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Building Brands Through Social Listening

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ABSTRACT

Marketers are using social media as a way to promote their brands and build consumer relationships. Research has shown that brand relationships can provide consumers with resources in making decisions, meeting their needs, and motivating them. With a growing number of marketers reporting that social media is important to their businesses, keeping a watchful eye on what the customers are saying on social media, and what competitors are doing, is critical. Social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook enable the creation of virtual customer environments, where online communities form around specific firms, brands, or products. For this project we hope to demonstrate, using digital tools and survey research, that social media comments can serve as a valuable indicator of shifts in brand sentiment. This research examines how emotional brand-based relationships and perceptions develop in online social communities. This project will utilize brand monitoring tools to track and analyze three global brands and examine the new and rapidly changing digital marketplace, and the various tools that can be used to help develop and maintain competitive brands. This research will also compare online and survey data to see how well they align, and reflect a window into the marketplace for assessing and developing brands.

Keywords

Social media, brand mentions, website analytics, content analysis

1 INTRODUCTION

Social listening is defined as the monitoring of digital conversations to determine what consumers are saying online about a brand, company and an industry (Steimer, 2017). When firms fail to fully engage their customers, they also fail to fully exploit the capabilities of social media platforms. Social listening is defined as monitoring digital conversations to determine what consumers are saying online about a brand, company and industry. More companies are now realizing the importance of engaging in social listening in order to hear more conversations, widen their audience, attract new customers, expand in new markets and gain valuable customer insight.

The importance of social listening cannot be overstated: “I like to think of social listening as the technological version of active listening,” says Sarah Patrick, senior content strategist at Clutch, a company that identifies leading software and professional services firms. “It’s not only checking to see when people are tweeting at your company or messaging you on Facebook, but actively searching for people who are using terms that your business addresses or discussing your company without necessarily using your handle” (Steimer, 2017:10). Social listening is not limited to only social media platforms. Other forms of social listening include; keywords, mentions, tags, Google Alerts, product reviews, websites analytics, social media channels, news sources, influencers, etc. By using social listening tools to track data, the information a company obtains is of extensive value. Consumer-generated content is the key. “Social media can be defined as consumer generated media that covers a variety of new sources of online information, created and used by consumers intent of sharing information with others regarding any topic of interest” (Kohli, Suri & Kapoor, 2015:37).

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main goal of this study was to examine the social media and marketing insights obtained for the brands Maybelline, Nike and Farfetch, monitoring social media data in the US.. After running the program for one month for each brand, we were able to collect several key analytics: competition analysis, online strategy, discovery of new opportunities, partners, leads or affiliates, identify emerging trends and new players, and understand brand consumer intent. By using these programs we are able to track the website traffic for each brand. In addition to the social media data, surveys were conducted among students to evaluate attitudes and usage of the major social media platforms.

3 SOCIAL MEDIA LISTENING & MONITORING TOOLS

Social networks are important means for communication, engaging millions of users around the globe. For enterprises in particular, being present and aware of what is discussed on these communication channels about their products and services has become an imperative. The growing interest in social media monitoring for brands has made “listening platforms” grow as an

industry. As the number of social monitoring tools has rapidly increased in the last years, enterprises are faced with the difficult tasks of choosing the right tool for their needs. This paper proposes a structured evaluation framework comprising a set of evaluation criteria that can be used to analyze social monitoring tools from three perspectives: the concepts they implement, the technologies used and the user interface they provide (Cámara, Valdivia, López & Ráez, 2014).

3.1 Data Collection Platforms: SimilarWeb and Brand24

For the analysis needed in this project, we utilized two tools to gather the information needed to conduct our analysis. These tools are *SimilarWeb* (<https://www.similarweb.com>) and *Brand24* (<https://brand24.com>). Both provide essential data and reports necessary to track the various metrics we are seeking.

Our SimilarWeb information base was focused on website analysis for the companies researched (Farfetch, Maybelline and Nike). Website audience, one of the key areas, consisted of the following statistics: traffic share, monthly visits, monthly unique visitors, average visit duration, pages per visit, and bounce rate. Geography helped identify the top 5 countries where the companies had the most interaction. The Marketing Mix clarified the Channels Overview information such as: direct, email, referrals, social, organic search, paid search, and display ads. Within each of those subsets, SimilarWeb further expands upon, and organizes, the information gathered. For example, referrals are broken down between “top referring websites” and “top referring categories.”

Brand24 offers a more in-depth view into the social media side of the marketing spectrum. From a discussion intensity chart, sentiment chart (with both positive and negative attitudes), number of mentions across several sources, the most influential and active social media authors to selected quotes about the brands. This provides a comprehensive snapshot of how the brands are viewed from an international perspective.

4 Nike USA

Nike.com ranks #315 in the country, according to Similar web. Throughout the one month of data collection for Nike, it received a total of 256 million visits a month worldwide on its desktop and mobile web pages. SimilarWeb reported that the mobile website is viewed by more than half of their consumers (64.9%). Only 35% of consumers visit Nike’s website on their desktop. Over the course of the 3 months that the program ran, SimilarWeb provided the data that the total visits in the past three months has decreased by about 25 million consumers. One key statistic to point out about the brand is that the average consumers visit on the brands website lasts about 4 minutes and 31 seconds. As far as their social media presence, they do not reach out to their consumers frequently with content.

From the month that the Similar Web program ran, starting February 28th and ending March 30th, it monitored how many consumers discussed or Nike.com ranks #315 in the country, according to Similar web. Throughout the one month of data collection for Nike, it received a total of 256 million visits a month worldwide on its desktop and mobile web pages. SimilarWeb reported that the mobile website is viewed by more than half of their consumers (64.9%). Only 35% of consumers visit Nike’s website on their desktop. Over the course of the 3 months that the program ran, SimilarWeb provided the data that the total visits in the past three months has decreased by about 25 million consumers. One key statistic to point out about the brand is that the average consumers visit on the brands website lasts about 4 minutes and 31 seconds. As far as their social media presence, they do not reach out to their consumers frequently with content.

5 MAYBELLINE

Maybelline is ranked #13 in terms of brand value (\$3.17 billion) among the world’s leading cosmetics brands, and has been a subsidiary of the French cosmetics company L’Oréal since 1996. Today, L’Oréal is also considered Maybelline’s largest competitor. The brand has a wide selection of different kinds of products for eyes, face and lips, but the products’ availability varies in different countries. On the website Maybelline gives tips about makeup and current makeup trends.

Maybelline is a global brand that seems to be struggling with their social branding. On a global scale, it’s ranked close to #43,000. While Nike is sitting in the top 500 companies. Maybelline receives about 1.834 million visits to their website each month. With the average visit lasting about 2 and a half minutes. Nike does have a greater brand presence and is more globally known. It’s target market is both genders and various age levels. Meanwhile, Maybelline’s target reach is significantly smaller than Nike’s. On March 10th, the company announced its new foundation line and eye makeup palette. This generated “buzz” on social media. On March 12th, the company officially released its new eye palette in the U.S. and their postings received an extreme amount of interaction.

Social media traffic is also an indication of the company’s advertising, and spreading the word about the brand and new products. According to Similar Web, YouTube is the biggest social platform for the company generating over 60% of traffic, while Facebook, Pinterest, Reddit and Instagram account for the other 40% percent. This isn’t surprising especially when you look at the generations that they are targeting. Makeup tutorials and advertisements are some of the biggest trends on YouTube today.

Posting product tutorials allows them to easily demonstrate how they are used and provides an opportunity for the company to reach out to influencers. By partnering with influencers, the company can send them their products and they can post to their social media accounts reviews about the products. This is a modern form of advertising that is reaching the millennial generation and younger age groups. Influencers can reach ten thousand to one million followers on an Instagram page and they have the power to reach that audience with one single post. Their Instagram account averages about twenty five thousand likes and about one hundred thousand video views. Instagram tends to be more popular among beauty brands because followers like aesthetically pleasing pages that promote a product as well as provides entertaining content.

6 FARFETCH

Farfetch is a global e-commerce company that connects shoppers with more than 400 luxury boutiques through a single Internet storefront for a seamless logistical experience for shoppers and sellers. Farfetch offers any small mom-and-pop shop a sleek, streamlined online shopping technology to power e-commerce. It also offers advanced logistics for global same-day delivery and in-store returns, and is continuously expanding its base of high-end global clientele. Farfetch started in 2007 when José Neves, co-Founder and CEO, combined his two passions: programming and shoes. He studied Economics at Porto University in the late '90s where he was already an entrepreneur. Neves established a contemporary shoe brand *Swear* in London, followed by B-Store in 2001 (<https://thebstore.com>) for which he received a British Fashion Award for 'Retail of the Year'.

Farfetch USA

Farfetch, is a luxury online platform for fashion. They have unique styles not available in other stores and offer express worldwide delivery services. Farfetch's website is ranked as #5,140 in the United States. It's total online visits, were over 48 million in one month, much higher than Maybelline. Nike has more visits monthly due to higher levels of brand awareness. Farfetch was introduced in the U.S in 2013, commands high prices and targets an upscale audience (which makes their free returns policy important).

According to Similar Web, Farfetch also receives most of it's social traffic from Facebook. With a total of 1.7 million "likes", the majority of Facebook posts consist of different styles and "looks" Farfetch offers. They post images of their newest arrivals, adding links for each to make it easy and fun for consumers. Farfetch generates a large amount of traffic on Pinterest, approximately 73,000 people follow Farfetch 24 "boards". Each board is titled specific product, trend, latest arrivals, season styles, or other specific styles. This gives consumers inspiration to use their products. Each board is very specific and well organized which makes it easy for the consumer to browse. There isn't any consumer to brand interaction. There is a message option on their profile, but there are no comments below the boards which shows that the mentions are based off of browsing and clicking on their boards and images. Twitter, although not listed above, 88.9 thousand followers. Although they have a lot of followers, they do not receive a lot of social traffic, which is interesting because Twitter is a very popular and commonly used Social Media platform amongst a lot of consumers. Farfetch's Twitter account recommends different products to their consumers, but so few are interacting. Every tweet that mentions a product, has a picture and also a link, which directs the consumer to where they can see that product, which is the Farfetch website. Instagram, although it's not mentioned in the chart above, is another social media platform that is used by a lot of fashion brands to share their products and other information. Farfetch has one million followers on their Instagram account with almost 7,000 posts, mainly product images. These posts do not generate many comments from consumers (often as few as five comments on a picture), which could indicate low levels of customer loyalty.

According to Brand24, the month of tracking showed that discussion intensity was very low. The only drastic incline was around March 11th and March 12th. On March 12th, it was announced that Harvey Nichols is officially partnering with Farfetch to sell accessories and clothes through the platform so it can increase web sales. It's officially the first department store to join Farfetch. Harvey Nichols sells luxury cosmetics, fashion brands, food and wine. This may caused an increase of discussion because there are now more products that consumers can have a chance to look at and purchase. This announcement was posted on Twitter by Farfetch and retweeted by Business of Fashion. It did not post any pictures that related to this announcement on Instagram. This may indicate that they use their Twitter account more for news updates on the company. Since Farfetch is such a unique brand, they have been using influencers as a main way to advertise. Their most trafficked social network is Facebook, with over 46% of social media users visiting their Facebook page. This number is surprising given that Facebook is no longer the most popular social network in the United States. However, Farfetch is a European based company where Facebook is the number one social media platform and Farfetch hasn't yet fully made the jump into the United States market. Over one million users "like" the brand's Facebook page (the brand averages about 300 likes per post), but they don't always receive "comments" or "shares" on their posts resulting in little interaction with the consumer.

7 US SURVEY DATA

Over 70% of US respondents were between the ages of 18-24 years. From the survey results we learned that on average of 6 to 10 advertisements on their feeds. The number one social media program that responders listed as having the most amount of advertisements was Facebook. This supports the conclusion that most companies use Facebook as their main source for advertising and that they have the most views on that social page. A negative side to this advertising, is that 65% of respondents

said that they scroll past the advertisement, which indicates that this advertising may be ineffective and does not result in “clicks” to a product or company webpage. One surprising result was the low numbers reported on the impact of celebrities and “influencers” on product awareness. Only 14% of survey participants said they hear about products from influencers, and even fewer hear about brands from celebrities. This is surprising due to the fact that many companies are now switching towards this type of advertising method to attract younger generations. Companies are partnering with influencers and celebrities to have them review and post about their products and brands on social media. Customer comments and “word of mouth” appear to be the primary drivers of purchase behavior.

8 CONCLUSIONS

Having developed a better understanding of social media behavior in the US, we can draw a relevant set of final conclusions:

- The way brands post, publish and advertise about their products or company makes a big impression on their followers.
- When users see a sponsored ad they are going to scroll past it. It’s not an effective method of advertising or branding for a company.
- In the case of Facebook, advertising is already felt to be “too much” and may have a negative impact of users of this platform.
- An effective way to post brand content would be to have an aesthetically pleasing social media page, one that is very active with users, and posts quality but entertaining content.
- Social media managers need to constantly keep up with this feed in order for users to stay interested in it.
- Social branding could go a long way with social media, but relevant and personalized content needs to be published in order for consumers to become lifelong followers.
- Twitter can be a powerful tool when messages are part of a well-integrated marketing campaign.
- Marketers need to differentiate and strengthen communications when managing sub-brands of global market leaders (L’Oreal, Maybelline).

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