

**BRANDED “STALKING”:
Social Media Listening**

OR. Social Creeping for Consumer Insights

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TO BEGIN... A DEFINITION:

"LISTENING: The study of naturally occurring conversations, behaviors, and signals, that may or may not be guided, that brings the voice of people's lives into the brand."
-- Advertising Research Foundation (ARF)

OR

"The truth is out there."
-- Scully, *The X Files*

BACKGROUND:

Social media listening (SML) is a critical industry skill today (and, frequently sought advertising junior skill!). It is imperative not only for basic monitoring of brand reputation, customer service/CRM, operational issues, PR activities, brand engagement monitoring and reporting, social community management, etc.; but, also for *social media research and consumer insights*.

Why?

- Consumer conversations about brands, good and bad, are occurring daily, raw, and in the moment.
- Some argue there are greater consumer truths available via social media platforms than other more traditional research resources (e.g., focus groups, in-person interviews, surveys, questionnaires, etc.).
- Also, thanks to the visual nature of many social platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitpic, YouTube commentary, Instagram, Tumblr, Pinterest, etc.) there are visual nuances and cues to be discovered – common themes, tone of communications, etc.
- And, this consumer feedback/dialogue is in “the vernacular of the people,” complete with the acronyms, misspellings, emoticons, photo filters and add-ons, likes, dislikes, and, repeated sharings.

SML is an incredibly useful skill for many different types of brands. Some examples of how social media listening, monitoring and resulting consumer insights have informed strategic planning and campaign executions include:

- *United Airlines & Taylor Guitars* – an oldie, but a goodie, the infamous “United Breaks Guitars” viral YouTube consumer music video and United’s response versus Taylor guitars (make sure to tell the whole story, if use in class)
- *Lululemon Athletics* – the too transparent women’s yoga pants recall, the subsequent stock decline and consumer listening responses
- *Maker’s Mark* - product change after listening to consumer social media comments about the diluted whiskey product
- *Kenneth Cole* – used 12 months of SML to identify brand fans by archetype and also analyze consumer feedback, defusing a potentially negative situation
- *Arby’s* – how they managed the now infamous Pharrell “we want our hat back” branded tweet from the VMAs
- *Gillette* – used social media listening insights to strategically address changing category consumption patterns (e.g., decreased use of razors because of rise of facial hair)

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STUDENT ACTIVITY

A quick note: this class approach follows my “I do – you do – we do” teaching philosophy and is designed for an interactive class where students must be active participants. Also, for hands-on classroom practice, it is best if students have access to computers (or, at least a few in each group have a laptop or tablet, smartphones work too...it’s just harder for others to see, comment, etc.).

Also, we teach in 3 hour classroom block schedules, so you may want to break this up over a week if your class meets multiple times within the same week.

Lesson Plan

1. INTRODUCTION: Open with perhaps one of the videos (see below).
2. DISCUSSION: Consider then an open class discussion (guided full class or possibly, small group breakouts with reporting out) of social media communication and consumer truths. Some possible questions to explore include:
 - *Do you think people “tell it like it is” on social media? Why or why not?*
 - *Do you feel group dynamics come into play? Is that a good thing or a bad thing or...?*
 - *Are social media comments more or less accurate than what might be said in a focus group, an electronic survey or questionnaire, an interview? Why?*
 - *What do you think you might be able to do with consumer findings from social media research? How could social media listening influence: research, strategy, campaign tactics (e.g., general advertising, apps., websites, games, branded entertainment, etc.).*
3. VIDEO EXAMPLES & DISCUSSION: As a segue into the assignment, show a case study video or two (see below for some options, there are many more available). Discuss the role of social media listening, what discovered, how applied, etc.
4. ASSIGNMENT ORIENTATION: Move into the assignment. Discuss how we as a class will be exploring branded social media listening. Remind them that a wide variety of brands are influenced by social media listening and ask for real or hypothetical examples: packaged goods, service, a non-profit, an idea (music in the schools, ride sharing, recycling initiatives), or a person, perhaps a political figure or celebrity (their favorite!).
5. INTERACTIVE LECTURE: Next, show them a variety of tools. At this point, I generally pick one of the brands they discussed (or, something current in the news with a lot of surrounding chatter/discussion). NOTE: you may have to insist on a “topless” class at this point (e.g., no phones-computers, etc. open)...they find the call of the social media siren and these perhaps new tools sometimes irresistible). Freebie tools and those with a free trial (those you must be judicious with your free trial, or screen capture examples) are below. Typically, I open the sites and walk through it with them, using our selected brand.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Twitterfall○ Social Mention○ Addictomatic○ How Sociable○ Meltwater (free trial)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Hootsuite (free version)○ twitonomy○ Icerocket○ Mentionmapp (two “p”s)○ Google Trends
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In addition, if time permits, I sometimes talk a tiny bit about top line data available for free from Compete, Alexa, Google Trends, etc. However, feel that the analytics take us into a whole other area deserving of more time than this classroom unit will permit.

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5. INTERACTIVE LECTURE (cont.)

- As a class TEAM, we then try to find some relevant consumer truths/insights. Questions we may ask ourselves, while “triangulating” all these different data points include: What is the conversation about (and how does it tie to the brand)? Is the brand part of a conversation, or “shouting?” What is important to these people? Can you infer any commonalities between them (demographics, psychographics, etc.)?
- Time permitting, we then look at a competing brand and go through the same exercise. We might even look at the category overall (e.g., energy drinks, reality TV shows, credit card companies, etc.). It leads to a richer discussion, but can be time consuming.

6. SMALL GROUP WORK SESSION

- Then, in small groups we tackle a brand of their choosing (with a little guidance from you). Work with the students to determine the competitive set, the category, and make group assignments accordingly, based on class size, time, etc.
- Give each team time to work together, using the tools discussed.
- Tell the teams to select a group representative to report out. Ideally, each team should have 5-10 visual exhibits supporting their findings (most students are very adept at screen grabs). The group should have a point of view on: consumer engagement level, brand sentiment, brand conversation (from consumers vs. brand), opportunities and issues.
- Review each team’s findings and then as a class, come up with recommendations for the brand. Tell them they are the junior social media listening experts, you just spent time in the social media “war-room” (as agencies do to listen and monitor brands) and it’s time to tell your team director what you have discovered.

7. POSSIBLE HOMEWORK

- If you are working on a team project, they should be able to fold such “stalking” / social media listening work into their classroom projects.
- Or, you can make this an individual assignment.
- Or, obviously, a team assignment.
- When I use as homework I give them clear deliverables (e.g., brand + one competitor, 30 representative exhibits, from at least four different sources for each brand, comparison of two brands, summary of findings, overarching strategic recommendation + three distinct tactics).
- And, of course, a grading rubric so they clearly understand what is expected.

FINAL NOTE:

*I have lecture slides from classroom presentations
and academic conference presentations.*

If interested, please reach out: pmurphy@colum.edu.

If you are fortunate enough to have a relationship with a social media listening service, good for you. Feel free to use the general sections of this assignment as you see fit.

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POSSIBLE READINGS (just a sampler platter – most available online):

- http://learn.meltwater.com/rs/meltwater/images/ListenUp_Ebook.pdf
Free ebook students can download from Meltwater. Does a nice job of covering assorted uses for social media, provides examples as well. Quick, graphically driven, and easy read for students. And hey, the price is right.
- <http://www.brandwatch.com/2013/02/what-is-social-media-monitoring-answers-to-common-questions-and-misconceptions/>
Brandwatch blog post, but does a nice job of covering an overview of SMM, links to possible freebie tools, some consumer insights and has links to several other sources, blog postings, etc. about looking for influencers, SM ROI, etc.
- <http://www.netbase.com/resources/case-studies/>
Nice set of case studies from NetBase clients, showcasing many uses of SML.
- <http://info.netbase.com/rs/netbase/images/NetBase-EB-SharpenCampaignMessaging-3017-01.pdf> Great e-book case study of Gillette, changing male grooming habits with the rising popularity of facial hair, gender sorted findings and resulting consumer insights.
- <http://searchenginewatch.com/article/2274254/Why-Social-Media-Listening-is-Important-for-Brands> Great blog post about overarching reasons why with specific case study examples, including social media pulls and videos.
- *Listen First – Stephen Rappaport, 2011.* (Also has an ongoing blog and gives the first chapter away online, which can be helpful.) Also available from Amazon, etc.
- <http://socialmediatoday.com/pammoore/239768/social-listening-done-right-stride-gum-case-study> Funny post about Stride “Mystery” gum, its apparently confusing brand communication (hard to find Facebook app., site, etc.), and good SML. Led to redemption and provides good example of rebound communication.
- <http://www.waxingunlyrical.com/2012/05/29/manwich-a-case-study-on-social-media-listening/> Another funny blog post about Manwich, of all things. Web consultant informally analyzes Manwich, its fanbase, common threads, etc. Not unlike the work students can do via free resources, if you do not have a paid social media listening resource available.

POSSIBLE VIDEOS FOR CLASS (all easily accessed via links):

- <http://www.netbase.com/news-events/events/2014-social-spotlight-webinar-series/>
Series of Netbase webinar videos, speaking to value of social media listening for better understanding of consumer needs, stronger consumer engagement, etc. Examples include: Jim Beam, T-Mobile, soon Arby's.
- <http://smartblogs.com/social-media/2013/06/06/andys-answers-how-wendys-uses-social-listening-to-make-better-business-decisions/>
Video from socialmedia.org's BlogWell conference in NYC, Brandon Rhoten from Wendy's, he discusses how SML helped the brand discover consumer dietary insight truths which led to app. development and PR tactics, promotional tweeting, etc. (Dig around, many more available at socialmedia.org)
- <http://www.salesforcemarketingcloud.com/resources/videos/> Series of videos from SalesForce, includes videos focused on client solutions (Burberry, Red Cross, GE, etc.)
- <http://theaarf.org/ogilvy-14.php>, <http://theaarf.org/meeting-details.php?mid=402>
Series of videos showcasing David Ogilvy Advertising Research Foundation winners. Pick cases you like best, based on your classroom, personal interests, etc. but there are several within here that feature social media listening and students should enjoy (e.g., K-Mart and “Ship My Pants,” Clorox Bleach, Millennials and “Bleachable Moments,” etc.)