

SOCIAL ECHOⁱ

LISTENING FOR THE CONSUMPTION DRIVERS IN EARNED MEDIA PART 1

At present social media monitoring is entirely about what is said. Instead, it should be equally about what is and is not spoken about; where advertising has succeeded and failed to ignite a specific expected conversation.

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There are those marketers who consider social media monitoring as just the data dredging of anonymous chit chat producing dubious data, displayed on breathtakingly beautiful dashboards. And, there are those who consider social media monitoring as providing the opportunity to gain authenticity in directly hearing the consumer without the interference of marketing research surveys.

Either way, you don't need to be a social media savant to know that as long as there is a determined will by marketers to generate earned media and a desire to listen in to consumers' conversations then, there will be a need to monitor and measure social media.

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Ken Roberts

CEO
Forethought Research

CHATS VS. STATS

Social media data are unstructured conversations. That may be stating the obvious, but increasingly and curiously, marketers are using social media as a substitute for customer insights studies such as customer engagement surveys.

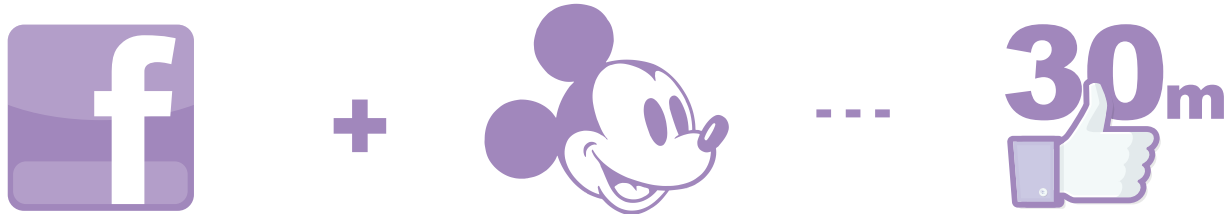
The curiosity in this thinking is illustrated via simple comparison: in the past you would not have relied solely on complaint letters to measure customer engagement. So why, for the same reasons, would you now rely solely on social media monitoring?

I concede that as a data source, social media monitoring does offer a timeliness advantage. As CMO of JetBlue, Marty St. Georgeⁱⁱⁱ puts it, “When you do market research, [there is] a month between the time you started it and you were actually sitting down looking at the report, ingesting it and making changes. Now, there are things I can learn in a single day.”

However, unlike the less sexy but well-structured quantitative questionnaire, social media monitoring does not allow you to draw statistically reliable inferences about your market.

Comparisons studies between a direct survey question and inferences drawn from online conversations have been undertaken. In one example,^{iv} 365 days' worth of online conversations were compared with a quantitative survey of 1,000 men and 1,000 women aged 18 to 65. In response to the question ‘What do you want right now?’ 50% of the survey responses related to a financial outcome (money, financial security, a new car), whereas online 80% of response conversations related to food.

From a segmentation perspective, another challenge is who is active on social media.^v In 2012 about 56% of the American population had a profile on a social networking site. For those under 25 years old that figure was considerably higher at 80%. That's great news for those marketing to millennials.



I CHAT, THEREFORE I SHOP?

Of those who do have a social media profile, only 5% said that Twitter had the greatest impact on purchase behavior. Facebook was considered to have the greatest impact on purchase behavior with its army of users displaying their almost involuntary reflex action of constantly refreshing their Facebook app. However, in general, social media monitoring does not draw from Facebook conversations.

In fact, the elephant in the social media monitoring room is Facebook. The biggest network site by far, and yet, no one but Facebook has access to the user conversations. The exceptions are the brands that can access their own Facebook fans' conversations, and the number of conversations can be considerable. For example, at the beginning of 2012, Disney had 30 million Facebook 'Likes' (July 2013, it had 44.8 million) – we can only speculate on the volume of conversations that occur about the happiest place on earth.

OBSERVATION:

At any given time, social media data - while often quantitative in reporting style such as Share of Voice and Sentiment proportion - is on a similar footing to qualitative insight; instructive, directional, worthy of developing hypothesis however, unstructured and only indicative of those social media conversations from whence it came. However, putting that known bias aside, on a longitudinal basis the changes in trends are expected to reasonably approximate market trends. That is, the concept of measuring net changes over time.

AFFECTING CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

While social media monitoring does not promise representativeness, it does seek to provide comprehensiveness. The question is comprehensiveness of what? From a media monitoring perspective the question is, are online conversations causal or coincidental to market outcomes? Perhaps it is neither.

In October, 2011, the Apple iPhone 4S was released. Eight weeks later, drawing on approximately two million tweets that mentioned the iPhone 4S, Twitter sentiment analysis was undertaken.^{vi} Of these tweets 37% were favorable, 29% were negative, and 34% were neutral. Of the negative conversations most related to the voice recognition system Siri and battery life. Incidentally, most of the positive comments also related to Siri.

Based on the sentiment analysis you may have concluded that the iPhone 4S was expected to be only moderately successful. However, with 30 million units sold, the iPhone 4S was the biggest selling mobile phone for the year.^{vii}

It would appear that the remarkable aspects of a conversation that go onto provide social media banter are not necessarily related to that person's future behavior. This is analogous to why customer satisfaction scores are not a strong predictor of change in market share.

According to 20 years of research and analysis by Forethought Research, the best predictor of a consumer's next purchase decision is not Satisfaction or the Net Promoter Score; it is Value-for-Money. So, unless the social media conversation is examining a primary driver of the consumers next purchase decision (based on a Value construct), social media commentary and measurement is unlikely to be predictive of change in market share.

Perhaps an anthropological explanation is that my Facebook self is not the same as my actual self. While complying with the dominant social order, because of the inherent cultural capital of posting, I am not truly revealing the person I am but rather the person I want you to know. How does that then affect your own social media commentary?

OBSERVATION:

Sentiment analysis is useful for product and operational performance feedback (e.g. Satisfaction) and one input to retention strategy, but not necessarily for predicting market outcomes or acquisition.



DID YOU HEAR ME?

Evidence that an advertising message is received and is resonating with the audience should be able to be captured through social media monitoring. This is a wonderful opportunity, but I am not convinced monitoring can do this yet.

In Robert Heath's important book 'Seducing the Subconscious',^{viii} he presents a compelling hypothesis that advertising is absorbed non-consciously via low and no attention processing and consciously via high attention processing. Given that our non-conscious processing is largely unavailable to our thinking or cognitive self, from an advertising content perspective, it is the result of the high attention processing encoded into long term memory that are largely found in social media conversations.

The high attention aspect of the message that advertisers hope will be encoded into long term memory is often referred to as the 'reason to believe'.

The 'reason to believe' should be selected from the hierarchy of consumption drivers that the brand has dominance on or can win a market advantage on, revealed using predictive modelling of what drives your consumer's purchase decision. This is referred to as the **Consumption Drivers Principle^{ix}** which states:

'When the objective of the communication is to bring about a business outcome such as gaining market share, then the creative idea and subsequent marketing measurement of that communication should have as its genesis the buyers' rational (explicit) and emotive (implicit) drivers of that business outcome.'

The 'reason to believe' then becomes your target audience's explicit, cognitive learning task.

Having chosen and communicated the 'reason to believe', marketers then need to understand: does that earned media conversation echo the owned media 'reason to believe'? This question is vastly different to the usual social media monitoring which throws a broad net over the Customer Experience via Sentiment Analysis, rather than identifying conversations related to specific consumption drivers.

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CAN YOU FEEL IT?

As is often the case with focus group moderators, it is common for social media monitoring vendors to claim to be able to measure emotion or feelings. Via social media monitoring, the presence of words like angry, love, anxious are cited as providing insight into how people are feeling and by inference, their likely buying behavior.

The leading academics in the field of emotions contend that emotions are largely non-conscious and for the most part are not cognitively accessible to the person experiencing them. Professor Antonio Damasio explains that only a small fraction, a few percent of emotions progress to a state of feelings made conscious.^x This means that if we are able to communicate an emotion it is typically a rationalized attempt at explaining what we think we felt.

Additionally, when a feeling does become conscious it is private and subject to editing to meet social conventions or norms. Given social media is our aspirational self mainly interacting between acquaintances, one would assume that such social norms are strongly in play.

The ability of social media monitoring to uncover emotions driving consumption behavior is surely questionable.

OBSERVATION:

Social media monitoring is most useful for understanding what those on social media think not feel.

CONCLUSION

If you are driving earned media and biding your time waiting for a perfect solution to social media measurement it is probably helpful to consider that researchers are yet to reach a consensus on how to measure the effectiveness of traditional paid media.^{xi} So, unsurprisingly there remain more than a few stumbling blocks ahead in perfecting social media monitoring.

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References

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