



Lululemon Australia Research Essay

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Research Essay, Communications, Marketing	This research critically evaluates Lululemon Australia's Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) strategy, specifically focusing on its footwear category. Despite Lululemon's established success in yoga wear, the footwear segment lacks a cohesive IMC approach, evident from its absence in promotional efforts and launch initiatives. The analysis draws on the framework, emphasizing the importance of consistent messaging and comprehensive audience coverage. It highlights discrepancies in targeting and communication alignment, noting a predominant female-centric focus contrary to the intended unisex audience. Overall, the assessment underscores the necessity for Lululemon AU to strengthen its IMC strategy for footwear to effectively resonate with and engage its diverse target demographic.

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INTRODUCTION

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) is widely recognized as a critical factor in the success of various brand communication strategies globally (Keller, 2016). This essay seeks to assess the current IMC strategy of Lululemon, a company specializing in "technical athletic apparel for yoga, running, training, and other active pursuits" (Stauffer, n.d.), with a specific focus on its operations in Australia (lululemon AU) and specifically within the footwear category as outlined in the client brief (lululemon AU 2023). Based on my findings, I argue that Lululemon AU has yet to implement a cohesive IMC approach to effectively coordinate and unify its communications efforts (Keller, 2016), particularly evident in the absence of promotion or launch activities for the footwear in question.

At the heart of integrated marketing communications (IMC) is the concept of strategically planning and consistently delivering messages to a company's target audience to achieve specific goals (Percy, 2014). This essay assesses Lululemon AU's footwear category by applying three criteria from Keller's (2016) seven Cs: Coverage, Contribution, and Commonality. The selection of these criteria is supported by their significance in IMC, emphasizing the breadth of communication (293), the primary impacts of messaging (293), and the alignment between audience and content across channels (294) (Fill & Turnbull, 2019). Despite Lululemon AU potentially employing an IMC strategy for other product lines like yoga wear, the evaluation reveals that their approach to footwear lacks integration, as indicated by the findings of a media audit. Overall, improvements are needed across all three criteria for Lululemon Australia's IMC strategy in the footwear category (Mozingo, Eno, Mitchell, Morrissey, & Eshleman, 2024).

The potential impact of communication strategies designed to influence perceptions and contribute to the Lululemon AU footwear category (Keller, 2016) appears limited due to the category's pending launch and promotional efforts. Additionally, the effectiveness of these efforts may be influenced by the communication strategies employed across other product categories within Lululemon AU (Keller, 2016). Notably, Lululemon is predominantly recognized for its women's yoga apparel (Williams, Fulton, Vaughn, & Spiegel, 2024), which contrasts with its intended brand

positioning as outlined in client briefs (Stauffer, n.d.); a cursory Google image search corroborates this (Figure 6). The objective of Lululemon AU's footwear category is to gain traction among male consumers (Stauffer, n.d.). Currently, however, the communication impact it generates is largely oriented towards women (Keller, 2016), potentially affecting how the intended audience perceives it. once the footwear launches, which is unisex, not only women (Stauffer, n.d.).



Figure. lululemon Google search image. (Source: Google)

Currently, the communication efforts for the Lululemon AU footwear category are not generating any noticeable impact, according to Keller (Keller, 2016). However, if the goal is to maintain low awareness of this category, then Lululemon AU is succeeding in that aspect (Baalbaki, Gilliard, & Hoffman, 2019). As a result, the Commonality (Keller, 2016) for Lululemon AU's footwear category is currently non-existent. In contrast, Lululemon AU's communication strategies in other categories are robust and yield similar effects (Keller, 2016). Figures 1 to 6 illustrate that across PESO media channels, there is consistent use of visual themes and messaging, which aids consumers in accurately processing and remembering information about the Lululemon brand (Keller, 2016). This consistency ensures that consumers perceive Lululemon consistently across all communication channels (Percy, 2014). Notably, Lululemon is strongly associated with an active, women-centric lifestyle, which may complicate efforts to promote the footwear category aimed at both genders (Stauffer, n.d.). The research fails to clearly articulate the objectives, benefits, and implications, although these aspects can be inferred from the discussion.

METHODS

This research will analyze a media audit conducted from February 2023 to August 2023, focusing on paid, earned, shared, and owned media. It will utilize Keller's 7C framework (Keller, 2016) to substantiate its arguments and compare Lululemon AU across different categories. Furthermore, it will delve into two communication challenges: brand awareness (Aaker, 2020) and brand positioning (Keller, 2016; Mammadova, 2023). Lastly, the essay will examine Adidas Australia's integrated marketing communications (IMC) strategy in the footwear sector to provide insights into addressing communication issues related to Lululemon AU's footwear.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Based on the assessment, this essay identifies two primary communication challenges facing Lululemon Australia (Keane, 2022). First, there is an issue with brand awareness. This involves ensuring that potential customers recognize Lululemon as part of a specific product category (Aaker, 2020). Many consumers are unaware that Lululemon offers more than just yoga products, including a footwear line not yet available in Australia (Social & Labour, 2022). Despite a media audit, there has been little to no mention of the footwear line in the Australian market, which is crucial for generating excitement and awareness (Aaker, 2020). According to Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity Pyramid (2001), the footwear category of Lululemon AU currently occupies the lowest level, indicating a need for increased awareness efforts. Achieving the highest level of "Brand Resonance," where consumers deeply connect with the footwear products (Keller, 2016), appears challenging under current circumstances. In conclusion, more attention must be devoted to raising awareness of Lululemon's footwear offerings in Australia (Bu, 2023).

The second issue lies in brand positioning. Currently, Lululemon AU is strongly associated in consumers' minds as a women's yoga brand, evident from their integrated marketing communications (IMC) channels (Kosteljik & Alsem, 2020). However, Lululemon aims to change this perception to establish credibility and be seen as a technical sports performance brand for all genders, especially with the upcoming launch of footwear (Stauffer, n.d.). This presents a challenge because Lululemon has historically positioned itself primarily as a brand for women (Brice, Thorpe, Wheaton, & Longhurst, 2023). The IMC channels reinforce this identity, predominantly featuring women's products over men's. There exists a disconnect between Lululemon AU's intended brand identity, defined by the company itself, and its brand image, which is how the target audience perceives it (Kosteljik & Alsem, 2020). This disconnect may undermine the effectiveness of the communications efforts for the footwear launch (Godfrey, Price, & Lusch, 2022).

Expanding on the communication challenges faced by Lululemon Australia, this essay will now analyze the communication approach utilized by one of its direct rivals, Adidas Australia, particularly within its footwear segment. The comparison aims to derive insights applicable to Lululemon AU, which has yet to introduce this product category in Australia. Adidas AU has garnered significant media coverage (Keller, 2016) across paid, earned, shared, and owned channels, effectively boosting product awareness (Keller, 2016) among a diverse audience, evident in their unisex footwear collections.

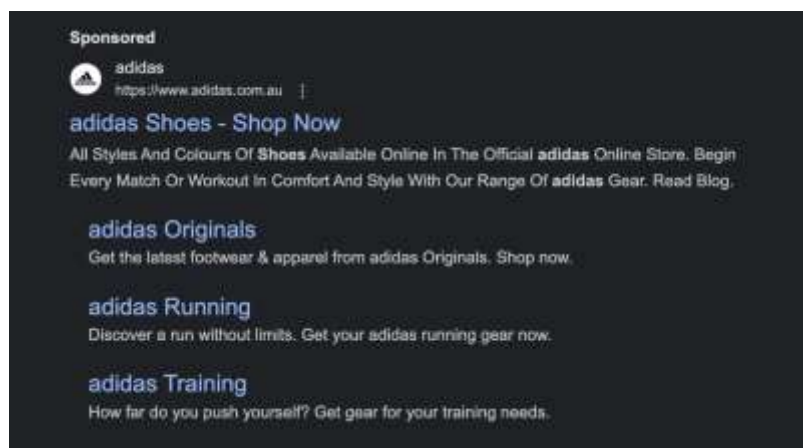


Figure. adidas AU Footwear paid media. (Source: Google)



Figure. adidas AU Footwear earned media. (Source: The West Australian)



Figure . adidas AU shared media. (Source: adidas AU Instagram)

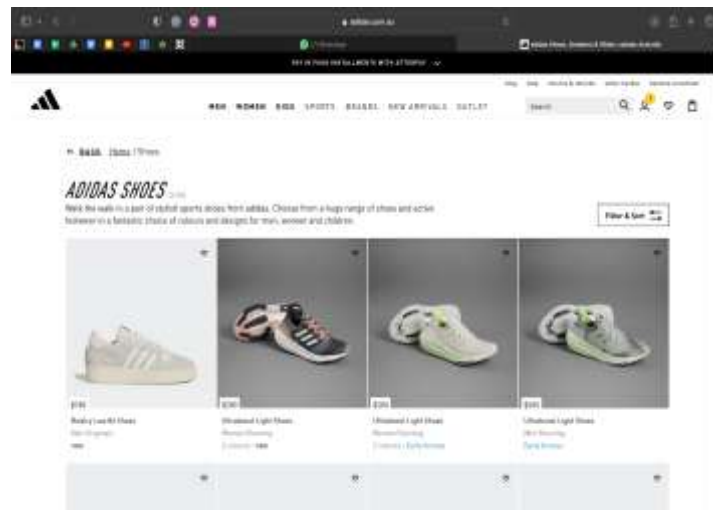


Figure. adidas AU-owned media. (Source: Adidas AU website)

Adidas AU footwear stands out for its effective branding as a unisex product line, avoiding favoritism towards any specific gender. This is evident in their support for sports events of both genders, such as the Fifa Women's World Cup (Figure 11). If Adidas AU were involved in a male-dominated event like the World Cup (Figure 12), they would similarly promote equality. This balanced exposure strategy, as noted by Keller (2016), contributes significantly to their strong brand positioning (Kosteljik & Alsem, 2020) as an athletic brand that caters to both genders, akin to the goals of Lululemon AU.



Figure. adidas AU Footwear on Fifa Women's World Cup. (Source: Adidas AU Instagram)



Figure. adidas AU Footwear on World Cup. (Source: Adidas AU Instagram)

CONCLUSION

In summary, lululemon AU footwear's integrated marketing communications (IMC) strategy does not meet the standards of an effective approach. According to Keller (Keller, 2016), the brand lacks sufficient Coverage, Contribution, and Commonality, hindering its ability to connect with its audience, make an impact, and establish a shared identity. These deficiencies are also apparent in communication issues such as low brand awareness and positioning, which could present challenges upon entering the footwear market. To overcome these challenges, lululemon AU footwear can draw lessons from Adidas AU footwear, a direct competitor that has successfully built brand awareness and secured a strong market position.

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