

Object: lululemon athletica

You can recognize the athletic clothing store lululemon by the white Sanskrit OM symbol surrounded by a red circle that hangs in front of its stores. According to Hindu belief, the symbol OM represents an all-encompassing mystical entity. A syllable that is now recited at the beginning and end of certain forms of yoga practice, the sound OM is associated with the reverberations resulting from the creation, divinity, and consciousness from the emptiness. OM is thought to be a reflection of all reality with no beginning or end.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the OM symbol, which is also featured on all of the company's products, the name "lululemon athletica" appears only as a light marking on the store's window and on their shopping bags. Unlike other athletic brands, you will not find a shirt with the name lululemon across the chest. The consumer is to recognize the brand by the OM alone, making the connection between Eastern spirituality and Western fitness apparel.

However, according to the company's founder, Chip Wilson, the OM symbol is actually a stylized "a"—a relic of the company's original name, "authentically hip," which "failed to make the grade." However, the spiritual element of yoga and the place of OM within yoga practice are relevant to the story of the brand's inception, as Wilson started the company inspired by "the post-yoga feeling" left with him after his first class.<sup>2</sup> The company's manifesto asserts the values of healthy living, friendship, community, and creating a positive impact on the world<sup>3</sup>—ideas embedded in Western yoga culture as a hybrid of Eastern philosophy and Western individualism and summarized in the company's original intent: "Elevating the world from mediocrity to greatness."<sup>4</sup> The company also values happiness and fun, as shown in their mission statement, "Creating components for people to live longer, healthier, fun lives," which is reflected in the name lululemon, which was chosen out of a list of 20 possible names in a survey of 100 people.

The symbology and ideology of lululemon are not the only facets of the company that makes it relevant to the study of globalization and culture. As with many clothing manufacturers, the company employs global commodity chains in the production and sale of their products. Made from materials sourced globally and assembled primarily in Asian countries, the products are distributed throughout the world from regional headquarters in Canada and the US. Lululemon promotes a responsible supply chain taking interest in global ecological sustainability and fair labor standards, requiring their suppliers adhere to their Vendor Code of Ethics.<sup>5</sup> The company also supports their vendors' engagement with their local communities through their "Metta Movement"—another Sanskrit term, meaning benevolence and friendship—a philanthropic project that provides grants to vendors who establish projects that “drive social and environmental sustainability,” creating a better lifestyle for their workers and communities.<sup>6</sup> Lululemon employees are also eligible for funds through the Metta Movement for projects they have developed in their communities and abroad.

Despite the positivity the company wishes to exude, lululemon is not universally loved. Many shoppers contend that the products are excessively expensive and former employees have noted a “cult-like” workplace culture. The company has come under fire recently for inconsistent product quality, which led Wilson to make claims regarding plus-sized women over-stretching the garments, prompting Wilson's resignation from the company two months later.<sup>7</sup> Aside from seemingly off-the-cuff discriminatory comments (including Eurocentric and overtly racist remarks), Wilson has also been cited as seeing the benefits of child labor in developing nations despite the company's noted support of the standards set forth by the International Labor Organization. Even with these controversies, lululemon's stocks continue to perform well with the company opening new stores across the globe.

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia, "OM": <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Om>. **Don't ever cite Wikipedia. This is for purposes of an example only.**

<sup>2</sup> Lulu Lemon, "Company History": [http://www.lululemon.com/about/history?mnid=fr;company\\_history](http://www.lululemon.com/about/history?mnid=fr;company_history).

<sup>3</sup> Lulu Lemon, "The lululemon manifesto": <http://www.lululemon.com/about/manifesto>.

<sup>4</sup> See, John Mackey and Raj Sisodia, *Conscious Capitalism* for more details on the connection between physical and spiritual wellbeing and individual success.

<sup>5</sup> Lululemon, "Vendor Code of Ethics": <http://sustainability.lululemon.com/responsible-supply-chain/vendor-code-of-ethics/>.

<sup>6</sup> Lululemon, "Elevating Community,": <http://sustainability.lululemon.com/responsible-supply-chain/elevating-community/>.

<sup>7</sup> Kim Bhasin, "Shunning Plus-Size Shoppers Is Key To Lululemon's Strategy, Insiders Say," *Huffingtonpost.com* (31 Jul 2013): [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lululemon\\_Athletica#cite\\_note-38](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lululemon_Athletica#cite_note-38).