Deciphering the Crowd

A study of a company’s presence in social media from a consumer’s perspective

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Spring Semester 2011
Abstract

New social media technologies like that of Facebook, have given companies new avenues in order to research their consumers and target market at a much faster pace than ever before. Though, with these new technologies companies are still focusing on traditional ways of advertising and marketing that have not equated to success over Facebook. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis was to better understand why consumers decided to engage with companies over Facebook and what they wanted out of this experience. This in turn will help companies readjust their focus when approaching Facebook. The authors explored these questions by looking at one company’s Facebook interactions with consumers in the form of a case study by conducting qualitative surveys with consumers as well as netnography observations of Chipotle’s Facebook page. Through this process the authors identified three reasons why consumers decided to engage with companies over Facebook. By doing so they were able to distinguish how these relationships contribute to the overall customer experience. Looking at social media interaction between businesses and consumers, from a predominantly consumer focus, the authors hoped to draw attention to potential aims as to why consumers decided to engage in this process in order to improve the business to consumer relationship for companies.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our tutor Vivi Hallström for guiding us throughout the writing of our thesis. We would also like to thank our participants who took part in our study and our classmates who provided their critiques during our research.
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Introduction

1.1 Background:

“Over the last few years the web has fundamentally shifted towards user-driven technologies such as blogs, social networks and video-starting platforms” and companies like Facebook are at the forefront of this change (Smith 2009, 559). From this, businesses are starting to explore the potential of Facebook and other social media platforms. There is an abundance of books and articles, such as, “Unlocking the elusive potential of social networks”, “Engaging with web 2.0”, and “Online Communities Handbook”, which provide insight for business which are unsure about the use of Facebook. Though they do not always agree upon the same points they all seem to state, “every business should have social media and social networking as part of their marketing and promotion strategy” (Akuffo, 2011). But just because companies are following this mantra, the way in which they are engaging their consumer base over Facebook is quite different. With some global companies such as Wal-Mart, the US based retailer, had a way for users to post direct questions on their Facebook page, where a specialist was more capable of helping them. On the other hand, other smaller local based companies had less interaction by only posting an advertisement every few days or weeks. These uncertainties with businesses using Facebook, is our focal point of this thesis. We hope not to contribute evidence that companies should use social media, but rather, evidence that examines the relationship between businesses and consumers. This will hopefully allow companies to be able to utilize Facebook to its full potential. In order to understand this better we will first look the history of the Internet and what role social media has played in it.

1.2 History:

Over the past forty years of the Internet’s existence, many technologies have revolutionized how companies and consumers interact with one another. It is important to understand the history of the Internet before discussing the implications these technologies have had on businesses, and further understand the growing and changing dynamics around the use of the Internet.

Historians agree that the “origins of the Internet in the 1960s and 1970s [came] through the efforts of the U.S. Department of Defense’s Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) to build a network to connect defense researchers and later military sites to one another” (Aspray and Ceruzzi 2008). Later, in the 1980s the Internet was adopted by the “scientific community to communicate with one another, share data, and gain remote access to powerful computing facilities” (2008). Though these technologies were collaborative and
powerful, they do not make up the Internet that is widely referred to of today. “In 1992, the U.S. Congress first permitted the Internet to be used by people besides academic, government, or military users”, which spurred the birth of the World Wide Web (ibid). After this event people outside of academia, the military, and the government were able to share data, have access to information, and communicate without being present around one another. This in turn spawned the birth of what is referred to now as Web 1.0. While some in academia in the Information Technology field view Web 1.0 as a time “where websites were typically collections of pages on which the owners published content and advertising- the communication was one sided” (Buss and Strauss 2009), others believe it goes beyond this phenomena. The Communication of the Association for Information Technologies views Web 1.0 distinctly different in three areas: technology, business applications, and social/users (Kim, et al. 2009). Regardless of its exact limitations of Web 1.0, it limited users’ ability to collaborate.

While it is hard to pinpoint the exact time, over the past,

“Few years, there have been massive changes in the ways that people are interacting with technology. In fact, more interaction with technology is one of the major changes that users are experiencing. This trend and key feature of interaction can trace its roots to the increasing usage of the term Web 2.0” (ibid).

These interactions within the new era of web 2.0 have spawned a new phenomenon known as social media. While one could argue a uniform definition for social media, a widely popular one is as follows, “social media employ mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content” (Kietzmann, et al. 2011). The aspects and examples of current social media technologies are within the following section.

1.3 What is Social Media?

Author Antony Mayfield best describes social media in his e-book, “What is Social Media?” as a type of online media consisting of five main characteristics (Mayfield, 2008):

1. **Participation:** Social media encourages contribution and feedback from everyone who is interested, resulting in blurring the line between media and the audience (ibid).

2. **Openness:** Many social media services are open to feedback and comments. They encourage user participation by allowing voting, commenting, and sharing of information on their social media outlets. Restricted information, such as password-protected content, is frowned upon because it reduces transparency (ibid).
3. **Conversation**: In traditional forms of media, the messages are sent as a “broadcast” (content transmitted or distributed to an audience). In social media, messages are more “conversational” (allowing communication to and from audience) (ibid).

4. **Community**: Social media allows communities to form quickly and communicate effectively. Communities share common interests, which vary from favorite movies to political figures (ibid).

5. **Connectedness**: Most social media tools thrive on connectedness, which is using links to other sites, resources, and people (ibid).

Unlike the times prior to the Internet, users today have the ability to communicate to thousands of people and companies with a few clicks of a mouse. Social media websites are relatively inexpensive to use as well. Most social media websites are free to use, while others allow premium upgrades for a low cost.

1.3.1 **Types of social media**

Social media is becoming more and more relative in people’s daily lives. New devices such as tablet computers and cellular phones come with pre-installed, easy to use social media applications in order to allow the user to post content to their friends and family from anywhere in the world. Today, the main forms of social media can be split into seven categories (ibid):

1. **Social Networks**: These allow users to create their own personal web pages in order to communicate and/or share content with friends and family (ibid).
   a. Popular website(s): Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn

2. **Blogs**: Blogs are similar to personal journals/diaries. Users create a personal webpage and can freely write content and publish it onto the Internet, with the latest entry showing first. Blogs can be public or private (ibid).
   a. Popular website(s): Blogger, Weebly

3. **Wikis**: These are content websites where the users are the authors. Users can contribute information and are allowed to add and/or edit information. This can be viewed as an online database from which users across the world are able to input their information (ibid).
   a. Popular website(s): Wikipedia

4. **Podcasts/ Really Simple Syndicate (RSS) feeds**: Audio, video, or text content which users subscribe to through the use of podcast or RSS handlers. Content is
recorded by the author and automatically downloaded for the user if he/she is subscribed to the podcast/RSS feed (ibid).

a. Popular service(s): Apple iTunes, RSShub

5. **Forums**: These are managed online discussion websites in regards to a particular topic or interests. Forums usually contain vast amount of content in regards to the specific topic and are a great source of information (ibid).

   a. Popular website(s): None in general. Topics vary greatly causing community-specific web groups. An example of a forum is e46fanatics.com, a high-traffic forum dedicated to the e46 generation BMW 3-series.

6. **Content Communities**: These are communities, which organize and share particular kinds of content. YouTube allows the sharing of videos, whereas Flickr allows the sharing of photos (ibid).

   a. Popular website(s): YouTube, Flickr,

7. **Microblogging**: Social media combined with bite-sized blogging. Small amounts of content (‘updates’ or ‘tweets’) are distributed online and mobile phone networks. Twitter, for example, allows the user to post tweets no larger than 140 characters. Another way to look at it is as a SMS message posted online and sent to all your friends or followers (ibid).

   a. Popular website(s): Twitter

1.3.2 **Introduction of Facebook**

Facebook is a social network tool designed to connect people who are around them (Holmes, 2007). This tool has gone from “a networking site for college students [to] a go-to tool for 19 million registered users, including employees of government agencies and Fortune 500 companies” (McGirt, 2007, pp.74). In a few short years Facebook, has experienced tremendous growth. From 19 million users in 2007 to over 500 million users in 2011 according to Facebook’s own statistics (Facebook, 2011).

Mark Zuckerberg, founder and current CEO started “The Facebook” at Harvard University in February 2004 (Holmes, 2007). In the same period Zuckerberg had gone from a college drop out to the 35th richest man in the world with an estimated net worth of 6.8 billion dollars (Hardy, Pomerantz and Hill 2010).

Facebook’s core principles include the development of “technologies that facilitate the sharing of information through the social graph, the digital mapping of people’s real-world social connections” (Facebook, 2011). This has changed very little in the period of Facebook’s existence. Facebook’s main “fundamental features…are a person’s Home page and Profile” (ibid). These features expand beyond the sole interaction with Facebook, with
other “core applications... that let people connect and share in rich and engaging ways” (ibid). These applications are now available to a variety of sources with individuals, celebrities, organizations, and companies able to actively engage within these interactions.

For a more in depth explanation and an example of Facebook’s technologies, please see Appendix A3.1.

1.4 Issue:

A core component of what attracts the vast number of users to Facebook has been their understanding of “what drives people and then develops technology and partnerships around those needs” (Moggridge, 2011). While, this aspect may be prevalent from Facebook itself, it lacks from the companies that reside within it with “many brands continue to operate in a traditional way even within the realm of Facebook, totally missing the chance to enhance relationships with customers” (ibid). These traditional ways refer to practice in which companies have excluded their consumers’ inputs, acting solely on the companies’ own intuitions, and forcing the consumer to change to them. Therefore, this thesis will revolve within the realm of understanding consumer’s needs and wants from companies over Facebook.

1.5 Purpose:

The purpose of this thesis is to identify possible motives as to why consumers decide to engage with companies over Facebook, and how these relationships lead to an extension of the customer experience.

The aim of this thesis is to apply our outcomes from a consumer’s point of view using one specific case study, in order to identify trends that can be applied horizontally across different industries and business.

1.6 Research Questions:

The main questions that will be answered in the thesis are:

- For what reasons do consumers decide to follow the selected company over Facebook?
- In what ways does the selected companies Facebook page contribute to the overall customer experience?

1.7 Delimitations:

The focus of this thesis is to use the social media tool Facebook in order to analyze the
motives for a consumer’s interaction with a corporate social media page, and what role a company Facebook page plays in the overall customer’s experience with the business. For our study, we will observe the activity of American restaurant named Chipotle and its followers posts on Facebook. There will be no analysis on the use of social media as a sales tool. Although we will not analyze social media in this way, we will not however, ignore this approach because it will help us understand what type of communication exists from the company to its followers on social media outlets.

1.8 Thesis Relevance:

Our intentions for this thesis are to provide theoretical and practical relevance for American fast food and other companies utilizing Facebook to reach their consumers. We will analyze the interaction between the company and its followers from a consumer standpoint, and apply relevant theories in regards to social media, consumer behavior, and customer experience.

1.9 Chapter Overview:

This is a quick briefing of what the thesis contains.

1. In the **methodology** section, our research approach and data collection are explained in full detail. Our choice of company is defined here as well as our methods used to finding applicable research methods and theories. The topics of errors, credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability are also presented in this part.

2. The **theoretical framework** section describes theoretical concepts in regards to consumer behavior and consumer relationship management. We provide definitions for terms in the way, which can be depicted from different perspectives in order to provide a common viewpoint, which was used in the writing of this thesis. Alongside of this, theoretical concepts are applied in the latter analysis of empirical findings.

3. The **empirical findings** segment brings forth our company, which we have studied. The information, which we have collected through the use of surveys and netnographical observations, are presented in order to provide a detailed description of this company’s connection with its social media followers, and how social media reflects upon their consumer relationship.

4. In the **analysis** piece, the theories, which we have chosen, are then applied to our empirical data. By doing this, we are able to focus on what can be learned from observing this company and its followers, and help provide a better understanding of why people follow company social media pages, what this relationship signifies to a company, and how social media pages affect consumer relationships within a company.
5. The conclusion section provides an overview of what our studies have concluded throughout this thesis. Our answers to the research questions are explained in this part as well.
Methodology

2.1 Research Approach
This section will explore the choices that lead up to thesis subject and how it was approached.

2.1.1 Background
Prior to the formulation of any concrete matters, the researchers began by reading articles and books on different social media techniques of how companies can, should, and have interacted within it. This allowed us to acknowledge the business to consumer relationship, which was also explored by further articles and books. Additionally, we began viewing different company social media pages at random, to observe the interaction between businesses and consumers. What was observed was not uniform. Rather, the extent and how these different businesses use social media depended predominantly on the business it self and their respective industries. These observations provided us with additional questions surrounding social media and its role in business.

2.1.2 Research Perspective
Previous influence and pre-understanding allowed us to obtain a broader view when examining issues in regards to social media, and the effects on consumer relationships. Pre-understanding, which is a vital part of the theory of hermeneutics, “follows from the recognition that prior to any interpretation, we and the object of our interpretation exist” (Arnold and Fischer 1994). When examining this phenomenon through the lenses of hermeneutics, it is important to understand what hermeneutics is. This theory is often “closely related to critical theory and diverges… most notably in its recognition of systemic distortion of pre-understanding, and in its use of analytic procedures to remove this distortion” (ibid).

In the case of the following thesis, the pre-understanding often derives from the user's usage of social media websites, particularly of Facebook. Being members of this social media engine for well over six years, we have the ability to understand and interpret online behaviors between peers as well as business to consumer. Through this pre-understanding, we believe that we are able to identify the use of slang and sarcasm, which can at times be misidentified by others unfamiliar with online communities (ibid). While this pre-understanding or view of social media communities has the potential for errors, which we will discuss in greater detail later in the thesis, we have tried to embrace the pre-understanding of social media and its respective communities. As Stephen Arnold put it in his article titled Hermeneutics and Consumer Researcher, “Our theoretical knowledge of attitudes, learning, socialization, and other consumer behavior concepts gives us an
additional basis for making sense of consumer behavior” (ibid), which is the mentality we have tried to embrace while being critical of it at the same time.

2.1.3 Qualitative and Quantitative Studies
In order to conduct these surveys in a constructive and scientific manner, we consulted the book Business Research Methods by Alan Bryman and Emma Bell (2003). Within their text, the discussions of qualitative and quantitative investigations are explored in greater detail. We will first define both types of studies as described by Bryman and Bell, and then we will explain why we chose one type of study over the other.

Qualitative study

In chapter one, Business Research Strategies, of the book “Business Research Methods”, Bryman and Bell display their definition of qualitative research as follows (2003):

“Qualitative research can be construed as a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data and that:

- Predominantly emphasizes an inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, in which the emphasis is placed on the generation of theories;
- Has rejected the practices and norms of the natural scientific model and of positivism in particular in preference for an emphasis on the ways in which individuals interpret their social world; and
- Embodies a view of social reality as a constantly shifting emergent property of individuals' creation.”

Quantitative study

In the same chapter of the “Business Research Methods”, Bryman and Bell define their definition of quantitative research as (2003):

“Quantitative research can be construed as a research strategy that emphasizes quantification in the collection and analysis of data and that:

- Entails a deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, in which the accent is placed on the testing of theories;
- Has incorporated the practices and norms of the natural scientific model and of positivism in particular; and
- Embodies a view of social reality as an external, objective reality.”

In short, Bryman and Bell describe qualitative investigation as “a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data (i.e. quantitative study)” (ibid).
Our reasoning for qualitative study

After our research of qualitative and quantitative research methods, we found that this “emphasis on words”, as Bryman and Bell described above in their description of qualitative studies, gave us a better understanding of the consumers’ own ideas, opinions, and judgments. By using this method, we were able to measure our necessary data needed for this thesis in a more advantageous way, than in comparison to the use of a quantitative study, which usually focuses on numbers or statistics. An example of this advantage is that in our netnography and surveys, we interpreted the consumer responses (qualitative), rather than examined the amount or frequency of consumer responses (quantitative).

The relationship between businesses and consumers over social media can be said to be a relatively new phenomenon. Due to this, we have decided to approach our research in the form of a case study.

2.1.4 Case study

In order to maintain consistency in defining terms, we chose to adopt Bryman and Bell’s definition and types of case studies. According to Bryman and Bell, “the basic case study entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case. A single case may be one of the following:” (2003)

- A single organization
- A single location
- A person
- A single event

For our case study, we have chosen our case to be a single organization. The organization will be introduced later in this section. It is also important to note what a case study does, and what its’ purpose is. Bryman and Bell define the case of a case study to be “an object of interest in its own right and the researcher aims to provide an in-depth elucidation of it” (ibid). This topic of elucidation further extends to two important approaches, idiographic and nomothetic.

We have conducted an idiographic approach for this thesis. The idiographic approach was formally defined as “the researcher [of a case study] is usually concerned to elucidate the unique features of the case” in chapter two of the “Business Research Methods” book (ibid).

The nomothetic approach is quite different. The nomothetic approach is a case study that “is concerned with generating statements that apply regardless of time and place” (ibid).
2.1.5 Application of Bryman & Bell’s Main Steps of Qualitative Research

In order to better understand our scientific process, it is best to understand Bryman and Bell’s idea of the main steps of qualitative research. Below is a visual representation of this process that is defined by the authors (2003).

![Diagram of Qualitative Research Steps]

Figure 1: Bryman and Bell’s Main Steps of Qualitative Research

In this particular case of this thesis, we have attempted to follow this graphical representation and put it into practice to the best of our ability. For instance, the first step in the process is to determine research questions that need to be explored in greater detail. We defined our research questions as followed:

- For what reasons do consumers decide to follow the selected company over Facebook?
- In what ways does the selected companies Facebook page contribute to the overall customer experience?

We completed the next step, selecting relevant site(s) and subjects in two distinct ways the first being an investigational study of different companies’ social media pages on Facebook. This gave us the ability to see comparisons and contrasts of how the companies operated
and communicated to their consumers through social media. The second way in which we selected relevant information was through the use of different literature on social media. These different literature archives gave us the opportunity to identify the market of social media and how businesses are using social media to enhance their production.

The third stage, collect relevant data, refers to our initial pre-study of a qualitative survey conducted with individuals which we are acquainted with. This pre-study was conducted through the use of our own personal Facebook sites. By using our personal Facebook sites, Facebook allowed us to have access to 981 separate individuals. Of the 981 individuals, we only had the access to the 21 people (between both of our accounts), which followed or “liked” Chipotle Mexican Grill on Facebook. All 21 individuals were contacted through the use of a Facebook message with a blanket statement asking for their participation of a study for our bachelor level thesis. The letter template that was sent out to these individuals can be found in the Appendix under A1.1 Pre-Study.

The fourth stage, interpretation of data, “provides guidelines for the classification and organization of the data, in particular through the creation and maintenance of ‘concept cards’” (ibid). We completed this interpretation of data through the use of our preliminary study. Through this preliminary study, 21 individuals received the survey questions, of which a total of five agreed to participate. The results of this preliminary study will be discussed in further detail later within the thesis. However, from conducting this preliminary study, we obtained a solid understanding of information that helped us understand the business to consumer relationship through social media.

The fifth stage of the main steps of qualitative research is conceptual and theoretical work. The development of theoretical frameworks in which to base empirical findings can be found in greater detail in the theoretical section of the thesis. However, we decided to use social media, consumer behavior, along with customer experience theories to focus the lenses on the relationship between businesses and consumers in social media.

Another part of the fifth stage is a subcategory titled tighter specification of the research question(s). We addressed this stage of the qualitative steps by revising our initial research problem. Originally our problem dealt with why consumers initially follow businesses on social media, the reasons why they remain a follower, and why they would stop being a follower. This is why in our preliminary study the question “are you still a follower of Chipotle’s Facebook page?” was asked. The reason why this question was asked was to try and give a better understanding to why consumers would stop following a business on social media. However, after receiving the data from the preliminary study, none of the participants stopped following Chipotle Mexican Grill. Therefore, we made a decision that this was not the direction in which our purpose should remain. This is not to suggest that users of social media ever stop following companies, but rather that the reasons one may
stop following a specific company can vary greatly. This is why, after further consideration, our purpose changed. It changed in order to better explain and understand why consumers chose to follow companies on social media sites, specifically on Facebook, and how did it benefit them as customers. This in term adjusted our research questions, putting in effect tighter restrictions on them.

The second subcategory of the fifth stage is titled collection of further data. An important part of qualitative research surveys is the idea of the participant may be surveyed on more than one and sometimes even several occasions. In quantitative research, unless the research is longitudinal in character, the person will be surveyed on one occasion only” (ibid). This important aspect of qualitative surveys gave us the opportunity to focus more on the participants in terms of what they might say within the survey, and not as statistic in a measurement. For this reason, with a revised purpose and research questions, we decided to re-survey certain participants based on their answers within the preliminary study. Five participants were re-surveyed more extensively following the preliminary survey. The survey was delivered in a similar fashion as the preliminary survey, which was via Facebook message. These five surveys can be found in the Appendix A2.1. Through the use of qualitative research methods we were able to revise our research purpose and approach a more concrete empirical study.

The final section of the qualitative research method is writing up and finding conclusions. While conclusions from the empirical findings combined with the theoretical frameworks can be found in the later section labeled analysis. It is important to understand what our goals are for our conclusion. Our goals for finding these conclusions are to answer the research questions as stated above.

2.1.6 Previous Research - SCRM
One concept many researchers are exploring is the idea of a social customer relationship management or SCRM for short.

_Sanaa Askool and Keiichi Nakata “define SCRM as a new strategy and system that integrates Web 2.0 and the power of online communities with traditional CRM systems for encouraging the customers to play a part with a firm in making decisions that have an impact on a particular customer and creating meaningful conversation and high value relation- ships between firms and customers”_ (2010, p. 4).

In order to understand the consumer to business relationship more thoroughly on social media we decided to explore the research of Askool and Nakata, to better help us understand the concept of SCRM and how it relates to the interactions between consumers and businesses on social media.

Their study, which we explored, was titled, “A conceptual model for acceptance of social CRM systems based on a scoping study”. According to their own description, “the aim of this
paper is to identify the factors that may influence businesses and customers’ adoption of social CRM” (2010, p.1). In order to accomplish this task, they decided to choose “banks in Saudi Arabia to develop a model for the usage and acceptance of SCRM” (2010, p.6). Their findings of why businesses and consumers embrace SCRM are identified in four concepts found through web 2.0, specifically social media. The four concepts were familiarity, which “generates the ability to understand the environment and the trusted party”, care which “focus on the relationships that are found within a social network, i.e. real and trustful relationships”, information sharing which “can be viewed as a flow of information through social network”, and perceived trustworthiness which “is specifically developed in relationship between customers and contact employee” (2010, p.10). The model below is their contribution of SCRM.

To their own accord, Askool and Nakata feel that their “model will enable a system designer to improve the traditional CRM system by understanding customer attitude towards SCRM” (2010, p.14). However, while they feel this insight is substantial, they do not believe that SCRM will one day take the place of traditional CRM, but rather “SCRM adds the dimension of connecting and collaborating with current and potential customers” (2010, p.13).

2.1.6a Research Gap -SCRM
The Askool and Nakata study was helpful in identifying potential reasons as to why businesses and consumers adopt SCRM, but it did little to identify why consumers decide to actively engage on social media, and thus in SCRM.
This study made many assumptions, the first example being about Web 2.0 technologies and social media. As it was stated early in our thesis, Web 2.0 technologies have allowed consumers to be more actively engaged using the Internet, specifically on social networks. However, within the Askool and Nakata study, they generalize these Web 2.0 technologies and do little to distinguish their differences. For instance, “Web 2.0 tools such as blogs, Wiki and other services, which are widely used by individuals, also have an effect on customer relationship management (CRM) systems” (2010, p.1). While this may be true, customer interaction is very different depending on what social network platform a consumer is using. In our introduction, we have depicted the similarities and differences between the popular forms of social media. For this reason, it is important not to generalize all of these social media products because of how much they differ. That is why we focused our thesis within Facebook only, in order to not make generalizations of all the social media platforms.

Askool and Nakata pointed out the potential communication channels of social media that can be enhanced by a SCRM, such as “an employee can start discussions or post news about a product... a customer also can publish comments regarding this product... These kinds of interactions represent the collaboration relationships” (2010, p.11). Askool and Nakata made the assumption that consumers are actively following within the specific companies social media, but do not ask why or how these consumers got there.

These two factors, not being specific in which social media platform to analyze in and not answering the question as to why consumers are following a specific company, are two reasons why we have decided to conduct our thesis. While, previous research was helpful in identifying the potential helpful factors of a SCRM, it did not answer vital questions in which we are hoping to make a contribution of answering.

2.1.7 Research Design
The lack of strong empirical data, as well as theories surrounding the relationship between consumers and business on social media, has made it difficult to analyze and contribute to previous research and theories. For this reason, we have decided to conduct a case study that addresses the relationship between businesses and consumers through social media. To give this process scientific credibility, the use of qualitative surveys have been conducted with first a small range of individuals following one particular company, and later follow up surveys with specific individuals depending on their responses to initial answers to the our preliminary survey. A qualitative observation was done over the company’s Facebook fan page.

The reason we chose to do a case study through the use of qualitative surveys and observation was that this gave us the possible method of investigating the relationship between consumer and business through social media. After we concluded our surveys, we obtained additional insight about the impact on social media for businesses through their
consumer base on social media. We have provided our reasoning for the choice of individuals selected for the survey process, an explanation of which company we had selected, and why this company was chosen in the latter section of this thesis named Data Collection.

While we conducted our empirical findings, we also tried to identify different theoretical frameworks that best connect with our study. These different theoretical frameworks helped our learning by giving a concrete base of information, in which we were able to identify the consumer-to-business relationship through social media. This connection between the empirical structures and theoretical framework allowed us a greater opportunity to investigate the relationship between consumers and business through social media in a structured environment, which pertains scientific credibility.

2.1.8 Choice of Literature
For this study, we chose to use mainly books, journal articles, and limited amounts of e-books and online articles in order to conduct our research. We attempted to limit ourselves from using online resources because of information being constantly added or removed from the Internet. In order to obtain information with more credibility than a standard Internet search via a search engine such as Google, we searched online academic databases instead. The academic databases we used Linköping Universitet’s EBSCO host and SCOPUS, as well as DePaul University’s e-book library 24x7, both of which can be found at their respective library pages. When searching these databases the main key words that we used were “social media”, “customer relations”, “consumer relations”, “customer relationship”, “customer relationship management”, and “CRM”. These words were combined in various ways while searching. Included in our Appendix under A4.0, we have included a search on May 28th, 2011 in the EBSCO database using the words “customer relationship” which yielded 188 results. Although the number in which the articles we have used from these databases changes in order, we have found that these articles still come up when using the specified search terms. However, this may not yield to be true within the future due to new material being added, as well as the possibility of some older content being removed. Since these articles have been published in professional journals and posted on university database search engines, we felt that these articles should have some type of credibility. We made sure to analyze and critique the credibility of the articles prior to incorporating them into our research.

In regards to books we have chosen to apply for our studies, we have trusted the text is valid. Since scholars and professionals in their respective fields wrote most of these texts, we had assumed that these books have already gone through previous revisions and scrutiny from their respective colleagues. Furthermore, these texts have been published and distributed, therefore we chose to hold these texts to be credible and feasible for us to use in our studies. This credibility also extends to our use of e-books as well; as these are
books which have been printed before and later been put in to an electronic format, or were originally published electronically.

2.2 Data Collection

This section will explain the process in which we gathered our findings.

2.2.1 Choice of Company

When examining different companies in which to conduct our empirical findings off of, we looked for three main criteria. This was first based on the number of followers that a company currently has on Facebook, second the companies’ active social media presence, and lastly whether the company is stable in the marketplace.

In order to satisfy our first criteria of identifying companies with a large number of Facebook followers, the article “Social Media 50” by Peter Romeo was consulted. The study identified the top 50 restaurant and fast food companies by monitoring Twitter and Facebook traffic. This was done by “counting followers and fans, how often consumers discussed the brands and the efforts of operators to foster that give and take” (Romeo, 2011, p.24). The study found Starbucks to have the largest number of Facebook followers with 19.3 million people and Red Robin with the fewest number of Facebook followers with 129,638 people (2011, p.25 and 35). These discrepancies between number of Facebook followers between the first company, Starbucks, and the last, Red Robin, forced us to look within the middle ground of the study, in order to get a more accurate idea of choosing a company in which to base our empirical findings off of. When we examined the study further we noticed that Chipotle Mexican Grill was ranked number 14th within the Social Media 50 survey with 1.2 million Facebook followers (2011, p.26). The number of Facebook followers alone was not the only reason for our selection of Chipotle. It was also ranked number one tweeting chain by the same survey with 57 tweets in 24 hours (ibid). This usage of Twitter and other active social media habits enticed us to look into Chipotle in further detail.

Though the previous survey was helpful in identifying a potential company, Chipotle, we wanted to identify their other social media habits in order to help satisfy our second criteria. Looking for other research on the matter, we came across newspaper article titled “Students’ low-cost Chipotle ads draw 18 million online viewers” by Ron Ruggless. The article describes a contest Chipotle was holding for $40,000 to the winner of a 30-second advertisement broadcasted on YouTube. Within “the first month that the contest’s top two 30-second ads were posted online, more than 8.4 million viewers were logged for each” (Ruggless, 2006, p.4). The winning advertisement went on to log more than 18 million views on YouTube (ibid). While, the contest benefited the students it also benefited Chipotle, who’s “target demographic is 18- to 34-year-olds, and college students are heavy
users” (2006, p.28). This exposure on other social media sites such as YouTube and Twitter satisfy our second criteria in terms of a company, while also making a strong case for our third. After the conclusion of Chipotle’s contest “other companies are using consumer-created content to further their messages” (ibid). For instance Quiznos Sub, “which claims that competitor Subway skimps on product quality and quantity, with a new campaign in the same vein” (ibid). This exposure and fronted thinking allowed us to examine our third criteria for picking a company, whether the company is experiencing growth.

Looking for information on Chipotle’s stability over the past few years in relation to our criteria. A study was found identifying the “Top Ten Growth Chains 2007” (Restaurant Hospitality 2007, p.38). In no particular order Chipotle was mentioned stating the reason for the growth is an “idea that a concept can be environmentally friendly and sustainable and still make a healthy profit” (2007, p.42). In the year 2006, the profits of Chipotle grew 31.8 percent to $837 million (ibid). This information does help us satisfy our final criteria, the date of the study raised doubts of whether or not Chipotle was still growing. Therefore, we consulted additional information and a more recent article. Stating that, “Chipotle Mexican Grill churned out quarter after quarter of positive results ending 2010 with same-store sales up an enviable 9.4 percent” (Jennings 2011, p.1). The article goes on to say that Chipotle has turned into a staple of other fast-casual restaurants to imitate (ibid).

Using these three measurements as a basis for our investigation into which company should be used as a model for our case study, Chipotle Mexican Grill satisfied all three requirements of number of followers currently on Facebook, the company’s active social media presence, and whether the company is stable. By doing so, we believe Chipotle gave us the best opportunity to answer our own research questions defined within the introduction.

2.2.2 Introduction of Chipotle

Current CEO and founder Steve Ells started Chipotle Mexican Grill, an American fast food company, out of Denver, Colorado in 1993 (Shambora, 2010). From 1993 to 2010 Chipotle has expanded to “1,084 restaurants, of which 1,081 were located throughout the United States, two were located in Toronto, Canada, and one was located in London, England” (Chipotle Mexican Grill, Inc., 2010, p.28). Chipotle serves predominantly Mexican style dishes such as “burritos, tacos, burrito bowls (a burrito without the tortilla) and salads” and as of December 31, 2010 the “average restaurant sales were $1.840 million” (ibid).

Chipotle’s philosophy, of “food served fast doesn’t have to be a traditional ‘fast-food’ experience”, has arguably made it a strong competitor in the field of ‘fast-food’ (2010, p.23). Each Chipotle restaurant across the United States is structured similarity. The common look includes the use of mainly plywood, stainless steel, open ductwork, and an open-view kitchen. The customers have a limited menu that doesn’t change often, and while choosing
with a certain range of topics... and the typically happens when the researcher has "survey and Bell, the fact that they had a We felt that qualitative studies offer. This 2.2 continues to look for ways to advance their ‘Food With Integrity’ program and expanding there already established brand. Through all of this Chipotle has become a fast-food industry icon, which many startups are looking to repeat (Jennings, 2011).

2.2.3 Surveys
As identified in the earlier section of 2.1.3 Qualitative and Quantitative Studies, we chose to do a qualitative due to the flexibility of responses qualitative studies offer. This decision to use a qualitative study narrowed our choice in data collection methods. In order to help us answer our research question of:

- For what reasons do consumers decide to follow the selected company over Facebook?

We felt that qualitative surveys gave us “flexibility” when we explored this question due to the fact that they had a much greater interest in the participant’s point of view (Bryman and Bell, 2003). According to Bryman and Bell there are two main types of qualitative surveys, unstructured surveys and semi-structured survey (2003). An unstructured survey typically happens when the researcher has “a brief set of prompts to him- or herself to deal with a certain range of topics... and the participant is then allowed to respond freely” (ibid).
Whereas semi-structured surveys usually happen when "the researcher has a list of questions on fairly specific topics to be covered", but the participant has a great deal of leeway in how to reply (ibid). After identifying both unstructured and semi-structured survey process, is we felt that semi-structured survey approach allowed us the best opportunity to answer our research question. This would enable us to have a set of standard questions that could be easily measured between each participant, while not limiting the participants’ answers or their ability to answer.

Sampling also became an important issue that needed to be addressed. Sampling is often described as the "methods either how their participants were selected or how many there were of them" (ibid). The example found within Business Research Methods, described the Marshall study and stated that the researcher “made a number of decisions to limit certain potential influencing factors” (ibid). Some of these included, “to survey only in and around London, to reduce the significance of whether or not managers were geographically mobile; secondly, to impose an upper age limit of 45 years, to reduce the potential differences between generations” (ibid). We explored these restrictions given by the examples, and decided to implement our own that would better help us answer our research questions.

The first limitation was the choice of only surveying participants that were already followers of Chipotle on Facebook. This limitation allowed us to focus on participants that would that aid us in answering our research question have For what reasons do consumers decide to follow the selected company over Facebook? Rather than worry if participants were already followers of Chipotle on Facebook.

The second limitation that was conducted through the use of our survey process was to impose an upper age restriction of 35 years old. By doing so, this allowed us to focus predominately on Chipotle’s “target demographic [of] 18- to 34-year-olds, and college students” (Ruggless, 2006, 28). This gave us the ability to try and obtain accurate answers from Chipotle’s own consumer demographic.

2.2.3a Preliminary Survey

Through the use of the semi-structured qualitative survey along with a specific set of sampling criteria, we sent out a preliminary survey to 21 individuals who followed Chipotle on Facebook. These individuals were selected using our own Facebook account in order to determine which of our Facebook friends currently follow Chipotle. These 21 individuals whom we selected were asked a total of eight questions in a Facebook message, ranging from their frequency of going to Chipotle to how long they have followed the company on Facebook. In total, nine decided to participate and responded to the preliminary survey. The full list of questions and answers can be found in Appendix A1.0
2.2.3b Follow up Surveys

As stated earlier, one vital aspect of a qualitative survey is the ability to go back and re-survey participants in order to gain a more accurate response (Bryman and Bell, 2003). In order to gain additional knowledge of the participants’ answers, we decided to conduct a follow up survey, based on the responses of the preliminary survey. The same structure as the preliminary survey was followed; qualitative survey questions were sent through the use of a Facebook message to willing participants, in order to elaborate and understand their previous answers. Five individuals were selected for a follow up survey based on their results of the preliminary survey. The participants were broken down into different groups based on question two of the preliminary survey. In total, five decided to participate and responded to the follow up survey. Six new questions were asked, four general questions and two that dealt specifically to what the participants’ answers to the preliminary survey. The full list of questions asked could be found in Appendix A2.0

2.2.4 Netnography

In order to answer our second research question we expanded our research study within the realm of netnography. Our second research question is as followed:

- In what ways does the selected companies Facebook page contribute to the overall customer experience?

Robert Kozinets’ explains that like that of typical ethnography, netnography is done over the use of the Internet using “qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to study the cultures and communities that are emerging through computer-mediated communications” (2002). This method of netnography gave us the opportunity to examine these relationships “in a far less time consuming and elaborate” manner while, still embodying “scholarly depictions of traditional ethnographic methodology (ibid). Prior to conducting guidelines need to be established in order to make accurate netnographical observations. The first aspect of this is determining what type of online forum is most appropriate for our answering our research questions (ibid). The second is being able to understand “as much as possible about the forums, the groups, and the individual participants” that will be examined. Within our own study we addressed both of these concerns. By identifying the type of communication channel seen on Facebook, we identified it as a board, “which functions as [an] electronic bulletin board”; typically these boards revolve around one central theme such as a company, service, product, etc. (ibid). In order to understand these users more proficiently, we used our preliminary survey in order to learn as much as we could about the users of Chipotle's Facebook page.

Once these aspects were identified, we needed to see if Chipotle's Facebook page could be held up to scrutiny that would allow it a suitable candidate to be investigated. Kozinets'
classifies five categories that should be considered before investigating an online community. They are as followed (2002);

- A more focused and research question-relevant segment, topic, or group.
- Higher “traffic” of postings.
- Larger number of discrete message posters.
- More detailed or descriptively rich data.
- More between-member interactions of the type required by the research question.

We believe that Chipotle’s Facebook page embodied all five of these categories thus making it a successful candidate for our investigation. Therefore, we decided to conduct netnographical observations of Chipotle’s Facebook page for a full week from the date of May 16th, 2011 to May 22nd, 2011. The responses by Chipotle were also gathered, for additional data. Through this research we hoped it would help us identify the possible ways in which the consumers communicated to the organization over Facebook.

2.2.4a Categorizing Consumer Comments
An important aspect of netnography is the uniqueness of data collection and analysis.

Kozinet’s states that “because the online medium is famous for its casual social elements, messages may be classified first as primarily social or informal and as primarily on-topic or off-topic. Although researchers might include all the data in a first pass or ‘grand tour’ interpretations, they will generally want to save their most intense analytical efforts for the primarily informational and on-topic messages” (2002).

Due to this reason of not incorporating all the information that was found doing the collection of data, we decided to construct five groups in order to categorize different comments that were likely to be found on Chipotle’s Facebook page. The five categories were positive comments, negative comments, suggestions, questions, and others. Therefore, we created standards for each comment that would allow us to easily identify each comment that was posted through the week of May 16th, 2011 to May 22nd, 2011.

Positive comments needed to consist of consumer stating something positive about Chipotle or one of its products. In order to identify we looked for key words such as like, love, appreciate, and other positive concentration words. An example of a consumer comment in which we categorized into a positive comment can be found in our Empirical Findings section, Figure 6.

Negative comments needed to be derived from something Chipotle lacked or failed to complete. Once again, this needed to be relevant to Chipotle or one of its products. Often key words such as terrible, disgraceful, horrible, upset, or other negative connation words,
that would allow us to identify a negative comment. A standard of a consumer comment in which we categorized as negative is seen in our Empirical Findings section, Figure 7.

**Suggestion comments** that are relevant to Chipotle, its stores, products, or brand can be identified through the use of key words such as you should, we need, etc. While, these are harder to categorize through the use of key words we deemed any suggestion when consumers were recommending or wanting something Chipotle currently not doing or has not done. A case of a consumer comment in which we labeled as a suggestion can be found in our **Empirical Findings** section, Figure 8.

Similar methods were used when identifying **question comments**. Key words such as what, when, why, where, and how, would help us easily identify a question a consumer is asking Chipotle. Likewise, with positive comments the question much is relative to Chipotle or one of its products. An instance of a consumer comment in which we categorized as a question can be found in our **Empirical Findings** section, Figure 9.

The final category in which we categorized was **other**. This was anything that was not relevant to Chipotle; its products, stores, items, location, or anything else that dealt with the company of Chipotle. This was not specific to just comments; this could be positive comments, negative comments, suggestions, or questions. An example of a comment in which we categorized as other can be found in our **Empirical Findings** section, Figure 10.

### 2.3 Research Limitations

The following topics in this section will define any limitations, which we have found throughout conducting our study.

#### 2.3.1 Errors

During our study, we asked six people for our survey, but only five agreed to participate. Although we would have liked to survey more people, we felt that this number was enough to suffice for our studies. Our reasoning for this was that we have conducted a qualitative study and not a quantitative study. Therefore, we were not concerned with the small number for our survey group because we were still able to analyze the information from our five surveys.

In regards to the choice of our participants, it is possible that there might have been people who could have contributed to our studies better. However, we did not want to pick specific people who we thought would contribute more (or less). Therefore, we surveyed the participants who agreed to answer our survey questions. This brings forth another possible error, which involves us, the researches, surveying people that we already have a previous friendship established. Although we trusted our participants to answer the
questions truthfully and without any influence from us, there is always an opportunity to have some margin of error due to bias and/or personal influence.

Another area of our study, which we found, that may include some errors is the observation of consumer responses on Chipotle’s Facebook page. We did not have any set criteria to categorize specific things, which label responses as positive, negative, other, etc. For this, we used our best judgment in order to label these wall posts. Things such as sarcasm in consumer wall posts can be often misinterpreted from one viewer to another. Also, there can be a possibility that the Facebook user, who posted the comment on Chipotle’s page, might not actually be the registered user who wrote the comment. Although we have no control over who is actually posting these comments, we had to trust that the person who wrote the comment actually meant what they wrote, and that they were the original authors.

2.3.2 Credibility

How believable are our findings? (Bryman and Bell, 2003)

Throughout our research, we strived to always provide credible responses and data to use in our analysis. We have done this by using multiple approaches to obtaining information, such as semi-structured surveys and netnographical observations. This is often referred to as triangulation. “Triangulation entails using more than one method or source of data in the study of social phenomena” (ibid). The reason we used the triangulation method was due to the fact that we felt that having both netnography and surveys would aid us in answering our research questions more thoroughly.

2.3.3 Transferability

Do our findings apply to other contexts? (2003)

Since we have conducted a case study over one case (Chipotle’s Facebook page), our findings should only provide a detailed explanation to our research questions, and perhaps provide an example for viewers from other contexts. Therefore, we felt that our findings from this case study may partially be applied to other contexts, but the approach of the study should be mentioned and kept in mind when applying to other situations.

2.3.4 Dependability

Are our findings likely to apply at other times? (2003)

It is necessary to keep this changing environment in mind when reading this thesis and/or applying our findings, because there is a possibility that our findings might not be equivalently dependable as today if major changes were to occur to social media pages (specifically Facebook) in the future.
Furthermore, it is of great importance to mention the survey style, used for this study, which is semi-structured. We have displayed our reasoning for using this survey style in the prior section labeled 2.2.3 Surveys. Since we did not conduct structured surveys, it is also possible that if these questions were repeated at another time, that the answers may vary from the ones which we have received in our study. One possible reason for why answers might vary in the future is due to the communication style between business and consumer on social media pages might change in the future with new social media technologies.

2.3.5 Conformability

Have we allowed our values to intrude at a higher degree? (2003)

Although at times it may be difficult to be fully objective and separate from personal values when conducting research, we have done so to the best of our abilities. Throughout the study, we focused on not being influenced by any biases, which we may have within Chipotle or Facebook. Since we have both eaten at Chipotle restaurants before, we have our own feelings towards the company, but we strived to keep these feelings separate while conducting our research.
3.1 Introduction

For our study, we have decided to apply three types of theories to our empirical findings. These theories are social media, consumer behavior, and customer experience theories. We have decided to use social media theories due to the fact we have used Facebook in our studies. Consumer behavior theories are explained in the following text in order to help our readers understand theories which consumer behavior consists of. Consumer behavior is relevant to our study since there are followers of Chipotle’s Facebook page, which are consumers of Chipotle. Finally, customer experience theories are used in this thesis since Chipotle’s Facebook page is a part of the Chipotle organization, and in turn, plays a part in the overall Chipotle customer experience.

3.2 Social Media

3.2.1 Groundswell movement

The groundswell movement, as described in Li’s and Bernoff’s ‘Groundswell: Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies’ book is the phenomenon which is occurring today that encompasses 3 major trends (Li and Bernoff, 2008):

1. People’s desire to connect: People have always depended on each other and drawn strength from each other.
2. New interactive technologies: There are millions of people who use the internet and the number will continue to grow with new technologies incorporating more and more connectivity. With the spread and evolution of social media websites and tools, people are able to share information to more people, faster than ever before.
3. Online economics: With increased traffic, online advertising is becoming more popular for companies. Unlike traditional marketing, tools such as Google’s AdSense allow ads to target users with relevant advertisements when viewing specific web pages.

The people who use social media are powering the Groundswell movement. Consumers share personal reviews on products (example: Rottentomato is a site where normal movie watchers share their opinions and reviews on movies) in order to help others with their transactions. Although the Groundswell movement may pose a threat to many traditional companies, it seems as if companies are beginning to embrace the movement, rather than try to fight against it. More companies are turning to social media as a source to connect to their consumers, rather than trying to impose the traditional forms of marketing and business to consumer communication (2008).
3.3 Consumer Behavior

3.3.1 What is consumer behavior?

Author Karin Ekström states that the common definition of consumer behavior is “The dynamic interaction of affect and cognition, behavior, and the environment by which human beings conduct the exchange aspects of their lives” according to the American Marketing Association Dictionary in her book, Consumer Behaviour – A Nordic Perspective (2010). Ultimately what consumer behavior theory tries to examine is, “when, why, how, and where people do or do not buy products” (Sandhusen, 2000). These reasons can better be explained through the use of Sandhusen’s Black Box Model, where he describes there are three conditions in determining why, when, how and where consumers choose to buy products or not. These three factors are Environmental Factors, Buyer’s Black Box, and Buyer’s Responses. Environmental Factors has two separate processes that make up its entirety, marketing stimuli or what is under the marketer’s control, and environmental stimuli, anything that is out of the marketer’s control (2000). Similar to that of the pervious section of the model, Buyer’s Black Box is also divided into two smaller categories. The first being the individual buyer characteristics anything the buyers perceives, such as attitudes, movies personality or lifestyle choices (2000). The second aspect is the decision process, where the buyer engages in the decision making process (2000). The final section of the model is the buyer’s responses, which often includes product choice, brand choice, purchase timing, and purchase amount. Within the following section, we will focus on the decision process, as part of the consumer decision-making process, consumer culture a part of the buyer characteristics and consumer involvement as part of buyer’s responses. These three characteristics helped us narrow our focus but dividing these aspects of the consumer behavior process.
3.3.2 Consumer decision-making process

The diagram above depicts the consumer decision-making process (also known as the consumer purchasing process) in which people today go through during their purchase of a product or service. Before a consumer decides to buy anything, they must first recognize a problem and respond to it accordingly. A problem can be anything ranging from the lack of a good, which the consumer finds necessary to purchase, or the need to replace an outdated or broken product. Once a problem is established, the consumer then enters into the next phase.

With the vast amount of information online today with web 2.0, consumers can read reviews online compare prices, etc. During the information search phase, consumers can come across similar products, which may serve as alternatives or substitutes to the previously intended product purchase. This leads us into the next phase.
An example of an evaluation of an alternative is a consumer is looking to replace an outdated television with a new flat screen TV, the consumer might first think that a plasma TV would be best for their home. After reading reviews and information on other styles of flat screen TV's, the consumer might decide that an LCD TV would be a better choice for their home or budget.

After the consumer completes the first three stages, they are ready to purchase the product, which they have found would solve their problem best. With sites such as Groupon and Pricegrabber, consumers share information on where to find the product for the cheapest price, coupons to help consumers save on their purchase, etc. The consumer can then make the best purchasing decision due to the help of other consumers input on the Internet.

Once the consumer purchases the product or service, the decision making process is still not complete. Many people will evaluate their purchase against the consumer-generated reviews of the product to see if they agree with what was said previously (Ekström, 2010). Places such as forums and online communities are great examples of how people add in their thoughts on their purchase, and share it with the community.

3.3.3 Consumer culture
Consumer culture, as aspect of consumer behavior, examines “the relationships among consumers’ experiences, belief systems, and practices and these underlying institutional social structures” (Arnould and Thompson, 2009). In essence, consumer culture explores how consumers understand “symbolic meanings encoded in forms of advertisements, brands, retail settings, or material goods” (ibid) by doing so this allows consumers to “further their identity and lifestyle goals” (ibid). By being able to identify these different types of relationships that consumers have with marketing media, we are able to have a better “understanding of contemporary society” (Ekström 2010). Once this recognition is identified business along with marketers are able to create products and advertising material that is able to access consumer culture. This process is known as “a dual focus” (ibid). The first aspect being that material goods can act as communicatations to consumers and the second being cultural goods are able to operate within the spear of lifestles, cultural goods, and commodiites (ibid).This process of culture has the ability to go beyond the relationship between product and consumer. It can branch out to create relationships between consumer and other consumers. This extended relationship to other consumers can be defined as consumer involvement.

3.3.4 Consumer involvement
Involvement can be defined as a follows:

“State of motivation, stimulation, or interest which cannot be observed. It is stimulated by an object or a specific situation and brings certain types of behavior: certain forms of search activities, information processing and decision-making.
Involvement, therefore, refers to an individual’s state with regard to a domain of interest, the type and intensity of which can evolve according to circumstances” (Dubois, 2000, 34).

Ekström also states that the “social and individual importance of a product, sometimes called its sign value, originates in consumers’ search for an expression of identity by the means of consumption. Products are used as symbolic resources for the construction and maintenance of identity.” An example of this is teenagers who follow musician Facebook pages and interact with other followers, or car enthusiasts who post content regularly on automotive forums.

### 3.4 Customer Experience

#### 3.4.1 What is customer experience?

“Customer experience is the cognitive and affective outcome of the customer’s exposure to, or interaction with, a company’s people, processes, technologies, products, services and other outputs” (Buttle 2009, p.165)

Whenever a consumer interacts with a company, whether it is a purchase of a good in a store or browsing through a company’s website, the consumer is being exposed to some aspect of customer experience. Although corporations strive to ensure that customer experiences remain the same across all customers, unfortunately this goal is not always achieved. Therefore, there are two types of customer experiences, which can be defined as positive and normative customer experiences.

A **positive** customer experience “describes customer experience as it is. It is a value free and objective statement of what it is like to be a customer.”(2009, p.168) A **normative** customer experience is the depiction of what “customer experience as management or customers believe it should be. It is a value-based judgment of what the experience ought to be for a customer”(ibid).

At times, the positive and normative experience can be the same in the individual. If this is the case, then management’s goal to ensure the ‘ideal’ customer experience has been successful. However, if the positive and normative experiences differ for a customer, this shows that at some point of interaction between the company and the customer, the intended customer experience was not achieved.

The figure below displays how high or low levels in performance and expectations, both factors that are involved in evaluating satisfaction and dissatisfaction, can influence the resulting customer experience during the purchase of a product/service.
3.4.2 Core concepts of customer experience
Buttle states and defines the three main concepts that are associated with customer experience. They are as follows (2010, p.170):

1. Touchpoints: include websites, service centers, warehouses, contact centers, events, exhibitions, trade shows, seminars, Webinars, direct mail, e-mail, advertising, sales calls, and retail stores (ibid).

2. Moment of Truth: Any occasion the customer interacts with, or is exposed to, any organizational output, which leads to the formation of an impression of the organization (ibid).

3. Engagement: There does not yet exist a definition, which is widely accepted and agreed upon. However, engagement can thought of as the customer’s emotional and rational response to a customer experience (ibid).

3.4.3 Customer satisfaction
Customer satisfaction can be explained as “the customer’s fulfillment response to a customer experience or some part thereof.” (Buttle, 2010, p.44) He states that the ‘experience or some part there of’ component of the definition indicates that customer satisfaction evaluation can be directed at any or all elements of the customer experience (ibid). In order for one to obtain satisfaction, a customer must first have some sort of expectation for the product or service. Then once the product is obtained, satisfaction can be measured against the presumed expectation in order to define whether the experience was satisfactory or dissatisfactory.
If repeated satisfaction is experienced, it often (but not always) leads to customer loyalty, whereas dissatisfaction, usually due to performance below expectations, leads to a feeling of deception provoking in turn complaints, which can go as far as boycott (Dubois, 2000, 248). The repercussions of constant dissatisfaction don’t necessarily have to result from repetitive dissatisfaction. For example, if a customer has extremely high expectations for a product and it is of great importance to them, but the product delivers an experience, which is not seen as acceptable to the customers’ expectations, then the customer might react in a strong way.

3.4.4 Customer activity cycle (CAC)

The customer activity cycle (CAC) depicts the processes that customers go through during planning and making purchases of products/services. The CAC contains 3 main phases; pre, during, and post. In the ‘pre’ phase, the customer is deciding on what they want to do. This is the phase where the consumer does research on the product(s), evaluates what product(s) they really need, etc. Once a product is chosen, the consumer moves into the ‘during’ phase. In this phase, the consumer has purchased the product/service and has begun to use it. Eventually the consumer will enter the ‘post’ phase of the activity cycle where the product has been used up. The consumer must then evaluate what they are to do then, thus returning them to the ‘pre’ phase of the cycle (Buttle, 2009).
3.5 Summary of theoretical references

Before continuing further into the thesis, we will want to take a minute to review the information, which was covered in the theoretical portion of this paper. The purpose of this review is to refresh the reader of the relevant theoretical content, which was covered in this section.

In order for us to be able to solve our questions for this thesis piece, we first had to break down the major theoretical portions of this text. Therefore, we opened with defining what is the Groundswell movement. Since social media intertwines people from across the globe with others, there are many other theories, which we have applied in regards to the consumer. Topics of discussion encompassed theories that make up consumer behavior and customer experiences.

Examples were used throughout the theoretical reference section in order to help the readers truly understand the topics. Our goal from this section was to inform the reader of the theoretical studies which we have reviewed in order to make our analysis more clear when we apply these theories, with our empirical findings, to help solve the thesis questions.
Empirical Findings

4.1 Results of pre-survey

While a full analysis of these findings was not concluded for this preliminary survey, similarities and differences of the participants’ testimony were noticed.

- For Question one, “For how long have you been a follower of Chipotle’s Facebook page”, three participants have been a fan of Chipotle’s Facebook page for around a year, with the shortest amount of time being one month, and the longest being around two years.

- Question two, “What enticed you to become a follower of Chipotle’s Facebook page”, had varying responses with all of the participants. Some stated that they simply “love their food” (Survey, Participant 5 and 6) as a response to the why they have become a fan on Facebook, while others believed that following the company through social media they receive added benefits such as coupons or free food (Survey, Participant 2 and 4). While one participant stated that they decided to follow Chipotle’s Facebook page due, as what they describe as, “a lot of my friends 'liked' that page” (Survey, Participant 3). The varying responses of this question is why we decided to conduct follow up surveys to explore this difference further, that would allow us to answer our research question of: For what reasons do consumers decide to follow the selected company over Facebook?

- Question three, “How did you come across the Chipotle Facebook page? (Searched yourself, friend’s page/like, Facebook suggestion, Facebook feed, other)”, four out of the five of the participants searched the company on their own accord, while only one decided to follow through the suggestion box of Facebook.

- Question four, “How often do you visit the Chipotle Facebook page?” Also had varying answers. The least number of visits being two accounts stating “almost never”(Survey, Participant 3), and the most frequent being one account of “once every two weeks” (Survey, Participant 5).

- For Question five, “On Facebook, there is an option to hide feeds on your homepage from specific people/pages. Have you ever hidden Chipotle’s feeds? Do you still have them hidden? If you answered yes, please explain why”, none of the participants surveyed have hidden any information from Chipotle.
• With Question six, “Prior to following Chipotle’s Facebook page, have you ever eaten at a Chipotle restaurant”, consensus was reached again with all participants having actually eaten at a restaurant before following the company on Facebook.

• Question seven, “Approximately how many times a month do you eat food from Chipotle?” Had one of the greatest disparities, in terms of responses. Three participants stated that they typically eat Chipotle anywhere from 1-5 times a month (Survey, Participant 2, 3, 7, and 9), while the other remaining participants answered at an unusually high rate of anywhere from 10-15 times a month (Survey, Participant 1, 4, 5, 6, and 8).

• As for the final question, “Are you still a follower of Chipotle’s Facebook page? If yes, why do you continue to follow? If no, why did you stop following”, none of the participants have stopped following or want to stop following Chipotle on Facebook.

Copies of the actual responses to the pre-survey have been listed in the appendix under section A4.1.

4.2 Follow up Survey

With a second follow-up survey, we hoped to better understand the participants’ reasoning of following Chipotle on Facebook, while addressing broader topic issues, that will help us answer our research questions.

4.2.1 Results the follow-up survey

Two of the six questions were dependent to what the participants answered in the preliminary survey. For instance, deciding to follow because of interest, personal reason will be Group 1. Deciding to follow because of coupons/promotional material will be Group 2. Deciding to follow because of peers will be Group 3.

4.2.2a Group 1, own interest

Out of the five participants who partook in the second follow-up survey, two answered their reasons for following was due to personal interest within the previous survey, Participants 1 and 6.

• For Question one, which was unique to the group, “Your decision to follow Chipotle was mostly because you eat there so much, correct? What about Chipotle makes you like them so much?” answers very fairly similar with both participants stating reasons, such as the quality of food (Survey, Participant 6).

• Question two, “Chipotle seems to market themselves more toward college students/young professions. Do you think that is the reason you decide to eat there so
often?” showed some disparity of answers. One participant was uncertain whether or not there marketing strategy was directly targeted at college students but rather the convenience of locations, stating “They [Chipotle] are right around both campuses so when I need to eat in between classes it makes it easier” (Survey, Participant 6).

• With Question three, “Would you ever stop following chipotle on Facebook for any reason? What would that reason have to be?” once again had differences. One participant focused predominantly on themselves, by saying “If they begin to clutter my new feed too much with useless information maybe” but reiterating later that the decision to stop following Chipotle on Facebook would need to be a drastic change in order to get them to consider to stop following (Survey, Participant 6).

• Question four was once again unique to the group; it asked “You said that you didn’t really decide to follow Chipotle on Facebook for any other particular reason other than they are in your interest? Have you done this with any other companies/interest?” it was shown to have similar responses but difference in which other companies were followed. One participant listed some other companies but mostly followed celebrities and websites (Survey, Participant 6).

• For Question five, “You said you visit the Fan site rather infrequently, what do you think it would take to get you to visit it more?” the answers varied. One participant wanted to see more promotional give-a-ways in order to attract them to their Facebook fan page (Survey, Participant 6).

• For the final question, Question six, “By following Chipotle on Facebook do you believe it has any impact on the business? In terms of having a greater voice if something is wrong/right?” viewed their impact on businesses differently but both agreed that being a fan did very little, “There are so many people following them independently I don’t think I have a very big voice. But maybe collectively yes” (Survey, Participant 6).

4.2.2b Group 2, coupons/promotional
Just as with Group 1, two of the five participants listed their reasoning of following Chipotle on Facebook was in order to gain access to promotional or coupon offers, Participants 2 and 9.

• For Question one, which was unique to this group, “Your decision to follow Chipotle was mostly because of promotions or offers, correct? How often do you think you take advantage of those found on Facebook?” both participants had very different answers
in the frequency of utilizing promotional material. One participant stated, “I do take advantage of Chipotle offers on Facebook, every time they have them” (Survey, Participant 2). While, the other stated only when they recognize them (Survey, Participant 9).

• Question two, “Chipotle seems to market themselves more toward college students/young professions. Do you think that is the reason you decide to eat there so often?” once again had stark differences. Participant 2 listed reasons that they ate at a Chipotle restaurant before going to high school (Survey). While Participant 9, said it could contribute to it because they often eat there with peers (Survey).

• With Question three, “Would you ever stop following chipotle on Facebook for any reason? What would that reason have to be?” once again had differences of opinion. Participant 2, said they would stop following only if Chipotle was too actively engaged in Facebook, causing their news feed to be constantly updated (Survey). While, Participant 9, stated they would only stop following if they found out Chipotle did or supported something that they deemed unethical (Survey).

• Question four was once again unique to the group; it asked “You said that you followed Chipotle mostly for the promotions. Have you ever done this with another company on Facebook?” One participant listed that they also follow another company on Facebook due to frequent promotional deals (Survey, Participant 2). While, the other said they don’t really follow many other companies on Facebook other than Chipotle (Survey, Participant 9).

• Question five asked, “You said you visit the Fan site rather infrequently, what do you think it would take to get you to visit it more?” had the most similar responses. Both participants listed reasons surrounding more promotional material would get them to visit the Chipotle’s Facebook page more often (Survey, Participant 2 and 9).

• For the final question, Question six, “By following Chipotle on Facebook do you believe it has any impact on the business? In terms of having a greater voice if something is wrong/right?” One participant said that it is vital for companies now to be present on Facebook due to branding reasons, but doubted the impact for consumers (Survey, Participant 9). While the other is more mixed, by saying that there is a potential impact for business, but it is limited (Survey, Participant 2).
4.2.2c Group 3, friends/peer influence

Unlike the two previous groups, Group 1 and Group 2, one of the five participants listed their reasoning of following Chipotle on Facebook was due to friends or peers, Participant 3.

- For Question one, which was unique to this group, “Your decision to follow Chipotle was mostly because of your friends, correct? Why do you think you and your friends like Chipotle so much?” the answer that Participant 3, stated was they believe her and her peers enjoy Chipotle has to do with them being affordable and convenient (Survey, Participant 3).

- Question two, “Chipotle seems to market themselves more toward college students/young professions. Do you think that is the reason you decide to eat there so often?” disagrees with the claims and does not believe that is a reason in which her and her peers visit Chipotle (Survey, Participant 3).

- With Question three, “Would you ever stop following chipotle on Facebook for any reason? What would that reason have to be?” Similar to Participant 9, Participant 3 stated that they would only stop following if Chipotle did something “morally incorrect or bad” (Survey).

- Question four was once again unique to the group; it asked “You said that you follow Chipotle because of your friends. Have you ever done this with another company on Facebook?” Does believe that she has in fact followed other companies based on peer responses, however does not know exactly which companies (Survey, Participant 3).

- Question five asked, “You said you visit the Fan site rather infrequently, what do you think it would take to get you to visit it more?” Similar to many of the other responses from the varying groups, Participant 3 stated they would “visit the fan site if there was something on the fan site for me to see – polls, interesting news, etc.” (Survey).

- For the final question, Question six, “By following Chipotle on Facebook do you believe it has any impact on the business? In terms of having a greater voice if something is wrong/right?” The final participant stated they believe the impact for businesses is quite small due to the fact they don’t believe is has an actual bearing on sales.

Copies of the actual responses to the follow up survey have been listed in the appendix under section A4.2.
4.4 Netnography

As stated within the **Methodology** section, we categorized five common responses we expected to see while conducting our netnographical observations from the week of May 16th, 2011 to May 22nd, 2011. Many examples of all five responses were seen. For the purpose of consistency as well as being able to analyze our findings within the **Analysis** section, we only decided to focus on one comment from each of categories.

**Positive Comment**
Though, the consumer does not use directly the use of key words we identified within the methodology section, she is having a positive experience. Stating she will be back again and ‘awesome’, we saw this comment as positive.

![Figure 6: Positive Comment](image)

**Negative Comment**
The negative comment we selected contained the following key words we deemed to be negative such as ‘horrible’, ‘disgraceful’, and ‘sad’. For this reason we identified this comment as a negative.

![Figure 7: Negative Comment](image)
**Suggestion Comment**

As seen within our methodology section, we recognized suggestion comments as ones in which consumers wanted something of Chipotle that the company was currently not doing or has not done. For this reason saw this suggestion to bring a Chipotle to Queens Center Mall, as a suggestion comment.

![Figure 8: Suggestion Comment](image)

**Question Comment**

Any questions word within a comment is an easy way in which we recognized as a question comment. The consumers use of ‘when’ allowed us to categorize this comment as a question comment.

![Figure 9: Question Comment](image)

**Other Comment**

These comments refer to lack of relevant positive, negative, suggestion or question comment. We identified this comment as other because it lacked any information on or about Chipotle.

![Figure 10: Other Comment](image)
Analysis

5.1 Social Media Analysis

The Groundswell movement is a social media theory that will encompass Facebook as a whole, but we have viewed it specifically to analyze the Chipotle Company Facebook page. There are three major trends to the theory. The first trend, the people’s desire to connect, applied to question two of the preliminary study which asked the participants what enticed them to follow Chipotle on Facebook. Two of our participants responded that they joined the Facebook group due to the fact that their friends had influenced their decision to join. This can be viewed as a potential desire to connect with others. The second trend of the Groundswell movement can be viewed through our observation. During our observation, we found wall posts being created through technologies other than a web-browsing computer. For instance, in Figure 9 of our Empirical Findings section, we displayed a comment on Chipotle’s Facebook page, which was uploaded by a follower using a mobile device. This would be an example of a new interactive technology that users are not only able to access the Chipotle fan page, but are able to connect with others through it as well. Lastly, we only found the third trend described as online economics to be present in one of our participants in the follow up survey. Participant eight answered to question six saying “Now it is really important for companies to be present on Facebook because of branding. I believe for business to consumers companies it is vital to be present on Facebook” (Survey, participant 8). Through this response, we applied the third trend due to the fact that our participant felt that his participation in the Facebook group had some sort of monetary impact on the company.

5.2 Consumer Behavior Analysis

In our theoretical section, we described three main theories, one of which was consumer behavior. Since consumer behavior encompasses many broad categories, we have narrowed the focus to three aspects, which make up a sizeable portion of consumer behavior as a whole. In the following text, we will apply our empirical findings for our studies to these three aspects.

Consumer decision-making process

To reiterate, the consumer decision-making process is a five-step process involving need recognition & problem awareness, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase, and post-purchase evaluation. Throughout our empirical research, we found that the post-purchase evaluation step was predominately present in our preliminary study, follow up surveys and netnographical observations.
During our preliminary survey, we asked the participants how they came across Facebook page. Six of our participants (#1, #2, #4, #5, #6, #8) answered that they searched the Facebook page themselves after already visiting a Chipotle restaurant, according to question six of our preliminary survey study. For these six participants, we found that their post-purchase evaluation was to extend their relationship to the company. They did this by becoming followers of Chipotle’s Facebook page. For the remaining three survey participants, they post-purchase was essentially the same in terms of becoming followers of Chipotle’s Facebook page, however their motivation for doing so differed. For these three participants (#3, #7, #9), their motivation was not internal; rather they were inspired to become followers of Chipotle’s Facebook page due to Facebook’s suggested pages (refer to Appendix A3.0).

In regards to our follow up surveys, we mentioned earlier in the thesis, under 2.2.3 Surveys of the methodology section, that we categorized our participants from our preliminary study for our follow up surveys into three categories. Although the questions differed slightly among our participants, question four still maintained a common theme to identify whether or not they have followed other companies on Facebook after visiting the store. From these answers, we found that our participants’ decision to follow Chipotle’s Facebook page as a post-purchase evaluation was not a unique action.

For our observation, we found both positive and negative post purchase evaluations in regards to the company, which were posted on Chipotle’s Facebook page. Examples of these posts can be found in our Empirical Findings chapter.

Consumer Culture

As mentioned previously in the theoretical section, consumer culture “explores how consumers actively rework and transform symbolic meanings encoded in advertisements, brands, retail settings, or material goods to manifest their particular personal and social circumstances and further their identity and lifestyle goals” (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Due to our sampling restrictions that we placed on the participants of having to be previously followers of Chipotle’s Facebook page, all participants furthered Chipotle’s brand by conforming to this online social identity. Not all participants did this in a similar fashion. For instance, within the preliminary survey, participant #1 stated that on average he visited a Chipotle restaurant ten to twelve times a month. However, the same participant stated that he never re-visited the Chipotle Facebook page after initially liking the page. This example depicts the different ways followers of Chipotle’s Facebook page extend their identity with Chipotle. Unlike that of participant #5 who stated that they visit a Chipotle restaurant approximately 15 times a month, they visit the Chipotle Facebook page roughly once every two weeks. Although these two participants visit a Chipotle restaurant about the same amount, their activity in the Chipotle Facebook consumer culture varies. For
participant #1, they felt that they did not need to visit the Chipotle Facebook page frequently to further extend their identity and be part of the consumer culture, whereas participant #5 felt that they should visit approximately once every two weeks.

Within the follow up survey, our goal for question five was to identify what factor(s) needed to be applied in order to spark more activity within the user on Chipotle’s Facebook page, thus extending their identity as well. Almost all of our participants referenced that things such as promotional offers, interesting news, or interactive activities would create more interest to visit the page more frequently. It is out of our scope of our thesis, whether or not to determine improvements to Chipotle’s Facebook page would actually increase the participant’s identity. However, through the use of these follow up surveys all participants stated this would enable them to visit the Chipotle Facebook page more, thus increasing their identity with Chipotle.

**Consumer Involvement**

Unlike consumer culture, we found that consumer identity was applicable only to our netnographical observations. **Figure 7** displayed an example of two consumers who share similar thoughts, yet are not related and they did not have a previous relationship outside of this conversation.

Consumer involvement theory incorporates the idea of the traditional relationship between product and consumer, to consumer and consumer. What this means is that from consumer involvement with a similar product(s), communication can derive from having similar relationships with the same type of product. The example above shows a consumer named Corrine who was upset about a new Chipotle store. RJ, who had no relation to Corrine, agreed with Corrine about the same product and thus a communication was formed, thus providing that the consumer involvement theory existed within the followers of Chipotle’s Facebook page. It is also important that Facebook allows other types of consumer involvement, which don’t necessarily involve a consumer voicing their opinion through a text response. Consumers can use the ‘like’ button on comments which shows that they too share the same opinions, resulting in another link between consumer to consumer via a product.

**5.3 Customer Experience Analysis**

As a reminder, the customer experience theory incorporates any involvement between a consumer and a business, whether it is through an advertisement, website, in-person visit, etc. Through the preliminary study, our participants self willingly decided to follow Chipotle’s Facebook page. The Chipotle Facebook page is a touch point in the customer experience with Chipotle. We asked our participants in the preliminary study in question eight if they are still followers of this Facebook page, and if they had intent to continue
following as well. All of our participants responded that they had no intentions to halt their relationship with Chipotle over Facebook.

In the follow up survey, all six participants were asked what actions would need to take place in order for them to stop following Chipotle on Facebook, which would in turn disrupt their customer experience. From our participants’ responses, we found that two general themes arose from their responses as to why they would stop following. The first theme was ethical. An example of this was if Chipotle had done something immoral or ethically wrong to their employees, environment, livestock, etc. The other theme was more spam related, such as if Chipotle were to begin mass posting advertisements over Facebook.

In our netnography, we had looked into the satisfaction and dissatisfaction table, found in section 3.3 Customer experiences, when analyzing our data. In reference to Figure 6 of our Empirical Findings, the consumer posts about their first experience with the Chipotle restaurant. From her testimonial, we found that Chipotle’s performance ranked as high due to the fact that she stated her experience was “awesome” and that she will return to the store. We also identified the customers’ expectation of Chipotle as ‘high’ due to the fact that her friend suggested it, and that the customer had heard many good things prior to her visit. When applying the satisfaction/dissatisfaction table, we concluded that this customer experience was stable satisfaction (good product).

![Figure 11: Dissatisfaction Comment](image)

The figure above was another example, which we diagnosed through the satisfaction/dissatisfaction table during our observation period. Although this comment was not categorized in our study, the satisfaction/dissatisfaction model was still applied to this comment. This customer had visited Chipotle frequently and had already established a satisfaction standard for that Chipotle restaurant. However, on May 17th, 2011 he experienced transient dissatisfaction (bad luck) with his meal because he had high expectations for Chipotle, but received low performance from the restaurant.
While there were other varied responses in regards of satisfaction on the Chipotle page during our observation, we were not able to see other responses similar to these, which displayed both the customers’ level of expectation and performance to Chipotle. In the first example Figure 6, we found that the customer’s positive experience, a value free and objective statement of what it’s like to be a customer (Buttle, 2009, 168), met the normative experience, a value based judgment of what the customer experience ought to be (2009, 168), for Chipotle.

It is important to see recognize the importance of these followers posting their experiences on the Internet. Although we have applied these theories to customers’ experiences, which occurred in person, we must realize that these individuals found it necessary to use Chipotle’s Facebook wall as a point of communication. This is due to the fact that Chipotle’s Facebook page was a touch point for its customers. The customers had the ability to share their emotions with the company and other followers as well.

Apart from the satisfaction and dissatisfaction theory of customer experience, we applied the customer activity cycle found in section 3.3.4 Customer activity cycle (CAC) of the theoretical framework chapter to our empirical findings. This cycle attempts to explain three phases, which the customer goes through during purchasing a product. In our preliminary surveys, we asked our participants in questions seven and eight how many times do they consume Chipotle per month and why. Although the numbers varied from 1-15 depending on the participants, the numerical number did not apply to our study. However, the fact that the participants showed repeated visits to Chipotle solidified the presence of the CAC. If the participant were to answer that they visited Chipotle only once and never returned, then that would have a shown that the CAC between that consumer and Chipotle had been broken. This was not the case in our preliminary survey.

In our follow up survey, we asked our participants about Chipotle’s target market and if it had any influence for the participants to consume food from Chipotle. Our intention for this survey question was to hopefully arrive with a factor or reason as to why our participants engaged in repeated consumption of Chipotle, thus creating a CAC. Since we received mixed reviews, we established that the target marketing potentially could have had an impact on why those participants had kept returning to Chipotle, while for the others it wasn’t an influential factor.

For our netnography observations, we found that the post phase of the CAC was eminent. Referring back to Figure 6 of our Empirical Findings, this consumer displays a desire to continue the CAC that was created out of her first consumption at Chipotle.
Conclusion

In the following text, we will compile the empirical and theoretical findings described before and apply them to answer our thesis questions.

Throughout our studies for this thesis, we have come across many interesting factors, which helped draw the conclusions to the research questions. We have conveniently split this section into two parts focusing on each of our research questions individually as a section.

6.1 What are the reasons the participants decided to follow Chipotle on Facebook?

As demonstrated in the Analysis, through our findings in the preliminary and follow up surveys, we found that there were three main reasons as to why the participants decided to follow Chipotle on Facebook. The three reasons were due to their own interest, promotional opportunities, or peer influence. For the participants, these reasons were not unique to Chipotle. They admitted that they have followed other companies for similar reasons. This is important to realize because by knowing what types of users follow company Facebook pages, businesses may be able to market themselves towards the correct types of people which they seek to market. Since Facebook is a generally new outlet for companies, we felt in our opinion that companies should not be afraid to try this new targeting approach. If successful, the companies could draw more followers to their respective Facebook pages and in turn, their Facebook presence may become more meaningful to their followers.

We should also mention that we felt these findings can be applied laterally across other types of company Facebook pages, not just American fast food pages. Although we understand our research question was focused on why consumers follow specifically Chipotle’s Facebook page, it is important to understand the implications of our study, which can be applied outside the scope of this question. Therefore, we concluded that our participants decided to follow Chipotle’s Facebook page for three main reasons: personal interest, promotional offers, or peer influence.
6.2 How does Chipotle’s Facebook page contribute to the overall Chipotle customer experience?

The customer experience, in short, can be described as any interaction between customer and a business. We established earlier in our work that the Chipotle Facebook page could be seen as a touch point for customers of Chipotle. Although Chipotle’s Facebook page does not exist as a physical place, it can still be seen as a section of the company. It offers customers to write their thoughts, opinions, etc, to the company and connect with others on topics regarding Chipotle. By offering a Facebook page for their customers, we felt that it offered a new form of communication between customer and company, which was not available prior to its forthcoming. By Chipotle providing this new communication path to its customers, we felt that the Facebook page contributed to the overall customer experience in three different ways. We have broken them down in the following text for our reader(s) convenience.

From broadcast to conversation

Traditionally, when companies were trying to send a message to their user, it was done via a broadcast. This appeared to consumers as pamphlets, advertisements, bulletins, etc. Today, we have the access to websites such as Facebook, which allow more of a personal experience between business and consumer. During our observation, we found that whenever Chipotle responded to a comment on their Facebook page, the response came with the employee name at the end of the message, and opened with the original poster’s first name in the beginning. By doing these two small things, it personalized the message and established a conversation between the company and the consumer.

Personalization

Personalization draws a new approach to business to consumer (B2C) communication. Through the use of modern technology, consumers post their comments on Chipotle's Facebook page and are being responded to individually through a formal corporate outlet. This personalization in communication can bring a stronger bond between business and consumers because the consumer can feel as if they are not just one in the crowd. By sending personalized response messages, each customer who received a personalized response felt acceptance and the feeling of being wanted, because someone who represents the company has read and addressed their specific issue/comment. In our opinion, when Chipotle used the first names of its employees and Facebook followers, we felt that the customer experience was enhanced due to the closer communication between businesses to consumers.
**Feeling of importance and acceptance**

It was very interesting to see the rate at which Chipotle responded to majority of their Facebook comments. Prior to the existence of company Facebook pages, customers were usually asked to write a formal complaint letter, try to call customer-service, or write an e-mail. All of these issues required the consumer to wait an extended period of time, and at times the issue that was addressed was not properly solved. Furthermore, these resolution options were always personal, meaning that the consumer called the company and no one else was usually involved. Social media changed this approach and as a result, the customer experience as well. Followers today post a comment/complaint on the company social media page, and millions of users are allowed to see this comment. Facebook allows users to ‘like’ the post and add their own comments, which creates a bond horizontally across the followers of these social media pages, even though they might be complete strangers to one another.

**6.3 Summary**

Social media has indeed changed the way people communicate with each other today in comparison to before. Old bonds are being reignited, current ties are being strengthened, and new relationships are being created due to the connectivity that social media websites, such as Facebook, provide. Companies are also starting to dwell in social media in order to reach out to their customer base. We have taken the time to analyze this new relationship between businesses to consumers via Facebook, specifically looking at American fast food company Chipotle. We analyzed the results from our surveys and observation in order to answer our research question to the best of our ability. Throughout our study, we have discovered many interesting findings, which we have shared to our readers throughout our thesis. Although our study only focused on one company utilizing Facebook to reach out to its customers, we feel that we have provided an overview for companies to understand from the consumer’s point of view as to why people follow their company Facebook pages, and how these Facebook pages contribute to their overall customer experience.
Appendix

A1.0 Preliminary Survey

The full results can be found in full below. None of the results have been modified.

A1.1 Preliminary Survey Template

Hello,
My name is Konrad Bafia and I am doing a small study with my colleague Quinn Rodgers on the use of social media in companies. In our study, we have chosen Chipotle’s Facebook fan page as one of our observations. We are wondering if you are available to answer a few quick survey questions in regards to this topic. Please answer the following questions honestly to the best of your abilities. Your identity will be anonymous in this study.

Notice: This is an academic study being conducted for our Bachelor’s Thesis at Linkoping University, Sweden. We are in no way affiliated with Chipotle or their company.

1. For how long have you been a follower of Chipotle’s Facebook page? A rough estimate is acceptable.
2. What enticed you to become a follower of Chipotle’s Facebook page?
3. How did you come across the Chipotle Facebook page? (Searched yourself, friend’s page/like, Facebook suggestion, Facebook feed, other)
4. How often do you visit the Chipotle Facebook page?
5. On Facebook, there is an option to hide feeds on your homepage from specific people/pages. Have you ever hidden Chipotle’s feeds? Do you still have them hidden? If you answered yes, please explain why.
6. Prior to following Chipotle’s Facebook page, have you ever eaten at a Chipotle restaurant?
7. Approximately how many times a month do you eat food from Chipotle?
8. Are you still a follower of Chipotle’s Facebook page? If yes, why do you continue to follow? If no, why did you stop following?

Notes:
Chipotle’s Facebook page can be found here: http://www.facebook.com/chipotle
The term “follower” in this context is a person who “Likes” Chipotle’s Facebook page.

A1.2 Preliminary Survey Results
A1.2.1 Participant 1-

1. Around a year or so.
2. Since I eat there so often, and have a photo album dedicated to Chipotle specifically, it made sense.
3. I searched it myself.
4. Not often at all. In fact, I don't think I've ever been to it.
5. No I have not.
6. Yes, many times.
7. On average 10-12.
8. Yes. I guess I don't really follow, because I've never once seen anything being posted by them, but their in my interests.

A1.2.2 Participant 2-

1. I think I've been a follower since October of 2009.
2. The offer for free/cheaper burritos around Halloween enticed me to become a follower of Chipotle's Facebook page, as well as the other offers that they post time to time.
3. I searched the Chipotle Facebook page.
4. I'll visit the Facebook page when a post comes up on my Newsfeed, depending on the post.
5. I have never hidden Chipotle's feeds.
6. Yes.
7. 2-4 times a month.
8. Yes. I continue to follow Chipotle's Facebook page because I looveee Chipotle and am always on the look out for the next promotional offers.

A1.2.3 Participant 3-

1. probably about a year
2. i go out to chipotle with my friends a lot, and a lot of my friends 'liked' that page
3. it came up on the advertisement sidebar and said that x of my friends like chipotle
4. almost never
5. i don't have them specifically hidden, but they don't come up on my newsfeed very often, so it's not really an issue
6. yes
7. 1-2
8. i still like chipotle, so, i guess it never occurred to me to stop following them. and, as i previously said, their posts don't pop up on my newsfeed very often, so it's never really been a nuisance.
A1.2.4 Participant 4-

1. About 4 weeks
2. A Chipotle employee told me i can get coupons if i become a fan :]
3. Searched myself, after employee told me about it.
4. 3 times since i became a fan
5. No
6. I sure did!
7. 10-15
8. Yes, for some deals ofcourse! :]

A1.2.5 Participant 5-

1. About a year.
   2. I love their food.
   3. Searched myself
   4. Once every two weeks
   5. No, I do not hide them.
   6. Yes I have!
   7. 15
   8. Yes, I love the food. I’m interested in what they have to say about their food. Any new announcements they have

A1.2.6 Participant 6-

1. I would say around 2 months.
2. I’m a huge fan of their food. Even though its not real authentic Mexican food, its still really really good.
3. I searched it myself
4. Whenever it comes up on the news feed. Not often.
5. no
6. yes
7. 10-15 times a month.
8. Yes, I love their food and want to stay informed about what they are doing.

A1.2.7 Participant 7-

1. I think about a year.
2. When I’m looking for a quick place to eat and I know Chipotle is close I’ll stop in. I really enjoy their food.
3. Saw it under the recommended pages of Facebook.
4. Not sure if I ever have after I liked their page. Maybe 1 or 2 times
5. I’ve never hide anything on Facebook really.
6. Yup
7. Maybe about 3 times a month.
8. Yes I’m still a follower. I guess they are apart of my interest, even though I don’t really visit their page very often I still love the company and their food!

A1.2.8 Participant 8-
1. About a year or so
2. I saw that one of my friends liked it on Facebook, so I liked it as well
3. The page popped up on my suggested links after my friend liked it
4. Probably once or twice a month
5. No, I don’t have Chipotle hidden
6. Yes
7. Probably 10-15 times a month
8. Yes, Im still following Chipotles facebook page

A1.2.9 Participant 9-
9. I’m not really sure, but I think 6 months.
10. I really like their food, especially their tacos and I heard that I heard I able to get coupons from their Facebook page.
11. I saw it under the recommended side that listed which of my friends liked it.
12. Usually about twice a month, usually to see if there are any coupons.
13. No, they don’t really appear on my new feed very often.
14. Yes
15. About 5 times a month.
16. Yes, I enjoy going there with friends and want to like to know about any promotional offers.

A2.0 Follow up Survey Questions

Below are the questions asked for participants who stated that the chose to follow Chipotle on Facebook, because of their own accord. Questions one and four are unique to this category.

1. Your decision to follow Chipotle was mostly because you eat there so much, correct? What about Chipotle makes you like them so much?

2. Chipotle seems to market themselves more toward college students/young professions. Do you think that is the reason you decide to eat there so often?

3. Would you ever stop following chipotle on Facebook for any reason? What would that reason have to be?
4. You said that you didn’t really decide to follow Chipotle on Facebook for any other particular reason other than they are in your interest? Have you done this with any other companies/interest?

5. You said you visit the Fan site rather infrequently, what do you think it would take to get you to visit it more?

6. By following Chipotle on Facebook do you believe it has any impact on the business? In terms of having a greater voice if something is wrong/right?

Below are the questions asked to participants who stated the chose to follow Chipotle on Facebook, because of promotional reasons. Just as before questions one and four are unique to the response of question four in the pre-survey.

1. Your decision to follow Chipotle was mostly because of promotions or offers, correct? How often do you think you take advantage of those found on Facebook?

2. Chipotle seems to market themselves more toward college students/young professions. Do you think that is the reason you decide to eat there so often?

3. Would you ever stop following Chipotle on Facebook for any reason? What would that reason have to be?

4. You said that you followed Chipotle mostly for the promotions. Have you ever done this with another company on Facebook?

5. You said you visit the Fan site rather infrequently, what do you think it would take to get you to visit it more?

6. By following Chipotle on Facebook do you believe it has any impact on the business? In terms of having a greater voice if something is wrong/right?

Below are the questions asked to participants who stated the chose to follow Chipotle on Facebook, because of peer influence. Just as before questions one and four are unique to the response of question four in the pre-survey.

1. Your decision to follow Chipotle was mostly because of your friends, correct? Why do you think you and your friends like Chipotle so much?

2. Chipotle seems to market themselves more toward college students. Do you think that is the reason you decide to eat there so often?

3. Would you ever stop following Chipotle on Facebook for any reason? What would that reason have to be?
4. You said that you follow Chipotle because of your friends. Have you ever done this with another company on Facebook?

5. You said you visit the Fan site rather infrequently, what do you think it would take to get you to visit it more?

6. By following Chipotle on Facebook do you believe it has any impact on the business? In terms of having a greater voice if something is wrong/right?

A2.1 Follow up Survey Questions & Responses

A2.1.1 Participant 1

Participant decided to follow because of interest, personal reason

Questions

*Your decision to follow Chipotle was mostly because you eat there so much, correct? What about Chipotle makes you like them so much?

Chipotle seems to market themselves more toward college students/young professions. Do you think that is the reason you decide to eat there so often?

Would you ever stop following chipotle on Facebook for any reason? What would that reason have to be?

*You said that you didn’t really decide to follow Chipotle on Facebook for any other particular reason other than they are in your interest? Have you done this with any other companies/interest?

You said you visit the Fan site rather infrequently, what do you think it would take to get you to visit it more?

By following Chipotle on Facebook do you believe it has any impact on the business? In terms of having a greater voice if something is wrong/right?

Answers

Yes. I find the food delicious and its conveniently located by my school

Partially due to the fact that we have a Chipotle here on campus at DePaul

The only reason is if Chipotle were to have too much clutter on my Facebook page, but even then it would take a lot for me to do that

Yes

Maybe if the site had more interactive things
No, not really. I don’t think one voice on Facebook can change much in a whole company

A2.1.2 Participant 2

Participant 2 decided to follow because of coupons/promotions on fan site.

Questions

*Your decision to follow Chipotle was mostly because of promotions or offers, correct? How often do you think you take advantage of those found on Facebook?

Chipotle seems to market themselves more toward college students/young professions. Do you think that is the reason you decide to eat there so often?

Would you ever stop following Chipotle on Facebook for any reason? What would that reason have to be?

*You said that you followed Chipotle mostly for the promotions. Have you ever done this with another company on Facebook?

You said you visit the Fan site rather infrequently, what do you think it would take to get you to visit it more?

By following Chipotle on Facebook do you believe it has any impact on the business? In terms of having a greater voice if something is wrong/right?

Answers

I do take advantage of Chipotle offers on Facebook, every time they have them, I just wish that they had more of them.

No, I’ve been going there ever since the first location in my hometown, Evanston, opened. I can’t remember exactly when that was, but I know it was sometime before my freshman year of high school (around 2004-2005?). I have continued to eat there often because I really, really like it and still am not sick of it after all these years lol

I would probably stop following Chipotle on Facebook if they were posting frequently and constantly all over my newsfeed. That gets really annoying. Other than that, I wouldn’t stop following them.

Yes, I also follow Einstein Bros because they have frequent promotions and deals as well.

I would visit the fan page more if Chipotle had promotions and deals more often.

I think it does have an impact on the business but it is limited, because lots of people who don’t follow Chipotle on Facebook will still eat there.

A2.1.3 Participant 3

Participant decided to follow because of peer influence.
Questions

Your decision to follow Chipotle was mostly because of your friends, correct? Why do you think you and your friends like Chipotle so much?

Chipotle seems to market themselves more toward college students. Do you think that is the reason you decide to eat there so often?

Would you ever stop following Chipotle on Facebook for any reason? What would that reason have to be?

*You said that you follow Chipotle because of your friends. Have you ever done this with another company on Facebook?

You said you visit the Fan site rather infrequently, what do you think it would take to get you to visit it more?

By following Chipotle on Facebook do you believe it has any impact on the business? In terms of having a greater voice if something is wrong/right?

Answers

i think we like chipotle because its cheap, convenient they give you a lot of food, they're open late, and they won't kick you out for being too loud....

not really

if chipotle as a company did something morally incorrect or bad, i would probably stop following Chipotle, but, it would have to be a lot for me to go out of my way to stop following

i don't really pay attention, but i probably have

i would visit the fan site if there was something on the fan site for me to see - polls, interesting news, etc.

i don't think it has very much of an impact because it seems like just people like their facebook page doesn’t make them actually visit Chipotle anymore.

A2.1.4 Participant 4

Participant decided to follow because of coupons/promotions on fan site.

Questions

*Your decision to follow Chipotle was mostly because of promotions or offers, correct? How often do you think you take advantage of those found on Facebook?
Chipotle seems to market themselves more toward college students/young professions. Do you think that is the reason you decide to eat there so often?

Would you ever stop following Chipotle on Facebook for any reason? What would that reason have to be?

*You said that you followed Chipotle mostly for the promotions. Have you ever done this with another company on Facebook?

You said you visit the Fan site rather infrequently, what do you think it would take to get you to visit it more?

By following Chipotle on Facebook do you believe it has any impact on the business? In terms of having a greater voice if something is wrong/right?

**Answers**

It really depends, when I happen to see them and if I am able to print them off in time. I have taken advantage of some but probably not as many as I should.

Yeah, I think so. I wouldn’t say that is the only reason but when I go there it is usually with friend and because it is close to school.

Yeah I would. If I found other they were doing something unethical or mistreating the animals I probably would stop following them.

None that really come to mind, most of the things I don’t follow that many companies on Facebook.

If they came up more on my news Feed I probably would, like promotions only on Facebook, or a new menu or something like that.

Now it is really important for companies to be present on Facebook because of branding. I believe for business to consumers companies it is vital to be present on Facebook

**A2.1.5 Participant 5**

Participant decided to follow because of personal interest

**Questions**

*Your decision to follow Chipotle was mostly because you eat there so much, correct? What about Chipotle makes you like them so much?

Chipotle seems to market themselves more toward college students/young professions. Do you think that is the reason you decide to eat there so often?

Would you ever stop following chipotle on Facebook for any reason? What would that reason have to be?
*You said that you didn’t really decide to follow Chipotle on Facebook for any other particular reason other than they are in your interest? Have you done this with any other companies/interest?

You said you visit the Fan site rather infrequently, what do you think it would take to get you to visit it more?

By following Chipotle on Facebook do you believe it has any impact on the business? In terms of having a greater voice if something is wrong/right?

**Answers**

The quality of their food, their meat is so juicy and tender. And their guacamole is probably the best I've ever had.

Maybe. They are right around both campuses so when I need to eat in between classes it makes it easier Plus I’ve eaten there since I was in middle school and there is one by my house.

If they begin to clutter my new feed too much with useless information maybe. But it would be hard.

Yes, I’ve done this with a number; Pixar, GunnerKrigg Court, Blip, Connien Obrien, etc.

If I saw more promotions of getting free stuff I would probably visit their site more often.

There are so many people following them independently I don’t think I have a very big voice. But maybe collectively yes.

**A3.0 Facebook Guide**

1. Title: Displays the title of the Facebook page
2. Side Menu: Displays additional features of the Facebook page
   a. Wall: The picture displays what a company Facebook wall looks like. Visitors to this page are able to post content on the Facebook wall.
   b. Info: This page displays additional info about the company. The administrator of the Facebook page writes it. Examples of information are the company mission statement, website URL, etc.
   c. Events: This page displays any Facebook events that the company has created. It also displays any previous events, which the company has created in the past.
   d. Discussions: The discussion page works similar to a forum. A visitor to the page can create a discussion thread where other viewers are able to share their ideas on the topic.
e. Video: This page displays any videos, which the company has uploaded to their Facebook page. The ‘video’ page also displays videos in which the company was tagged.

f. Photos: The photo page works exactly the same as the video page, however it displays photos, which the company has uploaded or has been tagged in. The photo page also shows a list of photo albums, which the company has created on Facebook.

g. “Wrap What You Love”: This is a company specific advertisement page for Chipotle. Company Facebook pages have the ability to create these special pages in order to help promote special offers, events, etc which they might be holding throughout their stores.

3. This number depicts how many Facebook users currently follow, or have liked the company Facebook page.

4. This Facebook feature displays how many of the viewer’s Facebook friends are currently following the same company page.

5. The recommended page feature is randomly generated Facebook pages, which are suggested to the viewer. The pages shown relate to other similar pages, which the viewers, or their Facebook friends, have already liked.

6. The comment box is where the viewer is able to post content onto the company Facebook wall. The visitor has options to post four different types of comments:
   a. Post: Text comment.
   b. Photo: The viewer can upload a photo from their computer or take a photo using a webcam and post it on the company wall.
   c. Link: The visitor is able to share an Internet link (URL) on the company wall.
   d. Video: This feature works exactly the same as the photo option, but involves videos instead of photos.

7. Like and Comment feature: These options display on all wall posts. Other readers of the wall post have the ability to like the wall post and/or add a comment to the original wall post.
   a. Like: When a reader presses the like button on a wall post, they will then receive notifications in regards to that wall post. A number displaying how many likes a wall post has received will display after one person has liked the wall post.
   b. Comment: Viewers are able to share their opinion on the wall post. However, text comments are only allowed while using this feature.

8. This is an example of a wall post, which was made through the use of a mobile device. Notice the cellular phone icon to the right of the user’s photo just below the text, which they have written.

9. This is an example of a traditional wall post, made via an Internet web browser on a computer that has received likes and a comment in response.
10. Notification bar: This feature displays how many notifications the user currently has. There are three types of notifications, which a user can be received and be notified of: friend requests, messages, and notifications. In the figure below, the user has no friend requests at the time. Therefore the friend request symbol is not highlighted and is also not showing a red balloon. The user does however, have one private message to read, hence the red balloon displaying the number one. Finally, the user has two notifications of content of which he/she has posted, or liked/commented on. Notifications also display for other Facebook things such as event invites, game requests, and many other things.
References


