New Ways to Drive Social Media Engagement With Data Analytics

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With more than four billion people using social media, platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Twitch, LinkedIn, SnapChat, TikTok, and Instagram generate massive amounts of data.

Until recently, however, only limited types of this data were available to business users. "You could see how some posts perform, such as which posts got a lot of likes," says Mike Metzler, Digital Marketing Manager at Conviva. "But you weren't able to see where those likes were coming from or if they were authentic."

Now brands have the power to dissect exactly who is engaging with what content, and how they're engaging with it.

This newly accessible data can help brands boost engagement with their audiences—but only if they actually tap into it. According to McKinsey & Company in their report Marketing & Sales: Big Data, Analytics, and the Future of Marketing & Sales, "Very few have achieved what we would call ,big impact through big data,' or impact at scale." McKinsey surveyed analytics leaders from major companies and discovered that three-quarters of these businesses had achieved less than 1 percent revenue or cost improvement through data analytics. Using social analytics to improve your content, save time, and drive additional revenue should be viewed through a similar lens: you can't benefit if you don't do it.

Don't fall into the trap of leaving valuable insights on the table. You now have access to rich social data—so we put together this step-by-step guide to using data to generate engagement, from deciding what to analyze to tracking the results.

THE SOCIAL SEQUENCE:
7 DATA-DRIVEN STEPS TO DRIVING SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

In the cycle you'll learn about here, each step feeds into the next. After the final step, you can start from the beginning armed with more insights.

1

Start with intuition

It may seem counterintuitive to use your intuition in making data-based content decisions. But going with your hunches is an important way to kick off your data analysis.

Before diving into the data deep end, use your instincts to determine where to start applying your analytics. "[One] place where intuition is found in analytical companies is in the choice of the business area where analytical initiatives are undertaken," writes Thomas H. Davenport, a Professor of Management and Information Technology at Babson College, in Harvard Business Review. "Few companies undertake a rigorous analytical study of what areas need analytics the most! The choice of a target domain is typically based on the gut feelings of executives."

If you're a social media manager, these areas where you'll be applying intuition are most likely different social platforms or content themes. For example, say while scanning your social feeds you see something that makes you wonder if your audience responds better to celebrity X than celebrity Y. Or you get the distinct feeling that your videos are a little too short, or a comment from a follower gives you an idea for a new content theme to test out.

Your intuition offered you a hypothesis about how your social media audience engages with your content. Your data can now prove (or disprove) that hypothesis.

"It all starts out as a hunch, and then everything is an experiment. After that it gets more refined," explains Metzler. "Ultimately any good social media strategy is a combination of science and creativity."

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If you're a social media manager, you never have enough resources to do what you want to do. But the best way to make your case for more resources is through data. Let's say that you're seeing 100% growth year-over-year on your Instagram engagement. You can tell the decision-makers, 'We should invest more resources there, because we can't spend our time across everything.' It helps you determine priorities...and, ultimately, budgets."

Mike Metzler
Digital Marketing
Manager at Conviva

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Intuition –› Data Selection

Once you have a target, choose the right metrics to get a full view of your content's performance and to test your hypothesis. Views, likes, and comments point to engagement, but they're only one piece of the puzzle.

Your latest social video racked up 20,000 views. That's great news!

Or is it?

Most of the platforms count "views" differently, so you can't gauge the success of a post or campaign until you factor in the details. For example:

» How long did viewers spend watching the video?

» How many viewers dropped off after three seconds, 10 seconds, 60 seconds? (See the box "What's in an Engagement?" below.)

» Are they watching with the sound on or off?

» Did the viewers click to play, or did the video autoplay?

Relying on incomplete data can lead you to create, optimize, and put ad dollars behind the wrong content. "Some of the most widely used and carefully managed metrics in a marketer's arsenal don't actually correlate with business success; however, significant time and resources are still wasted obsessing over them," writes Ryan Green for MarketingProfs. "What's worse, meanwhile, is that many marketers miss other opportunities to optimize digital marketing campaigns and turn ads into sales." In the above video example, for instance, tracking only views might cause you to boost content that isn't as popular as you thought or to waste resources creating videos that don't truly engage your audience.
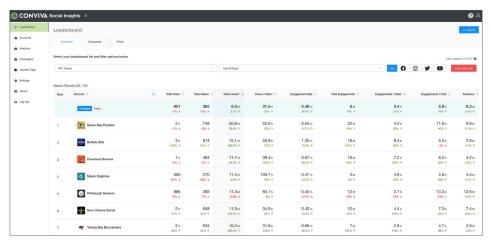
Besides taking into account the different metrics hidden inside terms such as "views," you can add other types of data to your analysis for a richer, more robust view of your content performance.

Demographic data, for example, can help you make better decisions around social engagement when combined with views, followers, and likes. Are your views coming from women? Viewers in the Midwest? Knowing this will not only help you develop the most engaging content for each demographic—it will also allow you to sell more attractive branded content, as you can let advertisers know which types of content resonate best with which demographics. "This data-driven process allows you to charge a premium for branded content," says Metzler.

Social analytics platforms like Conviva offer demographic insights into social followers and activity

FB Page all audience demographics: 34.5% female

Another good mix-in for your engagement metrics: data that shows how you stand in comparison to the industry. This helps you understand where you might need to ramp up, slow down, or rethink different types of social content to increase engagement. For instance, what is the average views per post for your industry on Facebook, and how do you stack up? Where are you lagging behind your competitors—and where are you blowing them out of the water?

Conviva's Social Insights Leaderboard is a powerful tool for measuring how you stack up against your industry

Getting a full view of your content's performance by combining (the right) metrics will take your content game to a new level.

WHAT'S IN
AN ENGAGEMENT?

There are many more engagement metrics you can track besides likes and comments on individual posts to get the most in-depth view of your content's performance. For example:

Engagement Rate:
The total number of engagements on average for each post as a share of total audience.

Comment Rate:
The average number of comments your content garners per post.

View Through Rate:
The percentage of impressions on a video that convert to an actual view.

Average Watch Time:
How long, on average, people watch your videos across different platforms.

Link Clicks Per Post:
Divide the number of posts by the number of clicks for a given period. This metric shows whether people are engaging with the posts in the ways you want them to.

Retention Rate:
How many people watched your video for 3 seconds vs. 10 seconds vs. 30 seconds, etc. (depending on the length of the video). This metric helps you determine the ideal length of a video for your audience.

3

Group your social posts around different variables to more easily analyze the metrics you selected in the previous step.

Now that you have so much access to data, the new challenge is that there's too much information to separate the important from the insignificant. In 2017, there were 2.7 Zettabytes of digital data—and this number is predicted to grow to 175 ZB by 2025, reports the market intelligence company IDC.

This holds true even on the level of an individual business. Just consider the amount of content assets your brand generates, the proliferating number of social platforms, and the data that comes out of all of this: your engagement metrics, behavioral data, demographic data, and more. It's easy to see how an abundance of data can lead to a scarcity of insights.

In the same way that A/B testing in email marketing helps you evaluate the effects of small changes—for example testing one button color over another—developing series of posts around different variables can help you hone in on the exact characteristics that increase engagement. For example:

» **Create series of posts around different content themes:** What athlete on a team generates the most engagements? How do behind the scenes videos compare with highlight videos? How does news content stack up against posts about social good?

» **Group different content types:** You can also try grouping posts around different types of videos or images—to test, say, how images compare with carousel posts or videos on Instagram, or how longer videos perform vs. shorter videos on Facebook.

» **Compare different campaigns:** A TV show might want to see how all social content for season 1 compared with season 2, or how episode 17 promotions fared against episode 18.

» **Test different posting frequencies:** "You might notice that if you tweet 10 pictures of a popular player each day, you get an average of 100,000 likes per post...but if you tweet 20, it drops to an average of 70,000 likes per post," says Metzler. "So you're getting more engagement overall, but you're getting less engagement per post."

The practice of grouping posts not only makes it easier to test variables, it also makes it easier to interpret the results. When you see a dip or a spike in audience engagement during a particular time period, you can start with the assumption that the variable you're testing during that period is the cause and then go deeper into the data (or do more tests) to see if your hypothesis proves out.

In addition, if you determine that a particular variable is to blame for a decrease in engagement, it's easier to swap out those posts for better-performing content if they're grouped together than if they're spread throughout the next several months of your content schedule. (More on pulling underperforming content later.)

MINI
CASE STUDY

Grouping Content & Delving into Demographics
a Boon for Branded Content

The Miami Dolphins had an advertiser that wanted to reach female fans. In the past, the brand would have used page analytics to determine how many men vs. women engaged with content. Now, thanks to their social analytics platform, they were able to use the data they gleaned from testing out series to show that one series over-indexed with women—so the Miami Dolphins' advertiser could sponsor that type of content to reach their desired audience.

Analysis –› Collaboration

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Once you've run experiments and analyzed the results, collaboration ensures that the content team can use this information to take impactful action.

None of what you've done so far will help improve engagement if your brand doesn't actually take action on the insights.

"Organizations spend enormous amounts of money on social analytics, but many of them can only explain the insight they have gained, not the action they've taken," reports Christy Pettey in Gartner's "5 Reasons You're Failing With Social Analytics." "This is because the part of the organization responsible for generating insight is usually a step removed from the part that could take meaningful action with that insight. This disconnect prevents organizations from getting real business results from social analytics."

One recommendation from Gartner is to have the business unit that would make immediate use of the data sponsor the social analytics project. This way, both the data analytics team and the content team "own" the project, and they're responsible for collaborating to put the insights to use.

Don't limit this sharing and collaborating to social data, though: you have access to a great deal of other marketing data that can be combined to deepen your insights. "Organizations are failing to capitalize on their social analytics because they are looking at social media data on its own, rather than in conjunction with email data, call recordings, surveys, and countless other internal and external sources," writes Pettey.

Some social analytics platforms let you "share" data among your industry peers. For example, you can track the top posts from inside your industry for any specific platform, see which accounts in your field are getting the most engagements, or check which types of posts are getting the highest engagement rates...and adjust your content accordingly.

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Collaboration -> Action

The content team now knows what they have to do. Here's how to do it.

You've discovered which types of social content are generating the results you want...and which are not. But it's not so easy to pull the plug on underperforming posts and campaigns. After all, a lot of work went into that content, and chances are it's someone's favorite (whether among your audience or among your team).

To get past this hurdle, take a cue from the TV broadcast world. When a show has low viewership, networks will cancel the show and replace it with another one that has the potential to attract more viewers and turn a higher profit. Unlike shows that are "concluded" or "ended," which involves a mutual agreement to stop the program and then a series finale, a cancelled show just...stops. In the middle of a story arc? Still have unbroadcasted episodes? Have a dedicated group of super-fans? It doesn't matter.

The TV networks have no tolerance for time- and money-wasters, and neither should you. Set your engagement benchmarks and have a system for handling content that falls below those standards. In broadcasting, the magic number differs from show to show; in the same way, the benchmarks you set might vary depending on the type of content or the platform.

In the end, you have to put sentiment aside and do what's right for your brand. In writing, it's called "killing your darlings"—deleting those passages you're too attached to in order to develop a stronger story. Says Metzler, "It sounds ruthless, but you have to continually optimize."

Action –› Tracking

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Track the results of your data-driven actions over time to get an accurate view of your content's performance.

You notice that the average number of likes on your Facebook posts went from 2,000 yesterday to 1,000 today, and ready yourself for action. What can you do to reverse this scary slump?

Before you start working on a plan to bring those numbers back up, take a look at how they've trended over the past year. You might discover that this is part of a bigger trend that points to a need to freshen up your content style—or that your likes always decline during the week of Thanksgiving and then jump back up.

These situations call for different actions, and relying on just two days' worth of data could have led to a knee-jerk reaction that doesn't address the core issue.

Analyzing the trends in your data, rather than looking at snapshots, can also reveal whether one platform is growing faster than another, a new content series is garnering a higher engagement rate than past ones, or the introduction of a new content series has boosted engagement overall.

MINI
CASE STUDY

Tracking Trends Leads to Smarter Spending

Tracking data over time helped some NCAA teams spot an opportunity to increase engagement by reallocating resources. "We saw that the total share of Instagram engagements for our college sports teams was getting bigger and bigger compared to our other social platforms; the share was shifting from Facebook to Instagram," says Chris Dion, Associate Director of Digital and Social Media for the NCAA. "So we knew it was time to invest more resources and build out additional strategies to capitalize on that."

Learn more by watching this recorded webinar with Dion: **Winning Strategies for Increasing Engagement on IG Stories**

Back to Intuition

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Increasing content engagement through data analysis is a virtuous cycle; the more insights you gain, the more testing you can do and the more actions you can take to improve results.

Thanks to tools that offer access to more data, and better ways to slice and dice that data, brands can experience light-bulb moments by evaluating data from different departments—and from inside and outside the company—in new ways.

Continue to build up momentum by applying what you've learned from your data analysis to conduct new experiments and test new theories. The cycle outlined here will feed into itself, boosting your content engagement higher every time.

Increase Engagement with the Right Tools

Conviva lets you collect, analyze, and report on real-time paid and organic social metrics—all in one dashboard. Reach out for a demo to explore how Conviva Social Insights can help you save time, make better content, and drive new revenue.

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