

**SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYSIS AS A NEW RESEARCH TOOL –
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY TO DETERMINE THE RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY
OF ANALYSES ON THE SOCIAL WEB**

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ABSTRACT

The Internet has increasingly changed from a pure uni-directional information medium to a multi-directional exchange medium and thus nowadays holds a strong position in peoples' daily life. Today, the world-wide-web is used for information search and for vivid interchange of opinions and ideas amongst consumers. Especially the communication between users has experienced an enormous boom during the last decade. Out of the 140 billions monthly visited web sites, about 25% are social media like facebook, google+, and twitter (Rösch 2010). Social Media offers users a platform on which people all over the world can talk about their desires and need as well as about products or brands online (Theobald 2009). Listening to these discussions is worth for companies because this so called user-generated content presents a large and mainly free accessible knowledge base (Schaffner and Mohr 2009).

To acquire such user-generated data, media agencies and marketing companies currently offer a new research tool called 'Social Media Analysis' (SMA). Although this tool has gained increasing popularity in practice, it has been largely neglected in academia. Therefore, the SMA is currently in a dilemma of legitimacy. The goal of this exploratory paper was to overcome the Social Media Analyses' dilemma by testing SMA reliability and validity. Regarding the hybrid character of this tool, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in our approach.

The results of our empirical study emphasize the potential of SMA as a new marketing research instrument which mainly outstands by its rapidness, low costs and the opportunity to address a large audience. However, the sole use of this instrument as basis for relevant marketing decisions requires further research.

References available upon request