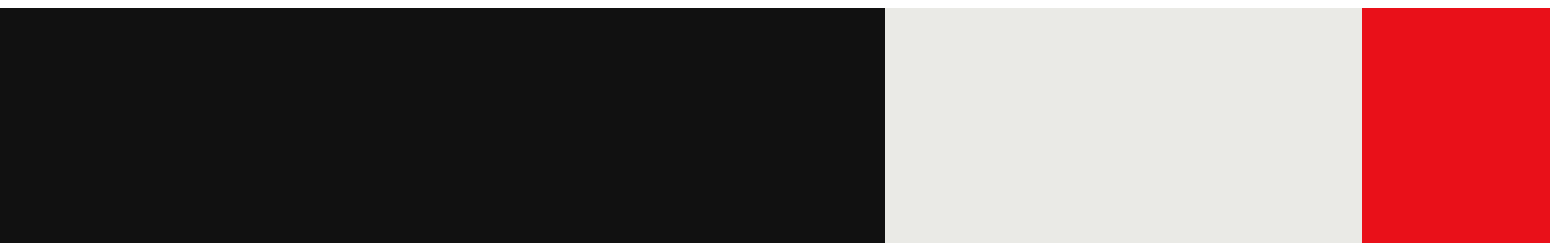



4 misconceptions about social listening and how to get it right

Article



Social listening (i.e., tuning into social media conversations about or adjacent to brand culture) is considered by nearly 61% of US businesses **to be part of their social media marketing strategy**, according to a May 2022 report from Social Media Today and Meltwater. But many aren't using the technique to its full potential. Here's how marketers can avoid four common misconceptions.

1. Social listening doesn't mean scrolling through product reviews

Social listening provides an understanding of the entire culture surrounding a market, not just feedback on a single product or brand.

Marketers “mistake information for intimacy” by working from a glut of data that doesn't actually tell them much about how customers think, according to **Marcus Collins, PhD**, clinical assistant professor of marketing at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business and head of strategy at Wieden+Kennedy. While understanding discrete KPIs like clickthrough rates and cart abandonment is important, brands should use social listening to build a bigger picture of their base.

“The better we understand people, the more likely we are to get a sense of how they see the world and, ultimately, how they like to behave,” he said.

2. The most popular platforms aren't necessarily the best ones

Browsing Facebook and Instagram hashtags can show how people view a brand, but community-based spaces like Reddit and Discord have more specific information.

Social listening is “less about massive, big networks and more about small, curated networks,” said Collins.

Those networks will be different depending on who your key customers are. A brand targeting older consumers may have more luck analyzing a Facebook Group's commentary. But for brands selling to younger audiences or a particular community like gaming or crafting, Reddit and Discord are far more effective because the forums focus on specific communities and self-moderate to ensure posts remain relevant.

“Being more specific about our people helps us choose the best platform to leverage,” said Collins.

3. How the public thinks matters way less than how your consumer does

Use social listening to understand how your brand's community will react, but ignore the noise beyond that segment.

For instance, a lot of people online made fun of **MSCHF's Big Red Boots** when they launched earlier this year. But people interested in tech and streetwear bought the shoe and posted about it. And MSCHF has **since launched yet another quirky footwear** item—a backward sneaker—showing the brand was encouraged by its base even as others criticized the shoes.

Collins said marketers need to focus less on reach and more on significance. “Who are the people that see the world the way we do that we want to connect with? Who are the folks that we’re trying to get to adopt behavior?”

4. Social listening is not community-building

However tempting it may be, social listening is about observing consumers, not engaging with them.

A Reddit thread about camping supplies provides far more useful information to a brand if it isn't actively pushing products within the thread. A Facebook Group dedicated to wedding planning is more fruitful without a dress company commenting on and liking posts.

Community-building is vital to customer loyalty, but brands should approach it separately from social listening.

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