Social Media Brand Analysis: Dr Pepper

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Introduction

Sitting firmly in the number five spot, just behind Mountain Dew and one notch in front of Sprite, Dr Pepper is one of the more distinctive and recognizable brands in all of America. As the fifth best-selling soft drink, the brand has firmly entrenched itself in the American psyche as being just a little “different” from market leaders Coke and Pepsi, a position it continues to leverage in its marketing efforts as it struggles to hold its ground in a soft drink industry that has been in slow decline for some time now, thanks primarily to an increasingly fragmented beverage market.

This purpose of this brand analysis is look at some of the elements that consumers use to define the Dr Pepper brand from a social media perspective. Once this outside perspective is understood, a brand can use the findings to better evaluate the effectiveness of existing marketing strategies. Perhaps more importantly, with this perspective, brands can more effectively plan future marketing strategies and advertising campaigns that take advantage of the growing power and influence social media has in shaping consumer perception.

Specific components addressed by this case study include an evaluation of the Dr Pepper brand with regard to the volume of comments, most frequently discussed topics, positive and negative sentiment, emotional associations, geographic and demographic associations, current marketing campaigns, and correlations to consumer areas of interest. Brand extensions are analyzed and compared throughout with added consideration given to the most recent and heavily promoted addition to the Dr Pepper family, Dr Pepper TEN.

Volume & Sentiment

With 1.6 positive comments to every negative comment, Dr Pepper has a generally favorable standing in the social media universe. However, over the past year positive comments have declined by 8%, negative comments have declined by 1%, and neutral comments have increased by 9%. While negative comments are undesirable, one of the last things a brand wants to be is boring, so the increase in neutral comments may be of some concern for Dr Pepper.

The single largest spike in volume occurred on December 7, 2013. Examining the posts in detail on this date we find that they are largely the result of a Dr Pepper-sponsored halftime contest during the SEC championship game between Alabama and Auburn. The Dr Pepper College Tuition Giveaway, which asks hopeful students to submit their dream of achievement and then promote it, has been going on for seven years now. Participants have an opportunity to win a variety of prizes, but the granddaddy is $100,000 given away during a halftime contest at the ACC, Big Ten, Pac-12, and SEC Championship games each year.

In 2013, when interviewed after the contest, the winner thanked God and Dr Pepper. The combination of the two in the same sentence set off a frenzy of tweets and posts from people who found his comments to be odd and humorous.
Selected Twitter Comments:

“Halftime contest winner at SEC champ. game just thanked God and Dr. Pepper. First time ever both used in same sentence.”

“Dude thanked god for the opportunity to throw footballs into a giant Dr. Pepper can.”

“the kid just won 100k getting a football through a tire hole. He thanked Dr Pepper and God, in that order.”

Another strong spike in volume occurred on July 2nd in response to Dr Pepper’s Backyard Bash Twitter Party and a coupon for a $10 Walmart gift card consumers could earn by purchasing five 12-packs of Dr Pepper, and then sending in a picture of the receipt.

Multiple comments associated with the Backyard Bash were also found on several related blogs where bloggers were recruited by Dr Pepper via Collective Bias to promote the Backyard Bash. These comments were generally positive in nature and bloggers shared pictures, recipes using Dr Pepper (cake, BBQ pork, etc.), and ideas for hosting a summer backyard bash.
The second largest spike in conversation occurred on May 8th. Most comments on this date were the result of Dr Pepper reaching the sixteen million fan mark on Facebook and an associated contest. Fans were asked to “like” the post and comment as to why they love Dr Pepper for a chance to win a Dr Pepper mason jar mug. In addition to the comments, several promoters took the opportunity to upload pictures validating their love for Dr Pepper and thus, at least in theory, increasing their chances of winning.

**BRAND EXTENSIONS** - Breaking it down by the individual brand extensions, we find that Diet Dr Pepper is by far the most discussed, followed by Dr Pepper TEN and Cherry Vanilla Dr Pepper. Interestingly, Diet Cherry, Caffeine Free, Diet
Cherry Vanilla, and Diet Caffeine Free Dr Pepper combined don’t account for as many social media posts as the next most popular brand extension, Cherry Dr Pepper.

Senses & Emotion

Nearly 35% of all comments associated with Dr Pepper were about “taste.” While “taste” as the leading sense should likely be expected, it is interesting to note that more than 25% of all comments had something to do with the visual aspect of Dr Pepper and approximately 20% had something to do with “touch.” In this case “touch” is most commonly associated with the way Dr Pepper makes you “feel” than the actual physical touch of Dr Pepper.

More than perhaps anything else, the emotions associated with a brand serve to define it and stimulate purchase. A total of 26 emotions were analyzed, with the top ten emotions associated with Dr Pepper shown in the chart below. The most common emotion linked with Dr Pepper is “affection” followed closely by “joy.” These two positive emotions are reflective of what was learned from the sensory analysis and the association with “feel.” As with any soft drink, taste is a primary component, but with Dr Pepper feelings of “affection” and “joy” appear to be key.

Topics of Conversation

When analyzing the volume of comments, peaks of topic conversation were discovered that dominated social media conversations for a short period of time. These peaks were discussed earlier. Looking at September 2013 to September 2104 as a whole, rather than just the peaks, we are able to identify the general and reoccurring topics.
Brand Analysis: Dr Pepper

Topics associated with “drinking” Dr Pepper account for nearly 10% of all conversation. Diet Dr Pepper is also heavily discussed along with topics expressing “affection” such as “Good” and “Love Dr Pepper.” It is also interesting to see the close association people have with Dr Pepper and Texas. Coke is the leading competing soft drink brought up in conversations about Dr Pepper and is discussed approximately twice as much as Dr Pepper’s rival, Mr Pibb, and much more than Pepsi. The Dr Pepper Tuition Giveaway is also among the top topics of conversation. An association with pizza is another interesting takeaway from this analysis and likely something Dr Pepper should investigate for increased usage in advertising visuals and cooperative promotions.

For Diet Dr Pepper, the top five social media topics of conversation are:

1) Drink
2) Getting
3) Taste
4) Diet Coke
5) Regular Dr Pepper

Additional topics of interest that were found to be associated with Diet Dr Pepper are: coffee, caffeine, and breakfast. Indeed, there appears to be a relationship among a segment of Diet Dr Pepper drinkers with breakfast, coffee, and Diet Dr Pepper, with some choosing Diet Dr Pepper over coffee as their caffeinated beverage of choice in the morning, or in addition to it.

For Dr Pepper TEN the top five social media topics are:

1) Commercials
2) Drink
3) Free Dr Pepper TEN
4) Diet Dr Pepper
5) Dr Pepper TEN cans

Additional topics of interest are: “Dr Pepper 10 guy” and “Dr Pepper ad.” Clearly the current “Bold Country” advertising campaign for Dr Pepper TEN has gathered a substantial amount of attention. Sentiment associated with the commercials featuring a rugged retro mountain man in an exaggerated and humorous “manly” wilderness setting contributed to a positive rating of 25% and a negative rating of 20% for Dr Pepper TEN. However, over the past year positive sentiment has slipped 16%, and has recently bottomed out. Additionally, neutral sentiment has risen. These two factors are a strong indication that the current advertising campaign may be in need of a refresher.
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The following graph shows how positive and negative sentiment have changed over time, with positive sentiment in green, negative in red, and gray indicating neutral sentiment.

Demographic Analysis

Demographic analysis shifts the focus from what people are saying about Dr Pepper to who is saying it. The purpose of demographic analysis is to allow for more effective targeting and development of marketing campaigns.

ASSOCIATIONS - Of particular interest is the association consumers of Dr Pepper have with other topics. These associations are derived by analyzing what else consumers of Dr Pepper tweet about and then indexing these associations to all of the conversations on Twitter.

Based on 179,362 posts with identifiable interests
In the preceding chart several topics of general interest were identified and analyzed. The green circles to the left represent topics that are positively correlated with Dr Pepper while the blue circles to the right represent topics that are negatively correlated to Dr Pepper. The size of the circle indicates the volume and the further the circle is to either side the stronger the correlation/relationship. The topic of Texas, for example, is tweeted about by people who also tweet about Dr Pepper thirteen times more than average.

Sports appears to be one of the biggest topics of association for Dr Pepper consumers. The topics of college football, ESPN, SprotsCenter, NFL, baseball, basketball, and NBA are all closely affiliated. However, not all sports are positively correlated to Dr Pepper---Soccer has a negative correlation. Consumers of Dr Pepper tweet about soccer about one-fourth as much as the general population. So while the association of Dr Pepper to sports is strong, when planning advertising or marketing campaigns, the focus should likely be on specific sports rather than all sports in general. Additionally, any campaign featuring Justin Bieber or One Direction would likely be a significant blunder for the brand.

Although relatively small, it is interesting to see a strong association between Dr Pepper and “churches” and “Christianity.” Additionally the association between Dr Pepper and “Xbox” is of interest as is the association between Dr Pepper and “fitness” and “health.” Although the text is not shown on the graph, there is also a strong relationship between Dr Pepper and “parenting,” “being a mom,” “country music,” and “coupons.”

**GENDER** - Looking at Dr Pepper and the top brand extensions, we see that Dr Pepper is evenly split down the middle with regard to the gender of social media posts. Not surprisingly, posts about TEN are primarily from men. Interesting is what appears to be a favorability of Cherry Vanilla by women. Whereas Cherry is evenly split, women tweeted and posted about Cherry Vanilla more than men, the takeaway being that adding vanilla to any flavor may make it more appealing to women. Of course there are other aspects associated with the drink that would need to be researched, such as visual imagery, in order to verify this, but at least initially this relationship appears to be significant.

**AGE** - With regard to age, nearly half of the social media posts about Dr Pepper were from 18- to 24-year-olds and 64% were from those age 24 and younger. Comparing the individual brand extensions, we find that Cherry Vanilla is highly favored by the 18- to 24-year-old age group. Cherry is also a topic of discussion for this group, but skews older with more than a third of its posts coming from those age 35 and older. Dr Pepper TEN skews the oldest, with nearly 50% of social media posts from the 35 plus age cohort.
Geographic Analysis

Geographic analysis looks at the total number of social media posts per capita. Headquartered in Plano, Texas, Dr Pepper is discussed more in the Lone Star State than any other (as illustrated by the darker color). Oklahoma, Kansas, and Utah are also hotbeds for social media posts about Dr Pepper.

Diet Dr Pepper follows a similar geographic mold to regular Dr Pepper but is more concentrated in Kansas, Oklahoma and Utah and less so in Texas.

Social media posts for TEN are big in Texas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Utah, and Alabama. Cherry Dr Pepper is favored in the upper mid-west states along with Texas, Nevada, and Alabama. Social media posts for Cherry Vanilla are heavily concentrated in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Arkansas. There were no social media posts in Montana, Vermont, and Maine about Cherry Vanilla Dr Pepper.
“Always One of a Kind”

Debuting in January 2012 during the BCS National Championship Game, Dr Pepper kicked off a new slogan: “Always One of a Kind.” Marketing efforts associated with this slogan focus on the originality that is in individuals. To drive this message home, some Dr Pepper commercials show stories of semi-famous people who have experienced many of the same things everyone else has, but then found a way to make themselves truly unique, setting themselves apart as “one of a kind.”

The most recent commercials have focused on Latin singer Romeo Santos, rappers Macklemore & Ryan Lewis, and make-up demonstrator/YouTube sensation Michelle Phan.

This current group of “one of a kind” individuals truly are unique with regard to the positive and negative sentiment found in social media posts. Romeo Santos has received the greatest amount of positive sentiment at 38%, followed by Phan at 29% and Macklemore at 26%.

Interestingly, net sentiment shows high favorability for Romeo Santos but low favorability for Macklemore & Ryan Lewis (3%). Digging into the comments associated with Macklemore & Ryan Lewis, we find that there is no single reason for the lower net sentiment, only that the rappers appear to be more polarizing, with some users tweeting and posting their approval and others their disapproval.

Selected Twitter Comments:

“Boycotting dr. Pepper because macklemore is in their commercials”

“Ironic that Macklemore is talking about not selling out while on a Dr. Pepper commercial?”
Conclusions

From a social media perspective, the Dr Pepper brand is strong. However, the success of the current campaign may hinge on the brand’s ability to continually refresh its advertising. This was observed in the “Bold Country” advertising campaign for Dr Pepper TEN. While generally received favorably, sentiment associated with TEN is fading into disinterest. Additionally, although advertising associated with the “Always One of a Kind” slogan is perceived as generally favorably, the choice of individuals selected to represent this mantra has led to some polarization. Although brand indifference should be avoided by choosing exciting people, Dr Pepper should look closely at the values of its target audience when choosing to reflect those values in someone who represents the brand in order to avoid potential backlash by some promoters, as was observed as a result of the Macklemore commercial.

The volume of online conversation is greatly enhanced by contests and amplified when something unique results from these contests, as was seen with the remarks made by the winner of the 2013 Tuition Giveaway during the SEC Championship game. Creating situations that give people a reason or excuse to tweet about the brand should be incorporated into any marketing strategy. Although contrived situations are always a bad idea, the use of contests naturally lends itself to this goal and should continue to be a key component of Dr Pepper’s online strategy.

Some niche marketing opportunities were discovered as a result of the brand analysis and should be explored further in order to identify their viability. First among these is the appeal of vanilla to women. Some backlash associated with Dr Pepper TEN has resulted from the “It’s Not for Women” slogan. Repositioning Diet Cherry Vanilla as a women’s soft drink may breathe new life into this brand extension as well as create a balance to the more “manly” position of TEN.

The relationship of Dr Pepper with what appears to be “traditional” hometown values such as Christianity, cooking, coupons, country music, and parenting could be used to micro target online marketing campaigns aimed at people associated with these interests. These interests were found to be strongly correlated to Dr Pepper, but have lower volume than broader associated interests, such as sports. As a result, directly targeting these groups should prove most effective.

Although it is unclear if the strong association the brand has with sports, especially football, is a result of the brand’s history of targeting that area or natural interest, the associated success of going after this group is clear. The continued promotion of The College Tuition Giveaway should strengthen the brand’s position in this area. Additional opportunities may be sought out by highlighting college athletes who have a story that fits nicely into the “Always One of a Kind” campaign.
Methodology

A total of approximately 374,000 social media posts about Dr Pepper were sampled for the time period of September 1, 2013 to September 15, 2014. Although multiple social media sources were used to gather data, a full 82% of the comments were from Twitter.

A smaller sample was used to analyze the data used in the Senses and Emotion section. For this section of the report, a total of 2,380 comments were analyzed. These comments consisted of a mix of posts from Facebook (39%), Twitter (34%), and Google (25%).