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By

Jenna Brook Welch

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The Report committee for Jenna Brook Welch

Certifies that this is the approved version of the following report:

**Social Media Tools, Consumer-Generated Media and the Need for  
Micro-Targeting in the Digital Age**

**Approved By**

**Supervising Committee:**

**Supervisor:**

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Neal Burns

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Gary Wilcox

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by

**Jenna Brook Welch, B.A.**

**Report**

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**Social Media Tools, Consumer-Generated Media and the Need for  
Micro-Targeting in the Digital Age**

by

Jenna Brook Welch, M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2009

SUPERVISOR: Neal M. Burns

The purpose of this professional report is to more precisely define social media tools and consumer-generated media and consider their effects on advertising campaigns in the digital age. By examining the rather controversial “Motrin Mom” campaign, certain insights arose, including the necessity to embrace the concepts within the micro-targeting of demographics and the testing and measuring of consumer-generated media.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

The days of Mad Men are over, and the world of advertising is in a transitional state lying in the midst of what seems to be two separate models: the old governing rules of Ogilvy and traditional media and a new set of practices built upon the internet and social media. Advertisers go where the people are, and in August of 2009, The Nielson Company reported that seventeen percent of all time being spent on the Internet was either on social networking sites or blogging sites, which is a three hundred percent increase from 2008 (Keen 2009). Therefore, while some are maintaining their foothold in the realm of traditional advertising, many are doing ninety miles per hour on the digital media highway believing it to be the fast track to advertising and marketing success.

Social media and their associated connections and networks are internet tools that allow individuals and groups to generate user-created content including the use of text, video, audio or multimedia that are published and shared in one or several social environments. These environments include personal, political or corporate blogs from the blogosphere, video hosting sites such as YouTube, picture hosting sites such as Photobucket and Flickr, and social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace.

The opinion of the consumer has always been one of value, but with social media tools, each consumer has the opportunity to be heard in ways that have never existed before. Consumer-generated media or "varied and new

sources of online content that are created, initiated, circulated, shared and used by consumers who are intent on educating others about products, brands and services...often informed by relevant experience and typically archived online for access by other consumers and market influencers,” dominate the media landscape from blogs to YouTube. Through social media, consumers can express their opinions about a product, listen to other consumers and their experiences with the product, and thus engage in a conversation that creates a consumer-generated pool of data. By reporting consumer-generated media, measuring systems such as Nielson BuzzMetrics assists marketers in promoting and protecting their brand (Niederhoffer 2006).

Social media are accessible to millions, in turn creating opportunities for consumer-generated media on a worldwide scale, and while revolutionary and exciting in nature, for commercial and enterprise enhancing objectives such media are best used with extreme caution and not on a mere whim. If employed properly these tools can successfully launch, fuel and market an advertising campaign catapulting a product and/or brand to the heights of the iconic Coca Cola. However, if used improperly without due process of research, testing and measuring, social media tools can turn into “weapons of mass destruction” and ultimately wipe out a campaign and possibly blemish the reputation of the product and overall brand image.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THE MOTRIN MOM CAMPAIGN**

In September of 2008, Motrin set out to promote its brand by attempting to capture the target audience of mothers who carry their babies with them by various means that may cause physical aches or pains. The Motrin Mom campaign was displayed on the company's website as well as in print form in various magazines in distribution. The transcript is as follows:

Wearing your baby seems to be in fashion. I mean in theory it's a great idea. There's the front baby carrier, the sling, the shwing, the wrap, the pouch and who knows what else they've come up with. Wear the baby on your side, your front, go hands free. Supposedly it's a real bonding experience. They say that babies carried close to the bod tend to cry less than others, but what about me? Do moms that wear their babies cry more than those who don't? I sure do. These things put a ton of strain on your back, your neck, your shoulders, did I mention your back? I mean I'll put up with the pain, because it's a good kind of pain. It's for my kid. Plus, it totally makes me look like an official mom, and so if I look tired and crazy, people will understand why. (Gates 2008)

Motrin's slogan, "We Feel Your Pain," positions its brand on the side of the consumer by communicating a message of empathy for pain. The aim of the Motrin Mom campaign was to convey their sense of empathy to mothers who

have infants and may carry them in a way that causes bodily aches. The gesture is in line with the brand image, but the tone and wording of the transcript coincidentally did not transmit a positive message to a micro-group of blogging moms.

## **The Backlash**

The uproar took only a few hours to go viral. After the first known online reference to the campaign from Magic City Slingers on November 14, 2008, it ultimately became the top trending topic over the next few days on approximately 300 blogs, including the micro-blogging site of Twitter, a few mainstream media outlets and eventually YouTube (Neff 2008). The comments began spreading across the internet, but the wildfire did not start until November 15, 2008, when the dialogue and criticism of the Motrin Mom campaign was initiated via Twitter, where quality and quantity of tweets is important, because each has a restriction of 140 characters. The instigator of the conversation is attributed to the blogger Amy Gates of Colorado and [www.crunchydomesticgoddess.com](http://www.crunchydomesticgoddess.com), who currently has over 5,000 followers on Twitter. Along with tweeting she also sent an e-mail to Motrin regarding her thoughts on the campaign:

Motrin's new ad campaign targeting baby wearing is offensive, disrespectful and wrong on so many levels. If a mom is experiencing significant pain from wearing her baby, then she

needs to adjust her carrier/sling or try another one. Baby wearing has so many proven benefits to both mom and baby, and women have been wearing babies since the beginning of time. Stop disrespecting us moms, Motrin. Unlike our babies, we weren't born yesterday, and we will take our \$ elsewhere. (Gates 2008)

Within the hour, fellow mommy blogger Jessica Gottlieb of Los Angeles, California, followed suit and tweeted to her followers currently counted at over 10,000. Her semi-famous tweet read, "Dear <https://www.motrin.com>, fuck you and your campaign. I wore my baby while you got an MBA; it's called ibuprofen and generic is cheaper." On November 16, 2008, she used the #motrinmoms tag on Twitter to track tweets about the campaign and Motrin Brand. Almost instantly comments started to cascade down the page on #motrinmoms, and by the next day it had approximately 1,500 tweets on the subject (Neff 2008).

Social media consultant, mommy blogger, editor and founder of SkimbacoLifestyle.com and SkimbacoHome.com, Katja Presnal, expressed, "moms have brains, don't treat us like that and learn to market to us. We spend 75% of our families' money" (Evans 2008). She currently has over 17,000 followers on Twitter and utilized her account to ask other moms about the Motrin campaign by tweeting, "Moms! Watch <https://www.motrin.com/Mom-ologue> and let me know what you think! Me: I'm all for baby wearing and NO for Motrin." Presnal used the responses to her tweet to create a YouTube video entitled,

"Motrin Makes Mom Mad" which showcased various Motrin protest tweets under #motrinmoms. User kikarose, Jessica Rosenberg tweeted, "Wow Motrin, way to mismarket. My sling is saving my life and has been for 15 months now. Have you tried carrying a baby all day?" User LandOfLovings, Jennafer Loving, tweeted, "I can't believe Motrin didn't think to test that ad on the demographic. How did that even make it past the brainstorming stage?" User MobileMommy, Laurie tweeted, "Wow Motrin, you REALLY messed up with that ad. No more Motrin for my family." User KatyLinda tweeted, "They obviously did not consult any real moms when making the ad...it's a shame." User typeamom, Kelby Karr tweeted, "I can't even count the ways I'm offended right now. Taken aback! This is a serious screw-up for such a major co." User merrycricket, Mary tweeted, "Baby wearing IS a good thing, not just a theory and better for mom and baby, not a fashion statement." The video featured other such tweets and had over 60,000 views at the time of controversy in 2008 and currently has over 100,000 views. Following the surge of online criticisms of the Motrin Mom campaign, various outlets, including the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Forbes, Reuters, AP and Advertising Age covered stories about the campaign including the actions by Johnson & Johnson and Motrin that followed suit (Neff 2008).

### **The Response**

Motrin's response and apology to the onslaught of complaints concerning their new campaign came in electronic form. Johnson & Johnson temporarily

shut down the Motrin website on November 16, 2008, in response to the uproar. They reopened their site on November 17, 2008, to show a response from Kathy Widmer, McNeil's Vice President of Marketing:

With regard to the recent Motrin advertisement, we have heard you. On behalf of McNeil Consumer Healthcare and all of us who work on the Motrin Brand, please accept our sincere apology. We have heard your concerns about the ad that was featured on our website. We are parents ourselves and we take feedback from moms very seriously. We are in process of removing this ad from all media. It will, unfortunately, take a bit of time to remove it from our magazine advertising, as it is on newsstands and in distribution. Thank you for your feedback. It's very important to us. (Owyang 2008)

Widmer also responded to various blogging individuals, such as the ones at [www.mom-101.com](http://www.mom-101.com) and [www.crunchydomesticgoddess.com](http://www.crunchydomesticgoddess.com), who expressed their distaste of the Motrin Mom campaign with this e-mail:

I am the Vice President of Marketing for McNeil Consumer Healthcare. I have responsibility for the Motrin Brand, and am responding to concerns about recent advertising on our website. I am, myself, a mom of 3 daughters. We certainly did not mean to offend moms through our advertising. Instead, we had intended to

demonstrate genuine sympathy and appreciation for all that parents do for their babies. We believe deeply that moms know best and we sincerely apologize for disappointing you. Please know that we take your feedback seriously and will take swift action with regard to this ad. We are in process of removing it from our website. It will take longer, unfortunately, for it to be removed from magazine print as it is currently on newsstands and in distribution. (Gumbiner 2008)

### **The Reality in Perspective**

The Motrin Mom campaign did offend a number of moms, and it did cause an uproar; however, between the YouTube posts of the actual Motrin and the video created by Presnel, approximately 280,000 views were counted. "Even without subtracting duplicate views by the same people, which are impossible to know, that amounts to less exposure than running a single thirty-second ad on a cable news network" (Neff 2008).

A Lightspeed Research survey speculated that almost ninety percent of women had never seen the Motrin Mom ad. Of those who did see the video advertisement, approximately forty-five percent liked the video, forty-one percent were neutral and fifteen percent did not like it. Out of all of those who were surveyed, a mere eight percent said that the ad negatively affected their feelings of Motrin Brand (Klaussen).

According to an analysis and a blog by Lexalytics, only thirty-five percent of tweets about the campaign were negative with the rest being either neutral or positive, and this includes those who utilized the #motrinmoms hash tag (Neff 2008).

### **CHAPTER THREE: CONCLUSIONS**

On the surface, the Motrin Mom campaign reached their target audience, initiated engagement in dialogue about the brand, and found a way to track outreach (Evans 2008).

However, the Motrin Mom campaign was not successful in either strategy or execution. Social media tools and consumer-generated media are powerful and depending upon the volume, attitude expressed, and/or “authority” of those posting the comments, they can magnify positive buzz or negative feedback. Erin Kotecki Vest of QueenofSpainBlog.com referenced the blogging moms that took down the Motrin Mom campaign when she expressed, “What happened this weekend went from smart, powerful activism to Palin-rally lynch mob,” explaining Motrin Brand’s hasty decision to remove the campaign from all media. She went on further to say that corporate marketing corporations are aware of the power of mommy bloggers, because they are buying advertisements, engaging women online, sponsoring trips, sending these women free items and even paying them for consultations (Neff 2008).

If corporate America is aware of the power of blogging moms, then the Motrin Mom campaign was launched under the assumption that mothers would fall in line with the attitude and message of the advertisement. Unfortunately for Motrin, their lack of research and testing ultimately lead to the demise of the

Motrin Mom campaign. Widmer sent an e-mail to Katja Presnal that reads as follows:

We listened extensively to moms, the insights about their lives, and how their pain impacts them...I think where this went wrong was the creative expression we used...The tone was intended to be real and lighthearted, but it came off as irreverent...We did conduct focus groups with moms. But truthfully they probably weren't extensive enough to uncover this. (Neff 2008)

The Motrin Mom campaign reached moms, but unfortunately for Motrin Brand, its message was, like most campaigns, not well received by the entire target demographic. Marketing to a large demographic of consumers in this personalized, digital age is more complicated than it used to be with the more traditional models of advertising. "Not all women think alike," as Holly Buchanan said in her article, "Was the Motrin Moms Campaign Really a Failure?" Motrin Brand utilized this understanding in their Motrin Mom campaign, because they specifically targeted moms who carry their babies, not all women. However, not all moms think alike either, thus, creating the need for micro-targeting. Micro-targeting is the creation of "customized messages, proof points and offers, accurately predicting their impact, and delivering them directly to individuals (Agan).

In order to achieve micro-targeting success, a company must test their campaign on a wide audience of their consumers to discover smaller distinctive segments within their target demographic and thus make small modifications to the campaign to reach these varied groups of valued consumers. Advertisers cannot always please the consumer population at large, but with micro-targeting and testing, they can produce messages that reach as many consumer segments as possible as well as discover campaign error as these messages relate to the various groups of consumers. As demonstrated with the Motrin Mom campaign, “if you get it right with some, but blow it with others, your whole campaign can go down the tubes” (Buchanan 2009).

If Motrin Brand had carefully monitored buzz about their brand and the campaign utilizing measuring systems like Nielson BuzzMetrics, they would have discovered how consumers, like the blogging moms, felt about them and the current campaign in real time. This would have allowed Motrin Brand to capture immediate insight as the backlash unfolded. They also would have discovered exactly who was generating consumer-generated media, the volume of those creating buzz, and who was ultimately being impacted (Niederhoffer 2006).

The upheaval of the Motrin Mom campaign verifies the power that lies behind social media, but it also points out that the use of social media for marketing tactics should incorporate extensive research, testing on small

segments, constant monitoring and of course measuring, which will lead to more strategy based marketing decisions in the future.

While corporate blunders are not new to the marketing world (e.g. the well-known Jarvis postings tagged Dell), opportunities should be found or made around the corner of every action of execution. When a small demographic of blogging moms attacked the Motrin Mom campaign, Johnson & Johnson and Motrin panicked, removed all remnants of the promotion and retreated into apologies and campaign failure. Their immediate reaction should have been one of a public relations nature: remain calm, assess the situation and take all opportunities to be proactive.

According to a Lexalytic blog post, "If Motrin's brand managers were not just listening to the market, but accurately measuring it too, they might not have been so quick to panic and pull the ad" (Neff 2008). It was a top trending topic, but because of tracking problems with Twitter, many that saw the tweets involved in the controversy may not have been directly involved, and therefore the Motrin Mom controversy is not likely to affect "search engine results for "Motrin", be a mainstream press story, or cause damage to stock price" (Owyang 2008).

By pulling the ad, Johnson & Johnson and Motrin "bowed to a vocal flash mob that represents a tiny fraction of moms." According to a blog by Tom Martin, the President of Zehnder Communications, New Orleans and Lexalytics,

Johnson & Johnson “should have kept the campaign in place, apologized to critics in whatever medium they had used to complain, and used the opportunity to engage in dialogue” (Neff 2008).

Even though the Motrin Mom campaign failure did not collect an overabundance of press, most did not shed a positive light on Motrin Brand or their ability to uncover consumer insight. By abandoning the campaign, Johnson & Johnson and Motrin Brand missed out on the opportunity to turn their bad press into good press and ultimately turn the tide in their favor while improving the campaign for their target market by making it more relevant to their needs.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: IN RESOLUTION**

As more and more companies utilize online networks to market and promote their brands and products, “you can expect to see more stumbles from corporate giants...Web ads, blogging, social networks and all the tools afforded by the Web are still uncharted territory for many companies, and many are still struggling to understand how to use them effectively” (Madway 2008).

This digital age has given rise to the need for micro-targeting. It will challenge advertising and marketing professionals to delve deeper into research and ultimately arrive at a more heightened and perceptive level of consumer insight. Along with the need for micro-targeting, comes the requirement for more routine testing and measuring of advertising campaigns as they produce consumer-generated media, which will produce more strategy based corporate marketing endeavors. New media call for new metrics to assess the levels of engagement of consumer-generated content. The methods of the past and the cultural changes that have impacted the trust and confidence in traditional media are represented in the adoption of these new methods of measuring of consumer involvement. The Motrin Case is instructive, and its exposition in this report may help hasten better practices for commercial use of social networks.

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## **VITA**

Jenna Brook Welch was born in Canyon, Texas. After completing her work at Canyon High School, she entered Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas. Her studies focused on Advertising with a minor in Communication Design, and she received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in August of 2008. She immediately went on to pursue Graduate School at The University of Texas at Austin where she studied Advertising with emphasis on Strategic Planning.

Permanent E-mail Address:       jennawelch00@yahoo.com

This report was typed by the author.