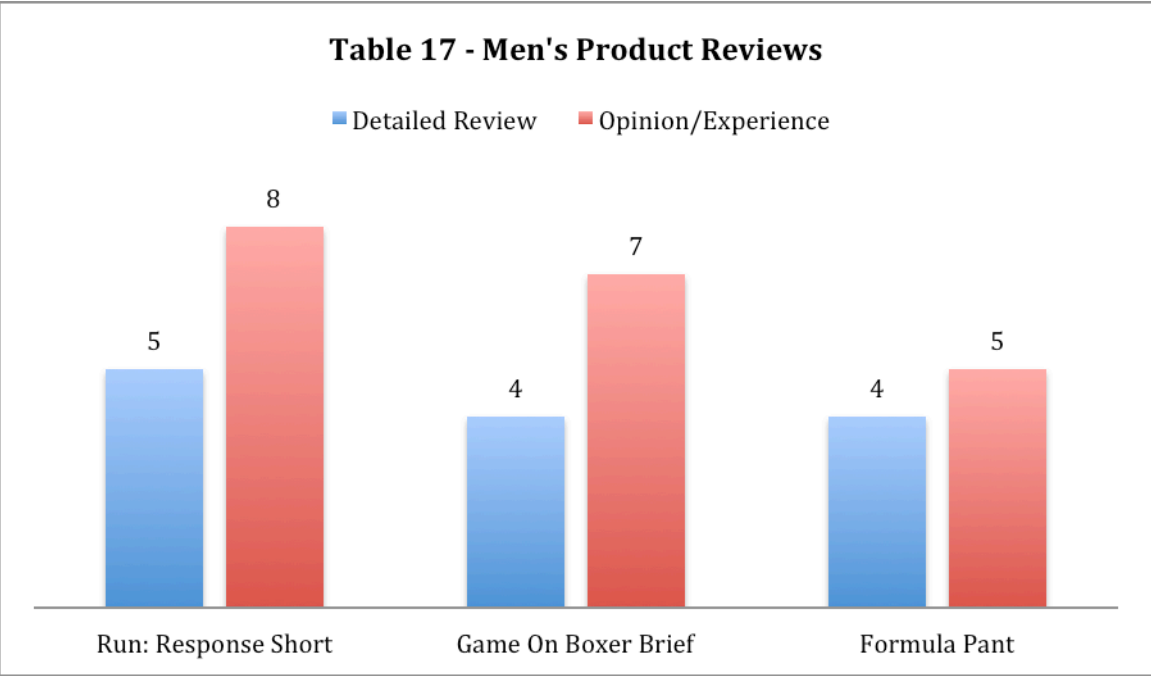


The reviews were also separated into two categories, detailed fit reviews and simple opinion/experience reviews (see Table 16 and Table 17). The reviews were split into two categories because not all reviews are equal in terms of helping a customer decide whether to purchase an item based on the review. Detailed reviews would likely be more helpful than a simple opinion. Detailed reviews included reviews that focused on helping other customers make a decision about purchasing



the item, for example, containing a more comprehensive description of the fit or quality of the item. The simple opinion/experience reviews included generic statements (e.g., “I love this item”), sizing information similar to that found in an online size guide (e.g., height and weight measurements), or personal stories about purchasing the item. It is interesting to note that for some men’s products the reviews were written by women who bought the items for their husbands and then wrote a review on their behalf.





For both women's and men's product reviews, the reviews that expressed the user's personal opinion or an experience they had with the item were more frequent than reviews outlining how the items wears and fits. For examples of the women's product reviews, see Table 18. For examples of men's product reviews, see Table 19.

**Table 18 – Examples of Women’s Product Reviews**

Product	Scuba Hoodie	Cool Racerback	Groove Pant (Regular)
Detailed reviews	<p>“So I finely splurged and got myself my very own Scuba hoodie! So glad that I did! It's a very flattering fit and I think TTS (I got a 6 and it's a teeny bit loose for layering purposes which is great. I'm 5'8" , 34c, 130# athletic/runner for reference). I *loooooove* the thumbhole/hand covers, they're perfect for when I'm out walking my dog or running. The color is also gorgeous (I got the "pigeon/rocksteady" My one complaint is that I wish the hood had a drawstring or something, because it feels like it's falling back off my head a little when I have a ponytail. But otherwise it's great! I may need this in other colors...”</p>	<p>“I normally don't write reviews for my purchases, but this is one that I thought it is only fair that I share! This tank top is functional and multi purpose. I can wear it to yoga, gym and even to work (under a jacket of course). You can wear it with any cross back bras (if not used for sports) and most sports bra. I like it that there is no built in padding, as not all padding suits my shape. It is also long enough (great for my 1.73cm height) and does not ride up during exercise or when I walk. Although it may be a little long for slighter women. It gives me a very womanly silhouette, I finally have a waist! Notwithstanding the clingy [fabric], it is extremely flattering, no lumps and bumps. It is a true size 4 for me though, contrary to what some reviewers say. Strange. Looking forward to seeing more colours!”</p>	<p>“Just got 2 new pairs of these, size 2 &amp; 4, but they're just a little too short! I find that they are fine if you [wear] them with boots, but they don't look right with runners due to their short-ish length! The tall's are way too long for me so I'm kinda wishing there was like, an in between length so that us medium height girls could fit them! I'm 5'6, so pretty average, but just a little too long for the regulars :P”</p>
Simple opinion/ experience	<p>“This hoodie is the comfiest ever!!! Warm and fits awesome, bought in toothpaste first, awful color!!! Exchanged for Black Swan, beautiful dark purple!!”</p>	<p>“I absolutely love the CRB! I not only wear them for run, spin, and yoga, but I wear them as an under tank with my scrubs for work. I do wish for more colors!! :)”</p>	<p>“these pants are so amazing! i recommend them to anyone who wants comfort and there great for working out :)”</p>

**Table 19 – Examples of Men’s Product Reviews**

Product	Run: Response Short	Game On Boxer Brief	Formula Pant
Detailed	<p>“These are the most comfortable and best looking workout shorts I've ever owned. After finishing up a 30 minute cardio session wearing these and a simple (cheap) cotton t-shirt, I noticed the difference in my body temp almost immediately. Throughout the rest of my workout, my legs/lower body felt cool and comfortable, my upper body (in the cheap T), on the other hand, was soaked, hot, and generally uncomfortable. I can't tell you how much I loved the feel of these shorts [during] my first workout with them and I can't wait to get a few of the metal vent t-shirts to go with them. Love these shorts, the only thing I would change (if anything) is to move the pockets further out to the seams rather than more forward like they are now. Reaching into these forward facing pockets to grab your iPod can look a bit "interesting".”</p>	<p>“I've been converted to boxer briefs! After finding out what a hot yoga class does to cotton briefs I went to my local store to see what underwear lulu had to offer. That was the [beginning] of the end for my cotton underwear! The fit is superb. The fabric is simply amazing. When they say it wicks away moisture it's true. Even after a 90 minute hot yoga class they almost feel dry. As for comfort. It's like wearing nothing at all! I've had all of my pairs now for almost a year and they're all just as good as the day I bought them. A quick note on sizing. I wear a medium in other brands and a large fits me perfectly. Well done lululemon! Don't change a thing about these and you'll have a GOBB customer for life! :)”</p>	<p>“These pants are so cozy! They're very roomy too. Great to wear to and from places, or at school on a lazy day. They keep you so warm! Note that until you wash them a few times, you're going to be leaving a trail of "fuzzy" behind you from the material inside the pant. As I said, they're very roomy so you certainly don't need to size up. If anything, size down!”</p>
Simple opinion/ experience	<p>“I love these shorts. The extra pockets are perfect for holding keys, gu, DL, etc. I wish they came in brighter colors. Black and grey are so boring.”</p>	<p>“My wife was an avid Lululemon wearer but I was [sceptical] of the high prices. She convinced me to get a pair of the men’s boxer briefs and I can now say I own 10 pairs and they are the only type I wear. Please keep making more bright colors!”</p>	<p>“i tried them on and i liked them so much i didn't want to take them off so I bought a second pair and wore the first out. I washed both in case there was shrinkage (none fyi), brought them back to get hemmed, and had to buy a third pair so I could wear them while the other two were getting hemmed.”</p>

## Discussion

### *Research Questions*

The first research question of this study addressed how customers create a loyal following around a certain brand using social media. To better answer this question, several sub-questions were posed, some of which can be answered with the data from Facebook.

The first sub-question asked whether customer assemble around a brand due to the level of customer service received in the online community. A total of 454 comments were posted on lululemon's Facebook page with 206 responses from lululemon, and lululemon's 35 posts generated 854 responses from customers. These numbers show a large amount of traffic on the page created by customers. Of the 197 product reviews, lululemon responded to 34 of them. Negative reviews had the highest response rate, probably in an effort to resolve customer issues, which shows a high level of customer service. The data studied here pointed towards the notion that customers do appreciate the customer service that they receive from lululemon:

*Facebook user:* "Chinook Centre customer service is amazing WOW!!! I went tonight and bought a few things. I wish I knew the names of the associates but honestly all of them were so helpful. Thank you, thank you, thank you!! BEST customer service EVER!!!"

A customer response in a cascade: "Thx [lululemon employee]~love the customer service ♥"

For some customers, the level of customer service on social media was unexpected (although the reason why it was unexpected was not stated).

*Facebook user:* "I was [disappointed] when I visited one of your store and found no coats. Are you not a Canadian Company....this is only November and there is nothing in the store? How don't know if you read this or not ...love your clothes but as soon as something is out the larger size are gone....do you get the message."

*lululemon athletica:* "Hey [Facebook user], Thanks for sharing your feedback with us, and yes, we do read all of the posts here! I'm sorry your local store didn't have the style of coat you were after. We did release a winter coat style, the Apres Piste Jacket, last month but we don't have many left at the moment. We are just starting to see our Winter items come out, so we may always see more in future. If you'd like us to check other local store in your area for the jackets, feel free to give us a call at the GEC, 1.877.263.9300 option #2 ~[lululemon employee]"

*Facebook user:* "WOW, I am impressed way to go Lululemon. I did not expect a reply. I am very impressed. I live in Pitt Meadows British Columbia and shop at Coquitlam Centre and they had NO coats. I will keep checking. Thanks again"

This example illustrates that customers appreciate receiving customer service via social media. If companies want to maintain their brand by keeping their customers satisfied, they must be cognizant of how customers are treated and give them a pleasant overall experience, as seen in the customer-based brand equity model (Keller 60). As was seen in this study, Facebook is sometimes used as a customer's first point of contact when they have questions or comments, and having a high level of customer service to address those customers is likely to be a beneficial factor towards keeping customers happy and encouraging return customers. As for customer product reviews, leaving up negative responses and responding to them shows customers that the company takes their disappointment seriously and will work towards resolving the issue, which also shows the company's level of customer service.

The second sub-question looked at whether customers assemble around a brand due to its popularity, and asked whether there was a crowd effect occurring

or conspicuous labeling with brand or logo visibility that customers wanted to display. One observation here is that whenever a Facebook user clicks that they “like” a page on Facebook, it shows up on their profile. It could be argued that some users want to display this on their individual profile page. Another observation is that some users do more than simply “like” the page—they also write on the lululemon’s page that they love the brand, which takes more effort than simply clicking that they “like” the page. Examples of such statements include:

Facebook user 1: “Love this page....for those who enjoy yoga & lulu, check it out.....”

Facebook user 2: “Love my lulu lemon top”

Facebook user 3: “Love my Lululemon....”

While these observations give the impression that there may be some customers who do want to show how much they like they brand, the research sub-question could not be fully answered with the data from this study. As the data gathered for this study offered a “snapshot” of Facebook comments, perhaps a more lengthy and detailed study would yield more results. This type of question may also require additional information from customers: one way of finding an answer may be through interviews with them.

The third sub-question asked whether customer assemble around a brand due to a perceived or actual quality or functionality of the product. Some comments within the data addressed this question, both on the Facebook page and in the customer product reviews. Of the 197 customer product reviews, 161 of them were positive, which shows that customers are satisfied overall with the products and their quality. Customers also wrote about the quality of the products on Facebook, with comment such as the following:

*Facebook user 1: "My most comfortable, best fitting, greatest quality & best looking gear EVER!!!! ....and I do try everything folks! :)xo"*

*Facebook user 2: "heading to New York for the Rock n Roll 10k in Brooklyn on Saturday, the to St Louis Rock n Roll half Marathon on Sunday ... my travel clothes are Lululemon, my fun clothes are Lululemon & my running skirts are Lululemon ... I just love your comfortable, unique and quality clothes. Although I do feel like a walking commercial ... lol! :) Keep making the great clothes!"*

These examples show that some customers do indeed return to the brand due to its level of quality. This may be another factor in why customers are assembling around lululemon. As customers choose to use social media to voice their opinions about product quality, it is important for companies to not only monitor social media for comments on quality, but to use them to address any potential problems customers may run into. Responding to an unhappy customer, as seen earlier in the example with winter coats, can make a customer happy and give a positive tone to a negative situation, which can help satisfy the customer. As satisfied customers will keep brands strong, companies should use the various types of social media available to them to create, improve, and maintain positive relationships with customers.

The final sub-question looked at whether customers feel involved in the brand and whether this increases customer loyalty. The data gathered in this study showed that customers do feel that they can express their opinions in terms of suggestions for products, such as colour. Some customers would respond to lululemon employees asking them what they liked about a certain product, and others would do so without being prompted by lululemon, choosing to share their ideas on the Facebook page:

*Facebook user: "Here's an idea: Instead of squeezing out yet another shade of berry pink, aqua, or royal blue this year, let's go GREEN! Can*



you make some clothes in green? How come you never make green? It's autumn, let's see some nice earthy leafy greens. Please? I would be most grateful."

Also, customers are quick to share their opinions about products and provide reviews. One customer wanted help in resolving a problem with viewing and leaving product reviews on lululemon's webpage:

*Facebook user:* "can't see ratings/reviews on any products today, and I can't leave a review myself. Did something change? I don't even see the stars under a product name and price line."

These examples show that customers do want to share opinions and suggestions about products, which may be their way of feeling involved in the brand. Also, customer involvement in general on Facebook may suggest that some customers feel involved in the brand. For instance, some users are quick to help other users by answering their questions before, or even instead of, lululemon employees. This may be one way customers feel involved in the brand. However, whether customers actually feel involved in the brand could not be answered with the data gathered. Neither could this study answer the question of whether involvement in the brand increased a customer's loyalty. Answers to these questions would require further study, most likely through customer interviews, to better ascertain their level of involvement and sense of loyalty.

The answers to the sub-questions thus do provide some answers to the first research question. There does seem to be a level of customer service and product quality that customers post about online. Customer opinions also seem to be valued, seen especially in the various types of customer product reviews being posted online and left up for other customers to read. However, this study could not

confirm whether customers feel involved in the brand. It also could not determine whether a crowd effect is occurring, or whether conspicuous labelling has any influence on customers assembling around the brand. In spite of this, there does seem to be evidence that customers have created a loyal following around lululemon using social media, and that social media is an outlet where loyal customers voice their opinions. Some do so by stating that lululemon is their favourite brand; others have implied their loyalty with comments about how they “need lululemon anonymous” or by discussing the number of products they have purchased from this brand. However it does remain to be seen whether social media encourages that customer loyalty.

The second research question of this study aimed to determine what role, if any, the company plays in encouraging extremely loyal customer behaviour via social media. As with the first research question, several sub-questions were posed to help find an answer to the research question. The first queried the company’s level of involvement in maintaining an online community. The study results show that lululemon has a high level of involvement in maintaining its online community. During the study period, the company posted to its Facebook page an average of almost 3 times per day, which generated an average of almost 70 responses per day from customers. Lululemon’s total number of responses during the study period was 206, which is an average of 16 responses a day. For example, lululemon responded to one customer:

*Facebook user:* “GEC, do the arms/sleeves on the don't worry be happy pullover fit tight and does the pullover fit TTS in the body? Thanks :)”  
*lululemon athletica:* “Hey [Facebook user], I haven't had a chance to try on the pullover yet but I chatted with an educator this morning who

said that she found it true to size and didn't find the arms to be tight.  
Hope this helps! ~[lululemon employee]"

These numbers show that lululemon monitors its Facebook page on a frequent basis, informing customers of new products and responding to their questions and comments, thus maintaining a high level of involvement in this online community.

The second sub-question asked what, if any, kind of customer service the company offered, whether it was promoted to the online community, and what its policies were (return, warranty, repair, alterations, etc.). Lululemon's Facebook page seemed to serve as a platform for customer service. The company's Guest Education Centre team responds to customer's questions and comments using their own experience with the brand to help customers. When issues with a product arise, employees responding on Facebook urge the customer to contact lululemon's GEC by phone to resolve any issues. For example:

*Facebook user:* "I ordered the long sleeve cabin II in black swan and it arrived today with the security tag on it! Why would this happen? Why would you put security tags on merchandise? Isn't that the stores responsibility when merchandise arrives? Also, why is this the only cabin tee that reverses to the same color? What is the point?"

*lululemon athletica:* "Hi [Facebook user] Thanks for reaching out to us. Sorry to hear you received your Cabin Long Sleeve with the security tag on. We would love to fix that for you. Please call us at the GEC at 1-877-263-9300 option#2 and an educator will be able to sort that out for you. As far as the black swan colour being the same colour on both sides, that was a choice our designers made when they decided what would look best for this style. I would love to pass your feedback along to our designers. What colour would you like to see paired with the black swan? -[lululemon employee]"

This type of customer service was often encouraged on Facebook, likely because the company can in this way more easily discuss the problem at hand and attempt to appease the customer. The option of calling the GEC was often suggested for

problems customers encountered with orders or products. For example:

*Facebook user:* “Dear GEC, Do the Ombre Stripes Cabin LS tops run longer than the other colors? Or did I get a fluke one and need to exchange for one that's the correct length? Mine is 2" longer than the Black Swan one I already own (same size) and it's also bigger in the body. It's almost dress-length instead of the mid-hip length I'm used to from these. I'm very disappointed because my local store didn't get this color (as far as I know), so I can't easily exchange it for another if it is a fluke and shouldn't be as long as it is.”

*lululemon athletica:* “Hey [Facebook user], Thanks for taking the time to share this with us. It is quite possible that there is a difference between the two colours, but so far I haven't heard any feedback about it. What I have heard though, is that this season of Cabin LS are a lot longer than last season. They seem to be hitting a lot of people around the upper thigh, like how it sits on the fit model online. If you feel that the length of your top is beyond that however, I'd suggest giving us a call at the GEC or taking it into your local store so we can look into this further for you. ~[lululemon employee]”

With regard to other customer service policies, while these were not explicitly advertised on the Facebook page during the study period, they were often mentioned on the page. The company's return policy was often referred to, with some customers complaining that it was too short and restrictive and others simply wanting more details about it. For example:

*Facebook user:* “is there any chance we can return/exchange something that was bought in another city and has a gift receipt? my dad got me a pair of shorts at the lululemon store in calgary just yesterday but I already have the same pair”

*lululemon athletica:* “Hey [Facebook user], As long as it's within the return policy, you'll be able to exchange or have the amount the short is currently selling for refunded onto a giftcard for you with your gift receipt. ~ [lululemon employee]”

Other customer service policies mentioned included complimentary hemming that the company offers in its stores. For example:

*Facebook user:* “hey i was just wondering - if i buy pants online can i take them to my local store and get them hemmed? Thanks.”

*lululemon athletica:* “You bet, [Facebook user]. Any of our stores will be

able to hem your pants for you. ~ [lululemon employee]”

Even though lululemon does not explicitly advertise its customer service policies, customers can still find out about them simply by reading other customers’ posts and lululemon’s answers on Facebook. In this way it is visible that lululemon has customer service policies that are made known to its online community, which may assist in reinforcing its brand image.

The third sub-question asked whether the company attempts to involve customers in the brand image, and if so, how. One such attempt is the company’s posting of images of new items or links to its website. Lululemon’s 35 posts generated 854 responses from customers, some of which were opinions about items that were posted. This could be seen as the company’s attempt to gauge a reaction from customers about those products. For example:

*Lululemon athletica:* “This Just In » Cuddle Up Jacket, Scuba Hoodie\*Print and Dog Running Pant! [http://bit.ly/ThisJustIn\\_Oct20](http://bit.ly/ThisJustIn_Oct20)”

*Facebook user 1:* “MUST HAVE!”

*Facebook user 2:* “Oh that cuddle up jacket looks SOOOO cozy. Too bad about the price. :( ”

*Facebook user 3:* “Nice - I want one!”

*Facebook user 4:* “drool!”

*Facebook user 5:* “The dog pants are my favourite pants of the year! So excited! I wore last year's in the rain last night and my legs were so warm and dry. But I will be picking up this year's version for sure!”

Not all responses to items are positive (for instance, many customers shared their dislike of the name of a newly released scarf); however both negative and positive responses are helpful in terms of future product releases (such as knowing whether to bring back a product or to give it a different name next time). Another attempt to involve customers in the brand image can be seen in certain lululemon responses to user posts that ask for the return of a certain style or a new colour. In these

responses, the employees ask what colours or changes in the product the customers would like to see and even encourage customers to keep posting feedback:

*Facebook user 1:* "more men's stuff would be awesome..... gets depressing to walk in and see the same stuff... AND more color :) tired of the gray and blacks and muted tones"

*lululemon athletica:* "That's great feedback, [Facebook user 1]. What types of colours would you like to see us bring out for you gents? ~[lululemon employee]"

*Facebook user 1:* "I might be an exception.... but i have a pair of pink/magenta run response shorts and LOVE those. I have a couple hoodies that have blue/cyan color as well as one that is orange, and one that is lime green (all older lulu stuff).... and my FAV is my Japan hoodie (white and red)"

*Facebook user 2:* "RED and BRIGHT BLUES!!!! AND MORE LIME GREEN :)"

*lululemon athletica:* "Awesome! This is all great to hear. I'll let the design team know that you'd love to see some reds, blues, greens and perhaps even some magenta thrown in the mix. ~[lululemon employee]"

*Facebook user 3:* "If you could add a few colors from the women's palette that would be awesome. PS, I wore my Tight Tights on a ride last night over a pair of Pearl Izumi cycling shorts and I can feel the difference between the 2 fabric and fit wise."

*Facebook user 2:* "i am also very happy about the black plum colour! great for fall! (so I would love a hoodie in this colour)"

*lululemon athletica:* "Colour for all is what I'm hearing! I'll definitely be sharing this with the designers for you. Keep the ideas coming. ~[lululemon employee]"

Most of the feedback the company seeks is about its products, which make up a large part of the company's brand image. While these examples are evidence of attempts to involve customers, they do not reveal whether the company takes these suggestions into consideration or implements them. And so, although the data shows that these types of questions posed by lululemon are attempts to involve customers, future study could include interviews with lululemon to determine if they indeed involve customers in their brand image.

In response to the main research question, then, this study found evidence

that lululemon understands the important role that social media can play in terms of customer loyalty and is using social media to embolden it. The company maintains a high level of involvement on Facebook; lululemon also maintains a level of involvement around its customer product reviews, as was visible in its responses to certain reviews. And while the company does not explicitly state any of its customer service policies on its Facebook page, it answers any questions about them when customers ask. Also, examples show that lululemon does attempt to involve its customers, such as actively asking them for feedback in their responses to customer posts, although it remains unknown whether lululemon takes these suggestions into account. However, as lululemon is very active in participating in social media, it does appear that lululemon takes an active role in encouraging customer loyalty via their social media.

### *Brand community*

The data found in this study also supports the idea that the lululemon Facebook users constitute a brand community. Muniz, Jr. and O'Guinn describe brand community as "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand. It is specialized because at its center is a branded good or service" (Muniz, Jr. and O'Guinn 412). Lululemon is the branded good at the center of this community. The authors describe three main features of a brand community: consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions, and moral responsibility (Muniz, Jr. and O'Guinn 418-424).

In the first of these features, "consciousness of kind," members of the

community “feel an important connection to the brand” and “more importantly, they feel a stronger connection toward one another” (Muniz, Jr. and O’Guinn 418). Within this feature is the idea of legitimacy, which is “a process whereby members of the community differentiate between true members of the community and those who are not, or who occupy a more marginal space” (Muniz, Jr. and O’Guinn 419). This study found some references to this type of membership on lululemon’s Facebook page, for example, when users state how often they wear lululemon:

*Facebook user 1:* “love lululemon, wear it 5 days a week!!!”

*Facebook user 2* likes this.

*Facebook user 3:* “I wear it 7 days/week LOL!”

*Facebook user:* “Lulu, thank you for “giving” me more stuff to wear to DANCE class! I love you!!”

*Facebook user:* So many compliments of my Lulu jackets...long one and short one and one is 4 years old...looks new. It has been to every hockey game, x-c race racing/ coaching and teaching gym outdoors in the fall. I love my huge lulu wardrobe...best work clothes I have ever owned and great investments!!! Thanks!”

Other references included differentiation between people who visit the Facebook page frequently and those who do not. One example of this occurred when customers asked when lululemon would be holding a warehouse sale: only the “true member of the community” knew the answer from (presumably) reading one of the first questions posed about it. This “true member” did not pose the question themselves but rather answered when others asked it. On one occasion, users even joked about it amongst themselves:

*Facebook user 1:* “When/where is the wearhouse [sic] sale this year????????? Inquiring minds want to know LOL!”

*Facebook user 2* likes this.

*Facebook user 3:* “Hahahahahahaha”

*Facebook user 1:* “ ;)”



Another example showed users anxious for new products to be uploaded to company's website:

*Facebook user 1: "Please upload soon!!!!!!"*

*Facebook user 2 likes this.*

*Facebook user 1: "You tell us the GWs are coming today...and now you're site is taking a break :( "*

*Facebook user 3: "I think they do it every week right before the upload."*

*Facebook user 1: "Oh ok, thanks, Jen! I hadn't noticed that before"*

*Facebook user 2: "what are GWs???!! :)"*

*Facebook user 4: "Looks like it's back up!!!"*

Those who know what happens right before an upload, as well as what a GW is (Gratitude Wrap, a popular sweater-type wrap), show that they are "true members of the community," whereas the others, unaware of these things, are not.

Another element of consciousness of kind is oppositional brand loyalty, where "through opposition to competing brands, brand community members derive an important aspect of their community experience, as well as an important component of the meaning of the brand" (Muniz, Jr. and O'Guinn 420). While the Facebook page exhibited no major direct comparisons with other brands, customers would post that lululemon was their favourite brand. For example:

*Facebook user: "What's your favorite workout gear? I would wear this every day if I could! lululemon athletica"*

*Facebook user: "My most comfortable, best fitting, greatest quality & best looking gear EVER!!!! ....and I do try everything folks! :)xo"*

*Facebook user: "My favorite Yoga wear is Lululemon Athletica. We have a store right here in SA!  
<http://www.facebook.com/lululemonSanAntonioQuarry>"*

*Facebook user: "im either clueless or biased(love lululemon athletica), but anyone know of any good exercise clothing brands? specifically for running in cold weather"*

And so, while this study revealed some small hints that lululemon Facebook users exhibit “consciousness of kind,” no outright or detailed examples from this data set fully support this definition. A longer and more detailed study and interviews with customers would perhaps yield results that would help define this aspect of brand community better.

However, some of the Facebook posts exemplify the other two aspects of brand community: “rituals and traditions” and “moral responsibility” (Muniz, Jr. and O’Guinn 418-424). Rituals and traditions, according to Muniz, Jr. and O’Guinn, “represent vital social processes by which the meaning of the community is reproduced and transmitted within and beyond the community” and “these rituals and traditions typically center on shared consumption experiences with the brand” (Muniz, Jr. and O’Guinn 421). One such ritual among lululemon Facebook users is the weekly upload of new products to lululemon’s website. While the upload happens on a different website, customers post to Facebook about it:

*Facebook user 1: “UPLOAD!”*

*Facebook user 2: “Have you uploaded for this week already? Can see some items. Are there still more to come later on?”*

*Facebook user 3: “This week’s upload is up!”*

Shopping on lululemon’s website as soon as the new products are uploaded is a ritual shared by members of the community. Customers go to Facebook to post what they want and what they bought, and even to seek technical support if they are having trouble with a purchase. For example, one particularly long thread of comments was spawned by a lululemon post that a particularly popular item had

returned to the online store. In this thread, customers with technical difficulties posted to Facebook about their troubles. Lululemon seemed to be monitoring and actively responding to customers having trouble. Examples such as this one show that the community of online lululemon shoppers uses Facebook as a venue to meet and discuss purchases, which in turn works towards creating an online brand community. Customers also often turn to Facebook as a venue to seek help from lululemon if they are having trouble with an order and want it checked on, which may enhance the online shopping experience.

Another example of rituals and traditions is that many lululemon stores offer complimentary yoga classes once a week, and sometimes other types of fitness classes, such as running clinics (“Gift of yoga”; “Lululemon Athletica Westboro Run Clinic”; “about us”). While the complimentary yoga classes are offered through the various lululemon stores, customers will sometimes post on lululemon’s Facebook page about the event:

*Facebook user:* “Thanks for leading the run and stretches after yesterday. Everyone was friendly and supportive of each other. Log miles and get stuff - yeah that's another reason to show up and get our sweat on! Thanks!”

*Facebook user:* “This Sunday, [company]'s own [instructor] will be teaching a free yoga class at lululemon athletica on 66th & 3rd from 10-11am! Be sure to stop by and show some [company] love!”

*Facebook user:* “Must remember to pick up a new pair of lululemon athletica socks tonight at the Lululemon Running Club in Brentwood. What are your pre-race superstitions?”

Offering complementary yoga classes in stores brings customers into the store and likely reinforces the company’s yoga culture; but, given that customers are surrounded by the merchandise during the class, this practice may also be a way to

entice them to purchase new items—which may be what the customer was referring to with “get[ting] stuff” in the above example.

Muniz, Jr. and O’Guinn refer to two main sub-topics in defining rituals and traditions. The first is “celebrating the history of the brand” (Muniz, Jr. and O’Guinn 422). If lululemon’s history as is considered as being rooted as yoga wear, then these roots are constantly visible on its Facebook page, with customers posting about yoga events and lululemon itself posting new products to wear to yoga (although the company also offers clothing for running and other sports). The second way rituals and traditions are defined is through the sharing of brand stories, where “stories based on common experiences with the brand serve to invest the brand with meaning, and meaningfully link community member to community member” (Muniz, Jr. and O’Guinn 423). In the case of lululemon, these can either be stories about lululemon events, such as the complimentary in-store yoga classes, or about purchases. These latter stories are often seen on Facebook. Customers choose to share stories about their purchases from lululemon, including any experiences they had at the store or with the products during their use:

*Facebook user 1:* “If it wasn't for my business casual Wednesday morning meetings, I would live in lulu. Eat. Pray. Love Lulu.”

*Facebook user 2:* “In Orlando 5 Minutes and blew my budget at lululemon athletica Orlando Premium Outlets! Happens everytime I hit a lululemon athletica!”

*Facebook user 3:* “So glad the lulu site is up and running, and turbo tanks are back! Just bought a few in store, and now online.. I absolutely love them! My favorite tank used to be scoop neck or push ur limits, but I have a new favorite... Seriously, this tank is soo flattering for any body size or shape, and the length is wonderful! You can scrunch it up so it's not too tight, or you can let it hit just below your butt. The back is also very unique.. I think that's my favorite part. Yeahh! :)”

This type of storytelling is centered on the brand and its products, which is another way that lululemon's Facebook users can be seen to make up a brand community.

The final element of brand community is moral responsibility. Muniz, Jr. and O'Guinn define moral responsibility as "a sense of duty to the community as a whole, and to individual members of the community" (Muniz, Jr. and O'Guinn 424). One of the ways that this is expressed is through the integration and retention of members, where "it is necessary to retain old members and integrate new ones" (Muniz, Jr. and O'Guinn 424). This can be seen on lululemon's Facebook page when customers state that they are first-time buyers of a certain product, or the brand, and others agree with them, creating a sense of community. Some customers posting about a new item purchase create a cascade, in which the responders express happiness that the customer made that purchase. Having others validate their purchase may make that customer feel like part of the community. In the following example, one customer posted that they bought a new pair of pants, three Facebook users "liked" the comment, and two others responded in accord:

*Facebook user 1:* "Just got Astro pants and I am in heaven! I will never ever take them off! Lol"

3 people like this.

*Facebook user 2:* "Yay for Astros....I love them too....and my astro crops as well!"

*Facebook user 3:* "I am soo glad you love them!"

Customers will also post on Facebook when they have been introduced to the brand outside Facebook:

*Facebook user:* "After a 14 miler this morn with new pal, came home and purchased the same Turn Around long sleeve that she has. She is already a good influence on me! :)"

In this particular example, while the brand community itself did not integrate this new member, the fact that this customer chose to join the online community after purchasing a lululemon product could indicate that they are joining the online brand community. Sharing the shopping experience may be a way of identifying with the community.

Another element of moral responsibility is “assisting in the use of the brand,” which means, “looking out for and helping other members in their consumption of the brand” (Muniz, Jr. and O’Guinn 425). In the Facebook data analyzed in this study, this is the element of brand community that appeared most frequently. Customers would post questions wanting help with one aspect or another about a lululemon product or purchase, and other customers would respond to them, sometimes before lululemon did, sometimes instead of lululemon, and sometimes regardless of lululemon’s response.

*Facebook user 1:* “Anyone have the “Ahead of the Curve” Jacket? I take a size 6 in the define jacket but it is pretty fitted from the waist up. I would like to be able to layer under this jacket. Should I size up to a size 8 or is this jacket made already made for layering?”

*Facebook user 2:* “It looks like it has stretchy side panels so depending on how thick of a shirt or jacket you want to layer it with will likely depend on if you should go up a size or not.”

*Facebook user 1:* “Thanks [Facebook user 2], I noticed the side panels too but never thought that the panels might be stretchy. It’s probably the same concept as the skirts and I know the waist on them has some give.”

*Facebook user 1:* “I’m sure this has been asked before but what is the difference between regular and brushed luon?”

*Facebook user 2:* “brushed is softer and a bit thicker, great for fall/winter!!!”

*lululemon athletica:* “Great question, [Facebook user 1]! Brushed luon has been “teased” on the inside to give it a fleecy feel. It offers a little more warmth and is oh-so cozy. Hope this helps! ~[lululemon employee]”

*Facebook user 1:* “Thanks [Facebook user 2] and [lululemon employee]!”

*Facebook user 2:* “no problem! I have boogie pants that are brushed luon

and I LOVE them!"

*Facebook user 1:* "I'm debating between the regular stripes galore stride vs one of the newer brushed ones right now. I'm thinking the brushed one may win as it's getting chillier out lately!"

*Facebook user 2:* "Love brushed luon, especially for fall/winter...I say go for it and I hope it stays together for ya!"

These types of examples, with other customers assisting each other in this way, are evidence of the strongest factor of lululemon's brand community. While some of the other elements are not as visible in this study (perhaps due to its "snapshot" nature) and may not make for a solid recognition of lululemon's Facebook community as a brand community, the abundance of examples of users assisting each other is evidence of a brand community around lululemon. Further research could be conducted to determine whether in fact these trends are continuing and whether there is a strong brand community of lululemon customers online.

## Conclusion

The data showed evidence that answered both the first and second research questions: customers are using social media to create loyal followings around a brand and lululemon is using social media to encourage that loyalty. Also found in the data was strong evidence of an online brand community that has formed around lululemon. While more research may be necessary to provide more in-depth and decisive answers on the various functions of this community, this study has found encouraging data to support the notion that social media is an important tool in branding and encouraging customer loyalty. This study has shown that customers have taken a strong interest in social media and use it not only for sharing their opinions but also for seeking answers and suggestions to any questions they may have. Those opinions can either be positive or negative, and since there are many ways customers can share them (Facebook, customer product reviews, blogs), it is important for companies to leave all opinions visible online and address and use this information to better manage their brands. Addressing both positive and negative opinions shows that the company acknowledges the good with the bad, and demonstrates a commitment to customer service when the company takes action to address and remedy any situations that need it. This can show customers their opinions are valued, which in turn may lead to an increased sense of loyalty from customers who have had their problems remedied in such a public manner.

This research is beneficial to a discussion of the importance of social media to branding. It can be used as a starting point both for academics wanting to further the research of this study and for industry and marketing professionals wanting to



add value to their brand. Social media is an important tool not only for keeping customers informed of company initiatives (such as new products), but also for creating and maintaining an open dialogue with customers in the hopes of encouraging customer brand loyalty.

### *Future research*

For future research, a longer study period for capturing data may produce richer results and lead to more substantial examples to support more definitive answers. It is important to note that because lululemon's Facebook layout has changed since the data was gathered for this study, a different method of collecting the Facebook posts would need to be created.<sup>1</sup> Initiating follow-up with some customers may also give greater insight into the reasoning behind some of their comments. It would also allow for analysis of whether customers' interaction with a company through social media does, or does not, increase a sense of customer loyalty to that brand. Further study could also determine whether customers who had problems that were remedied via social media feel an increased sense of loyalty. Future research could also determine whether witnessing such exchanges on social media affects other community members' sense of loyalty to that company. To gain a better perspective from the company's point of view about their social media use, interviews with company representatives would also be beneficial. Face-to-face or over the phone interviews may be best, as they would allow for more flexibility in the questions being asked and would lead to richer data for analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> The data was gathered between September and November 2011, and the Facebook layout for lululemon's page was changed in March 2012.

### *Limitations*

One of the limitations of this study was its reliance on secondary data. Initiating follow-up interviews with customers would provide a richer understanding of the customer's posts. While attempts were made to speak with employees at lululemon, interviews could not be officially scheduled, and as a result, this research lacks some potentially valuable company insight. This may have been due to the sensitivity of the topic or due to proprietary information that the company did not wish to divulge. This study thus relied on public information to learn about and observe the company's activities, using resources such as magazine and newspaper articles and the company's website. Because the study period was confined to comments posted on Thursdays over three months, this data provides only a snapshot of the community that exists on lululemon's Facebook page. A longer study would yield much more data, which would likely provide richer and more detailed results.

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## Appendix A – List of working questions for lululemon interview – manager

### Questionnaire for lululemon web team manager

1. What is your position title?
2. How long have you worked in this position?

### Company commitment to social media

3. How many people work in the online team?
4. How many people manage the Twitter account?
5. How many people work on the e-newsletter sent out to customers (“This just in” newsletters that gives online product notifications)?
6. What kinds of qualifications are required/desired to work on team that manages lululemon’s online presence?
7. How does lululemon differentiate itself from competitors in terms of its use of social media?
8. How important is social media to lululemon in terms of customer loyalty?
9. Would you agree that lululemon does not use traditional forms of promotion?
10. If you agree, how does lululemon leverage social media for promotional purposes?

### lululemon’s Facebook community

11. How many people manage the Facebook page?
12. Approximately how many comments does lululemon’s Facebook page receive in a day? In a week? In a month?
13. What time of year does the Facebook page receive the most traffic in terms of comments, postings, questions, etc.?
14. What are the most common types of posts by customers on the Facebook page (e.g. questions, comments, reviews, etc.)?
15. What types of comments does lululemon respond to most often? Why?
16. How long has lululemon been actively involved in the Facebook page?
17. How does lululemon’s Facebook page differentiate itself from its competitors Facebook pages?
18. How many lululemon stores have individual Facebook pages?
19. Who manages the stores’ individual Facebook pages?

### Customer written product reviews on lululemon’s webpage

20. How many people manage the customer reviews on the lululemon page?
21. Approximately how many product reviews does lululemon’s website receive in a day? In a week? In a month?
22. Are there certain products that seem to receive more or less customer reviews than others? Why?
23. To what types of reviews does lululemon respond to most? Why?
24. Not all reviews are positive, some are negative product reviews – how does lululemon react to the negative reviews?



#### Customer involvement

- 25. Are customers involved in the company? How? Why?
- 26. Does lululemon involve customers in their branding process? How?
- 27. Why is it/is it not important to involve customers in that process?
- 28. How much input from customers (such as design suggestions on Facebook, or customers saying what products they would like to see again) does the company actually take?
- 29. Is Facebook a place to find information for product design and development?

#### Customer service

- 30. What are lululemon's customer service policies (e.g. returns, alterations, etc.)?
- 31. Are these policies advertised to customers?
- 32. Is social media a way to promote those policies?
- 33. Is social media a way to promote any other aspects of the company?

## Appendix B – List of working questions for lululemon interview – Web team employees

### Questionnaire for lululemon web team employees

1. What is your position title?
2. How long have you worked in this position?

### Company commitment to social media

3. How does lululemon differentiate itself from competitors in terms of its use of social media?
4. How important is social media to lululemon in terms of customer loyalty?
5. Would you agree that lululemon does not use traditional forms of promotion?
6. If you agree, how does lululemon leverage social media for promotional purposes?

### lululemon's Facebook community

7. What are the most common types of posts by customers on the Facebook page (e.g. questions, comments, reviews, etc.)?
8. What types of comments does lululemon respond to most often? Why?
9. How does lululemon's Facebook page differentiate itself from its competitors Facebook pages?

### Customer written product reviews on lululemon's webpage

10. Are there certain products that seem to receive more or less customer reviews than others? Why?
11. To what types of reviews does lululemon respond to most? Why?
12. Not all reviews are positive, some are negative product reviews – how does lululemon react to the negative reviews?

### Customer involvement

13. Are customers involved in the company? How? Why?
14. Does lululemon involve customers in their branding process? How?
15. Why is it/is it not important to involve customers in that process?

### Customer service

16. How do you think social media serves to promote any other aspects of the company?

## Appendix C – Consent form – Manager

### Ryerson University Consent Agreement

#### Extreme Branding: Examining Brand Devotion of Fashion Companies by Customers Using Social Media

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

**Investigators:**

Caroline Czajkowski, Graduate Student, Master of Arts – Fashion, Ryerson University  
Dr. Tasha Lewis, Supervisor

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to determine how customers create loyal followings around a certain brand using social media, and to see what role, if any, the company plays in encouraging extremely loyal customer behaviour via social media. You are being invited to participate in this study because of your experience with social media and customer loyalty.

**Description of the Study:** You will be asked to fill out a questionnaire. The link to the questionnaire will be e-mailed to you, and you can complete it online. The initial questionnaire consists of 29 questions, which may take from 25-35 minutes to complete, depending on the level of detail in the responses.

**Risks or Discomforts:** There are minimal risks associated with this study, other than those encountered in daily life. Discomforts may include discussing various aspects about your employer (the company), or customers. If you feel uncomfortable with any questions, you have the right to not answer them and move on to another question. If the majority of the questionnaire leaves you uncomfortable, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Please note that withdrawing from the study will in no way harm your relationship with Ryerson University or with the researcher.

**Benefits of the Study:** There is no direct benefit to you; rather, this study may provide benefits to the academic world, in that a new area of study is being explored, that of social media. This study may provide insight into the importance of social media not only academically, but also from a marketing perspective, enhancing marketers' ability to better understand and connect with customers.

**Confidentiality:** Your confidentiality will be maintained. Your supervisor will not be notified as to whether or not you have chosen to participate. The answers from

the questionnaire will be analyzed, and may be quoted in the study, however no names will be published.

**Incentives to Participate:** Participation in the study is voluntary, and no incentives will be provided to participate.

**Costs and/or Compensation for Participation:** There are no costs or compensations for participation.

**Voluntary Nature of Participation:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your participation will not affect your current or future employment at lululemon athletica. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed.

At any particular point in the study, you may refuse to answer any particular question or stop participation altogether. If you choose to withdraw from the study, any data you have submitted will not be used for analysis and will be deleted.

**Questions about the Study:** If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact.

Caroline Czajkowski  
cczajkow@ryerson.ca

Dr. Tasha Lewis  
tllewis@ryerson.ca

If you have questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study, you may contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board for information.

Research Ethics Board  
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and  
Innovation  
Ryerson University  
350 Victoria Street  
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3  
416-979-5042

**Agreement:**

Checking the box labelled “Yes, I agree to participate in this study” below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Checking the box also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and

withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

You have been told that by checking the box on this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal right

- ☐ - Yes, I have read and understand the consent form and I agree to participate in this study
- ☐ - No, I do not agree to participate in this study

## Appendix D – Consent form – Web team employees

### Ryerson University Consent Agreement

#### Extreme Branding: Examining Brand Devotion of Fashion Companies by Customers Using Social Media

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

**Investigators:**

Caroline Czajkowski, Graduate Student, Master of Arts – Fashion, Ryerson University  
Dr. Tasha Lewis, Supervisor

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to determine how customers create loyal followings around a certain brand using social media, and to see what role, if any, the company plays in encouraging extremely loyal customer behaviour via social media. You are being invited to participate in this study because of your experience with social media and customer loyalty.

**Description of the Study:** You will be asked to fill out a questionnaire. The link to the questionnaire will be e-mailed to you, and you can complete it online. The initial questionnaire consists of 16 questions, which may take from 20-30 minutes to complete, depending on the level of detail in the responses.

**Risks or Discomforts:** There are minimal risks associated with this study, other than those encountered in daily life. Discomforts may include discussing various aspects about your employer (the company), or customers. If you feel uncomfortable with any questions, you have the right to not answer them and move on to another question. If the majority of the questionnaire leaves you uncomfortable, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Please note that withdrawing from the study will in no way harm your relationship with Ryerson University or with the researcher.

**Benefits of the Study:** There is no direct benefit to you; rather, this study may provide benefits to the academic world, in that a new area of study is being explored, that of social media. This study may provide insight into the importance of social media not only academically, but also from a marketing perspective, enhancing marketers' ability to better understand and connect with customers.

**Confidentiality:** Your confidentiality will be maintained. Your supervisor will not be notified as to whether or not you have chosen to participate. The answers from

the questionnaire will be analyzed, and may be quoted in the study, however no names will be published.

**Incentives to Participate:** Participation in the study is voluntary, and no incentives will be provided to participate.

**Costs and/or Compensation for Participation:** There are no costs or compensations for participation.

**Voluntary Nature of Participation:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your participation will not affect your current or future employment at lululemon athletica. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed.

At any particular point in the study, you may refuse to answer any particular question or stop participation altogether. If you choose to withdraw from the study, any data you have submitted will not be used for analysis and will be deleted.

**Questions about the Study:** If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact.

Caroline Czajkowski  
cczajkow@ryerson.ca

Dr. Tasha Lewis  
tllewis@ryerson.ca

If you have questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study, you may contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board for information.

Research Ethics Board  
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**Agreement:**

Checking the box labelled “Yes, I agree to participate in this study” below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Checking the box also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and

withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

You have been told that by checking the box on this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal right

- ☐ - Yes, I have read and understand the consent form and I agree to participate in this study
- ☐ - No, I do not agree to participate in this study