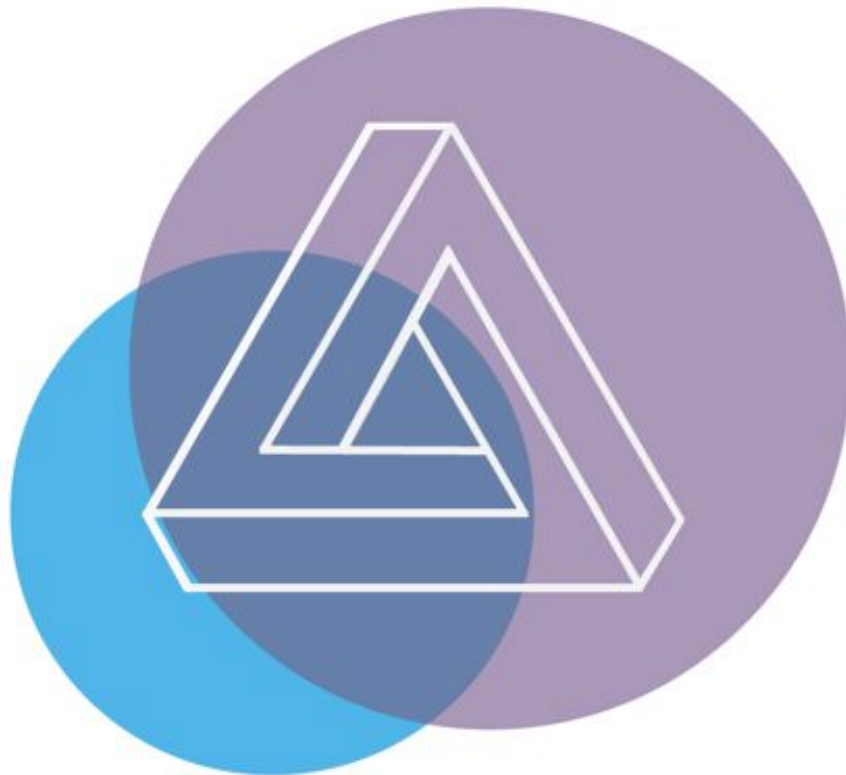


The triangulation of truth

How social media is redefining the approach to research



Shikatani Lacroix is a leading branding and design firm located in Toronto, Canada. The company wins commissions from all around the world, across CPG, retail and service industries, helping clients achieve success within their operating markets. It does this by enabling its clients' brands to better connect with consumers through a variety of core services including corporate identity, naming and communication, brand experience, packaging, retail, wayfinding and product design.

About the Author



Jean-Pierre Lacroix, R.G.D., President and Founder of Shikatani Lacroix

Jean-Pierre (JP) Lacroix provides leadership and direction to his firm, which was founded in 1990. He has spent the last 30 years helping organizations better connect their brands with consumers in ways that impact the overall performance of their business. Mr. Lacroix was the first to coin and trademark the term “Blink Factor” in 1990, which today is a cornerstone principle of how brands succeed in the marketplace. JP has authored several papers, and has been quoted in numerous branding and design articles. In 2001, he co-authored the book “The Business of Graphic Design,” which has sold over 10,000 copies. His latest book is titled “Belonging Experiences: Designing Engaged Brands.” JP can be reached at jpacroix@sld.com and you can follow his blogs at: www.belongingexperiences.com and www.sldesignlounge.com.

Other Articles and Books

Belonging Experiences: Designing Engaged Brands

Business of Graphic Design

The triangulation of truth through social media

The conventional definition of a triangulation of truth is the use of research that takes into account perspectives from different source points to ensure a higher degree of accuracy in both the information and its predictability. In the medical profession, for example, certain types of research could represent a combination of insights gained from the customer through sales data from the sales force, research with physicians who prescribe the medication, in addition to attitudes and behaviours from actual patients. In other instances, the research would focus on the conative, cognitive and emotive behaviours to determine how consumers would respond to a given offer or product. Through this triangulation of information, researchers historically were able to derive a vector that is closest to the actual truth.



With the meteoric rise of social media over the past ten years, a new definition of the triangulation of truth is emerging, providing researchers and marketers with a more relevant and accessible tool to gauge consumer attitudes and behaviours. This new approach is less prone to bias influences and benefits from the strength in numbers found within an online community of two billion active users. Another dimension of the triangle is the advent of fact based measurement tools in organizations as a means to make the right business decisions quickly and with a high degree of predictability. Today, the leadership of most organizations is under extreme pressure to ensure their quarterly earnings meet investors' expectations. This has become a greater challenge in today's economic climate with the shift of power from companies to consumers. The final tangent of the triangle investigates how conventional research is being commoditized through online tools and social media networks.

“Ultimately, brands need to have a role in society. The best way to have a role in society is to understand how people are talking about things in real time.”

Jean-Philippe Maheu,
Chief Digital Officer at
Ogilvy

Putting the triangulation of truth in perspective

Marketing research has historically been defined by the systematic investigation of insights that lead to new conclusions. And the need for insights has only grown stronger. The market research industry achieved 11-12% annual growth, reaching a value of US\$39.7 billion in 2009 (source: Outsell’s second annual MarketView report). This white paper will explore how we gain these learnings, and how social media will both impact and enhance our traditional approach to research.

We are not predicting the end of research as we know it, but investigating how organizations are leveraging a combination of new tools to guide their daily marketing and business activities. Conventional research is no longer the sole tool that organizations leverage as they implement their plans and investments.

For this reason we will be exploring the intersection of social media with fact-based business decisions and the commoditization of consumer insights to examine how they are impacting the future of research, namely:

1. The predictive power of social media
2. Marketers’ growing hunger for fact-based decisions
3. The need for speed in decision making
4. Shifts in approach for researchers

“Many managers think they’ve committed their organizations to evidence-based decision making — but have instead, without realizing it, committed to decision-based evidence making.”

Peter M. Tingling, CEO at Octothorpe Software Corporation

Why is social media impacting how we conduct research?

Over the last several months, we have seen the true power of social media as a tool to suppress oppression. In the case of Egypt, 2 million Facebook groups and tweets incited a social media revolution which ended the presidency of Hosni Mubarak.

What could not be accomplished for decades was completed in less than eighteen days thanks to crowd clout and social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. You could argue that Mr. Mubarak relied poorly on research and was tracking the wrong metrics using traditional research tools. Had his leadership team been more astute in social media chatter, or incorporated learnings from the triangulation of truth that takes into consideration the economic instability of the country, they would have realized months in advance that their popularity was in serious jeopardy. I am not sure the final outcome would have changed but they could have had greater warning of impending unrest and disrupted the use of social media tools, as countries such as Bahrain and China have done. I believe these events are the tipping point for how marketers gain market insights and statistical information to help them better predict consumer behaviour. These changes will have a significant impact on the research industry and the marketing industry for generations to come.

By putting the influence of social media into focus, we realize that there is an emergence of organizations such as Communispace, a leader in online consumer insights communities for market research, that are pioneering its use and legitimizing its importance for some of the largest brands in the world (as I write this white paper, the behemoth Omnicom is completing the acquisition of Communispace for \$40 million).

Is conventional research truly unbiased?

To understand the true importance of social media as a predictive tool, we first need to review why current research tools are becoming less effective at gaining insights. Traditional research has relied on both the experience of the researcher, the appropriateness of tools such as online quantitative studies or qualitative focus groups and ethnography studies, in addition to the right profile of respondents that form part of the study. The challenge today for researchers is consumers that are jaded when it comes to studies; they reflect new behaviours that are harder to grasp from conventional analytical tools.

Conventional research by its nature is also biased since we are pre-qualifying individuals to already have a predisposition to participate in research. In their white paper “Tutorials in clinical research: Part IV: Recognizing and controlling bias,” doctors J.M Hartman, J.W. Foreseen, M.S. Wallace and J.G Neely of Washington University School of Medicine identified a wider range of biases that impact the accuracy and predictability of research:

- **Selection/sampling bias:** occurs through omission when certain groups are omitted from the study, or inclusive bias where respondents are selected by convenience
- **Procedural bias:** when time pressure is applied to the respondents
- **Measurement bias:** typically these arise in errors in data collection and the process of measuring
- **Interviewer bias:** common in qualitative research when the interviewers give subtle clues with body language or tone of voice. This has been defined as “leading the respondents.”
- **Response bias:** when a respondent consciously, or subconsciously, tells the interviewer what he or she thinks they want to hear.
- **Reporting bias:** where an error is made in the way the results are disseminated in the report.

Social media, the true voice of the customer

In contrast, social media, by its nature, is not biased since it relies on the opinions of millions of people who are not influenced by who is moderating the chatter or discussion. Due to its viral nature, marketers and researchers lack the ability to truly influence the outcome of the discussion. Due to the size and speed of a social network, it's also almost impossible to control or shut down the process after it has been initiated.

According to www.internetworldstats.com, approximately 2 billion people use the internet to access knowledge and information, and usage has grown by 444.8% in the past ten years with a total population penetration of 28.7%. This has made the internet the most pervasive tool in gaining insights and knowledge for marketers and researchers. Social networking growth is on a steep incline with Facebook reaching over 400 million users worldwide and Twitter garnering 50 million tweets per day. Facebook and Twitter's triple-digit growth in social networking is accounting for 11% of all time spent online. As the usage of social media is increasing, so is the amount of time people are spending online. A report from The Nielsen Company showed there has been an increase of 82% in time spent on social networking sites. Across the globe over the past year, average time spent on social networking sites grew from 3 hours to 5.5 hours per month. In addition, there has been a significant shift on how people search online, with YouTube displacing Google as the preferred search portal. The growth of YouTube demonstrates that people today are much more visually oriented, preferring to view versus read information online. This will have a significant impact on the questionnaire's intensive quantitative research methodology as consumers are more reluctant to spend their online time going through tedious questionnaires. However, through the right social media tool, the questionnaire provides a platform for marketers to reach a global community quickly and efficiently.

“What gets measured gets done, what gets measured and fed back gets done well, what gets rewarded gets repeated”

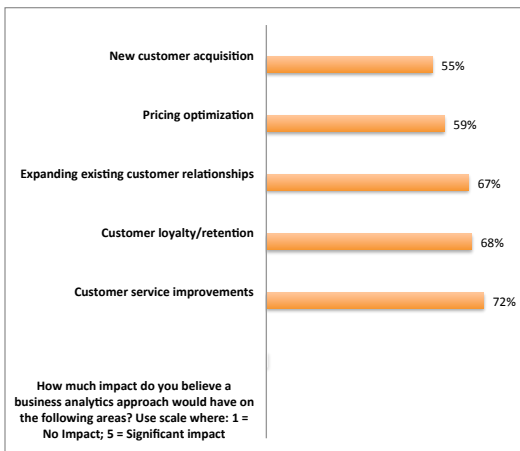
John E. Jones

The growth of fact-based decisions?

In 2009, BusinessWeek Research Services (BWRS) conducted a study to determine the attitudes and opinions of executives in the use and importance of business analytics, as part of a culture of proactive evidence-based decision-making.

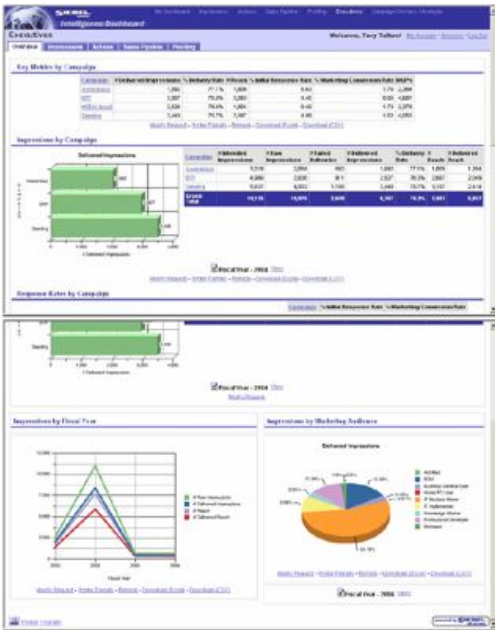
The findings identified that among C-level executives there is strong agreement (83%) that the importance of using information to effectively run a business has never been greater. This need has been accelerated by the market’s uncertainty of the past three years and the potential turbulent times ahead. The study identified the following:

- Executives are looking to derive greater value from existing customer relationships and work on customer retention—a more cost-effective method of customer management.
- The focus on customer retention and expanding relationships with the existing customer base has seen a strong increase in the last year.
- Customer retention and management have become more difficult than ever as consumers are being forced to better manage their spending and amplify their savings in a highly constrained environment.
- Business analytics can have a significant impact on expanding existing customer relationships, customer service improvements and customer retention.
- Business analytics enable companies to develop agile strategies that allow them to adapt to changing customer behaviours and achieve their business goals.



BusinessWeek Research Services (BWRS)
April 2009

The shift of power, the complexity of the fragmented marketing environment, and the increasing pressure by boards for marketing expenditure accountability are also factors that have raised the need for fact-based decision making.

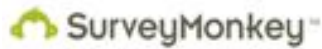


Making better decisions faster?

Over the years, organizations have gained a wealth of information about their customers and how they use their products. Leading firms have learned to harness this information and to constantly monitor and evolve its implications as consumers shift in behaviour and market needs. This focus on the facts has substituted the historical reliance on assumptions, anecdotal stories and the sole reliance of gut feelings when plotting their organization’s course of action. Organizations have realized that understanding their customers is the best way to make the right business decision that will minimize risk.

Software companies such as Microsoft and Oracle (Siebel) have realized that organizations need to embrace a new form of business intelligence that leverages key measurements, insights and market intelligence to help organizations make better decisions faster, with more predictable outcomes. They have crafted tools such as key performance dashboards and decision-making models that reflect how a four-stage cycle of learning plays a critical role in accelerating decisions. This starts with measurements, followed by analysis, that are easily understood by organizations, and leads to meaningful insights that support focused actions. No other investment spending has come under such scrutiny as marketing budgets, as senior management is challenged to clearly define the ROI. Dashboards are viable tools to measure what have traditionally been hard to validate – expenditures.

The implications to the research industry are considerable as organizations shift some of their investments from conventional research to software-based measurement tools that provide an accurate dashboard on the success of programs and marketing initiatives.



The commoditization of research

As in all industries, as the use of services accelerates so does the knowledge of the buyer and their ability to separate what is valued versus what is perceived as a commodity. We have seen a rapid rise of easy-to-use online research tools that bring a high level of sophistication to marketers at a fraction of the cost. I doubt these tools will ever replace the need for professionally driven research. What they will do is reduce the occasions that such research is conducted, reducing the level of activity within the industry.

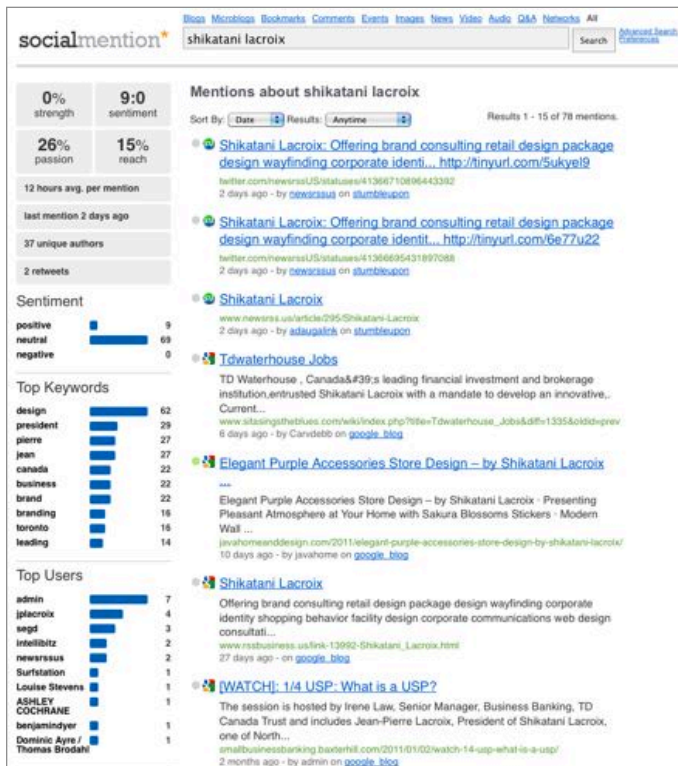
Sites such as SurveyMonkey.com, Zoomerang.com, SurveyMethods.com, SurveyShack.com and PollDaddy.com, to name just a few, offer companies and marketers access to a wide range of online research tools, such as simple customer satisfaction surveys, employee questionnaires and polls. These sites boast some of the largest corporations as clients who use their services. Another dimension is the rise of the “Get Paid Survey” online source for paid survey panels, where respondents can register to participate on a wide range of studies as a means to earn additional income. Both these industries are driving what I believe is the bigger trend, the development of online communities devoted to sharing their insights around a given topic or cause. Websites such as PermissionResearch.com positions itself as part of an online market research community with over 2 million members worldwide. PermissionResearch relies on its members to provide valuable insight into Internet trends and behaviour. Another service is Rockbridge, which promotes itself as an interactive application using social media data collection tools. These organizations and their offerings are at the forefront of the convergence of social media and research, giving their clients decision-making advantages over their competitors.

Of these many organizations, I find Toluna of great interest as it demonstrates that you can participate in the commoditization of the research industry while remaining a strong supporter of the sector. According to the company’s website, Toluna services market research professionals in more than 600 companies worldwide, providing sample and custom panels – 2.5 million active members in 30 countries, profiled into 16 specialist panels – that reach niche segments for premium quality survey research data.

Toluna also provides a PanelPortal service consisting of a highly robust and scalable hosted technology platform enabling research professionals to easily build, manage and run their own online panel communities and surveys. Where social media and research merges is through their QuickSurveys, self-service surveys of up to five questions, served on toluna.com, the world’s first social research web 2.0 network.

According to Wikipedia, social media measurement refers to the tracking of various social media content such as blogs, wikis, micro-blogs, social networking sites, video/photo sharing websites, forums, message boards, and all other user-generated content as a way for marketers to determine the volume and sentiment around a brand or topic in social media. There are both free entry-level tools and enterprise platforms available

for use by digital marketers and PR professionals.



There has also been an explosion of these research tools within social media sites to track levels of engagement, participation and content preference. These tools range from free online services such as Hootsuite (Canadian firm), Google, Buzz and Twitter Search, to more expensive paid services such as Radian6. The Social Media Monitoring Wiki identified over 150 such sites available to marketers. One of these sites is SocialMention.com, which provides a very in-depth analysis of what is being said about your brand.

Company Name	Platform Name	Media Type Coverage	URL	Country
Radian6	Radian6	All	http://www.radian6.com	Canada
Google	Blogsearch	Blog	http://blogsearch.google.com	USA
Twitter	Twitter Search	Twitter	http://search.twitter.com	USA
Loocket	Loocket	Blog	http://www.loocket.com	USA
Scout24	Scout24	All	http://www.scout24.com	USA
Brand Eye	Brand Eye	All	http://www.brandeye.com	South Africa
Visible Technologies	TuCast, TuReputation	All	http://www.visibletechnologies.com	USA
Teemup	Teemup	Twitter	http://www.teemup.com	USA
IFyn	Boardreader	Forums	http://boardreader.com	USA
Collective Intellect	oLearn, oLearn	All	http://www.collectiveintellect.com	USA
BeMyType	Connect	Blog, Twitter, Friendfeed	http://www.bemytype.com/connect	USA
Techmobi	Blogsearch	Blog	http://techmobi.com	USA
Fuggin Technologies	Boardreader	Forums	http://www.boardreader.com	USA
Facebook	Search	Facebook	http://www.facebook.com/search	USA
Facebook	Lemon	Facebook	http://www.facebook.com/lemon	USA
Social Mention	Social Mention	All	http://socialmention.com	USA
Now Matrix	Trendr	All	http://www.trendr.com	USA
Monitor	Monitor	Twitter	http://www.monitor.com	USA
Sprinklr	Spark	All	http://www.sprinklr.com	USA
Linkfluence	Linkfluence	All	http://linkfluence.net	USA
New Media Strategies	ADM	All	http://www.newmediastategies.net	USA
JD Power	Urbns	All	http://www.jdpowerwebintelligence.com	USA
System	M&I, Hearbeat	All	http://www.systems.com	Canada
Crimson Hexagon	Intelit	All	http://www.crimsonhexagon.com	USA
Visible Measures	TuReach, Video Engagement	Video	http://www.visiblemeasures.com	USA
Evings Group	Impedwatch	All	http://impedwatch.com	USA
CustomScope	ChIQ	All	http://www.customscope.com	USA
Bitworks	CharBeat	Twitter	http://www.charbeat.com	USA
TweetBeep	TweetBeep	Twitter	http://www.tweetbeep.com	USA
Altavio	Buzz Report	All	http://www.altavio.com	Belgium
Raven	Raven	All	Raven SEO Tools	USA

The convergence towards the truth

The new dimensions of the triangulation of truth support the importance of just-in-time relevant insights. It provides a great opportunity for research firms to evolve their proposition by being closer to how consumers share their insights. In his new book “Social Media Metrics: How to Measure and Optimize Your Marketing Investment,” Jim Sterne identifies a range of insight venues available to researchers and marketers:

- **Focused Grievances:** customers sharing views on companies has been a popular platform for social media usage so it’s a great vehicle to understand what people are saying about your brand, campaign or marketing initiative. Today, marketers put a lot of importance on the social buzz that emanates through social media about their campaigns.
- **Topic Trending:** these tend to be driven by marketers wanting to gain further insights on how to improve their product. It can consist of a website devoted to the customization of products, such as Nike or Dell, to gather early indications of what product features need to be eliminated or added. Or it could take the form of numerous mentions on social media networks about certain product features that are either a vast improvement or major irritant.
- **Tantrum Tweeting:** the ability of tweeting to the world in 140 characters-or-less blasts has emerged as one of the most powerful insight tools available to marketers. Tracking these tweets can create a by-the-second account of how your brand is doing in the marketplace. These insights can be integrated as part of research reports that either support or challenge conventional research approaches.

- **Crowdsourcing Ideas:** either through panels or as part of online communities, you invite your loyal customers to provide design ideas on how to make your product better. Organizations spend an enormous amount of investment to gain insights on how new products will fair in the marketplace based on various conventional research tools. However, having an open dialogue



with a wide range of customers is one of the best ways to gain insights on how to improve your offering. Dell leverages a website devoted to sharing ideas www.ideastorm.com, which lays the ground work for innovation and product improvement. My favourite site is the Pepsi Refresh program, where consumers are invited, as part of a social media initiative, to vote for the community program they feel deserves funding by PepsiCo.

“When our AXE community gives feedback on an ad, saying it won’t fly with AXE’s core demographic, the value is immediate”

Diane Tarr-Smith,
Communispace VP of Marketing

A new way of approaching the facts

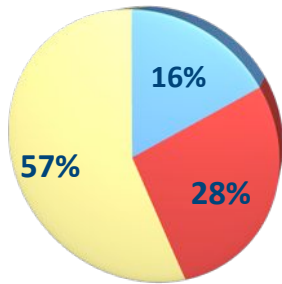
Fact-based decisions and social media will continue to evolve rapidly and here are some principles that I was able to glean from such organizations as Communispace, Altimeter and the Web Analytics Demystified firm:

- **Smaller is better:** the key to greater insights is having the right people in a private, intimate setting.
- **Recruit wisely:** finding the best community members who have special dynamics is key to effective insights
- **Don’t dominate:** community facilitation isn’t easy. Offer your audience something to talk about by creating a dialogue.
- **Innovation:** social marketing activities will spur innovation.
- **Advocacy:** help activate evangelism, word of mouth and the spread of information.
- **Business objectives and key performance indicators:**

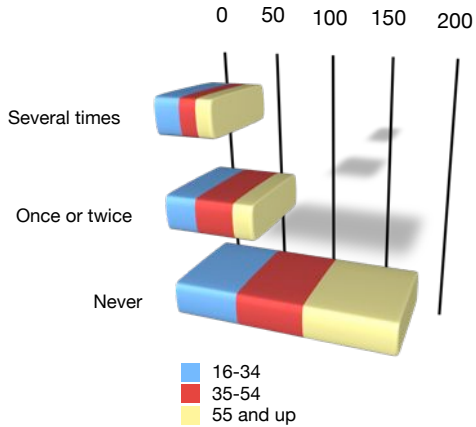
Figure 2: Social Marketing Analytics Business Objectives, Key Performance Indicators and Vendors to Watch

Business Objective	Key Performance Indicator	Vendors to Watch
Foster Dialog	Share of Voice	Athenian SM2, Radian6, Scout Labs, Statist, Trendr, Visible Technologies
	Audience Engagement	Coremetrics, Webtrends, Radian6, Scout Labs, Conversion, Fitbox (Live), Visible Technologies
	Conversation Reach	Athenian SM2, Radian6, Scout Labs, Social Radar, Statist, SIVX, Trendr, Visible Technologies
Promote Advocacy	Active Advocates	Buzz360, Fitbox (Live), Radian6
	Advocate Influence	Cymfony, Fitbox (Live), Litmus, Radian6, Razorfish (SM Score), Teligent, Tattalyzer, Visible Technologies
	Advocacy Impact	Coremetrics, Lithium, Omniture, Webtrends, SIVX, Teligent
Facilitate Support	Resolution Rate	Fitbox (Live), RightNow Technologies, Salesforce.com, Teligent
	Resolution Time	Fitbox (Live), RightNow Technologies, Salesforce.com, Teligent
	Satisfaction Score	ForeSee Results, iPerceptions, Kampyle, OpinionLab
Spur Innovation	Topic Trends	Athenian SM2, Cymfony, Fitbox (Live), Radian6, Scout Labs, Social Mention, Social Radar, Trendr, Visible Technologies
	Sentiment Ratio	Athenian SM2, Conversion, Cymfony, Fitbox (Live), Radian6, Scout Labs, Social Radar, Trendr, Visible Technologies
	Idea Impact	Buzz360, Cymfony, Fitbox (Live), Lighton, Radian6, Scout Labs, Visible Technologies

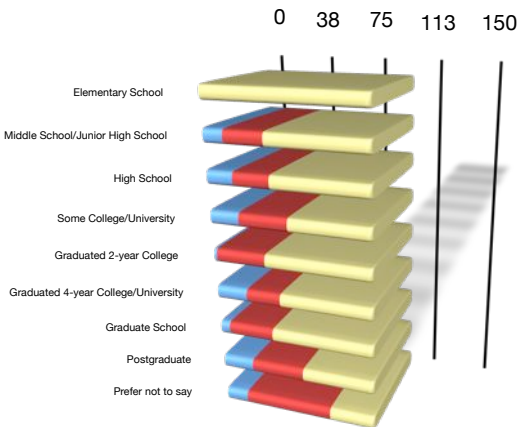
Have you ever responded to surveys within social media networks?



● Several times
● Once or twice
● Never



■ 16-34
■ 35-54
■ 55 and up



■ Several times
■ Once or twice
■ Never

Are the social network citizens ready?

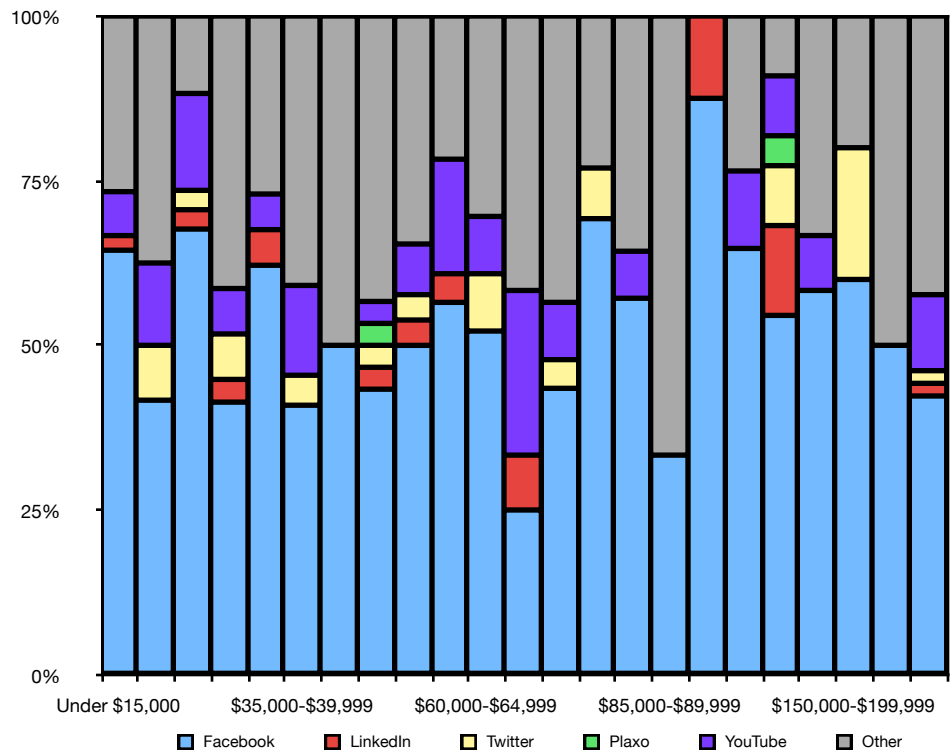
Our firm initiated an online study with approximately 500 consumers across Canada to understand their current online research habits to determine if they participate in social media network driven research. The study was limited to three key questions:

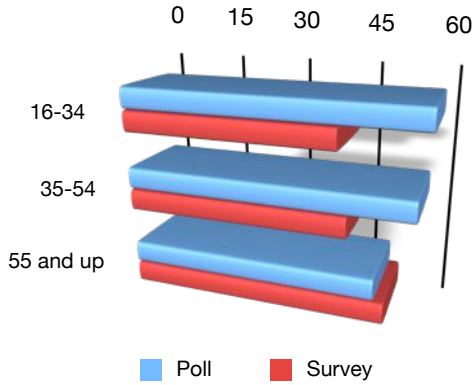
- Have you ever responded to surveys within social media networks?
- If you have answered yes to the previous question, please identify which social media network you participated within?
- If you did participate, for what type of research?

The research was open to anyone and our focus was based on the age of respondents. The study identified that women had a higher participation rate in this survey with 60% of all responses completed by women. More than 16% of respondents noted that they participated in social media initiated research studies, while 28% mentioned that they had participated once or twice for those who have participated several times, consumers age 16 to 34 ranked the highest at 20.21% followed by the 35-54 age group at 13.36%. In contrast, respondents age 55+ had the highest percentage at 72% for never participating in social media driven research. If we look at the provincial structure of the respondents, their participation on social media research driven sites is approximately uniform, other than British Columbia which at 8% is almost half the national average. If you combine the respondents who participate in social media driven research “several times” and “one or twice,” they tend to have a college or post-graduate degree.

Interestingly, based on the study findings, respondents who noted that they participate in several social media studies are grouped by those individuals with income levels of less than \$40,000 and those with annual incomes above \$100,000.

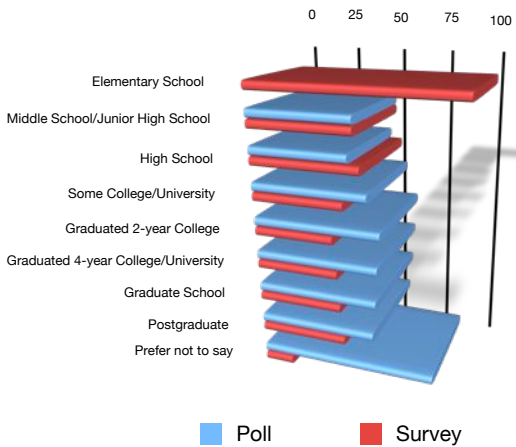
Facebook is the true leader in terms of research participation, according to our survey, with over 50% of respondents (16-34 and 35-54 age group) participating in research on this network. YouTube, which appealed to an older demographic, was a far second with an average of 10% mentioning this site for use in research. A significant portion of respondents (28% or more) mentioned others, indicating that online conventional research and other types of social media networks represent a significant percentage of online research channels.





It is also interesting to note that more than half of respondents mentioned participating in social media polls versus surveys, which identifies the need for researchers to shorten their questionnaire lengths. Interestingly, YouTube, which has outranked Google as a popular search engine, did so poorly as consumers are looking at visual ways to navigate their online searches.

Based on the sample of respondents, it's also worth noting that surveys tend to have a higher participation rate with younger consumers while older consumers tend to have a higher participation rate with polls. Income levels follow the same pattern as higher income respondents are more receptive to participating in polls versus surveys.



Based on these very high level findings, we believe that researchers will need to create more engaging approaches to research in order to gain a higher level of participation. I would also suggest that YouTube has truly under leveraged its opportunity to attract consumers who are shifting from conventional, text-based studies to video content-driven research studies that leverage the power of social media networks.

Conclusion

The importance of fact-based decisions will continue to grow and play a critical role in how organizations seek insights. As organizations gain a better understanding of social media networks, they will realize its full potential as a platform to engage their supporters and detractors to make better marketing decisions. Researchers will continue to play a role, but their involvement in the decision-making mix will be directly related to their ability to harness the power of social networks to gain real-time relevant and meaningful insights. The research firm of the future will leverage these networks as part of their insights arsenal to gain greater actionable knowledge for their clients, ensuring they stay ahead of the commoditization curve. Ultimately, the strength of research services will be directly related to their ability to create proprietary insight networks for their clients. Firms such as Communispace and Altimeter have realized that the convergence of conventional research and social media is here to stay and can help bring greater value to their clients.

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