

Brand by numbers: the data-driven art of social listening

The [Datareportal Digital 2021 Global Overview Report](#) reveals a 14% growth in South African social media user numbers in 2020, with that population swelling to 25 million courtesy of three million new registered accounts. While the [Social Media Landscape 2021 Survey](#) saw a 59% increase in respondents saying that social media is an effective public relations channel, and a 123% increase in respondents saying that it lowers the cost of communication.

By [Nicole Weimann](#) 24 Aug 2021



Source: www.pexels.com

The great social migration, a shift in online habits was accelerated as physical and social distancing continued throughout the pandemic and social media became one of the few consistent ways to connect with friends and interact with brands.

For some, good social reporting and strategy will be the difference between a brand's success and failure. Over 18 months Mirror Mirror Africa analysed over 180 brands, their highs and lows, and general day to day behaviour online. We've written a lot of different reports and content focused on diverse audiences. Some things stand out about the great reports, from start to finish.

Social reporting

How do you report on a brand's online presence? To answer that question, let's maybe begin with the question: "Why do you report on a brand's presence and perception online?"

The primary reasons are: to quantify the extent of your brand's online presence, gauge the perception of your brand online (when talking to you and about you), view your brand's audience, and see how you fare when measured against competitors in a similar manner.

When put like that, it is more a case of why wouldn't you want to?

Start with "What do you want to know"? What is the specific question that you want answered? Once you have the question (or questions), look at how to begin.

Publicly available data is everywhere. You need a way to gather the relevant data, and that's where a social

listening tool comes in. These engines scour social feeds and collate relevant information.

But the tool alone is not the answer. The tool is merely a rapid way to gather data that meets the requirements of the query. And while the query is not always complex, it is nuanced. Without experience, the simplest oversights and small errors in a query may omit large volumes of critical data. It is important to request information to, from and about a brand and supply relevant hashtags.

When the data comes in, it needs to be audited. Be critical of data without exclusions. As much as any person would love to think their work is perfect, somewhere in the data, there will almost always be irrelevant content (keywords used in a different context). Don't be afraid to ask whether your data has been checked for exclusions.

Depending on the purpose of this report, data exclusions can be the final check before writing. A need for sentiment view does require an extra step. For example GBV is almost always tagged as negative sentiment, but if your campaign is to raise awareness around GBV, in that context, those mentions could be changed to positives.

Was sentiment checked in the context of the query? This may or may not be a requirement, but it is good to know and determine upfront.

Now, the analysis and report writing can begin.

Brand health and strategy success

Reporting is done with two main objectives: to reveal the brand health, and to measure the success of the strategy. Mapping your brand's reach and volume of posts against trending topics will show how in tune you are with your audience. This is supplemented by share of voice and can be benchmarked against competitors to reveal the brand health within its market segment.

Engagement and click-through data gives a better overview of how individual content pieces are performing and informs the overall brand strategy. Content cannot always be objectively measured, but there are principles and frameworks that can be applied to this data to give a better indication of what can be considered best practice for your market segment.

There is an underlying image the findings create. Just below the surface is a detailed tapestry illustrating how your audience is interacting with your brand. Are you a trusted source of information or the butt of the trending joke?

There should also be actionable items and recommendations for the brand to use. Ultimately the report should answer the questions posed at the start. You could even flip the whole thing on its head and say "Now that we know who is talking to/about the brand, tell us more about them!"

Audience analysis and reporting is still relatively new but extremely valuable. It gives brands a holistic view of their followers and their interests, not just what those followers have to say about the brand. Start meeting your audience where they are and that could lead to more meaningful and authentic opportunities for the brand.

Strategic social content and campaign planning involves establishing its purpose, and that purpose must be woven into the fabric of your content. It should be a reflection of your brand's place in the online space and

speak the language of your audience. You should have an objective for each piece of content and be able to measure its success.

Build a better picture

Here's how to build a better picture of your online brand identity through accurate reporting:

- **Ask the right questions of the data**

Build a query that covers all the full range of relevant information and then audit the data thoroughly.

- **Know your role in the conversation**

A good report should reveal how your audience interacts with your brand and also set the expectation for your content strategy.

- **Have measurable content objectives**

With a full picture of your brand's online identity you can begin to set performance targets and execute the strategy.

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