Social Media Response to MNsure Website and its Implications for Businesses

Research by Paige Harker, Assisted by Dr. Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch

DEPARTMENT OF
WRITING STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Introduction

As part of Web 2.0, social media has allowed for more complex, multifaceted communication (Bythe, Laur & Curran, 2014). The "user generated content" trend in the communication field has caused social media websites to become more popular than other non-participatory websites (Lim, 2016). Social media has many benefits, including increased civic engagement among users (Olssen, 2016) and the sheer volume in which responses are posted. However, many businesses in the United States have not yet realized the potential in utilizing social media to benefit their company. According to Hurley and Hea (2014), one of the major concerns related to social media is representation management, which means that businesses must realize that the way in which their brand is represented online will have an effect on customer opinion of the brand. By analyzing the specific case of the MNsure health insurance website, one is able to see the importance of social media responses and what can happen when companies disregard them.

Overview of MNsure Case

The focus of this study is the social media response to the MNsure website. The MNsure program stems from the passing of the Affordable Care Act in 2010, which inspired the state of Minnesota's government to create its own insurance exchange-marketplace "tailored to the needs of [Minnesota's] families, employers, and health care system" (MNsure, 2016). This online marketplace was launched in 2013 and immediately received negative reactions from the public, many of which were realized through social media.

Research Questions

Are social media responses valuable to businesses? If so, why are these responses valuable?

Methods

The data analyzed in this study include social media responses from online blogs, newspaper articles, letters to the editor, and online radio broadcasts. The dates on which these sources were originally published range from 10/1/2013-7/21/2014. Each of the six data sets were analyzed independently of one another through the use of textual analysis software called AntConc. The following tools were utilized:

- WordList (most to least frequently used)
- Concordance (words surrounding a selected word)
- Collocation (words used most frequently with selected word)
- Connotation analysis (identification of positive/negative words)

Results

The results from the textual analysis of each of the data sets were recorded in separate tables. Though results from each data set were varied, one could identify patterns and similarities in the findings:

- Mixture of positive and negative responses
- More negative response than positive response
- Bipartisan contributions
- Specific focus on website usability
- High volume of engagement

For reference, one sample table has been included below. This table displays results of the WordList, Collocation (top five), and Connotation analysis (positive highlighted in green, negative highlighted in red). Though the table does not explicitly show the results of Concordance, the results of this tool are reflected in the selection of the words in the WordList.

Table 1. Collocation results from *Minnesota Public Radio* blog titled "Have you used the MNsure website? What was your experience?" from 10/01/2013.

WordList	1	2	3	4	5
mnsure	woefully	welcome	unheard	todays	timeout
site	rebuttal	worst	watch	waiting	troll
account	extended	userid	submitted	stupid	retrieve
website	curious	written	unheard	todays	slow
work	websites	sad	ridiculous	released	pray
error	popped	indicated	verification	sucks	submitted
application	whoever	twice	submit	stated	results
create	userid	thinking	submit	stupid	redesign
message	popped	verification	sucks	saying	platform
phone	woman	unless	talk	responds	recognize
system	user	opening	longer	indicated	glitching
help	tasked	employees	retired	possibly	great
nothing	zippo	zilch	doing	agony	totally
page	surprises	showing	refreshed	keeps	indicating
wait	kill	woman	witnessed	wish	unresponsive
frustrating	renewal	recently	poorly	move	clearly
obamacare	written	supporter	shrivel	rotting	myths
poor	launch	wonder	unemployed	released	homeless
experience	talk	shoot	interview	extensive	developer
process	research	rumors	registration	letter	hear

Discussion

Social media is a major outlet for public opinion, and users are relying heavily on social media to express the majority of their thoughts and opinions. Not only are respondents treating the online spaces like in-person conversations, but they are also establishing credibility through their writing. Additionally, the opinions were balanced, providing bipartisan insight. Consequently, these virtual spaces have created an opportunity for civic participation that must be considered in order to construct an accurate representation of a situation.

Social media gives businesses insight about customer experience. As is evident by Connotation Analysis, social media responses provide a mixture of positive and negative reactions. Overly emotional responses tend to be seen as less credible, so the mixture of emotions in responses provides an important balance that will not completely deter businesses from utilizing social media responses. Additionally, it has been proven that businesses who utilize social media to interact with customers and address their concerns are viewed more positively than businesses who do not have a social media presence (Lim, 2016).

Social media provides information similar to that of usability testing. Though these responses lack the direction of a usability testing session and do not allow for direct observation of users completing tasks, one notices a trend in MNsure social media responses that directly point out and address usability issues with the website. Due to the cost and limited access, formal usability testing is not a feasible option for many businesses. By monitoring social media responses, however, businesses can learn about usability problems experienced by customers and directly address them, all while spending little to no money. Addressing usability issues in a prompt manner can save a business from a negative brand image by improving customer experience (Nyguen, 2015).

Implications

All businesses should consider monitoring these responses to improve customer experience. By creating accounts on popular social media networks, a business can better interact with customers and learn about their experiences with a product/service. To be more specific, businesses can track certain phrases/topics on social media through inexpensive social media management systems. Additionally, businesses can directly seek out customer responses by creating free polls or asking users to comment on posts. Presently, it appears that MNsure has begun to create more of a social media presence for themselves by creating accounts, monitoring customer comments, and responding, which seems to have at least partially addressed user dissatisfaction.

References
Bythe, S., Laur, C., & Curran, P. G. (2014). Professional and technical communication in a Web 2.0 world. *Technical Communication Quarterly.* Retrieved from http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10572252.2014.941766
Hurley, E. V., & Kimmie Hea, A. C. (2014). The rhetoric of reach: Preparing student for technical communication in the age of social media. *Technical Communication Quarterly, 23*(1), 55-68.
Lim, J. (2016). Effects of social media users' attitudes on their perceptions of the attributes of news agency content and their intentions to purchase digital subscriptions. *New Media & Society, 18*(8), 1403-1421.
Nyguen, B. (2015). Brand innovation and social media: Knowledge acquisition from social media, market orientation, and the moderating role of social media strategic capability. *Industrial Marketing Management, 51,* 11-25.
Olsson, T. (2016). Social media and new forms of civic participation. *New Media & Society, 18*(10), 2242-2248.

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
Driven to Discover℠