Crimson Hexagon

The Brand's Guide to the Unique Value of Different Social Data Sources:

Twitter, Instagram, and Forums

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Introduction

The world of social media is expansive — according to Pew Research Center, seven in ten Americans use some form of social media as of 2017. But what are they using it for? The short answer is everything. Social media is no longer simply about connecting with friends and family — it is a way for people to share glimpses of their lives and what they care about, an opportunity for them to ingest and comment on news, and share their thoughts on events, culture, and brands. Indeed, most consumers use multiple social media platforms for different reasons.

Even though social media platforms are all anchored by the shared value of connecting with others, each social media platform contains strengths that others may lack. For example, a one-sentence complaint about a politician may work better as a tweet than as a posting in a forum, which are often venues for more about detailed discussions. An Instagram selfie featuring a new makeup trend may not work as well as a tweet.

This cuts the other way as well. The fact that consumers use different social networks for different purposes means that brands must be similarly nuanced in the way they work with different social media data sources. Each major social network has its own audience and purpose, so any analysis of their data should be similarly contextual.

Covering a wide range of industries and timeframes, we looked at three major social media data sources -- Twitter, forums, and Instagram -- to demonstrate the unique value of each for researchers and brands.

This guide is divided into three main sections, providing real-world examples from each platform to demonstrate the best way to approach extracting meaningful insights from each social network:

• **Twitter** for real-time response, sentiment analysis, historical data, and identifying influencers

• **Forums** for deep insights, crowdsourcing idea, and discovering subject matter experts

• **Instagram** for visual focus, uncovering communities, and identifying influencers

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SOCIAL MEDIA DATA SOURCE GUIDE:

Twitter

A deep dive into what makes Twitter
data unique for brands and analysts

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Introduction

Launched in 2006, Twitter has grown into a powerful social platform that enables users to provide live commentaries for events like the Super Bowl, react to political issues, respond to companies' PR crises, learn from experts in a certain topic, and more. The instant reactions, emotionally charged posts, wealth of historical information, and users who are thought leaders or experts in specific topics make Twitter a valuable tool for researchers and brands, who can use it to

- Analyze real-time reactions
- Uncover consumer sentiment
- Dig into its historical archive
- Identify social influencers

In this section, we'll look at these four topics through the lens of real events that played out on Twitter, like the election of Donald Trump, Brexit, and the rise of ridesharing.

Methodology

We identified four main values of the Twitter platform: real-time reactions, sentiment analysis, historical data content, and strong network of influencers. Using examples from different topics with varying time ranges, we explain how Twitter can be useful for researchers and brands.

Crimson Hexagon has expansive data access a wide range of sources, but not all sources are ingested into our platform the same way or in equal volumes. You can find more information about Crimson's data coverage here.

Real-time reactions

First and foremost, Twitter is a reactionary platform. It is seen as a place for instant feedback to major cultural and political events. When Starbucks launched its Unicorn Frappuccino, consumers immediately started tweeting news stories and jokes. For more serious matters like the results of the presidential election, consumers also took to Twitter to share information and opinions in real time.

And it's not just current events — every major topic is captured on Twitter, from PR scandals like Wells Fargo's fake accounts to Super Bowl ads.

Because Twitter is consumers' preferred social platform for instant reactions to breaking news and other developing topics, it is perhaps the most important social network for brands to use to stay up-to-date with the latest news and contribute to the information exchange. If you want to know what events are top of mind for consumers, head to Twitter.

How can real-time reactions help brands understand their customers and the quantify impact of specific events? Let's look at a few recent examples of real-time consumer reactions to unfolding events.

Wells Fargo accounts scandal

Wells Fargo took a PR hit on April 10, 2017, when media reported on an investigation detailing the company's unethical retail banking sales practices. The fake accounts scandal, which first surfaced in September 2016, was brought to public attention again as the 'high pressure sales culture' came under further scrutiny.

Wells Fargo Discussion by Content Source
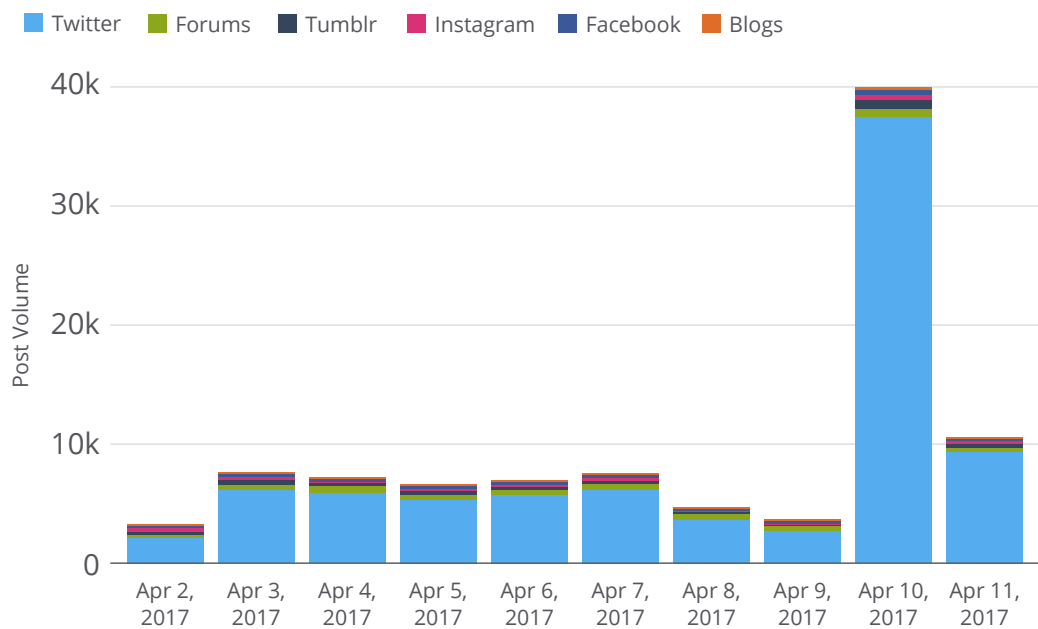
We looked at social media conversation on Wells Fargo overall. The majority of the conversation took place on Twitter, encompassing 87 percent. In the week leading up to April 10, conversation levels for Wells Fargo were low, hovering between 5k and 10k posts. But on April 10, conversation skyrocketed, reaching nearly 40k posts.

Wells Fargo Sentiment
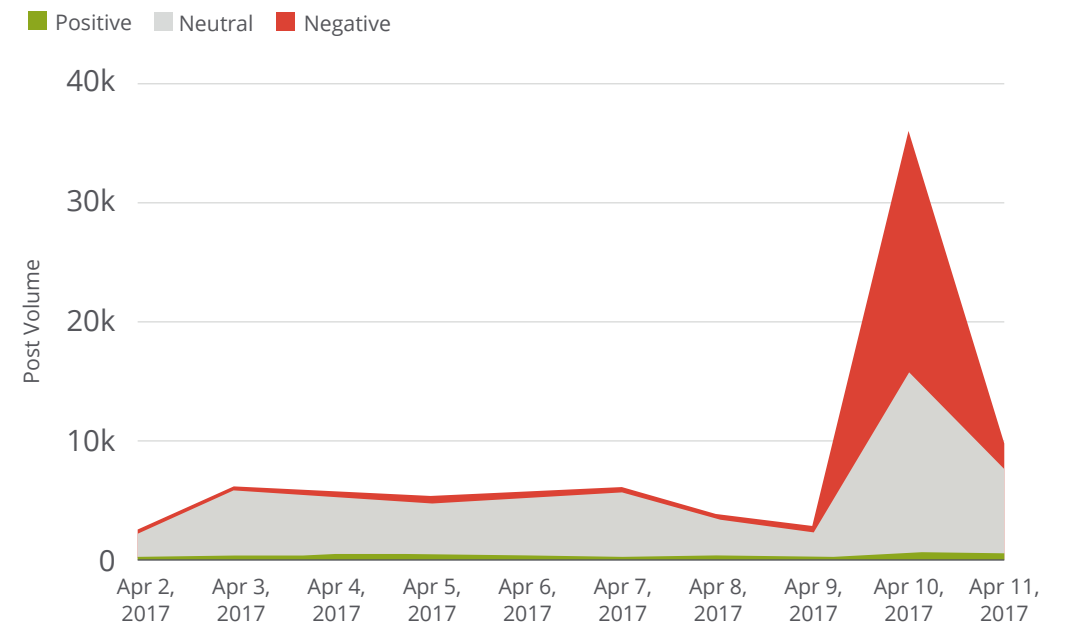
We also receive real-time insights on how people feel about Wells Fargo. From April 2 to April 9, most people were neutral about the company. But on April 10, negative sentiment had the highest share of voice.
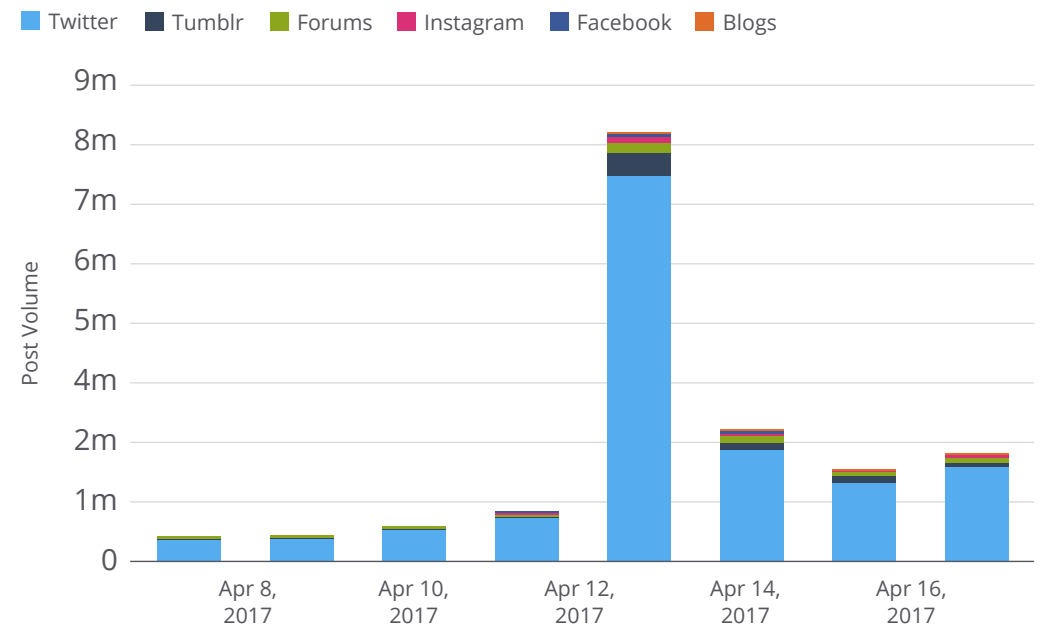
The Wells Fargo scandal demonstrates how consumers can use Twitter to monitor updates in real-time.

Brexit

On June 23, 2016, the United Kingdom held a vote to decide whether the nation should remain in the European Union. England voted for Brexit, with a 53.4 percent majority. Twitter comprised 89 percent of the Brexit conversation on social media.

The days leading up to the decision were particularly tense. People with different viewpoints voiced their thoughts on Twitter, often urging followers to vote a certain way. The day after the vote, conversation increased by more than eight times from the previous day, as people discussed the results. Many implications of leaving the European Union were brought up — the pound weakening against the USD, predictions of economic doom for the U.K., and the impact on neighboring European countries. In a time of frustration and uncertainty, people often use Twitter as an outlet.

Brexit Discussion by Content Source

Legend: Twitter, Tumblr, Forums, Instagram, Facebook, Blogs

Y-axis (Post Volume): 0, 1m, 2m, 3m, 4m, 5m, 6m, 7m, 8m, 9m

X-axis: Apr 8, 2017; Apr 10, 2017; Apr 12, 2017; Apr 14, 2017; Apr 16, 2017

When people react in real-time, they often do so with emotionally charged responses. This leads us to the second aspect that makes Twitter distinct from other social networks: sentiment-driven insights.

Sentiment-driven

A reactionary platform means emotionally charged posts, especially in response to cultural and political events. And with a 140-character limit, people must exert brevity without sacrificing clarity. Tweets are typically clear-cut, which makes it easier to understand the sentiment behind the post. A tweet like **"Eww. How can you say that without vomiting? "I like Trump." Some even say "I love Trump…" And I admire their gag reflexes. Truly."** clearly exhibits disgust. A tweet like **"Being bought craft beer and pizza, I'm the happiest girl alive"** exhibits joy. You do not need a lot of words to express your feelings on Twitter.

Let's run through a few recent real-world examples that demonstrate why Twitter data is ideal for understanding consumer sentiment about specific events and topics.

The Super Bowl

The Super Bowl is the biggest sports night in the U.S., and also one of the biggest nights on Twitter, as millions of people live tweet the game and commercials. On the day of the Super Bowl, 90 percent of the Super Bowl conversation in our dataset occurred on Twitter.

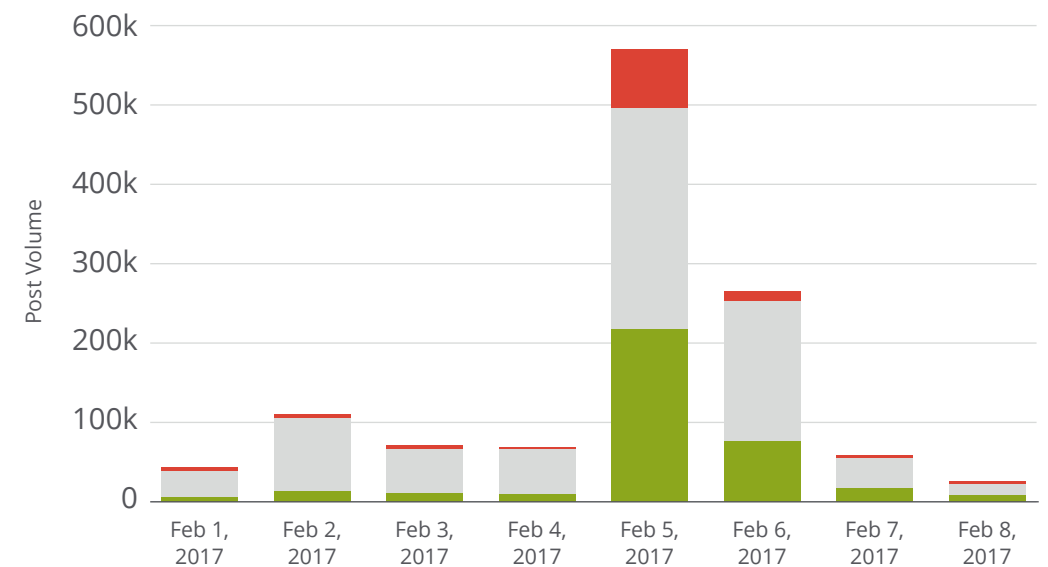### Super Bowl Discussion by Content Source

Twitter   Instagram   Tumblr   Forums   Facebook

90%
5%
4%
1% 1%
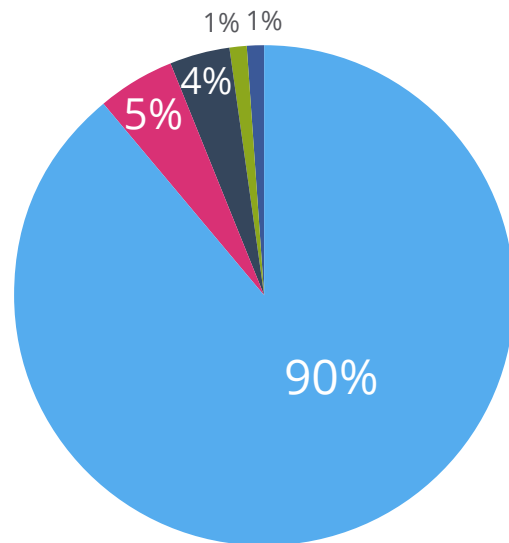
When millions of consumers react to an important event in real-time, you can be sure that a lot of emotion will be involved. Consumer reaction led tweets from Patriots and Falcon fans. Commercials like Honda's drew laughs, while Febreze drew disgusted reactions. Lady Gaga's performance elicited positive tweets.

Super Bowl Sentiment Trend

Positive   Neutral   Negative

Post Volume

600k
500k
400k
300k
200k
100k
0

Feb 1, 2017   Feb 2, 2017   Feb 3, 2017   Feb 4, 2017   Feb 5, 2017   Feb 6, 2017   Feb 7, 2017   Feb 8, 2017

As soon as an event takes place, there is an immediate outpouring of emotion on Twitter that brands and analysts can use to better understand consumer reaction to the event itself.

Election of Donald Trump

The election of Donald Trump in November 2016 sparked social media madness. People were shocked, fearful, angry, sad, and happy. And Twitter captured the bulk of it.

Trump Emotion by Day During Election November 2016
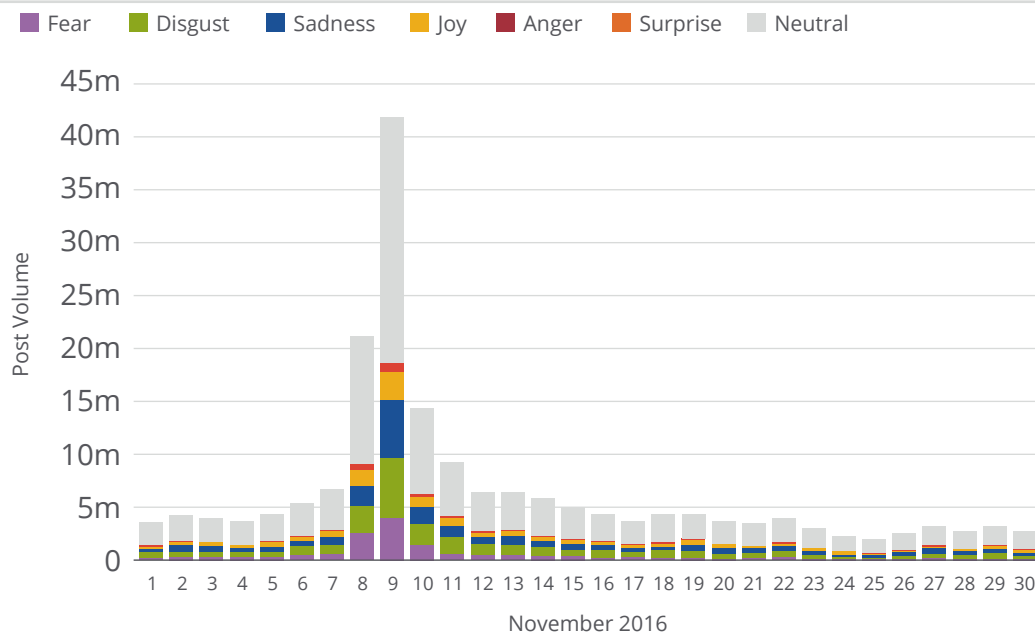
The announcement of Trump's victory took social media by storm, particularly Twitter, and filled users with a range of emotions. On November 9, the day after the election, fear, disgust, and sadness comprised 46 percent of the Trump conversation.

When something important happens, Twitter is the social platform that dominates — and its users tend to express their unvarnished opinions about whatever just occurred. As a result, Twitter is the best place for brands to analyze real-time reactions and understand the consumer sentiment as insights unfold.

But tracking real-time reactions and analyzing consumer sentiment is only part of what makes Twitter so useful to brands. In the next section, we'll look at another essential differentiator: Twitter's vast archive of historical content.

Historical data

Twitter has become an invaluable resource for brands, and one major reason is its huge archive of historical data. Since its founding in 2006, users have flocked to the platform to (often publicly) share their reactions, thoughts and opinions about a wide range of topics and events. This catalogue of nearly one trillion tweets is a gold mine for brands hoping to understand consumer opinion and sentiment about almost any topic, all in real-time.

While this massive database of tweets may seem noisy on the surface, within these 850 billion posts are patterns and trends that can help brands better understand the events, trends and opinions affecting their business.

In this section, we'll explore the evolution of several consumer trends — including Black Friday and Uber — that were surfaced by analyzing Twitter's library of historical posts.

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Black Friday evolution

Twitter was one of the first open data social platforms, and the historical content makes Twitter especially valuable for analyzing how consumer habits change over time. Black Friday is a perfect example.

It's no question Twitter owns the Black Friday conversation on social. Year after year on Black Friday since 2010, consumers take to Twitter to share their Black Friday experiences or voice their opinions about the event.

Black Friday Discussion by Content Sources YoY
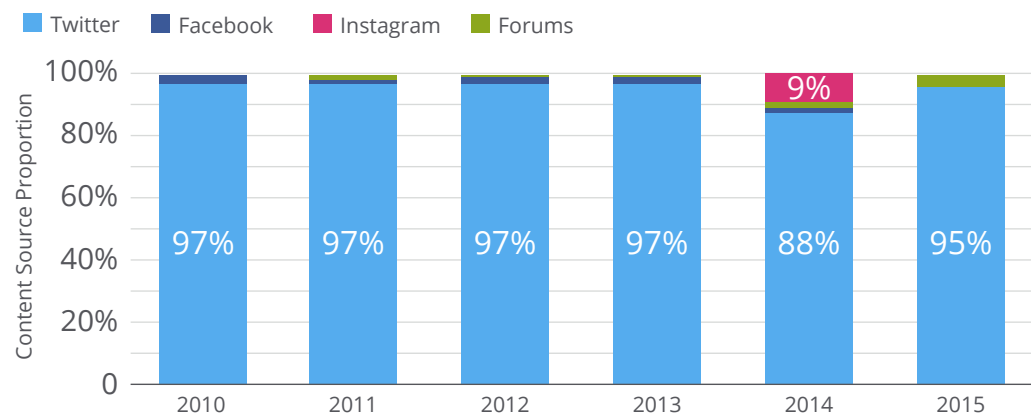
Thanks to Twitter's historical library of social content, we are able to understand trends and surface insights grounded in those trends. In the example below, we found that, over time, the conversation around online Black Friday shopping has become increasingly positive while discussions of in-store Black Friday shopping have become more negative. With historical data, a time series analysis reveals these types of trends, capturing changes in volume, conversation topics, and, of course, consumer sentiment.

Online Black Friday Shopping Sentiment YoY   ### In-Store Black Friday Shopping Sentiment YoY
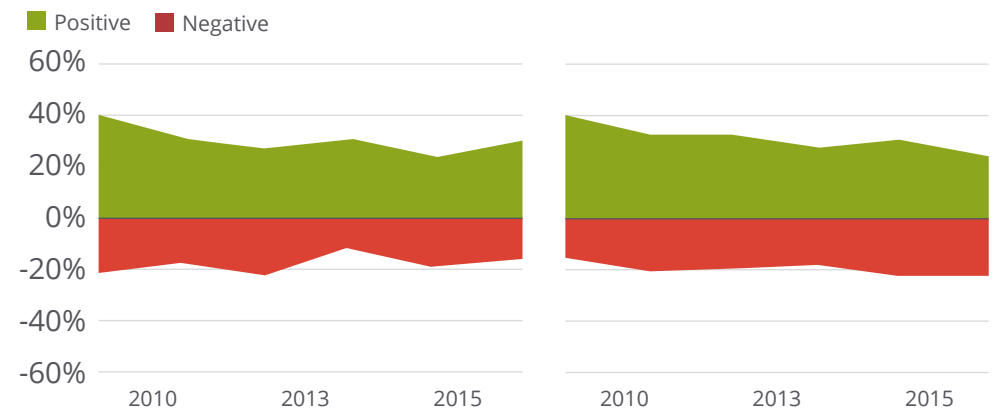

Using Twitter's historical archive of data, we are able to see how consumer opinion around Black Friday has changed incrementally over the years. But what if we use Twitter data to analyze a much more quickly evolving trend? For that, let's look at what analyzing Twitter can tell us about the rapid rise of ridesharing.

Ridesharing

Twitter is especially valuable for understanding how emerging trends evolve. Something that goes from a relative unknown to a fact of life in a relatively short period of time is an ideal topic to analyze using Twitter data.

For example, we analyzed ridesharing.

Taxis vs Ridesharing in Major Cities Share of Voice Trend
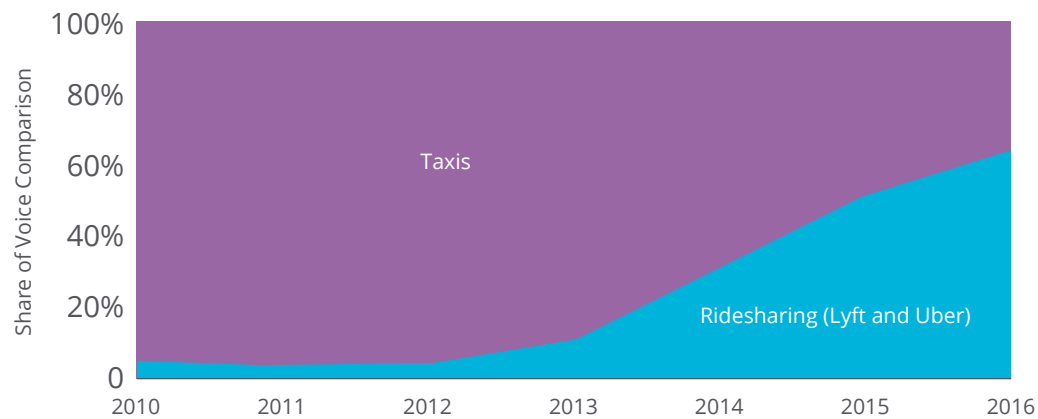
We are able to analyze the growth of ridesharing with data dating back to 2010. By looking at the taxi conversation and the ridesharing conversation, we can see how transportation preferences have evolved over time. From 2010 to 2012, when ridesharing had not yet spread to the wider market, people discussed hailing taxis to get around. Starting 2013, the ridesharing conversation began to grow. By 2016, ridesharing had 60 percent share of voice compared to taxis, a steep increase from the 5 percent share of voice it had in 2010.

Ridesharing Discussion by Content Source, 2010-2016
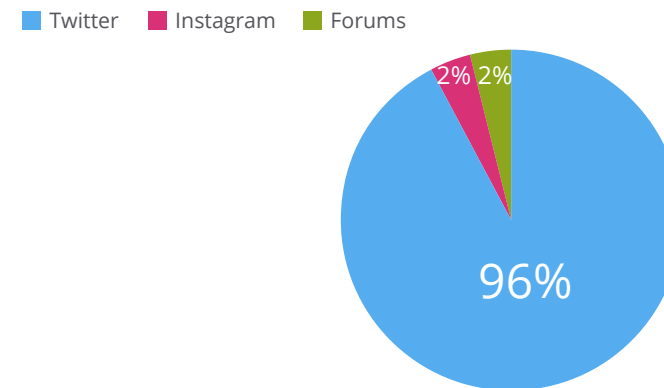
Because almost no one was talking about Uber and Lyft in 2010, it is easy to see exactly how quickly and thoroughly the conversation about it on Twitter has changed in the intervening seven years.

Strong network of influencers

As with any other social network, Twitter is filled with influencers who have outsize sway about a particular topic or industry. Often, these influencers occupy a niche industry, ranging from cosmetics to marketing to politics to travel.

There are several telltale signs of a Twitter influencer — large Twitter following, high social engagement through retweets and likes, and promoting their own content (their brand).

Twitter is also a useful platform for sharing outbound links to influencers' own content.

Identifying influencers

Twitter influencers can take part in a conversation without the constraints of having to comment on photos or videos or other media. Twitter influencers are useful to brands for their takes on relevant news about their industry — since Twitter is a reactionary platform, its influencers are often the first to respond to a recent development. These influencers are thought leaders in the sense that they have the ability to shape public perception on a trending or long-term topic. While some influencers are more tied to an ideology (ex. Clinton-supporting journalists, Sanders activists, Trump pundits) others have used their clout and following to promote brands they represent or are a fan of.

But the real question is how brands can identify and leverage influencers on Twitter.

To demonstrate how to identify influencers on Twitter, we picked the relatively niche topic of farmers markets.

Twitter network analysis finds influential authors in the posts returned by a query. The network analysis uses last 14 days of Instagram mentions to create a network between these authors. Clusters are the communities that exist on Twitter and are differentiated by the colors of the circles. They are calculated based on the author's mention strength and structure. Author influences, indicated by the size of the circles, are calculated using pagerank — the higher the pagerank, the more influential an author is. For our analysis, we used the maximum number of posts that can be retrieved, 20,000.

Kayla Thompson
@_KayDanTho_
Starting my new job today!

Hannah Hossley
@LilHoss11
@_KayDanTho_ what where?!

Replying to @LilHoss11

Kayla Thompson
@_KayDanTho_
@LilHoss11 A tea company called Piper and Leaf. They sell different types of tea in jars at farmers markets, Bridgestreet, and Lowe Mill!

Farmers markets

In the world of influencers and the influenced, Twitter is a place for dispensing and gaining knowledge. People who may be new to farmers markets often ask questions specific to that topic — what produce to buy, when, and where. By following influential farmers markets tweeters, these people are able to stay up-to-date. For farmers markets influencers, location plays an important role. Farmers markets are organized in communities, cities, and counties. Farmers market enthusiasts can gain more information relevant to where they live by following local farmers markets influencers.

Others who may not necessarily be interested in farmers markets find themselves being convinced to give it a try by those who are. For those who just moved to a new city, locals tout the farmers market as a community standby. The farmers markets Twitter community collectively selects "leaders."
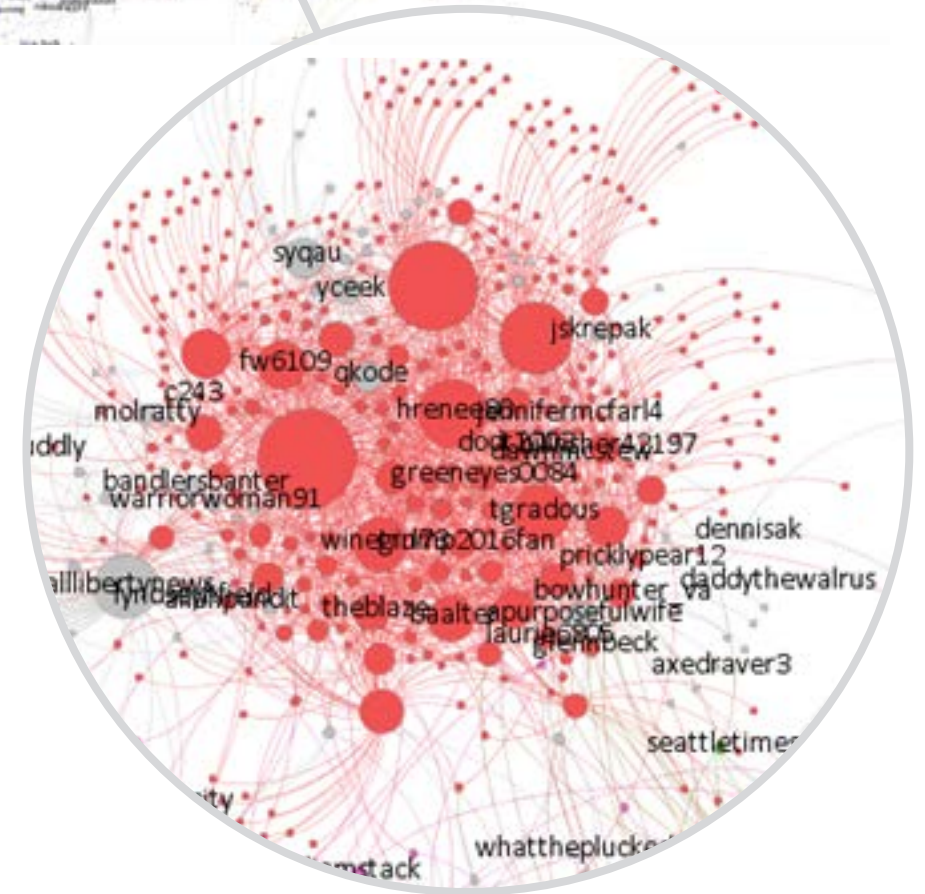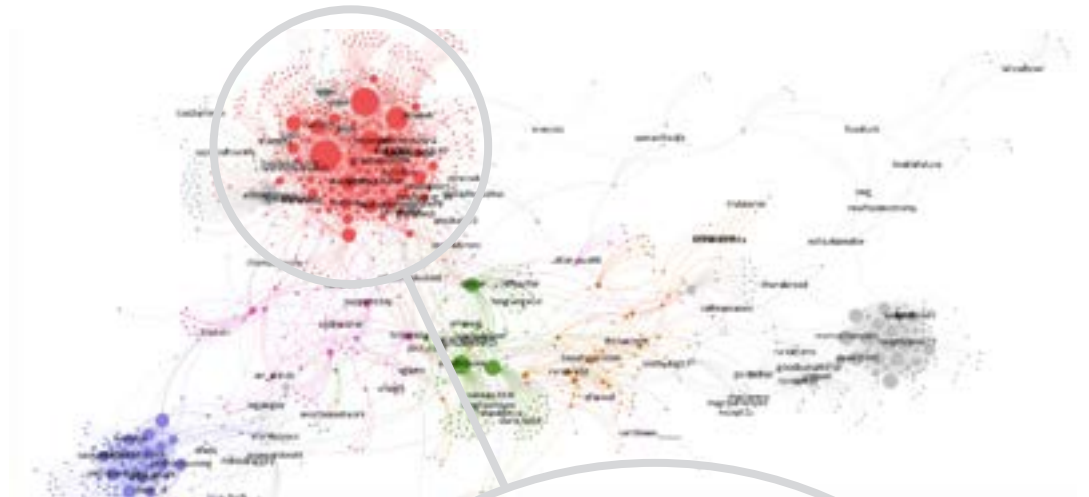
For farmers markets, there is one most prominent group (indicated by the red color). There are three more prominent clusters (indicated by the blue, green, and gray colors) and many shared connections between all the groups.

Conclusion

Twitter is an extremely valuable social media platform for brands and researchers because it helps them understand:

- Real-time reactions to important events

- The emotions behind those responses

- How consumer opinions have changed over time

For a platform that limits posts to 140 characters, the insights gained are worth more than a thousand words. Brands and analysts that want to understand consumers in real time — as well as the events that inform them — should look to Twitter data for their answers.

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Instagram

A deep dive into what makes Instagram data unique for brands and analysts

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Introduction

Since launching in 2010, Instagram has quickly become one of the most popular social platforms on the planet. Users have flocked to the platform for its photo-first mentality and use it to share a window into their daily lives and photos about the events, moments and brands that are important to them.

For these reasons, Instagram is an invaluable source of insights for brands and analysts about the things consumers really care about. Instagram data is an unparalleled window into the lives and interests of consumers, which makes it a gold mine for brands and agencies that want an authentic understanding of what matters to their customers. To demonstrate this value, we will present three examples from our recent analysis of the CPG industry.

Throughout this guide, we will use the findings from our CPG analysis as well as other examples to illustrate the three key ways in which Instagram's features and user base make the network different from other popular social media platforms:

- Visual Storytelling
- Community Building
- Influencer Identification

Methodology

We looked at posts from Instagram from January 2015 to December 2016, only including English posts in our analysis. We identified some major reasons why Instagram is a valuable data source for consumer insights and included examples of what those insights look like. There are three value propositions of Instagram, which are bucketed into the following categories: visual focus (storytelling through visuals, trendspotting), forming community (niche communities, shared experiences with family and friends), and social influencers (identifying prospective brand influencers).

Visual storytelling

Photojournalism exists for a reason — to communicate stories through photos. When telling stories, words can only do so much. While Instagram users do not have to be journalists or photographers, they can use the platform to share snippets of their lives through photos. Because most of the products we interact with on a daily basis are from brands, these brands can use social media to identify new or unique ways to fit into someone's life.

Instagram users showcase their lifestyles via photos. These glimpses often involve products, which means brands can understand how their products are being used organically, and adapt to customer needs.

To help exemplify Instagram's meaningful photo-based storytelling abilities for brands, we looked at diet and nutrition trends as an example of how the platform can help us uncover and track diet and nutrition trends through the eyes of consumers.

Eating habits and nutrition trends

When people talk about diets or dieting, Instagram is their go-to venue. Making up 77 percent of the overall online discussion, Instagram contains millions of people sharing pictures of food, meal prepping, and new fitness regimens to complement their diet and lifestyle changes.

Diet Discussion by Content Source (2015-2016)

- Facebook
- Forums
- Twitter
- Tumblr
- Instagram
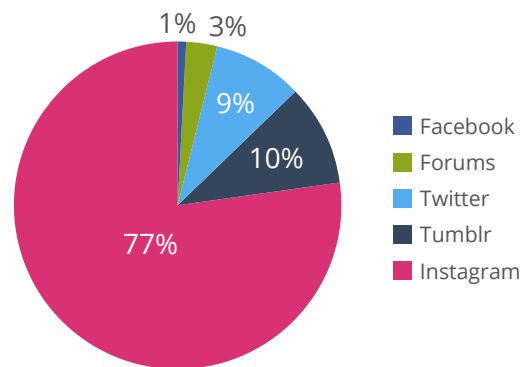
People use Instagram to tell stories about their experiences with different diets or nutrition trends. Rich with visual content ranging from photos of the foods they buy to the recipes they try, Instagram provides plenty of opportunities for brands to identify current and prospective customers, especially when people use common hashtags like #veganfoodshare, #vegansofig, or #whatveganseat.

These hashtags and self-identifying communities can help brands and researchers sort the larger Instagram conversation to better understand how trends are growing (or shrinking) over time, and how they compare to other popular topics discussed on the platform.

For example, Instagram data helps us see that veganism has consistently been the most popular diet trend on the platform over the past couple years, followed by paleo and low carb. Despite the hype about gluten-free and dairy-free, those two nutrition trends are the least talked about among the top six diet trends we analyzed.

Instagram's hashtag-rich captions help brands and analysts group and compare larger trends, but there is also much to be learned by looking at how consumers use the platform more generally. In other words: **What can Instagram data tell us about how people's habits and interests change over time**.

Nutrition Trends Share of Voice Trend
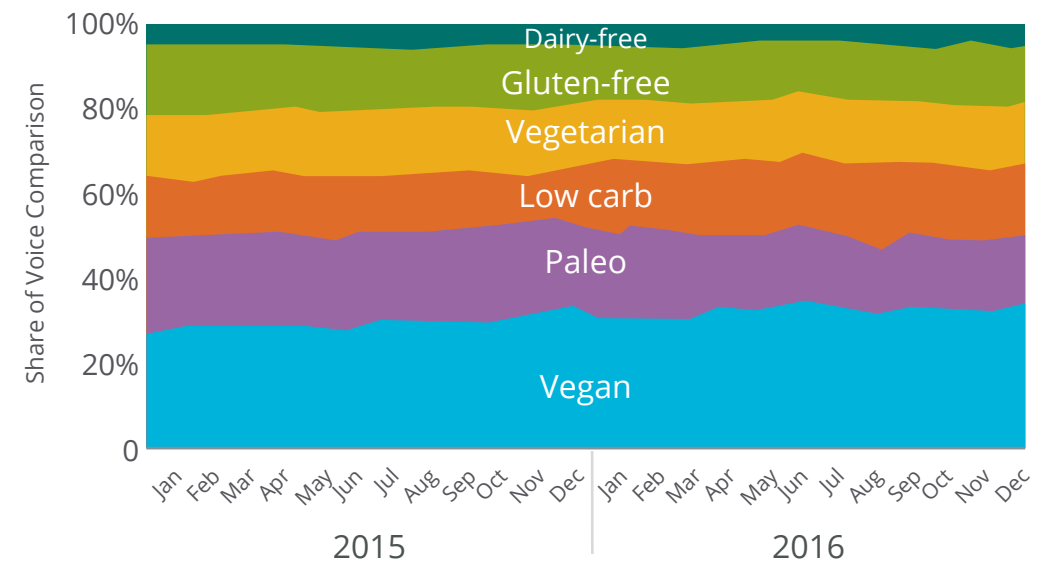
Personal stories, told through photos

Of course, Instagram is not all about one-off posts and photos. Often, Instagrammers take to the platform to share their unfolding life journeys. Nowhere is that more apparent than eating habits.

The nutrition trends discussed above often find themselves integrated into people's self-improvement journeys. People use Instagram to share their path to a healthier self. We've identified the three main steps within this path — discovery, experimentation, and transformation. **Instagram users may document their entire journey, or only select parts**. Whether or not they choose to show all stages, the different stages are distinct — discovery is marked with excitement and some uncertainty, experimentation is making the commitment to a nutrition trend, and transformation is the result of the effort.
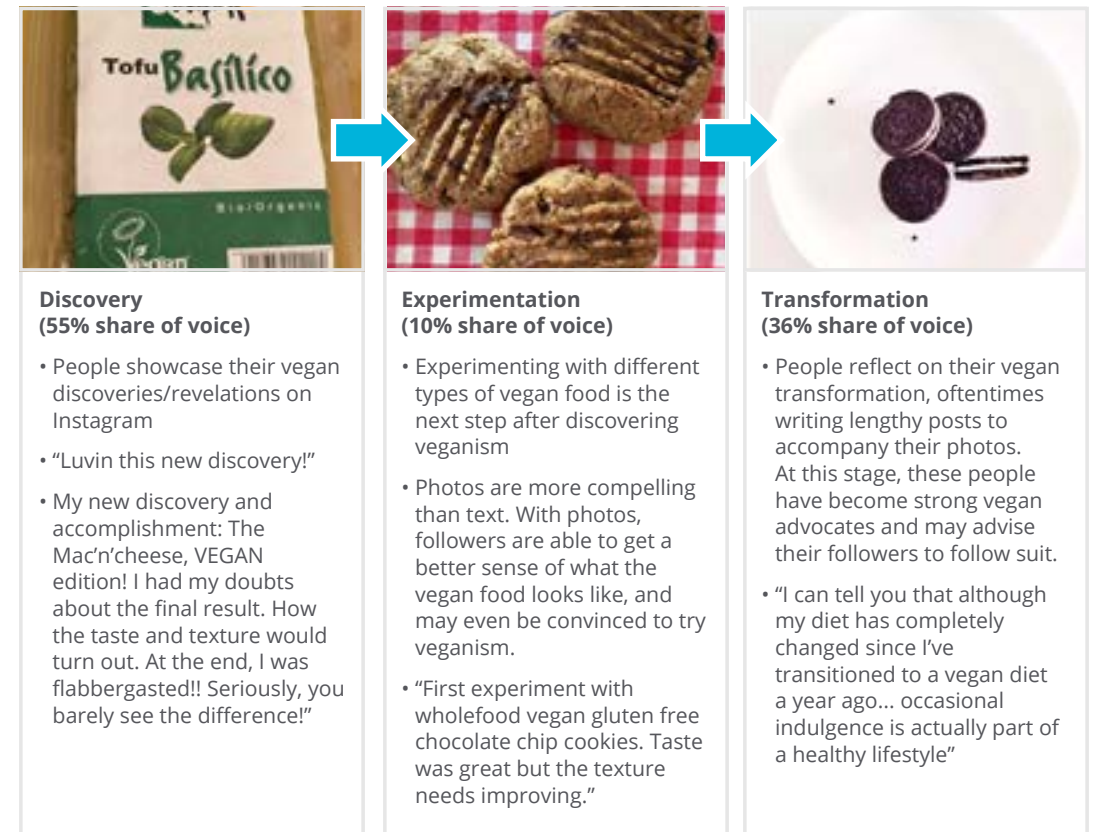
These journeys are incredibly valuable for brands and analysts because they provide useful context about how consumers think about their lives and their personal aspirations.

By analyzing Instagram data en masse, we can start to see how the language consumers use to describe their journeys can help us uncover patterns in journeys of self-discovery and -improvement.

People use different terms to discuss each of these stages. For discovery, people use words related to curiosity or finding. For experimentation, people may "try out" something new or play around with new foods to create something suitable to their new dietary needs. For transformation, people proudly announce the completion of their "journey," discussing the changes they've made.

In the discovery stage, people learn about a diet and then Instagram their findings, which may include a new cafe, food, advice, or inspiration. People share their discoveries as a way to kick off their new diet. After their initial discovery, they begin to experiment — trying out new cafes and recipes. People share their food creations on Instagram. The last stage, transformation, is the most popular on Instagram. People share the results or learnings from their nutrition changes.

We looked at **veganism** more closely to understand an Instagrammer's nutrition journey.

**Discovery
(55% share of voice)**

• People showcase their vegan discoveries/revelations on Instagram

• "Luvin this new discovery!"

• My new discovery and accomplishment: The Mac'n'cheese, VEGAN edition! I had my doubts about the final result. How the taste and texture would turn out. At the end, I was flabbergasted!! Seriously, you barely see the difference!"

**Experimentation
(10% share of voice)**

• Experimenting with different types of vegan food is the next step after discovering veganism

• Photos are more compelling than text. With photos, followers are able to get a better sense of what the vegan food looks like, and may even be convinced to try veganism.

• "First experiment with wholefood vegan gluten free chocolate chip cookies. Taste was great but the texture needs improving."

**Transformation
(36% share of voice)**

• People reflect on their vegan transformation, oftentimes writing lengthy posts to accompany their photos. At this stage, these people have become strong vegan advocates and may advise their followers to follow suit.

• "I can tell you that although my diet has completely changed since I've transitioned to a vegan diet a year ago… occasional indulgence is actually part of a healthy lifestyle"

Applying the three main stages to the nutrition journey for veganism on Instagram, we can visually see how users tell a story through photos. More than half of Instagram users discussing their vegan journey post about the discovery stage, where they are trying out veganism for the first time. Thirty-six percent post about transformation, where they have fully accepted the vegan lifestyle, proud to showcase the results. Ten percent post about experimentation, where they figure out how to best approach a vegan lifestyle — this may include which foods to buy and what to cook.

Using Instagram to share their diet-change stories is personal narrative storytelling as much as it is absorbing others' advice. There are other benefits to sharing their diet journey on Instagram. Publicly documenting their progress may help them stay accountable and more motivated to stick with the diet.

But it's not all about personal journeys. Instagram data is also incredibly valuable as way to discover and track consumer trends as they evolve.

Trendspotting

When brands or researchers want to search for new trends, they can turn to a variety of sources — Google, news articles, and social media. But Instagram is particularly well suited for trendspotting for two main reasons: a) it's image-based, which enables people to see the trends and better visualize how the trends can apply to themselves and b) the "explore" feature surfaces content based on user preferences, which helps promote customized trend discovery.

As trends become more popular on Instagram, they tend to snowball, allowing brands and analysts to identify the fastest-growing and most pertinent trends for their industries.

Perhaps no industry exemplifies Instagram's unique ability to surface and spread trends better than beauty.

Cosmetics have long been a popular source of conversation online. Many consumers who started as YouTube beauty vloggers have now taken their beauty looks and advice to Instagram. YouTube beauty vloggers may have even established their own personal brand through blogs, but to reach a wide audience they turn to Instagram, where millions of users can be inspired by the beauty trends they showcase. Instagram decreases the barrier to entry for people looking to become beauty gurus and enables anyone to discover emerging beauty trends. Instagram has amassed such a unique beauty look that it has been recognized as "Instagram Beauty."

What follows are a few examples of how Instagram can be used to uncover consumer trends.

Cosmetics: emerging beauty trends

When we look at where people talk about cosmetic trends and the latest makeup looks, we see that discussion takes place primarily on Instagram and Tumblr, with Instagram making up 41 percent of conversation.

Cosmetics Trends Discussion by Content Source (2015-2016)
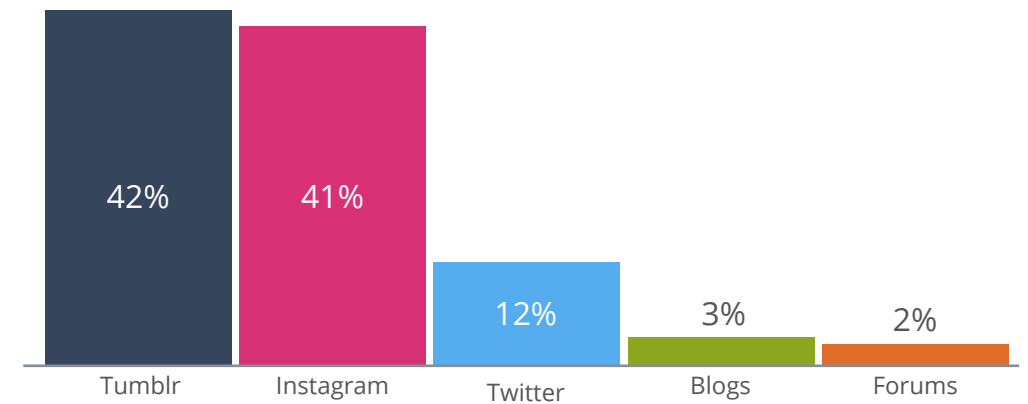
What are the major beauty trends we surfaced on Instagram? **Eyebrows, lips, contouring, and highlighting.** Lips were the major beauty trend in 2015 with roughly 60 percent share of voice. However, just a year later, trends quickly shifted. Eyebrows and highlighting are now more widely discussed.

Naturally, as trends grow, communities develop around them. Unsurprisingly, Instagram data is also extremely valuable for brands that want to better understand the makeup, opinions, and values of the communities most relevant to them.

Cosmetics Beauty Trends Share of Voice Trend
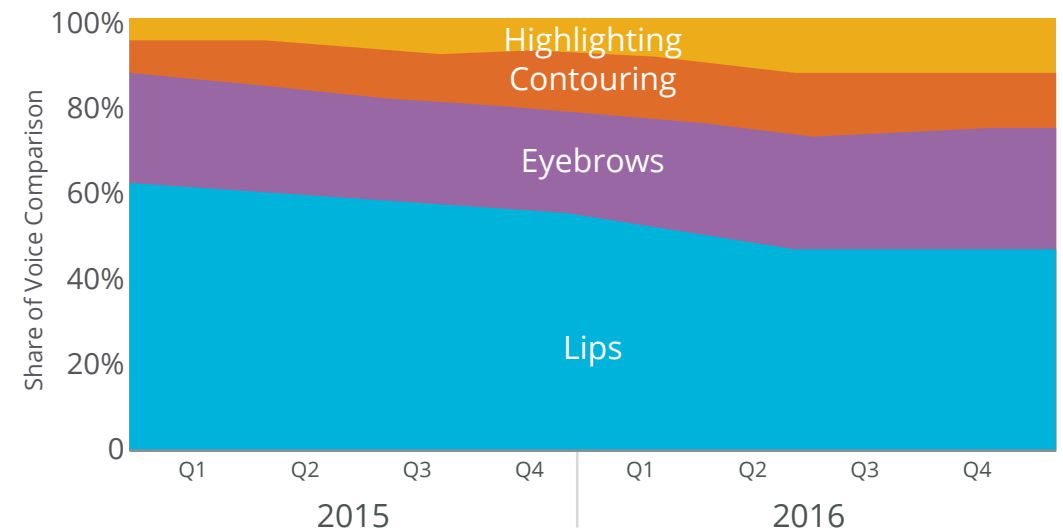
Community building

Social media platforms are designed to help users engage with their digital networks. While Facebook is primarily used for connecting with friends you already know and Twitter for sharing 140-character news, reactions, snippets, or thoughts, Instagram is used for connecting with people over shared interests. When this connection is nurtured by Instagram users having conversations on the platform, the community is strengthened.

Brands can learn the language of their target communities, the best ways to participate in the conversation authentically, and identify how to best appeal to their customer base.

In this section, we'll look at two specific aspects of the community-forming aspect of Instagram:

- Niche communities
- Shared experiences with family and friends

Niche communities

Niche communities naturally form on Instagram. For example, consumers interested in craft beer can follow someone who frequently drinks craft beer and visits microbreweries. These digital connections may even translate to in-person communication. Instagram enables people to find like-minded users, forming online communities held together by photos and captions. People bond over sharing best practices and discussing their favorite brands. The photo-sharing aspect, combined with themed accounts and hashtags, gives rise to niche Instagram communities. Because these niche communities share knowledge with each other, they often have more in-depth information, which is helpful for brands trying to understand what early adopters seek.

As an example of how Instagram helps create and sustain niche communities, let's take a look at the craft beer community.
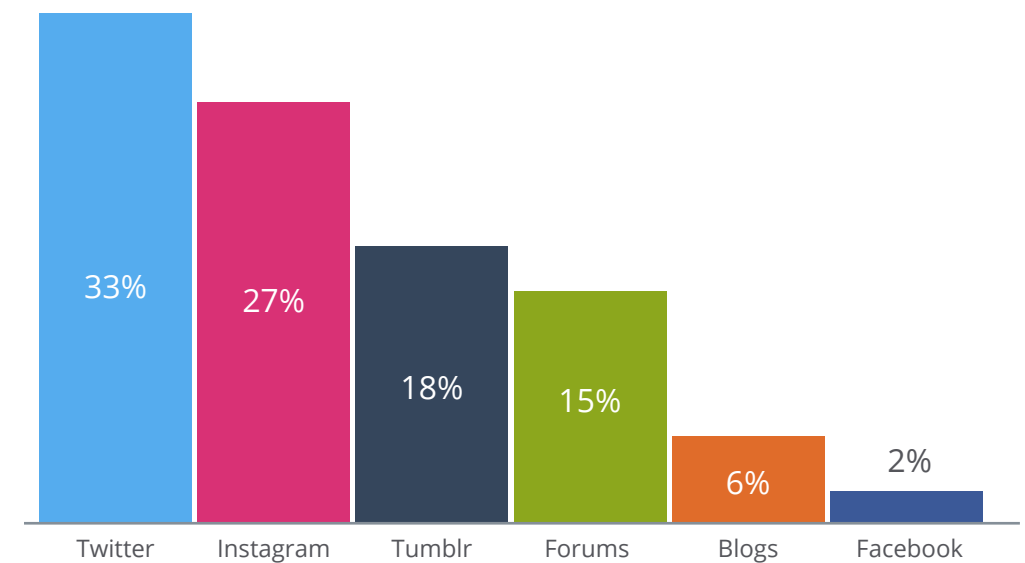
The rise of craft beer on Instagram

Craft beer is an ideal example of a niche community for the following reasons: it is a subculture with commercial appeal, there are many facets to craft beer including home brewing, and it is a community that relies on recommendations. There may even be craft beer meetups that originate on Instagram, bringing the online community offline and sharing the offline experiences online. An example includes a networking event called The Perfect Pairing. Craft beer events like LA Beer Week unite the craft beer community, from those just getting started to knowledgeable craft beer enthusiasts and homebrewers.

Discussion of craft beer is widespread across many social media sources. Twitter gets the majority of conversation at one-third, but Instagram comes in second with over one-fourth the conversation.

The most common craft beer discussion topics focus on the local aspect, the food that people consume with craft beer, craft beer festivals, craft beer tastings, and the live music that accompanies bars or venues that serve craft beer. All of the top topics have a communal element to them — the local scene breeds a do-it-yourself spirit; food brings family and friends together; and festivals, tastings, and live music draw crowds. Branding that emphasizes the independent, DIY spirit of craft beer can bolster a craft beer brand.

Craft Beer Discussion by Content Source (2015-2016)

Twitter	Instagram	Tumblr	Forums	Blogs	Facebook
33%	27%	18%	15%	6%	2%

Craft Beer Discussion Topics Share of Voice Trend

Live music
Tasting
Festival
Food
Local
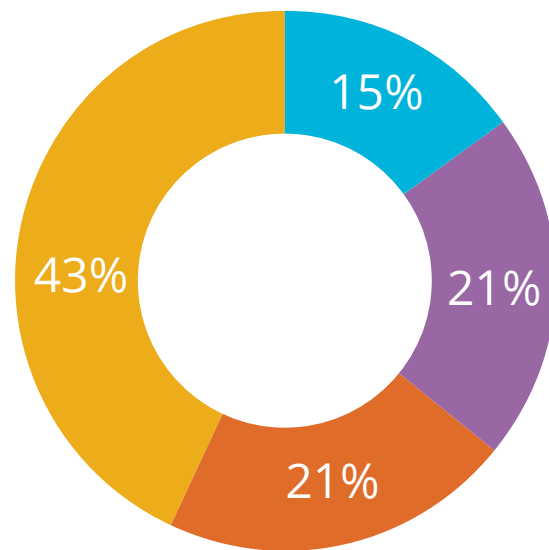
Y-axis: Share of Voice Comparison — 0, 20%, 40%, 60%, 80%, 100%

X-axis: Q1 Q2 Q3 Q4 (2015) Q1 Q2 Q3 Q4 (2016)
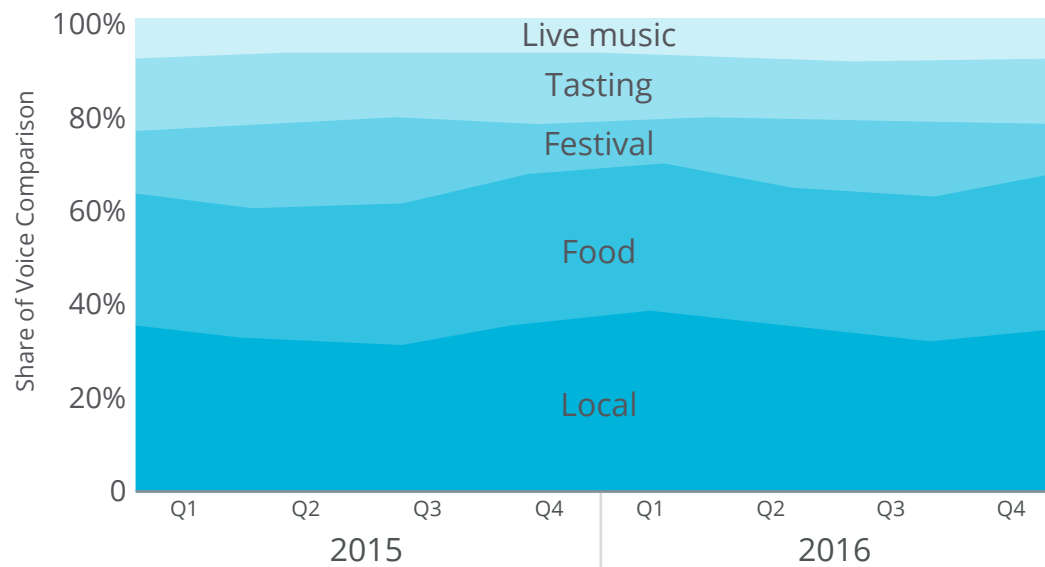
Why People Value the Craft Beer Community Share of Voice

■ Alternative   ■ Origin story   ■ Creativity   ■ Learning from others

15%
21%
21%
43%

What keeps people tied to the craft beer community? Analyzing Instagram data helped us identify the four key elements: learning from others, creativity, origin story, and the alternative/independent aspect. Craft beer novices can connect with experienced craft beer drinkers, and beginner homebrewers can learn from veteran homebrewers. The craft beer community is full of knowledge exchange. Learning from experts, alongside others who are not as experienced fosters strong community bonds.

When you transition from simply drinking craft beer to actually brewing it, you devote more time and energy, increasing your investment in the community. The types of craft beer brewed varies greatly. Craft breweries often devise innovative flavors and drive trends for the larger beer market. But the draw of craft beer is not just the different flavors — people are inspired by the breweries' origin stories that add a personal element to craft beer. The fact that craft beer is not mass-produced, but made by independent brewers, sparks local community bonds. Much like people are drawn to the community aspect of their local farmers' markets, consumers are drawn to their local breweries, which facilitate community bonding by hosting events or tastings.

Some craft beer companies have leveraged these values to their brands' benefit, hosting workshops on how to brew beer, sharing their company's roots. By understanding the core elements that craft beer drinkers value, brands can truly tell a compelling story.

In this way, niche communities on Instagram are perfect ways for brands to understand how consumers think about and discuss the interests they are most passionate about. Their authentic enthusiasm can help brands resonate with them more effectively.

But Instagram is not only built around mutual interests, and likewise, brands don't only care about shared passions. Instagram is also a venue for friends and families to communicate with each other and share thoughts about the most important aspects of their lives.

Shared experiences with family and friends

Bonds with family and friends are also strengthened through Instagram, as people share their social experiences. Brands can use these insights about how people enjoy products with family and friends to identify the social situations their product can be used for, making their products more relevant in consumers' everyday lives.
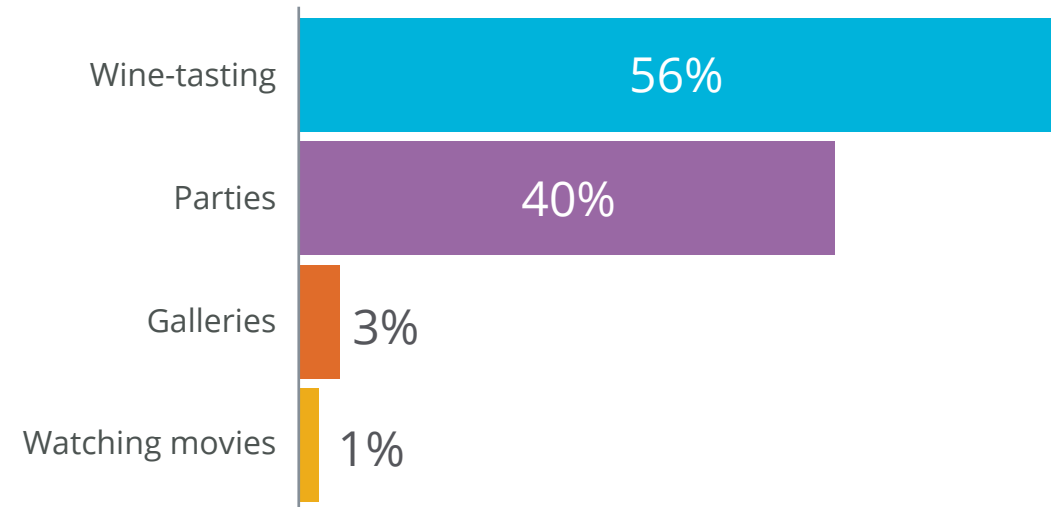
Wine conversation

Instagram is the place to understand wine trends and insights. Over the past couple years, wine conversation has predominantly taken place on Instagram, which accounts for nearly two-fifths of the total social conversation on the topic.

Wine Discussion by Content Source (2015-2016)
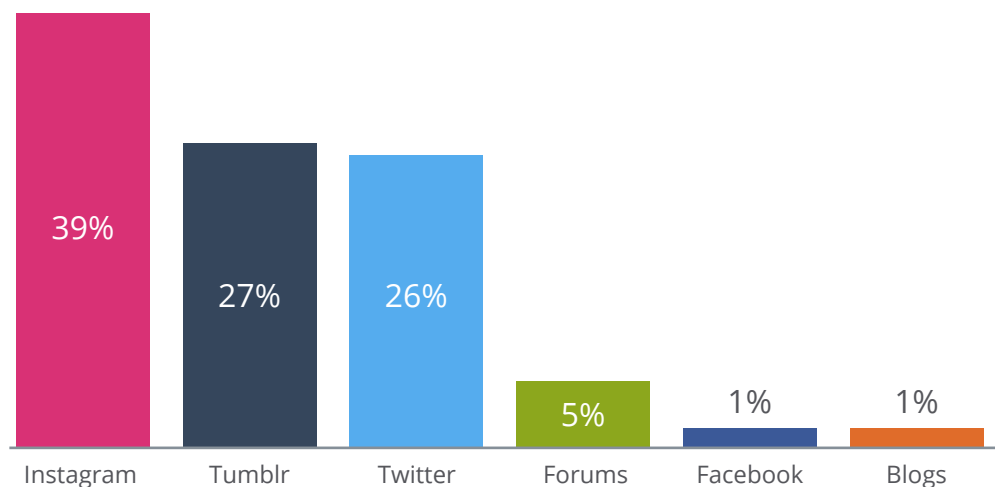
Catchy wine slogans like "I make pour decisions" can be found on every corner of the internet — and they are used by brands. There are slogans for specific types of wine too — for example, rosé all day, stop and smell the rosé. These playful slogans are used by wine brands for merchandise like t-shirts and wine glasses.

Wine Discussion Topics Share of Voice

Analyzing the wine conversation on Instagram helps us see what wine fans care about and how they use wine as a vehicle for connecting with friends and families. Wine tastings, for example, prove to be a common way for consumers to connect with those close to them.

More than anything, Instagram helps us see how consumers bond over wine. Brands can use this information (and the wine-specific language used on Instagram by consumers) to help them understand this thriving subculture. Brands can identify the social moments for wine consumption and authentically find a way to fit into people's lives.

But communities filled with average, representative consumers is just the beginning. Instagram is also a natural place for brands to identify the key influencers in their industries or who resonate with their audience.

Influencer identification

According to recent research from Hashoff, Instagram is both the most used social network by influencers and the top social network influencers focus on. Based on a survey from 300 social media influencers posting primarily about consumer topic areas (sports, travel, entertainment, food, etc.), 99 percent of respondents say they post content on Instagram, 67 percent on Facebook, 51 percent on Snapchat, 43 percent on Twitter, 30 percent on YouTube, and 28 percent on Pinterest. Racking up millions of followers, Instagram influencers usually choose a niche, be that cosmetics or craft beer. Followers consume content from Instagram influencers voraciously — by viewing inspiration about how a product can be used, followers may be compelled to purchase the product. According to an eMarketer survey from 2016, 54 percent of female consumers purchased a product after seeing it recommended by an influencer.

Brands may also notice some accounts that are very active in a certain community but don't get a ton of engagement on their posts; they're still important as possible up-and-coming influencers, or at the very least, worth paying attention to because of how active they are. These are known as community cheerleaders. Brands need to understand that not everyone has a niche account they post only specific niche-related content to. Some opt for a more all-purpose, life-encapsulating Instagram account, but that doesn't mean they're not worth nurturing a relationship with.

Identifying brand influencers in the pet care industry

The next wave of Instagram influencers can be identified by seeking out influencers on the rise, or a tier below that (community cheerleaders). These people may not yet have a brand sponsorship, but they are brand loyalists with a decent following. With a seemingly endless stream of celebrity cats and dogs, part of the attention is shifting to the products used to care for those pets.

Looking at the major discussion topics of pet care on Instagram, food, bedding, and grooming are some of the bigger conversation topics.

Diving deeper into the pet food conversation, we surfaced three top mentioned brands — Purina (62%), Blue Buffalo (25%), and Merrick (13%). And there are distinct differences in the types of influencers they attract.

Pet Care Discussion Topics

Total volume ■ Topic volume

Food	409K
Beds	304K
Grooming	16K

Post Volume
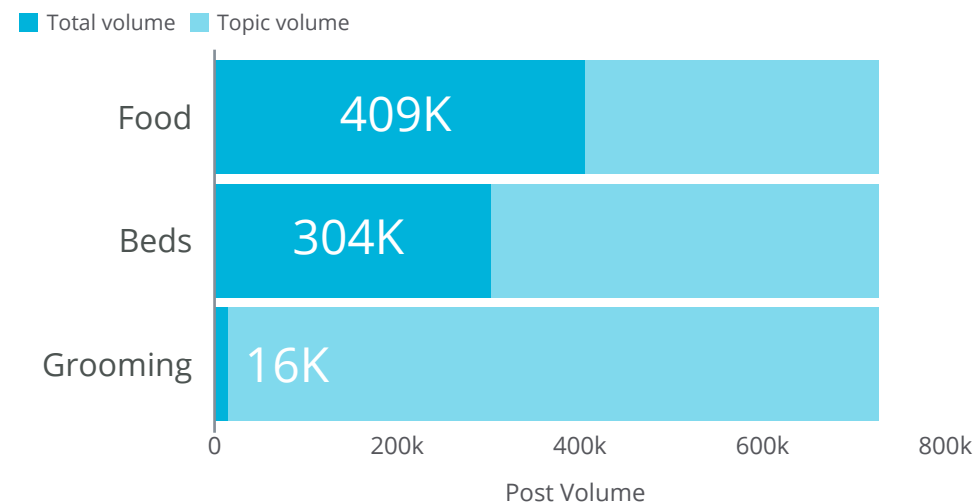
Top Pet Food Brands Share of Voice

■ Purina ■ Blue Buffalo ■ Merrick

25%

13%

62%
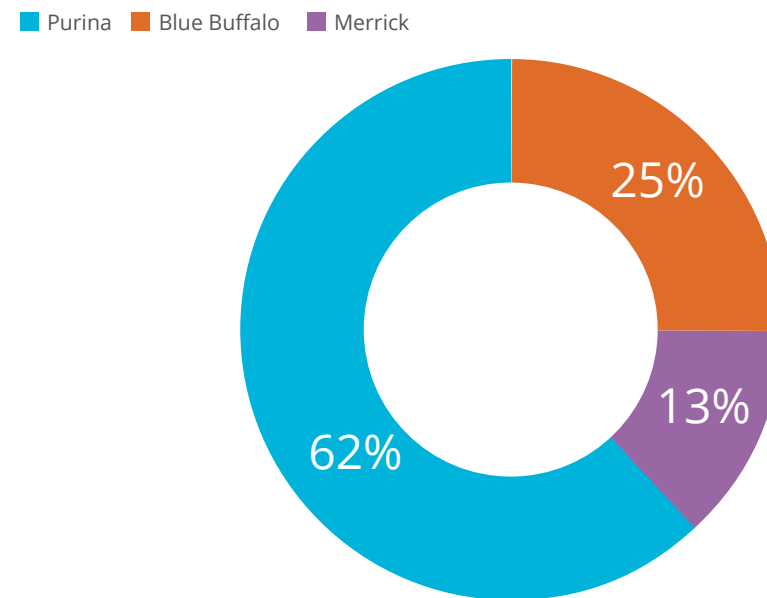
Understanding Instagram influencer data

Instagram network analysis finds influential authors in the posts returned by a query. We decided to look at the influencers and networks of the top three pet food brands: Beneful, Merrick, and Purina. The network analysis uses last 14 days of Instagram mentions to create a network between these authors — in our case, the analysis consists of data from May 9 to May 23. Clusters are the communities that exist on Instagram and are differentiated by the colors of the circles. They are calculated based on the author's mention strength and structure. Author influences, indicated by the size of the circles, are calculated using pagerank — the higher the pagerank, the more influential an author is. For our analysis, we used the maximum number of posts that can be retrieved: 20,000.

Purina Brand Influencers

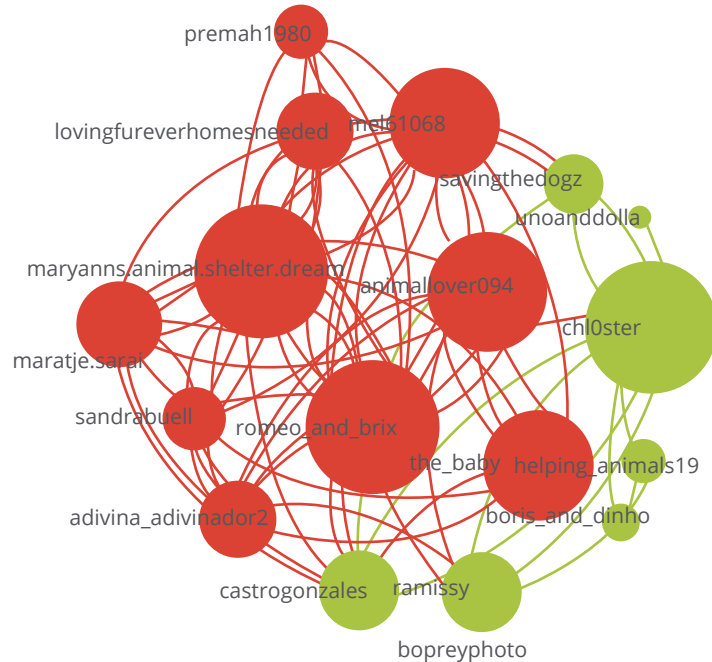The network features two main groups and other smaller groups, isolated from the main group and each other.

Purina boasts a large number of different influencer groups. Anti-animal abuse and pet adoption & help are the most prominent groups, though the latter group has higher combined page rank. The smaller groups (in terms of size) have similarly low page rank. What differentiates the Purina Instagram community is the focus on animal adoption and advocacy.

Grouping together each author by their common interests and assessing page ranks, we can see how each brand attracts different types of influencers and understand who these people are that are advocating these brands.

Purina Brand Influencers
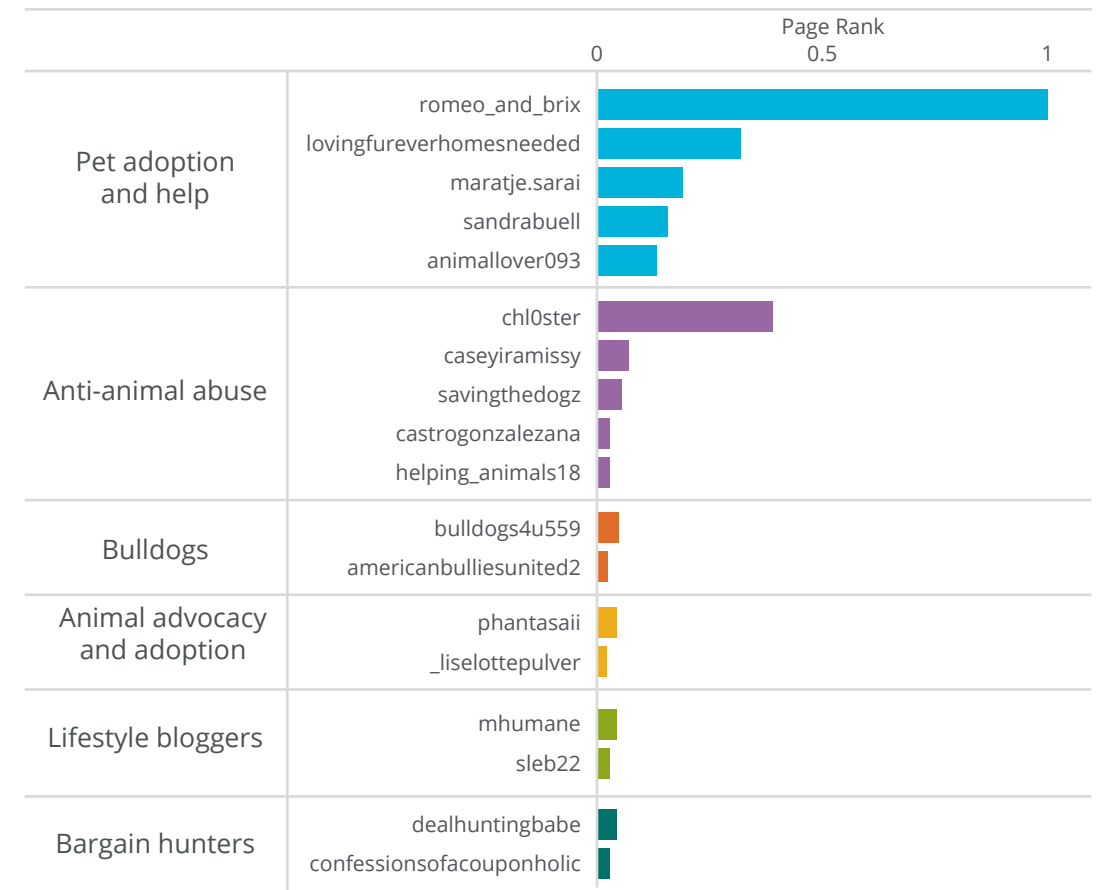
Conclusion

Instagram is a social media platform on the rise for good reason — easily accessible and customizable, people can use Instagram to best suit their needs that range from sharing stories, unearthing trends, finding communities, sharing social moments, and vouching for brands. These Instagram uses are captured in the data, information brands can use to achieve their business goals. For a platform that features photo filters, Instagram is refreshingly unfiltered in its conversation.

As social media becomes more secondhand nature to users, it has become increasingly important for brands to listen to the conversations that take place on social media. Each of the value propositions we demonstrated for the social media platforms (Twitter, forums, and Instagram) can be mapped to a business need or research question. Social media analytics can help brands and agencies gain clarity on consumers' thoughts and sentiment.
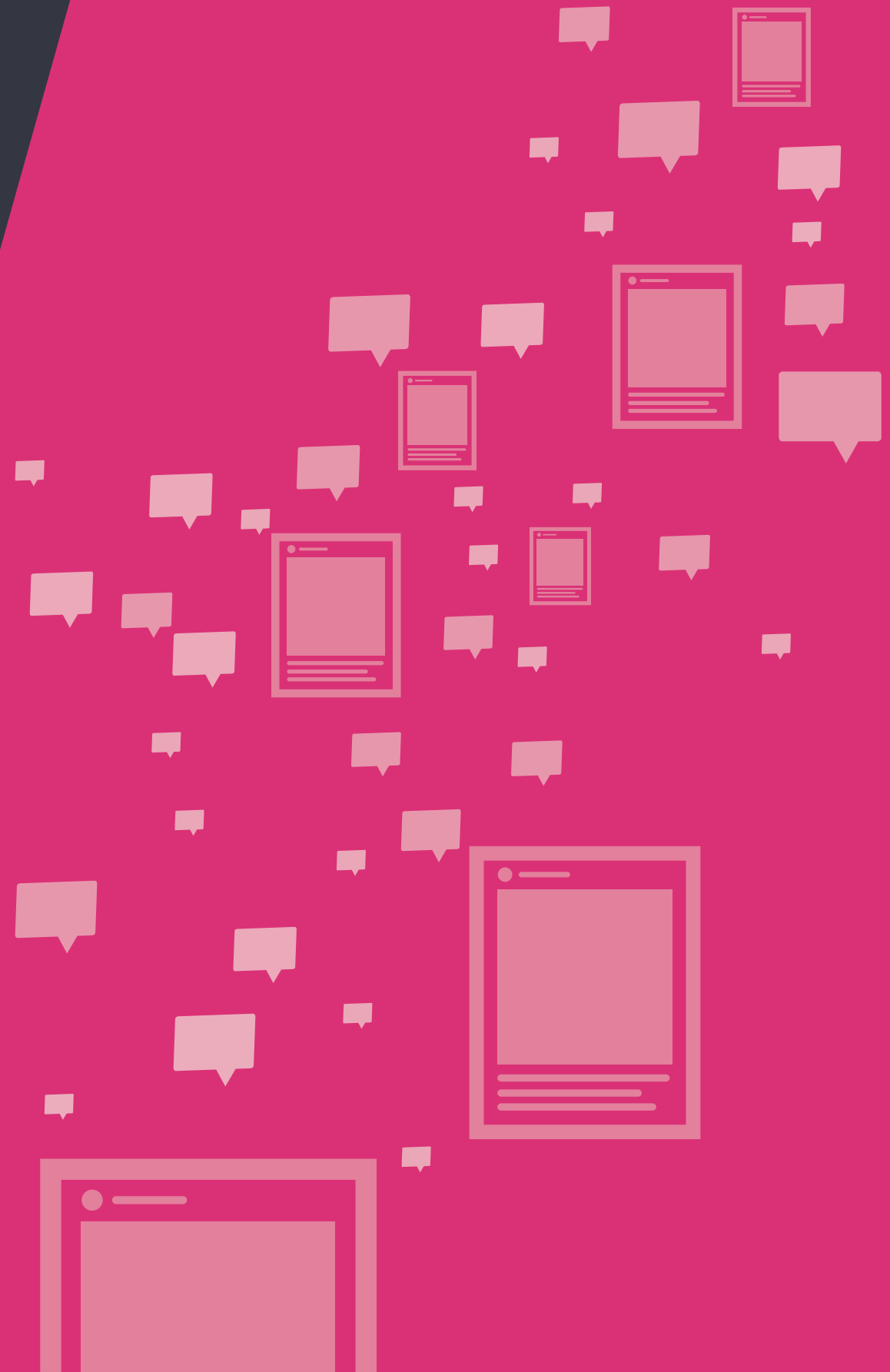
Forums

A deep dive into what makes online forum
data unique for brands and analysts

Table of Contents

Introduction

Online forums preceded social media giants like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. While those social platforms have additional features like stories and filters, they rely on the same sense of community and online network that forums pioneered years earlier. People join forums to both share and seek information about the topics that matter to them.

Forums engage communities formed around specific topics. There are topics that cover almost everything imaginable, reaching a massive range of participants and providing everything from general guidance to specific instructions.

Thanks to the breadth and depth of content it contains, forum data is useful for researchers and brands that want insights that do more than just skim the surface — they want an understanding of how people exchange information on trends, and an understanding of how experienced users (subject matter experts) differ from inexperienced users.

In this guide, we'll look at what makes forum data unique, including:

- In-depth discussion
- Crowdsourcing ideas
- Subject matter experts

Methodology

We identified three main values of forums — in-depth discussion, crowdsourcing ideas, and subject matter experts. Using examples from different topics with varying time ranges, we explain how forums can be useful for researchers and brands.

Crimson Hexagon has expansive data access a wide range of sources, but not all sources are ingested into our platform the same way or in equal volumes. You can find more information about Crimson's data coverage here.

In-depth discussions

Forums lack Twitter's brevity and Instagram's visual focus, but they make up for it as venues for deeper discussions. This aspect makes forums a unique resource for brands and researchers who want to understand the "why" behind the data and understand the nitty-gritty details of the topics they care about..

Forum users have unlimited space to ask questions and provide detailed opinions about the topics that matter most to them. The conversations held on forums are typically lengthy and organic, enabling researchers and brands to extract valuable information in an unsolicited, unfiltered environment. From purchases to services to products, forums yield deep, honest insights on just about every topic.

Travel and homesharing

Travel is a great example of an industry where a large portion of discussion takes place on forums. Consumers head to forums to discuss every aspect of hotels and home sharing, making forums a critical resource for brands and researchers that want to understand consumer sentiment and trends in these areas. Reviews, recommendations, and advice are all heavily sought after from experienced travelers, and they can be just as useful to brands in the travel industry that want to understand how consumers really think about travel accommodations and experiences.

Automotive is another industry perfectly suited to forums, as consumers talk in detail about car preference, problems and purchases. As large, well-researched purchases, cars lend themselves naturally to forums, and brands can learn a great deal about consumer opinions on car brands by analyzing forum data.

In this section, we look at conversations about **travel** and **automotive** to see how brands and analysts can use forum data to better understand unfiltered consumer opinions.

Hotels and homesharing

One of the biggest topics in the travel industry these days centers around homesharing. As services like Airbnb have become more popular, a growing number of consumers have started heading online to share their experiences about homesharing, and comparing them to the more traditional travel accommodation option of hotels.

Unsurprisingly, a large share of these conversations take place on forums.

Content Source Breakdown: Homesharing vs Hotels

Legend: Forums, Twitter, Blogs, Facebook

Homesharing: Forums 32%, Twitter 65%, Blogs 2%, Facebook 1%
Hotels: Forums 71%, Twitter 26%, Blogs 2%, Facebook 1%

Y-axis: Content Source Proportion (0 to 100%)
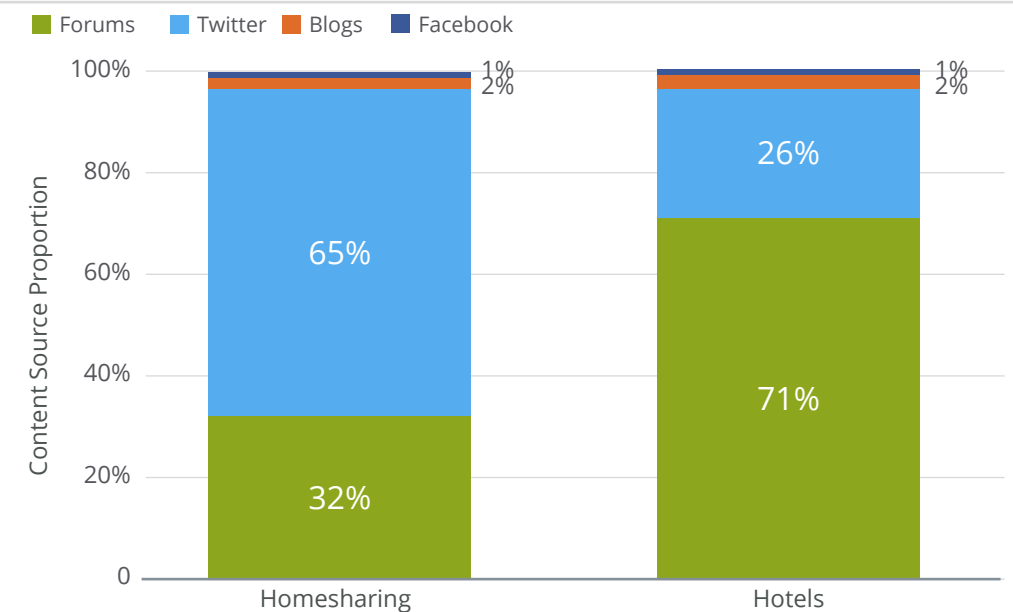
People seek homesharing and hotel posts on forums for advice on how, where and when to travel. Within 2015, 32 percent of home sharing conversation took place on forums. Forums garnered an even larger share of the hotel conversation, accounting for 71 percent of the overall discussion. When discussing hotels, consumers head to several popular travel-focused forums, with flyertalk.com as the most popular site. But top forum sites for home sharing are bit a more surprising — Reddit is in the top spot followed by Tripadvisor.

Hotels Discussion Top Forums

Forum	Share
flyertalk.com	45%
tripadvisor.com	10%
cruisecritic.com	5%
tugbbs.com	5%
disboards.com	3%
tripadvisor.in	2%
myfico.com	2%
tripadvisor.co.uk	2%
city-data.com	1%

Homesharing Discussion Top Forums

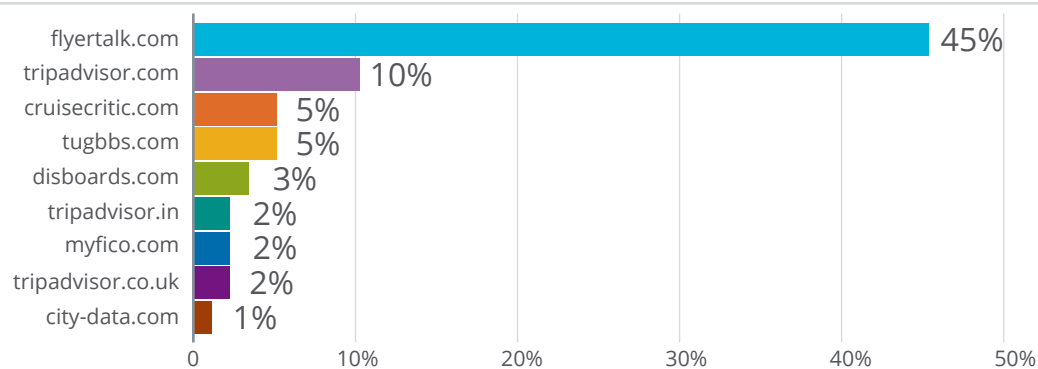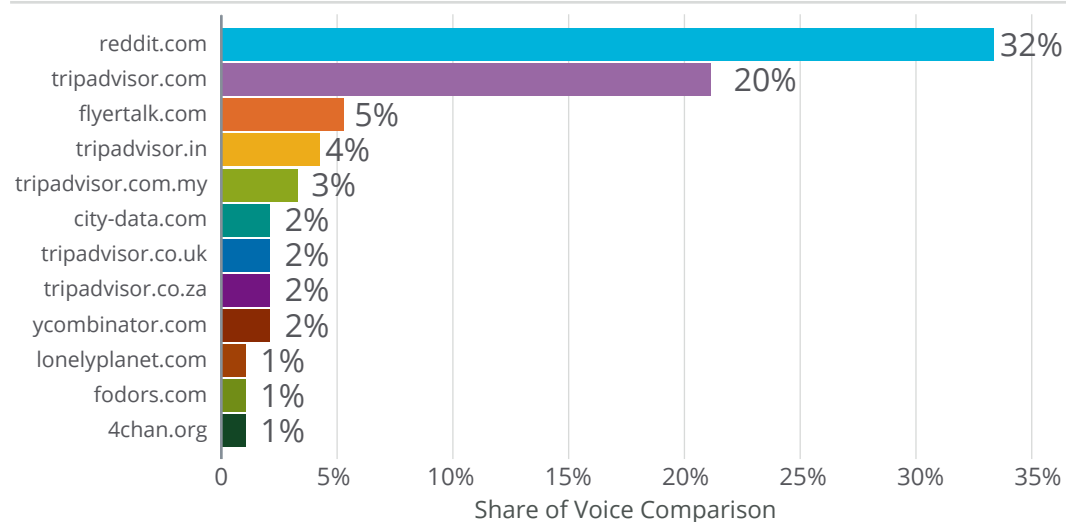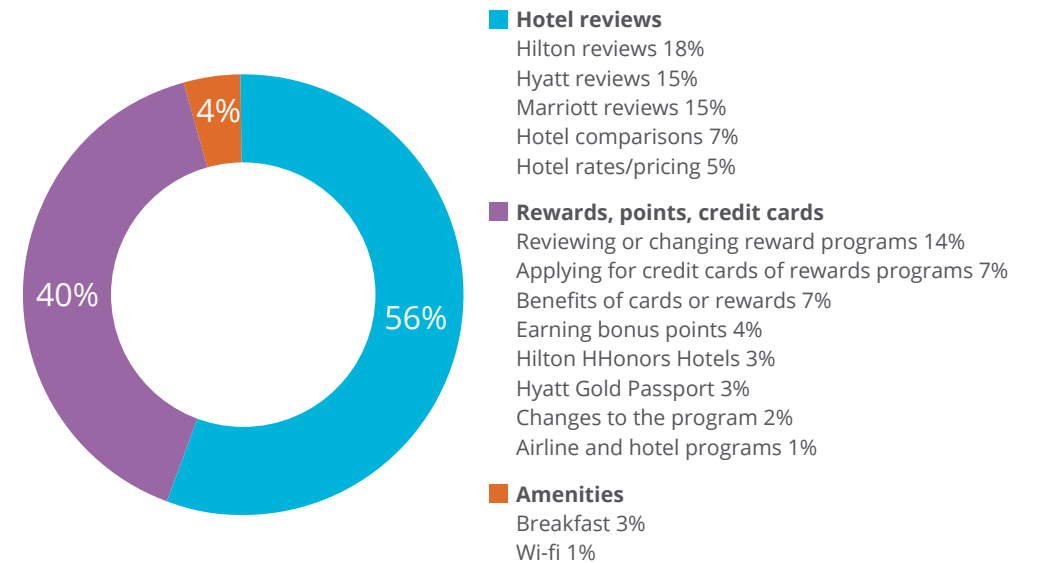| Forum	Share
reddit.com	32%
tripadvisor.com	20%
flyertalk.com	5%
tripadvisor.in	4%
tripadvisor.com.my	3%
city-data.com	2%
tripadvisor.co.uk	2%
tripadvisor.co.za	2%
ycombinator.com	2%
lonelyplanet.com	1%
fodors.com	1%
4chan.org	1%

Share of Voice Comparison

Forums are particularly helpful for providing insights to brands in the travel industry. On Twitter, people may post short bursts of anger or joy about their hotel or home sharing experience. On Instagram, people may be inclined to post dreamy photos of the hotel pool or scenic landscapes. But to get an honest and more comprehensive assessment of a hotel or a rental experience, forums are the place to go.

When looking at the major discussion topics on FlyerTalk for Hilton, Hyatt, and Marriott, we see that the conversation is mostly focused around hotel reviews and reward programs and points. Diving into the major topics further, we see that travelers most often provide hotel reviews for the Hilton brand and frequently evaluate reward programs, providing recommendations on the best rewards or credit cards. Although not as prominent as hotel reviews and rewards, amenities — particularly breakfast and Wi-Fi — are commonly mentioned topics on FlyerTalk.

FlyerTalk Topics for Hilton, Hyatt, and Marriott

Donut chart segments: 56%, 40%, 4%

Hotel reviews
Hilton reviews 18%
Hyatt reviews 15%
Marriott reviews 15%
Hotel comparisons 7%
Hotel rates/pricing 5%

Rewards, points, credit cards
Reviewing or changing reward programs 14%
Applying for credit cards of rewards programs 7%
Benefits of cards or rewards 7%
Earning bonus points 4%
Hilton HHonors Hotels 3%
Hyatt Gold Passport 3%
Changes to the program 2%
Airline and hotel programs 1%

Amenities
Breakfast 3%
Wi-fi 1%

"I have to spend $10K a year on it to keep Marriott Gold which redirects ~$200 away from my Membership Rewards program. With the $300 credit the annual fee comes down to $95... it's not the most economical card to have. My alternative is I could switch to the Chase Sapphire Preferred by my gut says even with the restaurant bonus it still makes sense to bucket my points with Amex/Delta/Hilton/SPG. Thoughts here?"

"Unless you're going for status with Hyatt from the stay credits at spending thresholds it doesn't seem worth it to me to get the Hyatt card since UR transfer to Hyatt 1:1."

"To be honest, the Hilton gym is one of the best I've ever been to: full range of high quality cardio equipment, full range of weights. Pretty well taken care of too. Pool is lovely too at the Hilton."

"We want to stay at either the Hyatt Olive 8 or the Grand Hyatt, and use a Diamond Suite Upgrade... I'm just not really sure what to go for. Things I'm curious about: better room overall, work space... is wi-fi noticeably better at either hotel? Are the rooms at one hotel any quieter than the other?..."

Of all social media platforms, forums' format lends itself best to lengthy posts that allow for in-depth insights on a topic. Twitter is for quick snippets and Instagram is a photo-first platform, but forums allow consumers to express their thoughts without being constrained to a character limit or required to post a photo.

Hotels are a great example of how people use forums to discuss a topic in depth. On FlyerTalk, users spill their thoughts on hotels, reviewing them, assessing their amenities, and discussing price. For reviews, people discuss their impressions and experience, then go into detail about the hotel quality. Future travelers are influenced and persuaded by others' opinions, advice, and reviews. The exchanges are organic, honest, and most importantly, influential to ultimate purchasing decisions.

Hotels' main competitor, homesharing, is also a prominent topic on travel forums. While Twitter can track Airbnb's meteoric growth in popularity, and Instagram can capture user photos of picturesque (or not) Airbnbs, forums store the deep, nuanced conversation about why people may prefer homesharing over hotels or vice-versa.

Indeed, forums can help us answer important questions about how and why consumers choose one option over another. For example, with forum data, we are able to identify the top reasons some consumers prefer homesharing and compare them to the reasons others prefer hotels. Overall, we found that people choose homesharing for a cheaper and more authentic travel experience while other more risk-averse consumers pick hotels for their luxurious amenities and reliability.

But forums are not just valuable for their ability to help brands ferret out consumer preferences from in-depth discussions, but also because forums generate large, organic conversations between hundreds or thousands of users.

In the next section, we'll look at how forum data can help brands and researchers harness the power of crowdsourcing.

Top Reasons Travelers Prefer Home Sharing (28,281 posts)

Affordability (45%)
Cost is one of the deciding factors for travelers when booking home sharing services, especially over hotels. Cheaper stays and lower prices are nearly always mentioned with other benefits of home sharing.

Convenience (44%)
Private properties, larger spaces, and the comforts of home, such as full kitchens, all contribute to the convenience of home sharing for the traveler, especially for families needing bigger accomodations on a tight budget.

Local, unique experience (21%)
Home sharing satisfies the travelers desire to experience the local flavor and meet new people. They want to be submerged into the culture of their travel destinations and feel less like a tourist—something many feel they cannot achieve at hotels.

Better options (8%)
Travelers feel limited with hotel locations and destination choices. Home sharing offers the idea of anywhere travel with a variety of property options and styles that meet the travelers checklist.

Top Reasons Travelers Prefer Hotels (27,475 posts)

Consistency and reliability (24%)
Last-minute cancellations, lack of host accountability, and skepticism with home sharing accommodations prompt travelers to return to hotels. Travelers want the dependability of booking and securing a room, and to avoid the guessing game when it comes to rentals.

Better service and amenities (21%)
Travelers value the in-person service and resources from hotels that is missing from home sharing, like concierge support, room service, gyms, and housekeeping.

Points/rewards reduce cost (12%)
Travelers will use points for free nights or redeem them for miles for cheaper airfare to help reduce overall vacation costs if points aren't competitive enough against home sharing rates.

More trustworthy (9%)
Potential scams and false listings make travelers question the credibility of home sharing. Some will shy away from home sharing due to lack of trust with hosts, guests, and the service overall.
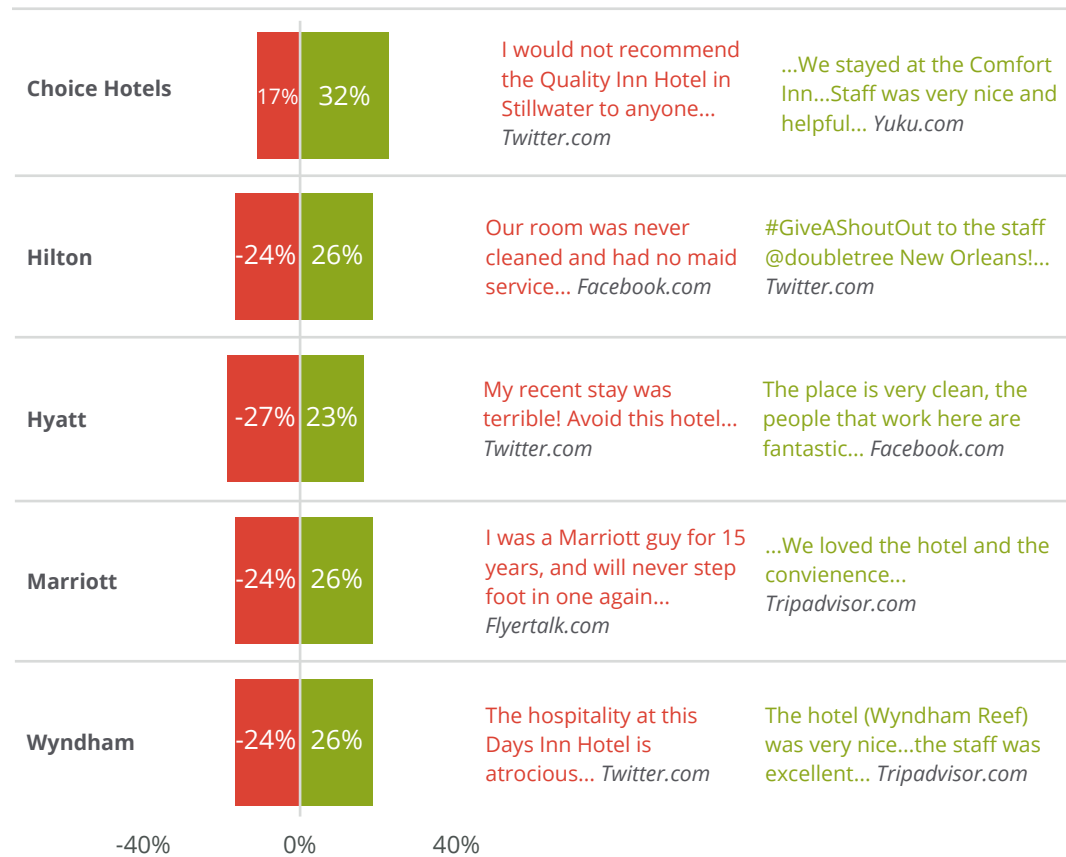
Crowdsourcing ideas

People use forums to seek out recommendations, opinions, and ideas, especially when it comes to travel and accommodations. Travelers often rely on forums to make decisions on where to stay based on in-depth recommendations and reviews posted by other consumers in forums.

Hotels

Hotel Conversation: Sentiment Analysis

Choice Hotels	17% 32%	I would not recommend the Quality Inn Hotel in Stillwater to anyone... *Twitter.com*	...We stayed at the Comfort Inn...Staff was very nice and helpful... *Yuku.com*
Hilton	-24% 26%	Our room was never cleaned and had no maid service... *Facebook.com*	#GiveAShoutOut to the staff @doubletree New Orleans!... *Twitter.com*
Hyatt	-27% 23%	My recent stay was terrible! Avoid this hotel... *Twitter.com*	The place is very clean, the people that work here are fantastic... *Facebook.com*
Marriott	-24% 26%	I was a Marriott guy for 15 years, and will never step foot in one again... *Flyertalk.com*	...We loved the hotel and the convienence... *Tripadvisor.com*
Wyndham	-24% 26%	The hospitality at this Days Inn Hotel is atrocious... *Twitter.com*	The hotel (Wyndham Reef) was very nice...the staff was excellent... *Tripadvisor.com*

-40%   0%   40%

Thanks to their community focus and free exchange of experiences and opinions, forums are an ideal venue for crowdsourcing. While there are dedicated communities for hotels on Twitter and Instagram, forums are a better way to ensure relevant, knowledgeable responses. And with so many voices talking about a single topic, forums are especially ideal for channeling and quantifying 'the wisdom of the crowd.'

When we analyzed the large, diverse conversation surrounding hotels, we found that there are several topics, and opinions, that come up again and again. General positive buzz included reviews about the quality of service, hotel amenities, and other pertinent attributes.

Of course, it's not just positive. General negative buzz found in forums consisted of traveler complaints of poor customer service both in the hotels and over the phone. Travelers also mentioned unpleasant hotel experiences involving dirty rooms, lack of amenities and difficulties redeeming reward points.
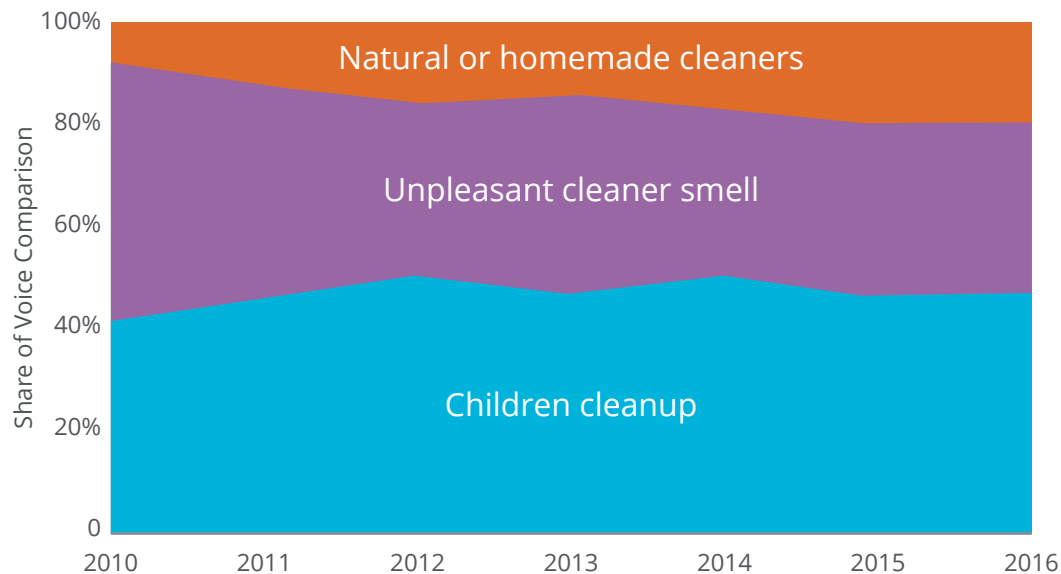
Household Products

Forums don't just help consumers leave their homes — they help them take care of their homes, too. Unsurprisingly, there is a robust conversation of forums centered around household cleaning products.

Surface Cleaners Discussion by Content Source

- 65% Twitter
- 26% Forums
- 8% Facebook
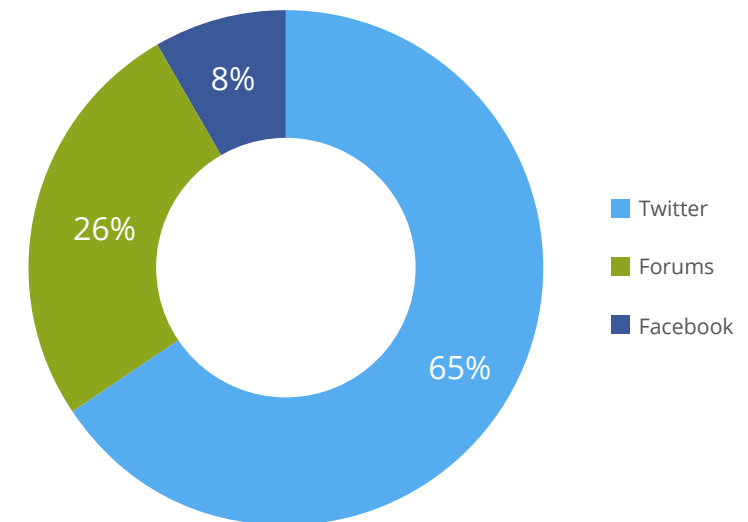
## Major Trends Driving Surface Cleaner Discussion Share of Voice

One common use of forums is consumers looking for advice and tips about household cleaning products. People can easily find others asking the same questions or expressing frustration the same problems on forums, making forums a great platform for using a large chorus of voices to help answer specific questions and sort recommendations on niche topics.

Forums show us that many consumers are tired of pre-packaged marketing jargon from brands — it can be difficult to figure out which product best suits their needs when all brands enthusiastically tout their product as the best. Studies have shown that people are more apt to trust their family and friends — this mentality extends to crowdsourcing.

By crowdsourcing and sharing ideas with other users who have similar questions, forums make it easy to find authentic consumer recommendations that are free of jargon, messaging rules, and brand guidelines. This is not only valuable for consumers seeking disinterested product recommendations, but also for brands and researchers that want to understand how consumers organically and honestly talk about the products that are relevant to their business.

Top Mentioned Natural Alternative Cleaning Ingredients
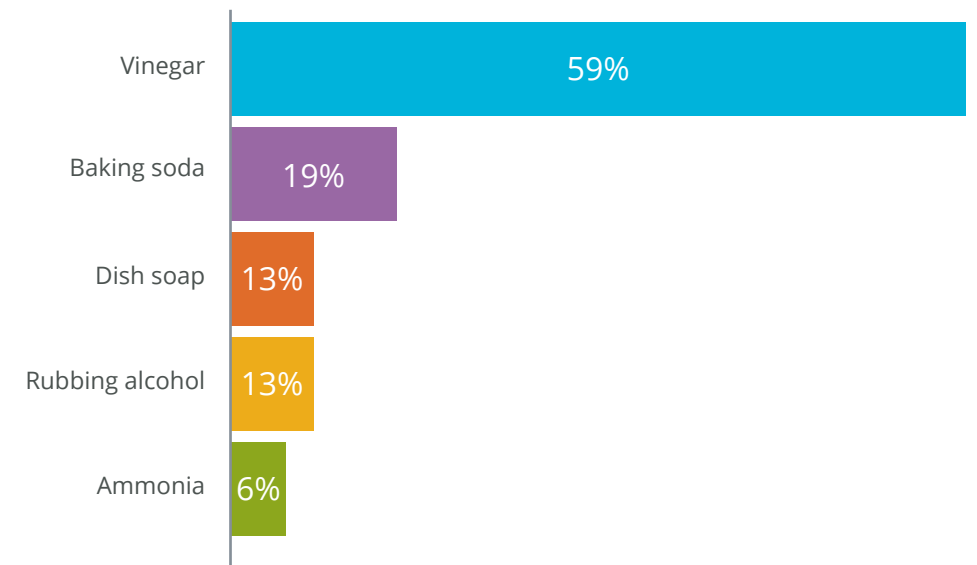
Household cleaners represent a clear example of this. For cleaning ingredients, crowdsourcing is an important approach, as consumers want to hear from others with experience using certain cleaning ingredients.

In recent years, brands have integrated themselves into crowdsourcing. For example, Lays looked to the public while searching for the next chip flavor. Doritos asked the public to help create Super Bowl ads. Consumers are no longer only on the receiving end; they are now involved in their favorite brands' product creation and promotion. When brands understand how people connect to discuss products, they can integrate crowdsourcing into their own marketing and product development strategies.

Analyzing forum data can help brands understand and harness the power of crowdsourcing. Whether looking for a product update, advertising campaign, or expansion opportunity, brands can turn to the multi-voiced conversations held on forums to quickly source and validate new ideas.

Subject matter experts

It may seem contradictory, but forums are not only opportunities for brands to synthesize the views of many to leverage the "wisdom of the crowd" but also a great place to filter that massive conversation and home in on the few "subject matter experts" that have disproportionately deep and authoritative views on particular topics.

Similar to Instagrammers, forum users select subject matter experts for their advice and involvement in a community. Subject matter experts can be early adopters, product devotees, or individuals skilled in a particular industry or trade. Their input on a product may speak for many others that feel the same way or offer insight to less experienced consumers. They can influence the purchase decision and behaviors of consumers, and shape perception on a brand or product.

Few industries demonstrate the power of subject matters as well as the auto industry.

Auto Brands

Forums encompass a significant part of the conversation surrounding the top auto brands. Many of the major brands have their own dedicated forums where users discuss the brands themselves as well as other attributes like fuel efficiency and reliability.

Top 3 Forum Sites by Post Volume in 2016

CHEVY	corvetteforum.com	reddit.com	67-72chevytrucks.com
FORD	reddit.com	ford-trucks.com	f150forum.com
HONDA	reddit.com	pakwheels.com	thumpertalk.com
NISSAN	reddit.com	4chan.org	bobistheoilguy.com
TOYOTA	reddit.com	pakwheels.com	priuschat.com

When we analyzed the online conversation surrounding car brands, we found that forum posts are, on average, much more negative than posts on Twitter. Common themes driving negative sentiment across all brands are: dealerships, service, and warranties. These conversations primarily take place on forums, with Reddit as the top site people visit.
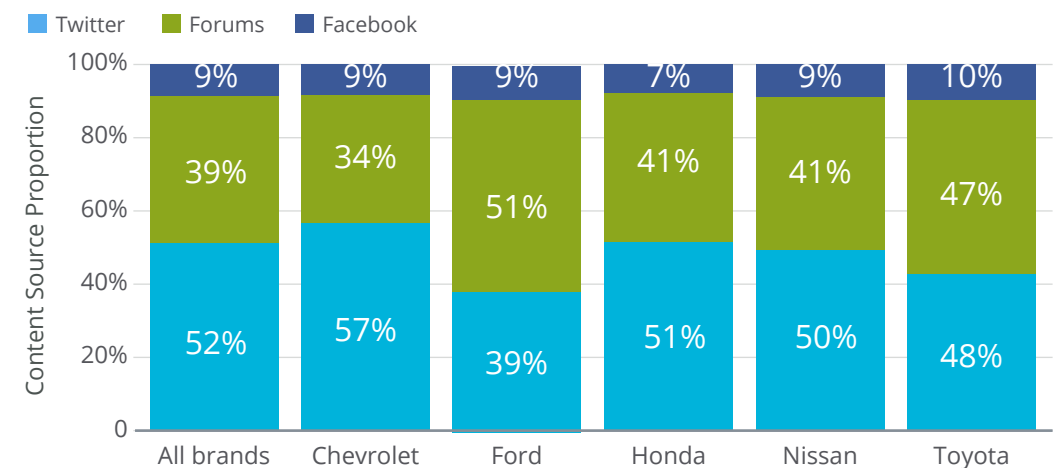
US Auto Brands Sentiment Ratio Index 2016
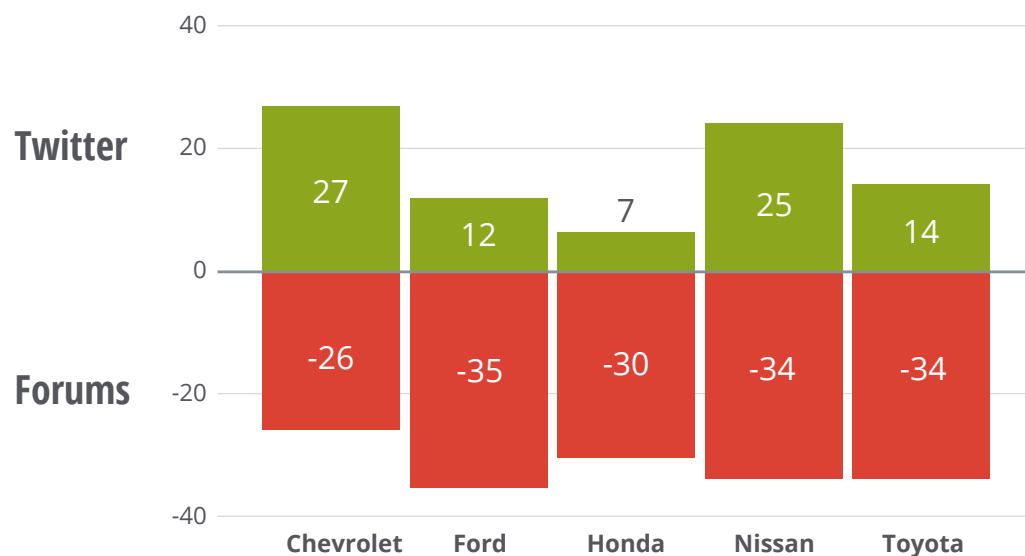
Car-focused discussions on forums make it clear that consumers generally distrust dealerships, feeling taken advantage of or underappreciated during service visits. Many perceive going to the dealer as a rip off while others get frustrated by the hard sell approach. Overall, visiting a dealership is less than an enjoyable experience. Others feel the warranty is not comprehensive enough and should cover more basic car problems, especially on newer vehicles.

> $500 is absolutely ridiculous for a new fob!!!! A total rip-off by Toyota dealers.

Patrice
@pdw901

@NissanDealerUSA Drexel Hill Nissan dealership is the worst business I've ever had the displeasure of dealing with. Truly dishonest.

> I don't trust any dealerships as an article of [non] faith. I'm not even that stoked on the Toyota brand anymore, though i've had them since 1972...

US Auto Brands Content Sources

Forums give people the in-depth information that they need about different brands and models, in this case, for major auto brands -- subject matter experts provide details for information-seekers so they can better make a decision.

Conclusion

On forums, people have nearly unlimited capability to express their thoughts. While this level of detail can be overwhelming, brands can extract useful, unfiltered information from forums with the right tools.

To gain understanding on issues people are experiencing with a product or service, analyzing the conversation on forums can provide the reason why. To look into how enthusiastic people are about a product or service, brands can see if people are recommending their product or service on forums. Forums are valuable for the wealth of deep information they provide and using a social media analytics tool can help streamline your analysis.

Conclusion

Analyzing social media data is one of the most powerful ways for brands and analysts to understand consumer opinion about almost any topic. But not all social media platforms are the same, and, by extension, the data contained on each is valuable in different ways.

In this guide, we looked at the the specific strengths and focuses of three of the most important online data sources:

• Twitter

• Instagram

• Forums

Throughout the report, we used real-world examples to highlight the differences between these three data sources. Only by fully understanding the use cases and user bases of each of these platforms can brands and analysts hope to extract the most meaningful insights.

But understanding these differences is just the beginning — brands that want to effectively leverage social media data must learn the fundamentals of social media analysis.

For a brief primer on the essential elements of social media analysis, check out our guide "The Fundamentals of Social Media Analytics."

To learn more about how social media data can help you better understand consumer trends and answer your most pressing business questions, schedule a customised demo of Crimson Hexagon today.

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