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04.04 / Understanding the Metrics that CGM can provide / By Alex Burmaster, Nielsen Online

Consumer-generated media (CGM) reveals the DNA of your brand or company. The billions of unprompted, unbiased public discussions that take place on the Internet are a goldmine of information on the most important attributes, issues and themes that consumers discuss and associate with your brand.

Nielsen Online's free analysis tool **BlogPulse** shows there are over 73 million English-language blogs globally and over one million new messages posted in the last 24 hours. There are numerous metrics that can help you understand this rich source of information and, more importantly, provide you with the necessary insight to make better decisions and actions for the success of your company. Measuring this 'buzz' is like a digital version of a crystal ball when it comes to success or failure.

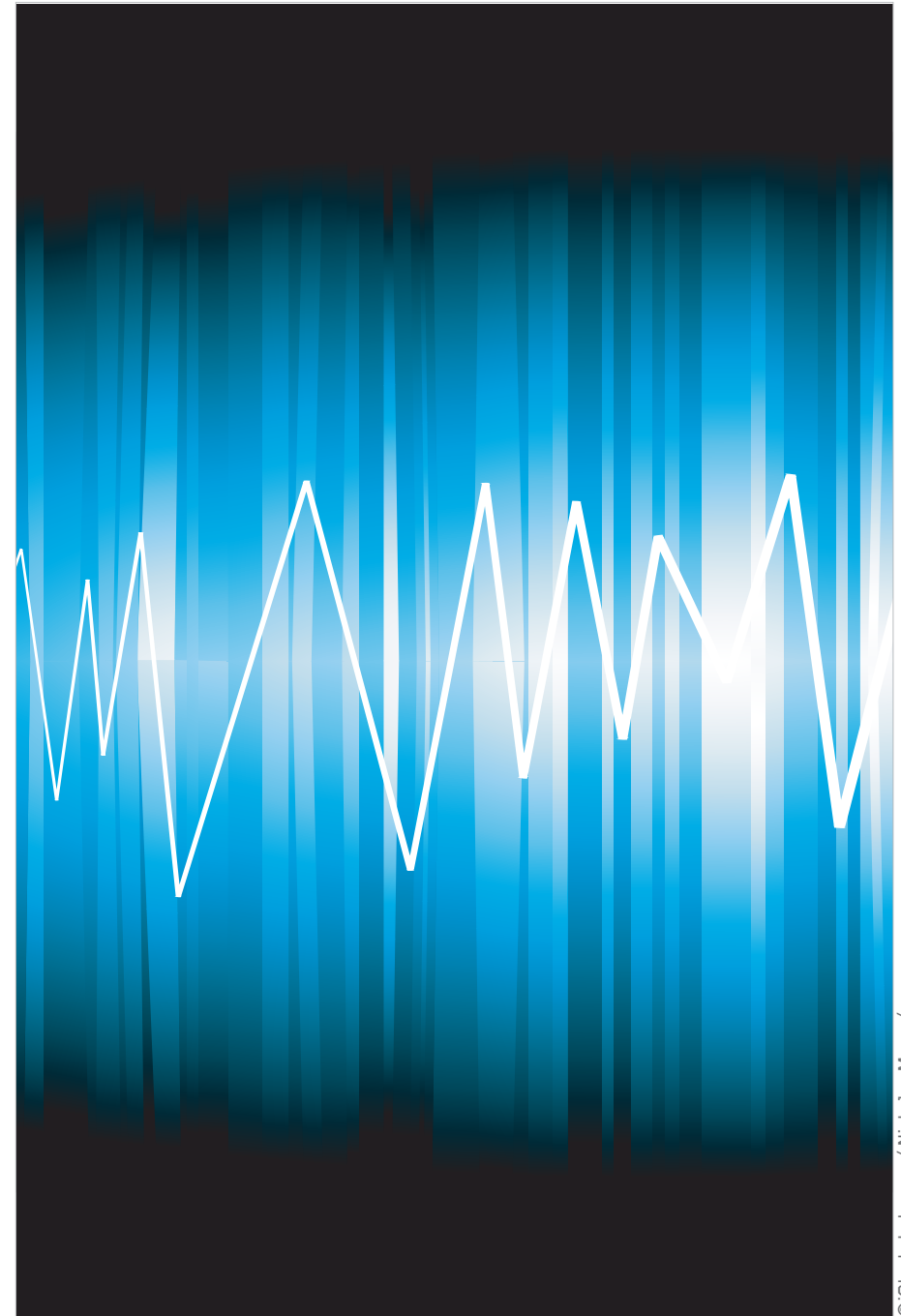
Volume

The first metric is 'volume'. How many comments (aka 'buzz') are out there about your brand or a particular issue? How are these levels of 'buzz' changing over time and how do they compare to your competitors? This is an obvious way of measuring trends. For example, in early 2006 **ConAgra Foods** saw that the levels of buzz around low-carbohydrate diets were dropping. This early warning system gave the huge food company the chance to change its advertising focus and promote an alternative healthy foods menu, six months ahead of its competitors.

As ConAgra's director of strategy and insights **Nick Mysore** said at the time, '**By utilising online message boards you pick up nuances in the marketplace - customer statements, thoughts - that enable us to distinguish whether something is a trend that has long-term impact or a fad that will be short-lived.**'

Sentiment

Following on from volume - as ConAgra alluded to above - is the 'sentiment' metric. Volume, whilst extremely helpful, is limited in the sense it doesn't indicate whether the buzz is good or bad. There might be 10 times as many conversations about my brand online, compared ▶





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to my major competitor, but if most of this is negative buzz then high volume isn't good. The text analytics and natural language processing software that helps measure CGM shows the extent to which buzz about your brand is good, bad or indifferent.

Emotion

A similar, and deeper, metric alongside 'sentiment' is 'emotion'. If buzz is good or bad, what did consumers actually feel within this sentiment? Were they happy, disappointed or confident in their experience with you? Did they feel betrayed? Were they angry, surprised, or excited? Understanding the emotions that consumers go through when they interact with your company provides an unparalleled insight into how to improve or develop your offering.

Topic/Issue

Another crucial buzz metric is 'topic' or 'issue' - what exactly is being discussed in relation to your brand. Is it your product, your customer service, your advertising, your spokespeople, your competitors or issues about how you go about your business?

For this metric, **Brand Association Maps™** are hugely popular as they visually plot the topics being discussed. At the centre of this circular map lies the central topic (e.g. the brand or issue). All terms that appear on the map have a unique relationship to this topic. Words that do appear (taking into account those that DON'T) demonstrate how consumers define the central topic. The closer a word appears to the centre, the stronger the association. How the terms are grouped around the central topic indicate micro-conversations within a broader discussion. They reveal not only the correlation between the central concept and each of the other terms, but the inter-correlations among all words in this discussion landscape.

A leading washing machine manufacturer in the US provides a great example of a company tapping into the 'emotion' and 'topic' metrics. The company, surprisingly, started to receive fan mail about their machines so they decided to monitor CGM online to delve deeper into this. They saw that consumers were delighted and surprised (the 'emotion' metric) with what the machine could actually take and clean. Conversations developed about what people were challenging their machine to wash (the 'topic' metric). A common theme was 'little league uniforms' so the company undertook various sponsorships and grassroots activities with key little league and youth sport organisations.

Source

Another important metric of CGM is the 'source'. Where is the conversation occurring - is it blogs, boards, groups? If so, what specific communities are starting this conversation or buzz? This is vitally important when it comes to monitoring early trends or potential threat assessments. If you are monitoring a particular board that you know tends to talk about any issues relating to your brand or industry before anyone else it gives you a crucial head start in initiating any relevant strategies to counter, or tap into, this early chat.

Virality

Following on from the source, CGM analytics software is also able to provide 'reach' and 'dispersion' metrics of these relevant conversations. That is, how many people, and what percentage of online consumers, are posting or reading comments in relation to your brand. Furthermore, how this conversation is being dispersed or spread. Sometimes called 'virality', this metric tells you what type of communities online, and how many of them, are discussing your brand.





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For example, **PlusNet** - a provider of broadband services in the UK - noticed that there were significant discussions taking place about their service, surprisingly, in a niche car community interested in racing **Skodas**. PlusNet was able to enter this conversation, one a marketer wouldn't normally think about targeting, and help the community with their enquiries and further the brand empathy. This has the added viral impact that many people racing Skodas are young men, likely to play football - a far less niche activity - and could transmit this positivity when discussing broadband within these, much larger, communities.

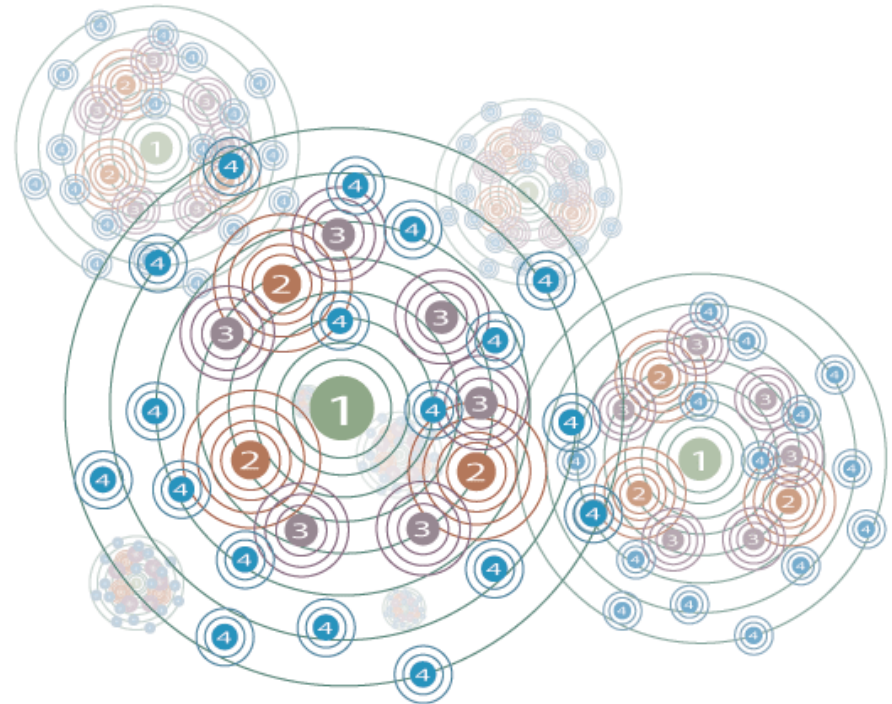
Author

Linked with the 'source' metric is another crucial area that many brands targeting CGM tend to be most interested in - the 'author'. Sometimes referred to as the 'influencer', brands have historically tried to tap into, or tackle the threat posed by, those who talk consistently about a particular brand or issue - namely bloggers. Who is doing the talking, are they credible, do they have influence, what is their ability to generate Buzz?

CGM analytics software can, essentially, measure the degree of influence the author has, which is based on a number of criteria. These include how often the author posts comments, how many people read them, how often are these posts cited by others, or linked to. It also includes more 'ethereal' measures such as their loyalty or enthusiasm, their level of knowledge or the amount of respect they garner in a given community. **Toyota**, for example, identified the most active and passionate car owners from the blogosphere and invited them to a special viewing of a new model six months before its launch. This resulted in numerous benefits for Toyota; it generated excitement amongst these influencers, reinforced the personal relationship between Toyota and their customers and generated feedback that was actually incorporated into the final product.

CGM continues to grow unabated but so does your chance to improve from it through the various metrics that help you make sense of it all.

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Blogging 'Influence' Ripples /

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