



*m*brain

Handbook of Social Media Intelligence

M-BRAIN E-BOOK

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1. The Case for Social Media Reiterated

As we have entered the year 2016, the case for social media has already been made, to the extent that the relevance of the term itself has been questioned. It can plausibly be argued that if a company is not involved in social media, it is not a part of the modern communications landscape. The use of social media applications may well have shortened our attention span, which in itself may further increase the popularity of social media, as people expect to both say their piece and get the information that they need immediately.

Analyzing the vast pool of information available in social media enables businesses and organizations to find out what makes their customers tick. Getting intelligence out of social media requires an efficient communications search engine tool, as well as human brain power, and yet it is both cheaper and quicker than using many of the more traditional research methods.

We will start this e-book by looking at some key characteristics of social media, before moving on to how different organizational functions can benefit from the use of social media. We will then examine the differences between social media monitoring, measurement and analysis, as well as their interconnectedness. We will also come to define the term “social media intelligence”.

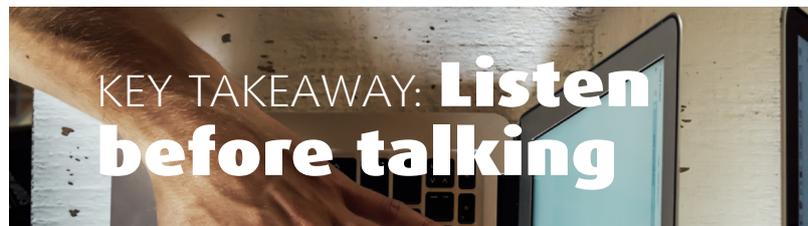
At this stage, it can already be revealed that it will be left for analysis to produce social media intelligence, the kind of insight that benefits the organization’s decision-making. In chapter 4, we will look into what kind of metrics and viewpoints the analyses should contain. When analyzing social media, a human touch is required to make sense of the data.

Listening becomes a virtue

When social media was still in its infancy, a common mistake that many companies made was to shout their marketing message to anyone who might listen,

without understanding the inherent nature of the new communications vehicle. Instead of a one-dimensional tool for promoting one’s marketing messages and ultimately sales, communications in social media, or social communications, is a two-sided affair. This requires that the brands first listen to what people are actually saying - without knowing the needs of people and the market, a brand cannot thoroughly understand the challenges, what it is doing right and what it is doing wrong.

It is important to understand that social media is both special and, yet, not that special after all. It is not that special since conversations between human beings have always taken place, only the medium has changed. Social media should be viewed as a complement and a tactical tool along with other forms of communications, with the aim of widening organizational objectives.



However, viewed from, say, a marketer’s perspective, social media is special because unlike in the good old days, a company cannot just push out a TV ad and wait for what happens next: did the consumers take a shine to the product, what happened to sales figures? Instead, it has to listen to what its customers are saying.

Social media characteristics: immediate, uncensored, amplified

In social media, the response is immediate. For a company that understands the value of social media and is willing to invest in it, this is positive. The company now

gets valuable and instant feedback from its customers. Tracking the right keywords enables the company to spot criticism anywhere and respond to it in an instant. In addition to this, compared to surveys with predefined questions or many other traditional forms of research, every bit of insight from social media comes straight from the horse's mouth. In other words, there is no censorship of any kind. This sort of insight can help a company understand the passions of its consumers and not just whether they think a certain coffee brand tastes poor, mediocre, good or terrific.

The style of communications in social media is different from what communications and marketing people or senior leaders may be accustomed to in more hierarchical organizations. This represents another challenge, but one which should be overcome by virtue of being honest, transparent and down-to-earth in communicating one's messages.

KEY TAKEAWAY: **Be ready to react**

Also, everything in social media is amplified. If someone happens to like a particular cause that a charity organization is driving, she may well share the essentials of the cause in Facebook or some other social media platform to her group of friends, some of whom may find the cause worthy and decide to donate something out of their pockets to support it. Similarly, a bad customer service experience shared to one's word of mouth networks can have severe consequences for the company that failed to think of its customer service as one of its most valued products.

Social media characteristics: friends and influencers, trust, relevant content

By its very nature, social media is also social. Conversations take place between friends, acquaintances and people unknown to each other. It may take time for a brand to enter this space and reach the level of trust required for it to become a natural partaker in these conversations. What matters in social media is trust:

Therefore, listen first, gain insights, and when the time is ripe, when you're no longer the stranger at the party, take part in conversations.

people are more likely to trust their friends and peer-to-peer recommendations than content shoved down their throat by an unknown marketer. This applies especially if they only came to check their social media account, out of boredom, perhaps, to see if anything noteworthy is happening in some of their friends' and acquaintances' lives. This characteristic of trust can be of enormous value for a company if it manages to convince key opinion influencers of the quality of its products or the significance of the cause it is promoting.

Therefore, listen first, gain insights, and when the time is ripe, when you're no longer the stranger at the party, take part in conversations. Along with trust, the relevance of content is currently a valued currency in social media. Organizations with a well-thought content strategy find social media a useful vehicle for furthering their objectives.

KEY TAKEAWAY: **Gain trust of the right people, keep your content relevant.**

2. How can different organizational functions benefit from the use of social media?

Business objectives determine social media objectives

Where should you start if you are considering how to make the most of social media use? Again, social media is not very special in this sense: the same old communications principles apply here. In order to understand what it is that one wants to achieve with social media, one must first understand wider objectives of the organization, or its very reason for existence. In other words, social media becomes a tool for promoting wider organizational objectives. Without understanding the bigger picture, the question of what role social media is expected to play in it will be left unanswered, or at best, the answer will be vague.

To underline the point: when an organization considers how to benefit from social media, the basic starting point should always be knowing the key business objectives of the whole organization. In other words, it should not tweet just for the sake of tweeting or accumulate Facebook fans, consider the “job done” and pat itself on the back. Both tweeting and acquiring more reach for the company by way of more fans or followers may very well be beneficial for the company. However, before thinking it is now the content superhero

and doing great in social media, the company should stop and ask itself a question: how does what we do in social media benefit the whole organization, and how are our social media objectives aligned with the key business objectives of the company?

One other important thing to understand is that to get the maximum out of social media, different organizational functions should co-operate with each other and let information flow freely. Insights that are discovered should be distributed inside the organization to benefit different functions, and especially those people in a position to take action based on the insights.

Social media use by different organizational functions – where do we stand?

Among the issues that M-Brain looked into in our [European Social Media Survey 2015](#) were “which organizational functions currently utilize social media the most?” and “what kind of activities are being pursued in social media?”. Responses were gathered from communications specialists and business managers across 15 countries and a multitude of industries. They revealed a

KEY TAKEAWAY **Make sure you know the reason why your company exists. Avoid information silos.**

high level of social media activity in communications, as well as by marketing functions.

However the results also showed that business functions of market and competitive intelligence, customer service and support, human resources and sales were likely to engage in only a low or moderate level of social media activity. Product development / R&D was the most likely function to report a low level of activity or no activity at all.

By far the most common activities pursued in social media included marketing & advertising and community management, pointing to key focus areas of marketing and communications functions. More than half of the respondents also reported that they have taken up listening and monitoring, recruitment and web analytics. Sales activities were advanced via social media by fewer than four in ten respondents, while surprisingly, only one in four of those who replied utilized social media in their customer support & service activities.

What can different organizational functions hope to get out of social media?

As explained earlier, social media objectives are derived from overall organizational objectives, guaranteeing that social media activities benefit the whole organization. Yet it may sometimes be easier to piece together the advantages of social media usage by thinking from the perspectives of different organizational functions.

In our social media survey, it was the communications and marketing functions that reported the biggest social media usage. How could these and other functions benefit from social media?

The importance of online reputation management and crisis communications

For the **communications** or a **public relations** department, it is of interest to make sure that a brand is able to hold on to its good reputation, or, if some damage



has already been done, to try to steer the media image of the brand from the eye of the storm towards more neutral waters. The social media metrics to track here are volume and sentiment of publicity: how often does the company appear in a negative context in social media, how often in a neutral context and how often in a positive context? How will this change over time? Are there certain themes that are likely to result in unfavourable social media coverage? What could be done to prevent this from happening? We will look at social media monitoring, measuring and analysis more thoroughly soon.

Another important area that often falls for communications or PR function to handle is [crisis communications](#). At the point of crisis, something has already gone seriously wrong. You should have a plan ready in case you do end up in the middle of a crisis. Whole books have been dedicated to advising how to manage crisis communications. Monitoring social media can help you in identifying where you are in a crisis cycle and where to direct your resources. It can also tell you which social media channels to focus your efforts on: is criticism mounting in Facebook, while you have managed to soothe the situation in Twitter? Start focusing your efforts on Facebook then.

If you are not yet in the eye of the storm, a sound monitoring practice may assist you in preparing for, or even

avoiding one. A communications search engine tool can send you alerts in case the share of negative mentions of your brand is on the rise. You could also look out for certain keywords connected with your brand and see whether there is a change towards negative mentions of the brand related to these keywords.

Not only Communications and PR benefit

An organization can also find social media useful if it decides to transfer a part of its **customer service** function to Twitter or Facebook. With shorter response times, the hope is that this would bring about more satisfied customers. By examining social media content, customer service can work out which kind of issues are the most likely to cause a reaction in customers. It can also take note of times when the need for customer service is the biggest.

Getting information about your **competitors** from social media may put you in a favourable position in relation to them and improve your **market intelligence**. You can also set up a Share of Voice comparison to compare the volume of your social media coverage to that of your most significant competitors. A coffee brand could start tracking a set of keywords to find out which brand comes up most often in social media in connection with coffee and adjectives such as flavourful, tasty or high-quality. Content-wise, there could also be a lot to learn from those campaigns of competitors in which they managed to engage people successfully.

In market intelligence, it is not only competitors that matter, but also customers, suppliers and the whole industry, including important strategic themes and trends

You can set up a Share of Voice comparison to compare the volume of your social media coverage to that of your most significant competitors.

inside an industry. Insight acquired from social media can become essential in an organization's strategic planning process.

Both **marketing** and **sales** functions also stand to gain valuable information from social media. As pointed out in the beginning, one of the lessons for marketers in social media is to be social and listen more than speak. Marketers can also track what kind of an effect their social media campaign has on an audience and compare this to engagement that a competitor's campaign manages to generate. Sales can be boosted by first making consumers aware of the brand, then by engaging with them on a regular basis and finally by turning the potential customers into buying customers. Plus, you can get sales leads from social media, straight out of that horse's mouth.

Human resources can utilize social media in searching for the right candidates to hire, while **R&D** could look for insights into what kind of features consumers want in future products.

KEY TAKEAWAY: A number of functions stand to gain from using social media. Make sure you know what it is you want to achieve.

3. Setting up a measurement practice

From monitoring to measurement

In his book, *“Social Media ROI – Managing and Measuring Social Media Efforts in Your Organization”*, **Olivier Blanchard** makes a useful distinction for those companies pondering how to put their social media program into practice. According to Blanchard, a company’s measurement practice will be built on four distinctive disciplines: monitoring, measurement, analysis and reporting. We will focus on the first three here. The last one, to whom to report, we will leave for you to figure out since you are best placed to answer this question.

The first of these cornerstones, **monitoring**, relates to an important point that we talked about earlier. Blanchard equals monitoring to **listening with purpose**. Monitoring identifies the data that may need to be measured. It is vital for brands, as it tells them what is being said about them. And why stop here? Monitoring can also help in understanding what consumers are saying about the brands and products of competitors.

Measurement, in turn, means assigning a value to metrics that are chosen carefully to support business objectives.

Measurement, in turn, means assigning a value to metrics that are chosen carefully to support business objectives. The number one rule in measurement is to concentrate on the metrics that matter: for a relatively unknown organization looking to raise its public profile,

this could mean increasing awareness among the public by way of getting new Facebook fans and Twitter followers.

When measuring your social media presence, it is important to be precise when it comes to targets that support the organization’s business objectives. In case the overall objective of the organization is to improve its public perception, a social media metric to support this would be tracking negative, neutral and positive mentions of the company in social media. Being precise with targets could mean that the organization would want to change from the current level of 30 per cent of negative publicity out of its total social media coverage to a maximum of 10 per cent of negative publicity. Doing this would constitute a success. It would be possible to be even more specific and set different targets for different social media channels. Setting detailed targets for social media presence gives purpose to measurement and helps in deciding what equals a success or a failure.

From measurement to analysis

Looking at the reasons behind a success or a failure is a healthy sign of shifting from measurement to **analysis** mood. Here, a human touch is required, for it is our species and our species only who is able to ask the “*so what*” question. Social media reports, often automated, might give you information about the volume of publicity or about buzz surrounding a certain theme, but this falls short of true intelligence. To get insight out of data, instead of asking “*what has happened*”, you should be asking “*why it has happened*”.

Here, we arrive at the definition moment: what does **social media intelligence** mean? Here’s one attempt at defining it: social media intelligence means that **something is learnt from the data**, perhaps some-

thing that helps the organization understand whether something that it did had the desired effect and what kind of corrective action it might need to undertake. The earlier mentioned relatively unknown organization, looking to raise its public profile, might find out that it has succeeded in acquiring a 50 per cent growth in its Facebook fan base (the “what has happened” question answered).

Digging deeper into the data, it could conclude that the growth in fan base was to a large extent explained by two particularly insightful posts, drawn up by a new recruit (analysis part, the “*why it has happened*” question answered). The organization should not stop here, but boldly go onwards and ask why the content was particularly engaging. Results of the analysis would then impact future actions of the organization: since the content was so inspiring, let’s produce more of the same! Perhaps even promote that content so that it reaches an even wider audience. And also, if not a pay rise, we might give more responsibility to that new creative type.

Analysis also links back to monitoring: reliable monitoring is a prerequisite for valid analysis. And without analysis of the data, measurement becomes merely a nice-to-know activity. Results detailed in the analysis should tell you how well you have succeeded in obtaining the specific targets set for your social media metrics. This

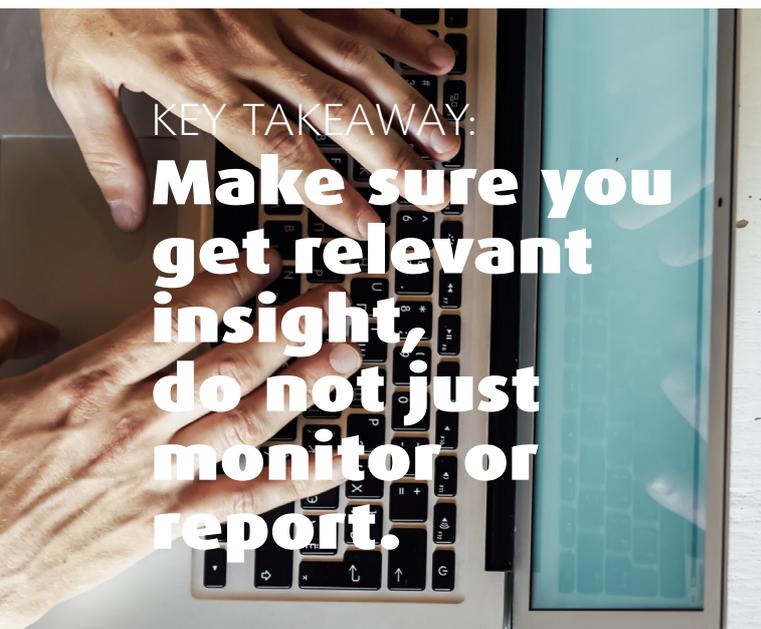
way, the evaluation process becomes part of the decision-making process. A failure to attract the targeted number of new Twitter followers should lead you to cast a critical eye on your content: perhaps the tweets weren’t informative enough, perhaps you thought they were informative when they in fact were dead boring. Maybe you forgot your audience. Fear not, for analysis helps in identifying where to take corrective action.

Establish a baseline, look for change

In analysis, it is important to look for changes in metrics. When you first start monitoring, you might already have an idea, a baseline, with which to compare the results. You might have noticed that roughly a half of the mentions of your company in Twitter are negative by sentiment. Your sentiment metric might show you that after three months of monitoring, the share of negative updates mentioning your company has dropped to 15 per cent of the total coverage. At the same time, you know that three months ago, your company decided to transfer a part of its customer service function to Twitter. Analysis should help you in understanding whether this favourable change in sentiment was due to your company deciding that it might be a smart idea to start replying to customer complaints in Twitter.

The debate concerning the use of automated solutions in sentiment analysis versus manual (human) evaluation of social media hits is ongoing, and benefits must obviously be weighed against the costs. At this moment in time, using humans in sentiment analysis remains a more reliable method, and the human brain power is also second to none in producing insights relevant to your business objectives.

You should question the value of automated reports that only show you peaks in your publicity or the division of media channels in which you have appeared. Not all of the self-proclaimed social media gurus have left the building. If you are buying analysis from an outside vendor, you should ask them whether they are able to answer the “so what” question, or whether they are simply reporting to you. The better you understand your own objectives, the better the outside vendor should also be able to provide you with relevant insights in their analysis.



4. What kind of metrics and viewpoints to look for in social media analysis? And what not?

Be wary of too simple solutions

It should be emphasized that it is only worth tracking those metrics that matter. Vanity metrics refer to those metrics that may look good on paper, yet the relevance may be hard or impossible to grasp. One rather extreme example here could be 1 000 Twitter followers bought for the company. They are not your real friends; they don't promote your organizational objectives.

Similarly, if someone presents you with a number that is supposed to define your social media presence, he is pulling your leg. What a company does in social media cannot be defined by a single number. Also, if you have outsourced your social media analysis to an outside agency with the task of calculating the value of your Twitter or Facebook follower, it probably becomes a case of the outside agency assisting you in tricking your boss. You can only calculate the value of your Twitter of

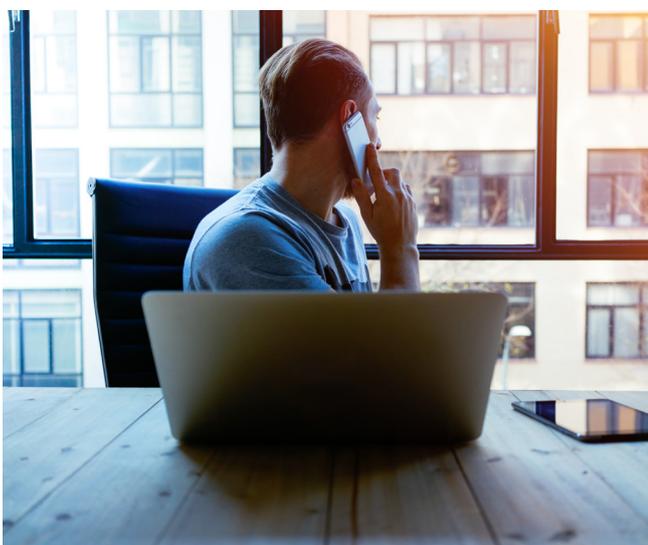
Facebook follower if you can prove that he or she has become a paying customer and you can show the value of his or her purchase.

Outdated AVEs, challenging ROI

A general consensus prevails among the practitioners of media analysis that advertising value as a metric is seriously outdated. Trying to put a monetary value to one's earned media presence is arbitrary. Still, a number of companies would be interested in knowing the return on investment (ROI) of their social media campaign. How could this be done?

Figuring out the return on investment (ROI) is related to the question of how much data you should hand to an outside agency to which you decided to outsource your social media analysis. When referring to ROI, we are talking of euros, or dollars, or any other currency. What you need to know is the currency value of your investment in, say, your Facebook campaign to drive the cause of endangered species, as well as the currency value of what you achieved with your campaign. This latter part could mean the number of new Facebook fans that you succeeded in acquiring and who decided to donate money to your cause.

If you invested 1 000 euros in your campaign and managed to acquire 100 new Facebook fans who donated an average of 15 euros to your campaign, you have made a 50 per cent gain (ROI) on your investment: 1 500 euros gained minus the initial investment of 1 000 euros divided by the initial investment. Easy math. The problem could be that it may not be that easy to prove exactly which part of the new donations



took place because of your campaign, but it is a good start at trying to come up with ROI. Another problem may relate to your relationship with the outside agency: if only you have your sales data, or in this case the data of donations available, then the outside agency can merely assist you in calculating ROI by reporting to you the number of your new Facebook fans.

Sentiment, themes, influencers

One of the metrics that always comes up in the discussion about media analyses, is the tone of publicity. M-Brain's media analyses aim to answer the question "how is your organization portrayed in the media". This applies to social media, as well as editorial media. Tracking changes in sentiment helps in piecing together the direction of the company's media image and in planning what can be done to improve it.

Tracking different themes in connection with the company's appearance in social media can help direct the focus of social media presence. A company may, for example, hope that people discuss its latest products while in reality everyone's tweeting about the company's (not that modest) management bonuses.

Identifying key experts and influencers in an industry can have significant implications for a company. In social media, friends trust recommendations from friends. Within a given branch or industry, the words of those recognized as opinion leaders have more weight than the words of your average debater. Therefore, if someone viewed as an influencer takes a shine to your product, it may positively affect your entire business. The amplifying effect of social media is further to your advantage. If an influencer comments favourably on your product, a good number of his/her hundreds or thousands of followers is likely going to spread the word further in their social networks.

Tracking influencers is straightforward if you have a sophisticated enough social media tool at hand. Tracking influencers is straightforward if you have a sophisticated enough social media tool at hand. In the case of Twitter, for instance, it is easy to single out the debaters with the largest following. A little bit of human insight helps to select content providers relevant to your company

or industry. Brand awareness can then be enhanced by entering into the right conversations with the relevant influencers.

Tracking trends and weak signals

Social media can also be great for tracking emerging trends and weak signals. The use of keywords and historical data makes it possible to identify topics that weren't that big a couple of months ago, but are now increasing in terms of volume. For instance, a topic rising in popularity could be the latest health trend, and by jumping aboard the bandwagon now, rather than later, a brand could gain a competitive advantage over its competitors.

Social media offers a lot of creative potential also to those people lucky enough to try to extract those crucial insights, social media intelligence, out of it. One example of a creative way to utilize social media data could be if a brand wanting to find the right athlete to represent it in the media. The analysis of social media data makes it possible to find out what kind of adjectives people use when describing different athletes, and what kind of values these spokespersons convey in their own e.g. Twitter or Instagram posts. The company could then pick the right athlete by examining how his/her values and media image compare to the one's the brand wants to identify with. Brand awareness can then be enhanced by entering into the right conversations with the relevant influencers.

KEY TAKEAWAY: Pay attention to what kind of metrics the analyses contain and why.

5. Putting it all together

Social media has a huge amount of information about consumer insights, latest trends, key industry opinion leaders and a number of other issues relevant to decision-making in organizations. Speed and immediacy, characteristics of social media, present companies with challenges as they need to be alert at all times, as well as opportunities since by being alert they are able to stay one step ahead of their less social media savvy competitors. Social media is not a bubble waiting to burst, but a modern day communications channel with its special idiosyncrasies.

Once you know your wider business objectives and the social media goals to support them, it becomes possible to extract that valuable social media intelligence out of the system. Finding out the right experts and opinion leaders and then engaging in the right conversations with them enables helps in spreading the essential messages and values that an organization wants to pass on. It is important to harness the whole organization to the cause so that maximum benefits can be reaped out of social media.



Finally, gathering information is not enough by itself. Information should lead to intelligence, which in turn translates into actions, whether that means staying on the current path or changing direction.

To conclude, social media offers a fresh perspective and information which updates daily, hourly, as you read this text. You could do worse than take advantage of it. And have a jolly good time along the way, after all it's only conversations!

TO THE READER

This e-book provides the reader with information on the meaning and business opportunities of social media, as well as the principles of its measurement and analysis.

After reading the e-book, you are better aware of typical conformities of law when it comes to social media, and you will know more about its benefits and what can be achieved when applying existing best practices in your social media operations. M-Brain always remains at the cutting edge of social media. If you enjoyed this e-book and want to know more about social media, analysis and market intelligence, you might also want to download our [European Social Media Survey white paper](#) that explores how companies utilize social media in their businesses. You are also [welcome to read our weekly blog](#).

