

# THE REAL QUESTIONS ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING/ ACTIVE WEB LISTENING



The questions that every potential  
user should ask

A publication of

**Digital:MR**  
market research evolved

London, December 2014

by Michalis A. Michael



Michalis A. Michael is the CEO of the online research specialist DigitalMR. He focuses on understanding the problems customers face and developing solutions that meet genuine research needs.



[mmichael@digital-mr.com](mailto:mmichael@digital-mr.com)



[@DigitalMR\\_CEO](https://twitter.com/DigitalMR_CEO)

# Why should I read this eBook?

**Should this new marketing discipline be called social media monitoring or web listening? Or any of the other 10 terms identified in this eBook? What are the questions that need to be asked before an organisation engages in this discipline?**



Is the data representative, is it relevant, is it ethical to collect it, what are the demographics of the contributors, how can we connect the dots with other sources, how do we measure the influence of a contributor to a conversation? Even though we have more pertinent questions than answers we make an attempt to provide a view on many of these important questions that every potential user should ask.

**If you are new to social media monitoring or don't have the answers to these questions, read on...**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Introduction.....  | 5  |
| What should we call this new marketing discipline?.....                            | 8  |
| Who should own it?.....  | 11 |
| Methodology, Objections and Challenges.....  | 14 |
| The 20 questions- to choose a social media monitoring/ web listening platform..... | 20 |
| Conclusions.....   | 23 |
| What to do next.....   | 25 |

CHAPTER 1

---

# Introduction

# Introduction



When there is confusion around an emerging discipline, solution, process, or technology and many people are trying to define it and own it, then you know there is something to it.

**The question is, how do we extract value out of the innovation at hand?**

If Google was to come to our rescue, and the answer was based on search results, “monitoring social media” would be the most frequently used term among the candidates. This position however, has the inherent flaw that people who do not know a lot about it (they are asking the question on Google) get to define what it should be called.



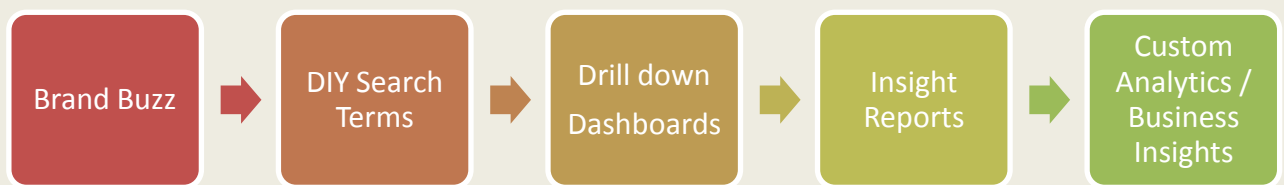
There are many companies competing in this space. Some are technology companies, some are research agencies getting the technology from third parties, and some are research agencies that acquired the technology. There is a continuum of offers with the two extremes occupied by:

- a) Technology companies that can report Buzz on brands or search terms
- b) Companies that can take topic based sentiment and provide advanced analysis, connect the dots with other sources, and provide business insights.

In between the two extremes we have many types of offers such as dashboards, brand sentiment, canned reports, DIY etc.

Other dimensions that differentiate the available offers are: the use of Linguistic vs. Statistical methods for automated sentiment analysis, the use of simple search terms vs. complex Boolean keyword combinations, the use of hierarchical taxonomies as opposed to flat taxonomies or none at all.

Our view is that only measuring buzz (number/share of mentions) or adding brand sentiment, is not enough to offer the business insights that one could extract by using topic based sentiment in addition to the other two levels of information. Data models can be built bottom-up from individual comments on the web, and turn unstructured text into structured reports. It is important to **Listen, Analyse, Understand and Engage.**



# What should we Call this New Marketing Discipline?



# What Should We Call This New Marketing Discipline?

Here are some alternative terms that others have used when trying to define the subject of this article:

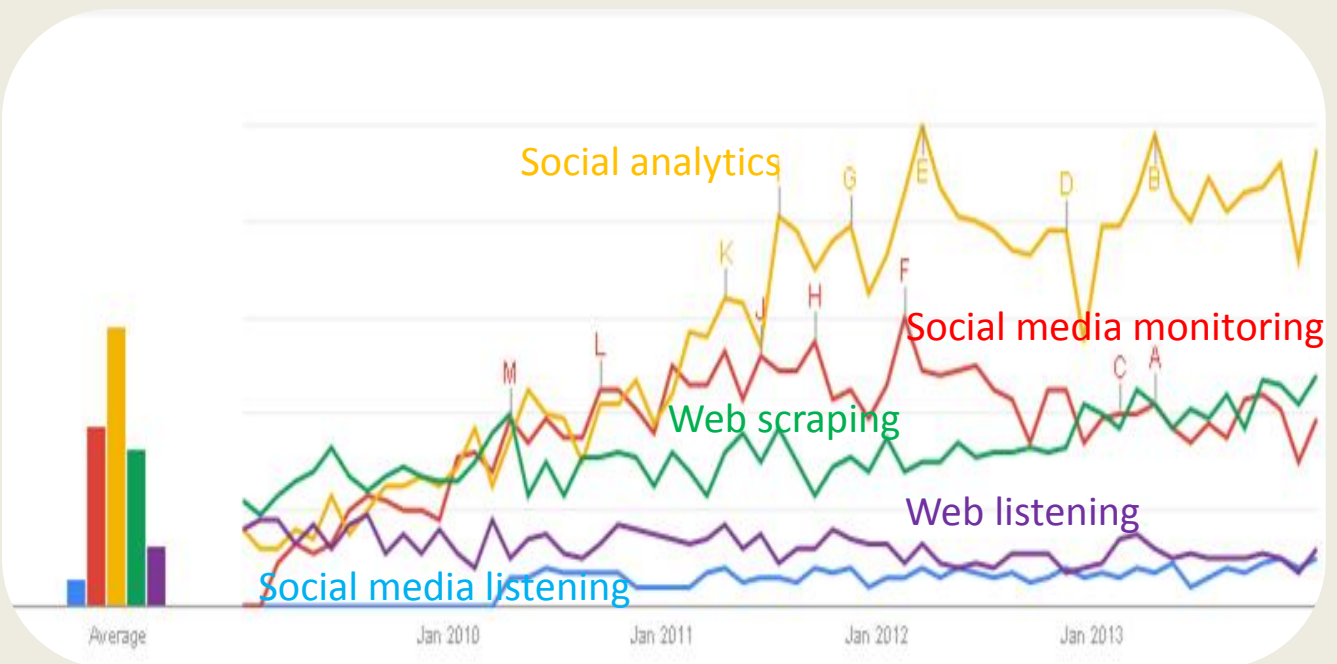
- Social media listening
- Web listening
- Active web listening
- Social media monitoring
- Social analytics
- Social media research
- Online reputation management
- Social media netnography
- Web buzz
- Buzz listening
- Buzz tracking
- Automated analysis of unstructured data
- Web scraping



The chart below shows how the popularity of 5 of the terms in Google search developed over the last 5 years.

“Social analytics” has overtaken all other search terms (see chart below) by 2011. Web scraping was the 2<sup>nd</sup> most popular term in 2014 with social media monitoring being a close 3<sup>rd</sup>.

What the dominant term will end up being is not driven by any linguistic process or rules or by search in Google. **The winner will simply be the name that is easier to say and is more adaptable in most languages.**



CHAPTER 3

---

# Who Should Own It?

# Who Should Own it?



Currently, within many end-user companies, the media or public relations departments own the monitoring of social media. It is less often the case that a market research department within an end-user company in sectors like FMCG/CPG, retail, banking, healthcare, automotive, IT, Telecom, Travel & Leisure etc., owns this discipline. It looks like the customer insights department in co-operation with communications is catching up fast demanding tools with higher sentiment accuracy.

At the end of the day, it is more important for companies to understand the impact of the digital word of mouth and decide if they actively want to:

- manage their reputation online
- find influencers and leads
- utilize user generated content for product innovation
- measure their online marketing activity
- track competitive activity and its impact to their success
- leverage positive sentiment for online and offline marketing campaigns

Once they decide that they want to make the monitoring of social media part of their customer strategy, they then need to have a frank conversation on whether one or more existing departments should be engaged, or if a dedicated digital department should be formed.

They need to define their web strategy, and resources need to be allocated to execute it.

In our experience a workshop facilitated by an external expert is highly effective in helping to set this strategy.



# Methodology, Objections and Challenges?

# Methodology, Objections and Challenges?

The following list of objections and challenges is a consolidation of many conversations with clients.

## Is it market research?

No, not in the traditional sense, we like to think of it as market research evolved. We don't regard web listening as a replacement for traditional research but rather a complementary aspect to it. It can steer and influence your research programmes and is a vital way of listening to your customers and influencers. At a time when survey response rates are dropping and it is getting harder to reach your key customers, web listening provides a unique portal. When necessary, we can then use the findings to inform further research such as [online focus groups](#) and online communities, and "connect the dots" to generate actionable business insights.



Another important application of listening from a research perspective, is to tap into the thousands or even millions of relevant conversations that are happening about your sector in order to find a niche or specialist research sample. It's a lot more efficient than traditional, phone, or face to face recruitment, and provides the opportunity to invite people directly into your studies or online communities based on what they are saying online.

**Are the kinds of people who provide comments different than the general public? What are these people representative of? And what about feedback from “normal people”?**

When conducting research it's always useful to bear in mind what your sample represents. It may be the general public, your customers, or your advocates and influencers. People who leave comments on Facebook, Twitter etc may not represent your broad customer base, but their views are extremely important. Not only will they be read by a much wider group of social media users, their views and opinions can quickly cross over into mainstream media. They definitely represent the people who have a Facebook or a Twitter account.

Therefore web listening is often a good way to judge the views of early opinion formers. If you want to know what's being said about your organization or brand before

it goes mainstream, then social analytics is an extremely useful tool which can help shape your social media strategy.

(Even if “normal people” don't leave comments, they are still likely to read what has been said before by others: Those who did comment function as [influencers](#)).





## **More people post negative comments than positive comments, how do you account for that?**

It's only human nature that people like to share their grievances, and the internet gives people the chance to do exactly that. By ignoring negative comments, bad news can escalate fast. It's the old adage - you can't manage what you can't measure. Better to monitor and act quickly, to improve your customer service and the products you provide. On the other hand, people who are impressed by a product or service often feel like sharing their experience in order to be helpful to others. A good way to state an unsubstantiated opinion about this is to consider the following 7 point scale:

- 1)Extremely bad / Awful
- 2)Very bad
- 3)Bad
- 4)Neither good or bad
- 5)Good
- 6)Very Good
- 7)Excellent

Our guess is that people who rate a service or a product with 1, 2, 6 or 7 are more inclined to post a comment than if their rating is 3-5. In any case, your brand will not appear particularly genuine or credible when every review is perfect! There's a lot to be said about listening to the negative, responding appropriately, and finally allowing other potential customers to see the effectiveness with which you dealt with a complaint.

## **What if the number of people who DID leave comments is very low?**

It's not always the volume of comments that matters – but their salience. One comment may, for example, give you an idea on how to improve your product, or how to ask more pertinent questions in your next wave of research. Also your products may not be the type that generate much debate. Even so, it is quality rather than quantity that is important here.

## Is it ethical to listen in on people's online "conversations"?

There has been a lot of publicity about privacy recently – for example with Facebook users. The right approach here is to only “listen” to comments that are in the public domain. We should never “peek” behind password protected member groups or private discussion areas unless we are given explicit permission.

We believe that people who post an opinion on a publicly accessible website should expect that their comment will be read, discussed, analyzed and interpreted.

## How can I use the results?

The list is endless! In short the findings from web listening can improve business performance: whether that's communication, targeting, product development, or using the findings to enhance data from existing sources and make more out of your existing research.

## How can I integrate web listening into my existing market research programme?

Web listening embraces the market research possibilities and opportunities of this digital age. This kind of unsolicited information can easily enhance existing survey programmes with additional information such as:

- Product attributes people talk about that can be used for your consumer tracking surveys
- New ideas that can be fleshed out in specific ideation sessions for product/ advertising development
- Customer loyalty and employee commitment surveys

## Social Media Monitoring is just a fad.

With Facebook reaching 1.23 billion users in 2014 it's safe to say social media is here to stay. If you don't embrace it be sure your competitors will.

**My marketing/ PR department is already using web listening software.**

There are already many software systems out there that monitor online mentions. However, how useful and how accurate is the information that you are getting? Is it helping you make better informed business decisions? Market researchers understand accuracy and the importance of using the right data to back the right decision. Ask what the sentiment accuracy of the tool is. Ask what languages the sentiment is available in.

**How much do I need to have to run/ manage in-house?**

A specialist research agency can manage the whole process for you, or use a hybrid approach. They should work with you to fit with your requirements. Whether it's ongoing dashboard that report with real-time updates, or regular debrief presentations containing actionable insights, they should work to your requirements and timetable.



# The 20 Questions to choose a Social Media Monitoring/ Web Listening Platform

# The 20 Questions

## How to choose a social media monitoring/ web listening platform

There are not necessarily right and wrong answers for each and every question below, however it is still very important to ask these questions to your prospective suppliers. A good way to judge who to choose would be by the depth of each answer you receive, as well as the conviction and argumentation of the supplier.

**If they cannot provide an answer to any of these questions, then this is a red flag which indicates that further due diligence is required for the supplier.**

Admittedly, for someone who is only starting out in social media monitoring, some of the questions may not seem clear and plausible, so feel free to get in touch with us if any clarification is required!



An alternative would be to rephrase the questions and ask the prospective supplier to explain the question first. For example, using question 1) below, some preliminary questions could be:

- a) what is data harvesting? b) what does a statistical method do? c) what is NLP? (not to be confused with Neurolinguistic-Programming)
1. Is the data harvesting and classifying algorithm based on linguistic, statistical methods, or both? Are any other methods used?
2. What is the average sentiment accuracy that can be achieved with the method used?
3. How is accuracy defined?
4. How exactly is the algorithm trained and how long does it take to get to the claimed accuracy?
5. In what languages can sentiment analysis be applied?
6. How long does it take to introduce a new language?
7. To what extend is the harvesting automated and how much manual work is required to produce a report?
8. Are search terms used or is it

an open ended inductive approach?

9. How do you annotate sentiment when more than one brand is mentioned in a post?
10. Can a user change the sentiment of a post and does the system learn?
11. How are the harvesting sites selected?
12. How are comments gauged and classified for sarcasm?
13. Is the pricing based on number of search terms researched?
14. Is a drill-down dashboard available for client in-house analysis?
15. If NLP is used, are adjectives classified as positive or negative independent from context?
16. Is the supplier a technology company or a specialized market research agency?
17. What is the definition of neutral and mixed sentiment?
18. How are posts versus mentions handled?
19. Does the supplier use taxonomies?
20. Can the supplier integrate the harvested data flow with your in-house MIS?

CHAPTER 6

---

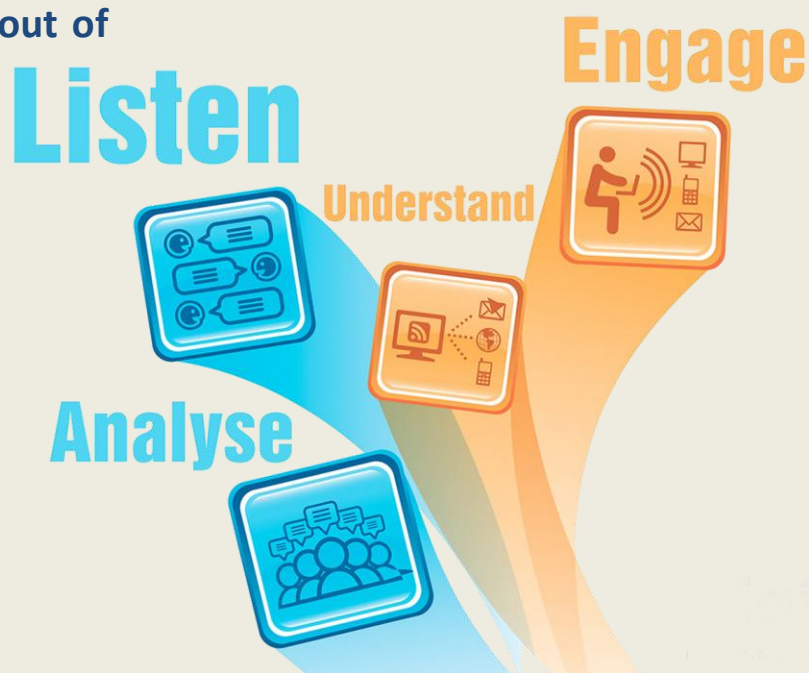
# Conclusion

# Conclusion

Regardless of what the name ends up being and who ends up owning it, the important thing here is that additional value will be created as a result of the usage of social media monitoring/ active web listening and engagement. The four terms below represent the full continuum your chosen solution needs to cover.

Each area needs to be managed by specialist employees, or partners with the appropriate skill set to make the most out of the next phase.

As the title and the abstract of this paper indicate, at this juncture of the social media monitoring evolution, there might be more questions than definitive answers. It is quite obvious however that this is a subject that is on every marketer's top of the list to figure out. **It is also clear that going forward, digital and social media will become more and more a part of our lives.**





# Thank You!

For any enquiries please email [info@digital-mr.com](mailto:info@digital-mr.com)

To find out more about listening247 [click here](#)

Follow DigitalMR on social media:

