



Dear Reader

This edition of IO takes a hard look at Social Communities and wonders if it is not time to take a cold shower and remember the cornerstone of research is authority?

There is no doubt we are riding a wave toward a new and exciting era of social engagement on all levels. But what exactly that new era will look like, and how research will increase rather than diminish both its role and authority in decision making, is yet to be determined.

The tipping point has not only *not* been reached, but could still tilt *away* from Social Communities research.

At one end we have the evangelists for social community research, for them 'empowering' the consumer and listening to their every twitter equals the holy grail of both marketing and research.

While at the other end we have an 'interested' but inherently conservative corporate environment that has spent decades driving an authority by measurement culture.

Which leaves the middle – this is a state somewhere between the chaos of online vox pop and controlled research, this is where the 'who' and the 'how' will be resolved.



Insight of the week

The Great "How"

How will we know who we are 'listening' too? And how will we measure the authority of what we 'hear'?

As more companies come to realise the obvious benefits of humanising their insight relationships with online communities, they'll grapple with the "how."

How will they reverse shift from decades pursuing the surety of metrics, to put themselves in the hands of the 'chatter'. Is there a real risk of creating an online vox-pop of a dimension not seen or used before? In choosing to take personal control of their community and conversation within it, companies will need to know how they will interpret and measure the success of engagement.

How they will introduce new voices to the conversation in a way that augments the effort, versus causing confusion? How does the company - by nature a conservative beast - confidently move forward into such a

chaotic environment, with so few guides to the achievement of authority and measurement?

Many major clients - while eager to explore the benefits of Social community's engagement - are cautious of the potential downsides.

Because once we get past being spectators to the 'buzz' and the talk on the street, the danger is if the negative examples of using broad based social communities outweigh positive examples.

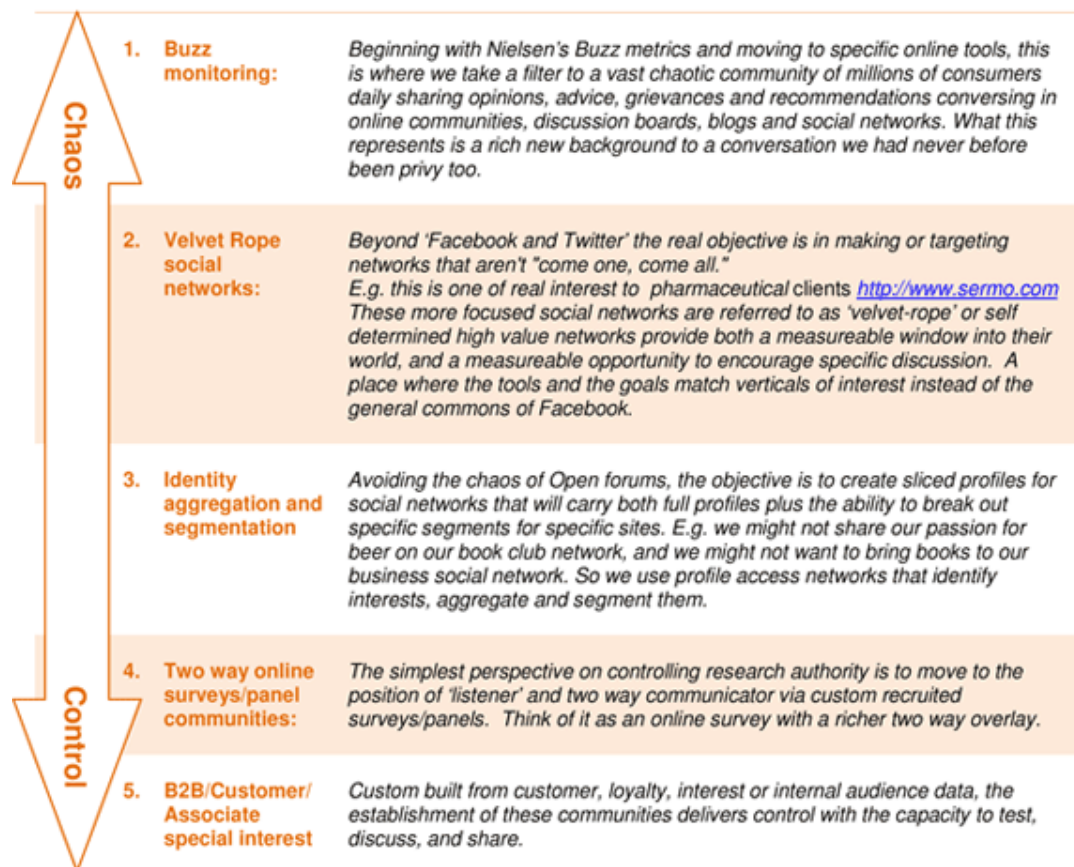
Historically we had become accustomed to email surveys and then graduated to sophisticated 'multi-media' online studies where control over participation is underpinned by specific recruitment or the management and facilitation of online panels. But as good as these are, they remain a one way conversation. And it's the prospect of observing and participating in two way conversations in social communities that is so powerfully compelling.

Social network research: How to separate Chaos from Control to deliver the full potential of both

It's not enough to say "if we get enough people, we'll figure it out".

By breaking social networks into 'forms' and understanding the psychology and key drivers of each we can build an authoritative methodological structure that will not only provide a tool kit to meet specific research objectives, but allow us to tap the social universe with confidence.

This table gives some insight into how this can be achieved from end to end:



From here you focus on 'knowing your market segment', not just your product target profile, but the overlay that tells you how and why they act the way they do online:

- How they participate and the skew toward the
 - 'Creators' (just 26%)
 - 'Critics' (35%)
 - and the ultimate goal, the 'Spectators' who make up a whopping 63%. That's the group you need but won't hear from, which leaves the 'active' minority in control of opinion.

(Source: Forrester Nov 2008 'Australian Adult Social Technographies')
Note: Groups include participation in at least one activity at least monthly

- And then their online psychological profiles. Motivations for being online in the first instance e.g. the:
 - Social introverts: (Current users of email and sms for 'arms length' expression)
 - Socialisers: (Networkers and 'look at me's')
 - Critics/activists: (Something to say that others should value)
 - Evangelists: (The online cool' and their business counterparts; the 'next big thing' opportunists)
 - DIYer's: (Traditional DIY's simply and conveniently going to the next step)
 - Value hunters: (Gratification from using and 'beating the system')

(Source: Streetscope Online Motivations 2009)

Conclusion

Beyond the cheer leading for social communities lays the Great '**HOW**'.

How from both marketing and a research standpoint – will authority and measurement be achieved?

We first understand the technologies but need to employ them with;

- The human empathy that comes with the knowledge that this is their environment, not ours.
- Understanding that 'control' is a relative thing, objective meets method, meets outcome.
- Method and research design are more critical in this new chaotic environment than ever.
- Mass participation will continue to grow, while experienced users employ refined filters to drive increased relevance
- Measurement needs to be addressed, but to get measurement we first need method.

Quote of the week

***'Doors are going to close all over the social web. Why? Because the money didn't come the way people thought it would.'* - Chris Brogan**

About Streetscope

Streetscope Research is a full service market research firm delivering strategic evidence based direction derived from sophisticated qualitative and quantitative applications.

Uniquely, Streetscope is committed to driving research advancement by reshaping the methodologies and technologies used to: design, execute, interpret and deliver qualitative and quantitative research.

Comprehensive analytical written and visual reports, accessible online and on-demand, provide clients with a superior level of customer connection and intimacy and thus the insight to feed their business intuition.

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