

Embracing social media monitoring

By [Jaco Pienaar](#)

25 Mar 2014

Global research has found that 71% of online adults use Facebook and 40% of cellphone owners access a social networking site from their device. But what does a growing reliance on social mean for news monitoring and analysis?

Given how Facebook is used by more than one billion people, Twitter by 243 million, and Mxit by 7.4 million on a monthly basis, content consumption has irrevocably changed in the connected world. But then, this in itself is not surprising. The past few years have seen online users view, read, generate, and share content in a different way. Today, people tend to trust family and friends more than they do news sources.



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Sources for information

For many, sites like Facebook with its own curated content and walled garden approach have become the go-to source for information. In many respects, such an extensive social network fulfils the role of a mini-internet that not many wander away from. People even forego going to news sites by opting to click on articles, videos, and other content that people share on the social platforms of their choice.

However, does this apply to South Africa with its disparity between those who can afford internet access and the digitally disconnected? Judging printed content consumption by circulation figures on its own might provide some publications with a false sense of security and others with needless panic to push their digital strategies. In general, people enjoy the direct channel of communication to a brand that social provides. However, in the local market there are not enough companies (especially consumer-facing ones) who have embraced this.

Quality of coverage

As every person becomes a publishing channel on his or her own thanks to the power of blogs and other social network platforms, media (across print, broadcast, and online) have almost gotten used to the idea of being disintermediated. But just as publishers need to address the social diaspora, so too must public relations firms convince their clients (many still traditional in their mindset) that print or even traditional media is not the be all and end all for coverage.

Unfortunately, those who do manage to push the boundaries and get significant exposure on social platforms and the personal blogs of influencers are struggling to quantify the quality of that coverage. Local monitoring agencies are not making matters any easier. Many of these agencies are battling just to track what is being said on social channels never mind trying to put a value to it. These agencies have come to rely on online reputation management firms to do 'the dirty work' for them and simply factor the outsourced cost into their client budgets.

Implementing change

The South African media monitoring and analysis market has reached a tipping point. Clients are no longer satisfied with just receiving a basic service offering that is not reflective of the changing content consumption demands of the connected world. Instead, they demand that agencies provide them with solutions that fulfil a range of monitoring needs, but also do not forego analysis for an automated approach just to save time.

This is especially true with sentiment analysis in the social space. It has become far too easy to opt for algorithms and forget the essential human touch required to truly understand what is being said on social platforms.

Embrace and implement change are words to live by if these agencies are to survive in the brave new world.

ABOUT JACO PIENAAR

Jaco is an MA Information Science graduate who specialises in research, analytical framework development, and content analysis. His thesis was on Intellectual Capital measurement and he applies this to his framework developments as well as knowledge strategies. Professionally, Jaco has worked in the journalism field, academic environment, multi-national research environment, and media analysis environment. He is currently the Chief Knowledge Officer at Professional Evaluation and Research.

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