

Social and Digital Media Channel Mix Affects Engagement

An Analysis of the Impact of
Social and Digital Media
Channels on Engagement at SAP
SAPPHIRE Now 2014

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Neuraspective™

Social and digital media play an important role in brand management and messaging. Neuralytix analyzed the impact of social and digital media data over the course of the SAP SAPHIRE Now 2014 conference, held from June 3-5 2014. Our analysis reveals the effects of the mix of social and digital media channels on the sustainability of social (Twitter, Facebook, etc. and blogs) and digital media, primarily news feeds, conversations over time.

Key Findings

- Social media and blog posts help sustain conversations longer than news reports;
- Conversations based on social media and blogs tend to be more authentic, and hence more likely to create true engagement than news reports;
- Conversations about new and emerging technology were more likely to happen in social media and blogs than in traditional digital media news outlets such as PR Newswire and InfoWorld;
- SAP partners tended to overload the digital media news channels with press releases that were repeated over and over. These posts did not sustain conversations long past the initial time of release; and

- A balanced social and digital media channel mix sustained conversations, and hence engagement, longer than channels that relied on one source.

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Analysis

Methodology

During the course of the SAP SAPHIRE Now and ASUG 2014 conference, Neuralytix, in association with Blab an advanced social and digital media analysis software company, monitored social and digital media conversations during the conference. This was then organized into a variety of categories associated with the conference. We observed:

- The volume of conversations in each category;
- The volume of conversation for topics within a category;
- Drivers for each topic including influencers, digital and social media channel mix, and the raw posts that comprised some conversations; and
- The trajectory of the conversations. This included retrospective patterns and future predications of the volume of a conversation and its digital and social media channel components.

The volume of conversations provided us insight on the amount of engagement present in digital and social media channels. More conversations indicated more activity and hence greater engagement - about a topic. The examination of individual or grouped posts and influencers gave a sense of the quality of the conversations.

Reading the Blab Graphs

There are two types of graph in this report. The first type of graph shows the volume, channel mix, and predicted trajectory of a term within a topic. For example, Figure 1. shows the channel mix, volume, and projected trajectory of the social term within the SAP Jam topic within the Product category. The wider the graph, the more volume of conversations. The channel mix is color coded and delineated with an icon. The gray line shows the predicted path the volume of conversations will take over the next 72 hours.

The second graphic shows the duplicate raw posts that make up any set of conversations. Figure 3, for example, displays all the posts for a single Attunity press release that was repeated dozens of times in digital media news channels

Overview

A review of the mix of social and digital media channels¹ – such as Twitter, Facebook, news sites, and video sites - on conversations at SAP SAPHIRE Now 2014, revealed the impact these channels and the *mix* of channels have on creating engagement – or a long lasting dialog that introduces and reinforces a message - with customers, media, and analysts. Using the BlabPredicts² software

¹ A media channel is a way to reach an audience with a message. Television is a mass media broadcast channel, NYTimes.com is a digital news channel, the New York Times newspaper is a mass media newspaper channel, and Twitter is a social media channel. All media channels allow marketing professionals to transmit messages to a specific type of audience.

² More information about BlabPredicts can be found at <http://www.blabpredicts.com/>

from Blab, Neuralytix analyzed topics that BlabPredicts surfaced from social and digital media conversations as well as the conversations themselves.

Conversations are made up of posts from different types of channels from experts, such as industry analysts, journalists, financial analysts, and technical experts, marketing professionals from SAP, SAP Partners, SAP competitors, and, most important, IT professionals.

Some conversations were entirely composed of news from digital media sites. Others were driven more by social media including Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. Some conversations had a more balanced mix of channels. Conversations comprised of a mix of social media, news, and blog activity produced more sustainable engagement over time while less balanced conversations petered out and had little continued impact.

[Social Media and Blogs Sustain Conversations Longer](#)

One obvious observation about the channel mix was that blogs and social media posts from experts help sustain conversations longer. Engagement was more robust in the social media and blog channels which kept conversations going. Once social media conversations were underway, they tended to continue for days – in some cases three or four days - owing to the interplay between community members. The best scenarios for creating sustainable engagement occurred when a topic had digital news reports to jumpstart conversations and experienced a switch to expert-driven social media and blogging.

For the IT vendor, this means engaging experts and press early so that they can begin to prepare articles and blogs immediately, and then encouraging them to continue their insights through social media during the event.

Old versus New Technology

Also evident from the data, was the interplay between channels and technology. Conversations about older technology such as CRM and ERP, clearly relied heavily on news, especially press releases, to generate activity. As long as the news outlets kept releasing articles, there was activity around topics such as CRM and even cloud computing. A flood of press releases by SAP and its partners generated news early in the event. As soon as the press releases and news reports stopped, the conversations dropped off since the conversations did not pivot to social media or blogs.

Since older technology relied on news, especially press releases, to generate digital media attention, it allowed SAP partners to effectively drown out SAP's own messages. On the first two days of SAP SAPHIRE Now, IBM, Microsoft, and others flooded the news outlets with press releases that focused conversations in their direction.

In contrast, conversations around emerging technology and product segments such as SAP Jam, collaboration and big data generated more conversations through social media, especially Twitter, and blogs written by experts. Social media created conversations that lasted much longer – often days longer - even though a lower overall volume than the news outlets.

The most sustainable results came from activity across a mix of channels which supported each other. A good example of this was the SAP Jam “social” conversation. Throughout the course of the event, this topic was a mix of news, social media, and blogs (Figure 1.). The trajectory of the social conversation continued along its growth path the next day (Figure 2.) and was predicted to continue to do so for days after. Here, interplay between social media and digital news outlets creates a mutually supporting system that sustains conversations longer than any single media channel could do so by itself.

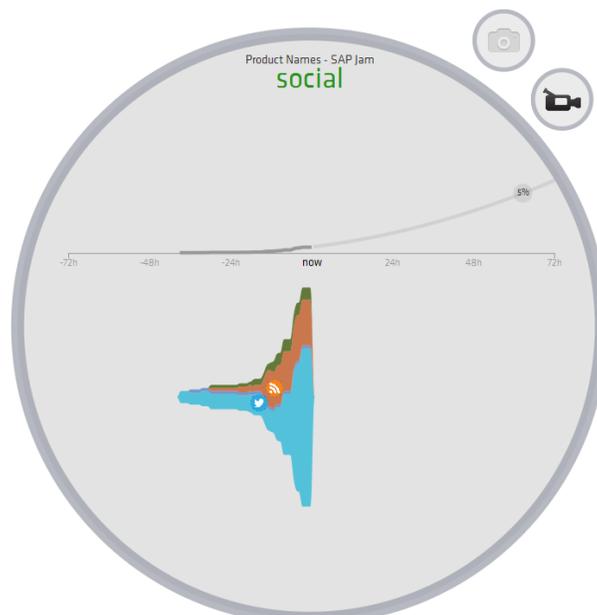


Figure 1: SAP JAM Social Topic 6-4-14 Channel Mix

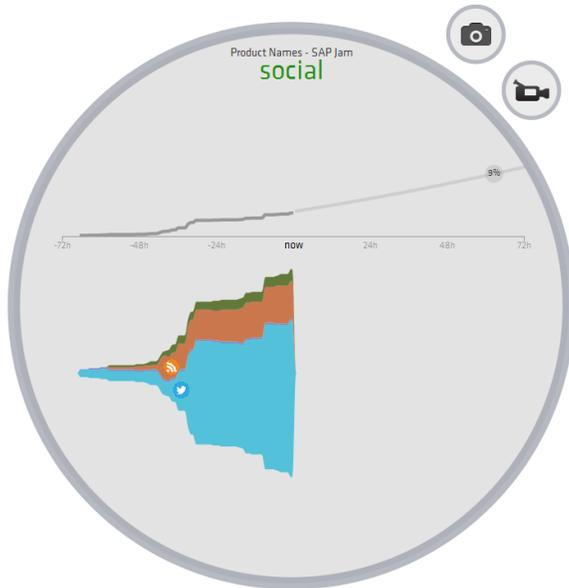


Figure 2: SAP JAM Social Topic 6-5-14 Channel Mix

Trusted Sources and Channel Stuffing

It became abundantly clear throughout the course of the event that digital media, especially news outlets, were susceptible to manipulation. In some cases, it was obvious that SAP partners and their PR agencies were effectively overloading the digital news channels with press releases. This resulted in conversations that would appear to grow – often doubling in size - dramatically and inexplicitly only to drop off quickly.

Diving down into the actual posts revealed that much of the news volume were the same press releases, lazily copied by news outlets, often verbatim. In some cases, the same press release was released several times over the course of the event, presumably to generate buzz.

The BlabPredicts software detected when a series of posts were actually the same repeated post and would group them together, making it obvious that this was an artifact and not serious engagement. For example, a press release from SAP partner Attunity generated dozens of posts in digital media outlets (Figure 3.) and picked up as an SAP Hana/IBM topic. This helped create an initial surge of activity in the topic (Figure 4.) which dissipated

quickly afterwards (Figure 5).

The screenshot displays a social media interface with a green border. At the top, a post titled "Attunity Introduces New Gold Client Solution to Accelerate SAP HANA® Adoption and Deployment" is shown with an RSS icon. The text of the post describes the solution's global reach and mentions partners like Microsoft, Oracle, IBM, and HP. Below the post, a timestamp reads "7:05 AM - 3 Jun 2014". The main content of the image is a grid of 12 smaller, identical-looking post thumbnails, each containing the same text as the original post, illustrating the rapid spread of the information.

Figure 3: Attunity Press Release Generates Dozens of Posts

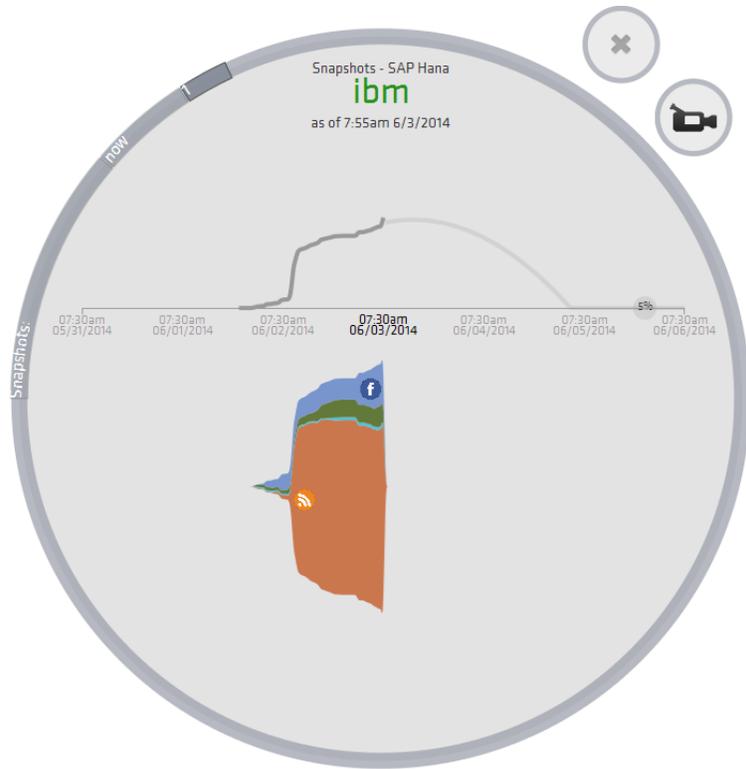


Figure 4: Attunity Press Release Creates Surge in Digital Media Volume.

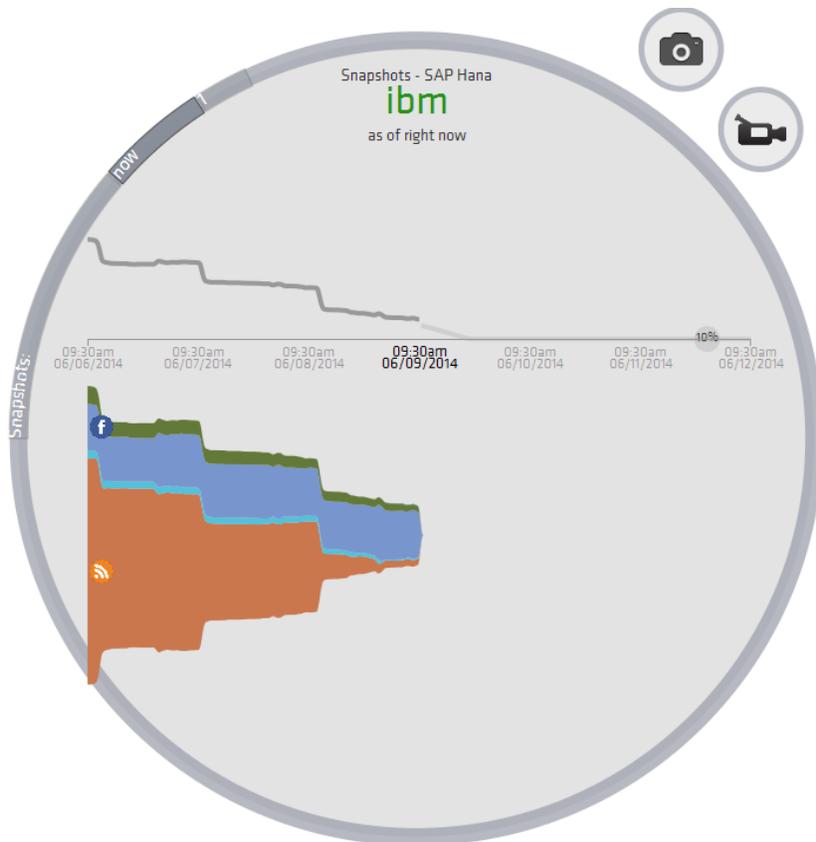


Figure 5: Steady decline in SAP HANA/IBM Topic

Social media and blog posts, on the other hand, came from more trustworthy sources, especially SAP executives and marketing professionals, industry analysts, and other experts. The conversations from these trusted sources tended to last longer and involve more participants.

For example, the posts from SAP Jam chief Sameer Patel often drove conversations around topics such as social, collaboration, and SAP Jam. The respect that Mr. Patel's followers have for him and the interesting posts plus those of other experts kept the

volume of conversations around SAP Jam, social, and collaboration growing throughout SAP SAPHIRE Now.

Conclusion

Social media and blogs help drive more sustainable conversations. A balanced mix of digital and social media channels works even better. Ignoring digital news channel manipulation, digital news posts provide a short-term burst of volume but need social media and blogs to continue conversations. Topics that depended on news media alone trailed off more quickly and their messages were less sticky,

Neuralytix believes that vendors should be careful about taking a quantity over quality approach. Overloading digital media channels with press releases does not create true lasting engagement. Conversations driven by news drop off much more quickly, often immediately, and involve fewer thought leaders than social media conversations. Instead, using select digital news outlets to prime the conversations and then following up with trusted expert analysis and conversation on social media creates a more sustainable engagement with customers and partners.

Note:

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About the Author

Tom Petrocelli is the Research Director, Enterprise Social, Mobile, and Cloud Applications. He is an experienced marketing, technology, and business executive with 29 years in the computer technology industry. He was most recently the Senior Analyst, Social Enterprise at Enterprise Strategy Group (ESG) where he covered social collaboration, social media, and the impact of social, mobile, and cloud on the software industry.

Before joining ESG, Mr. Petrocelli was Senior Vice President for Enterprise Software at IP.COM, where he led the software business unit. Tom's background spans software engineering, systems architecture, IT, product management, marketing, and general management.

About Neuralytix™

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