

Just How Negative Is the Blogosphere?

An Analysis of the Tone of Consumer-Written Blogs

Does Negativity Prevail in Consumer Generated Media (CGM)? Are Consumer Generated Media More Negative than the Mainstream Media (MSM)?

Among many members of the media and consumers, **the conventional wisdom is that the blogosphere is a medium where negativity prevails.**

One tenet of this conventional wisdom is that few people blog about pleasant visits to a local store, about service representatives from the cable company who arrive on time and dispatch problems with ease, or about recently purchased gadgets that are “just perfect” and that “don’t cost that much”. Instead, conventional wisdom dictates that only aggrieved consumers take the time to blog about their experiences.

But is the conventional wisdom correct?

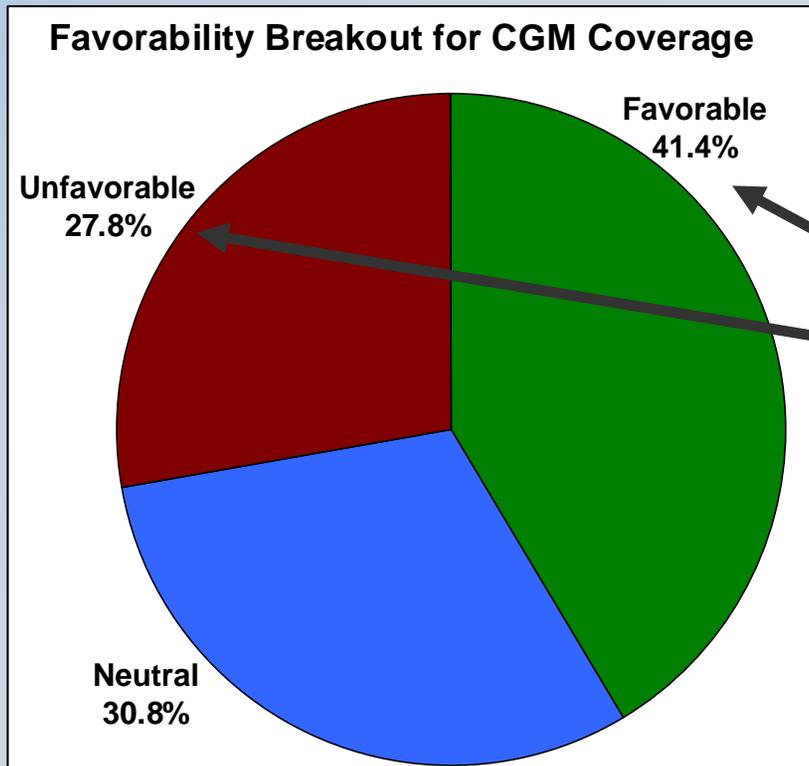
To answer this question, CARMA studied the results from its recent examination of more than 3,700 Consumer Generated Media (CGM) posts that included in-depth research of a random sampling of 300 of these posts. All posts examined for this study appeared from January 1 - February 28, 2009 and discussed one or more of 17 selected leading national retailers, with CARMA determining how frequently Consumer Generated Media published negative versus positive coverage.

CARMA also compared these CGM results to its analysis of more than 75,000 Mainstream Media (MSM) stories in U.S. media outlets from October 1, 2008 - February 28, 2009 about major corporations, trade associations, and other organizations.

All results discussed on this ensuing analysis are based on these two article universes.

Does Negativity Prevail in Consumer Generated Media (CGM)?

CARMA's analysis of Consumer Generated Media coverage of leading U.S. retailers found that the blogosphere was unfavorable in less than 28 percent of posts, while it was favorable in more than 41 percent of posts. Based on this data alone, it is not accurate to say that the blogosphere is pervasively negative. Perhaps the blogosphere is negative in other ways . . .



CARMA found that the Blogosphere was favorable more often than it was unfavorable by a large margin.

Is Consumer Generated Media Coverage (CGM) More Negative than Mainstream Media Coverage (MSM)?

Perhaps conventional wisdom saying that the blogosphere is negative is shorthand for a more nuanced, but less concise thought:

the blogosphere isn't wholly negative, it is just more negative than the mainstream media.

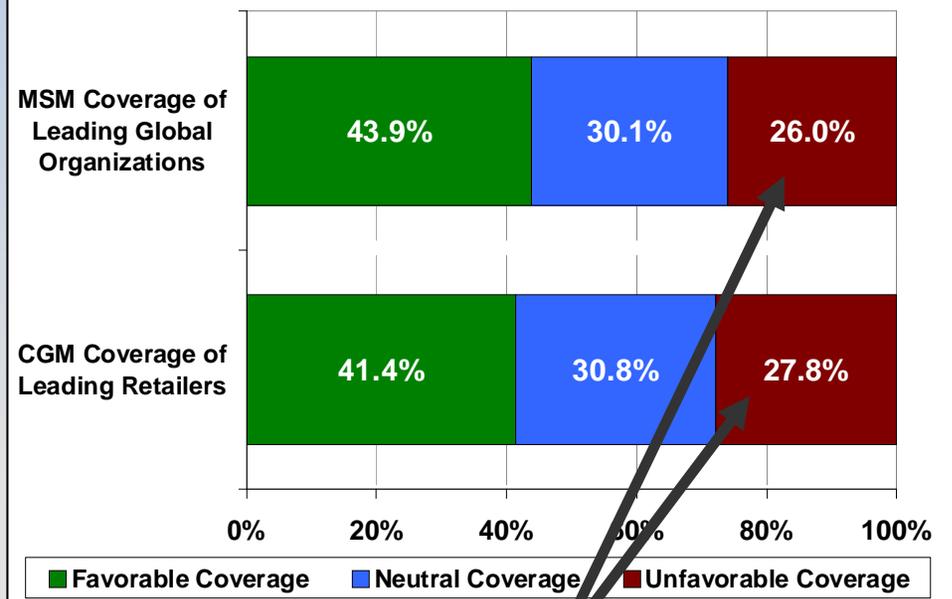
Let's compare the results from CARMA's analysis of CGM coverage with the results from CARMA's analysis of Mainstream Media reports to see if this is true:

Mainstream Media reports were favorable 43.9 percent of the time. Consumer Generated Media reports were favorable 41.4 percent of the time, just 2.5 percentage points less than the Mainstream Media.

MSM reports were neutral 30.1 percent of the time. CGM reports were neutral 30.8 percent of the time, less than 1 percentage point greater than the Mainstream Media.

MSM reports were unfavorable 26.0 percent of the time. CGM reports were unfavorable 27.8 percent of the time, 1.8 percentage points greater than the Mainstream Media.

Favorability Breakout: The Mainstream Media vs. The Blogosphere



Only minor differences emerged between how frequently bloggers provided negative coverage and how frequently the mainstream media did so.

Does Negativity Prevail in Consumer Generated Media (CGM)?

As we just have seen, it certainly is true that the blogosphere offered negative coverage more frequently than the mainstream press. But, CARMA's results show that this difference was not considerable and suggest that this difference alone also may not be enough to support the conventional wisdom.

Perhaps the conventional wisdom about the negativity of the blogosphere is demonstrated in still another way.

Perhaps the negativity of the blogosphere is demonstrated not through how frequently negative blog posts appear, but through how intensely negative blog posts are.

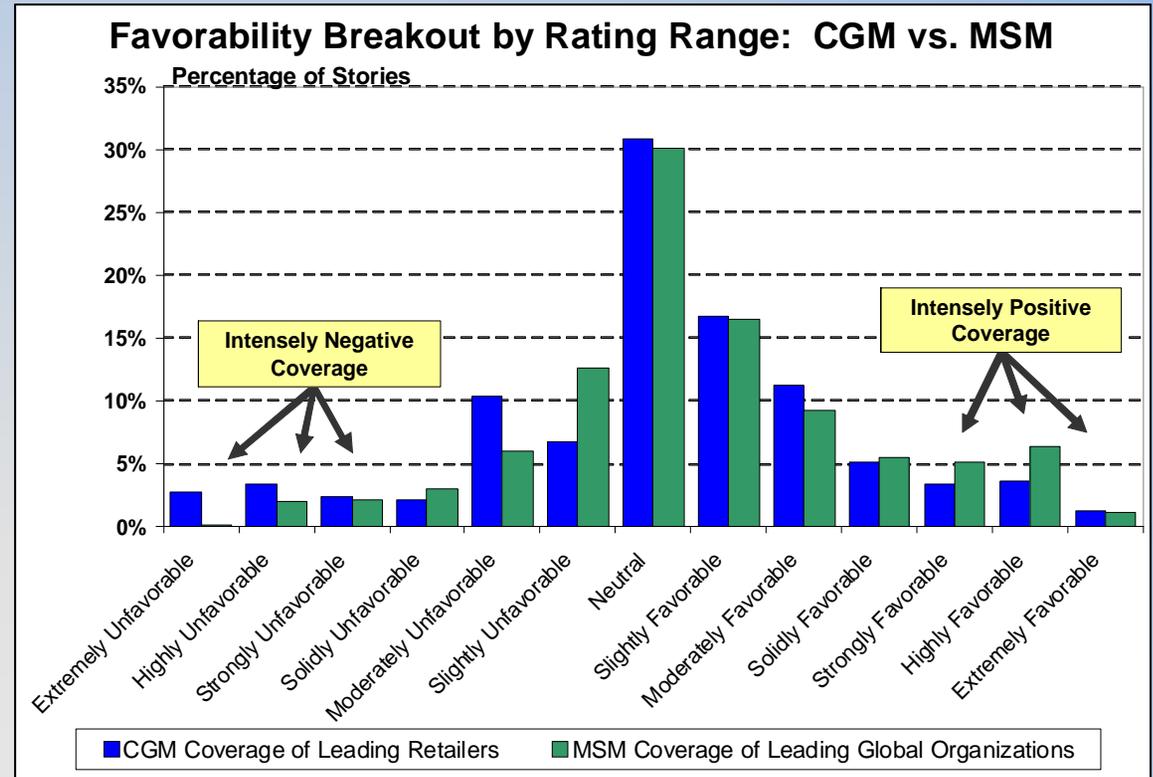
Maybe the difference is that, when blog posts are negative, they are **NEGATIVE!!!**, while the mainstream media is more restrained in its criticisms of leading companies and organizations?

Let's see how this bears out using CARMA's recent research.

Does Negativity Prevail in Consumer Generated Media (CGM)? Is Consumer Generated Media Coverage (CGM) More Negative than Mainstream Media Coverage (MSM)?

CARMA compared how often the blogosphere offered intensely negative coverage for leading retailers to how often the mainstream media offered similarly negative coverage for leading companies and organizations. Under the CARMA Favorability Rating System, intensely negative coverage is defined as reporting that is strongly unfavorable or worse.

The chart to the right plots not only how frequently coverage from Mainstream Media and Consumer Generated Media was unfavorable, neutral, and favorable, but also how frequently coverage from Mainstream Media and Consumer Generated Media fell within each of CARMA's 13 Favorability Rating Ranges. This chart enables us to see just how often bloggers and the mainstream media were intensely negative.

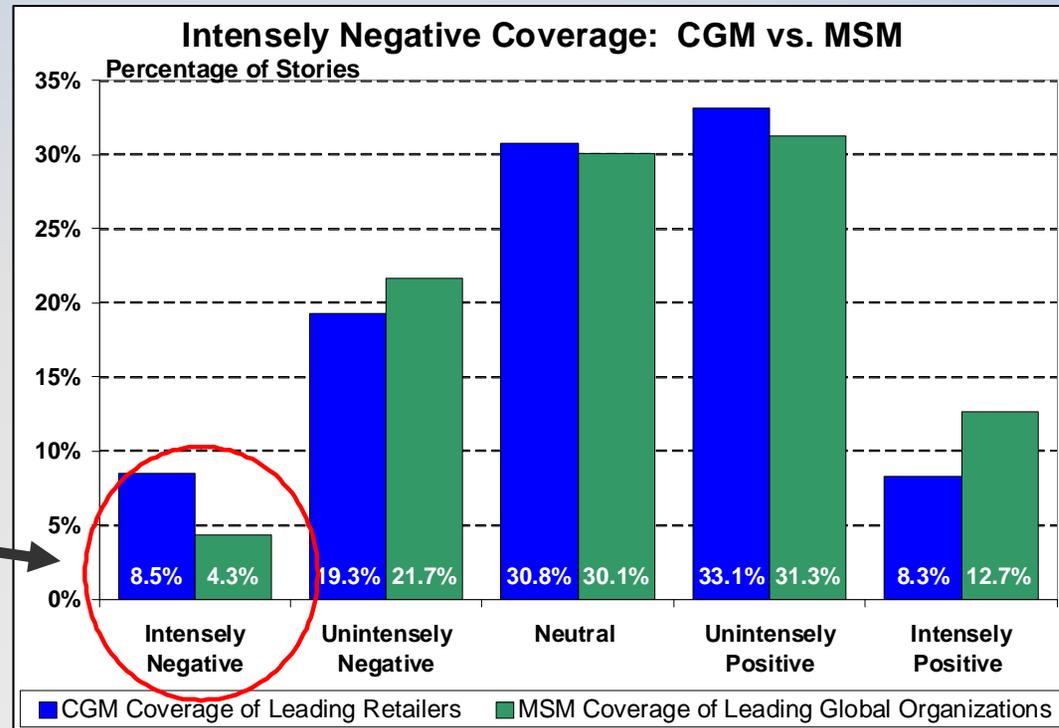


Does Negativity Prevail in Consumer Generated Media (CGM)? Is Consumer Generated Media Coverage (CGM) More Negative than Mainstream Media Coverage (MSM)?

Let's take a slightly different look at the data displayed on the last chart by grouping together intensely negative coverage and distinguishing it from unintensely negative coverage. Also, the results for intensely positive and unintensely positive coverage are grouped together as well.

Organizing the results thusly shows that 8.5 percent of CGM reports were intensely negative, while only 4.3 percent of MSM reports were so, making the blogosphere about twice as likely as the mainstream press to publish intensely negative coverage.

Bloggers published intensely negative coverage about twice as often as the Mainstream Media.



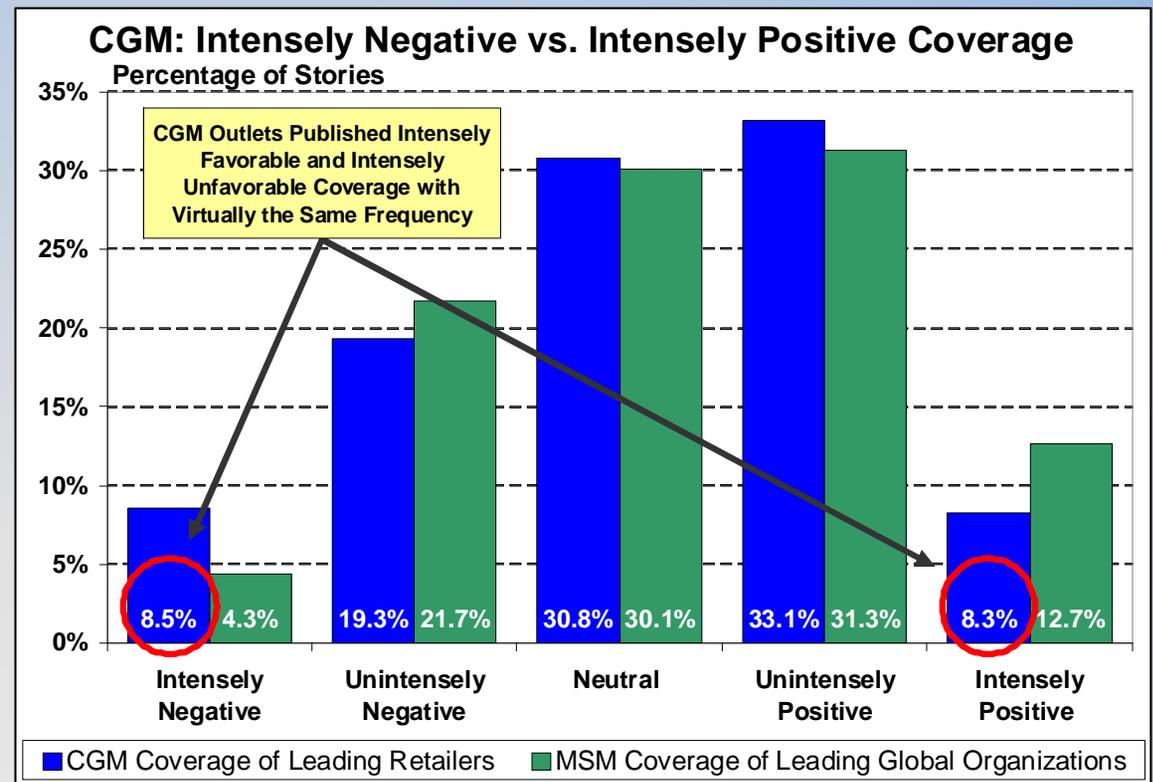
Does Negativity Prevail in Consumer Generated Media (CGM)? Is Consumer Generated Media Coverage (CGM) More Negative than Mainstream Media Coverage (MSM)?

Although we have established that it is accurate to say that bloggers are more intensely negative than the mainstream press, if the conventional wisdom is true, shouldn't CGM outlets publish intensely positive coverage only infrequently?

Here is the same chart as displayed on the previous page, but now examine the frequency of intensely positive coverage from CGM.

CARMA's research shows that CGM coverage was intensely positive in 8.3 percent of reports, virtually the same frequency as intensely negative reporting.

However, CGM media trailed the MSM in publishing intensely positive coverage, with the mainstream media offering such coverage 12.7 percent of the time.



Does Negativity Prevail in Consumer Generated Media (CGM)? Is Consumer Generated Media Coverage (CGM) More Negative than Mainstream Media Coverage (MSM)?

With CARMA's results in mind, is it accurate to say that the blogosphere is a bastion of negativity? Is it correct when:

- blogs published favorable coverage more frequently than they published unfavorable coverage;
- blogs published a comparable share of negative coverage as did mainstream media outlets;
- blogs published intensely negative coverage in less than 10 percent of their posts; and
- blogs published intensely positive coverage just as frequently as they published intensely negative coverage?

CARMA's judgment is, **no, the conventional wisdom about the blogosphere's negativity needs reconsideration.**

Appendix: The CARMA Favorability Rating System

All stories and blog posts included in the study were analyzed using CARMA's favorability rating system, which determines how favorably a story or blog post depicts the entities being examined for this study. The CARMA favorability rating systems runs on a scale of zero to 100, with all posts starting at neutral 50 rating. A 100 score is the best rating a post can receive, while zero is the worst. The post's tone, placement, and positive or negative messages and source comments all contribute to the rating. Following are the criteria that determine a post's rating:

Placement (Maximum 20 Points)

CARMA first examines the size and location within a publication of the story, whether the entity CARMA is monitoring appears in the headline and whether a photo or other graphic is present and then determines whether these factors weigh favorably or unfavorably on how that entity is depicted. CARMA adds or subtracts a maximum of 20 points combined for all these factors.

Sources and Messages (Maximum 20 Points)

CARMA then examines the body of the story to identify any person commenting on the entity being monitored and determines whether the comments reflect favorably or unfavorably upon that entity. Similarly, CARMA identifies any positive or negative messages conveyed about the entity in the story, determining how they reflect upon the entity's image. CARMA adds or subtracts a maximum of 20 points combined for comments from sources and for positive and negative messages.

Tone of Post (Maximum 10 Points)

The last factor that CARMA examines is the tone of the story. CARMA analyzes whether the post is slanted toward or against the entity being monitored and whether the post contains extreme language that reflects favorably or unfavorably upon the entity. CARMA adds or subtracts a maximum of 10 points based on these factors.

The Meaning of Overall CARMA Ratings

0-20: Extremely Unfavorable	51-54: Slightly Favorable
20-30: Highly Unfavorable	55-59: Moderately Favorable
31-35: Strongly Unfavorable	60-64: Solidly Favorable
36-40: Solidly Unfavorable	65-69: Strongly Favorable
41-45: Moderately Unfavorable	70-79: Highly Favorable
46-49: Slightly Unfavorable	80-100: Extremely Favorable
50: Neutral	

Appendix: Study Methodology

Beginning in early 2009, CARMA and CyberAlert began monitoring for English-language discussions of the selected 17 leading retailers that appeared on consumer generated media.

CyberAlert utilized its *BlogSquirrel*[™] service to monitor more than five million blog postings each day from a total of 50+ million blogs worldwide for any mention of any of the selected retailers. With *BlogSquirrel*, CARMA and CyberAlert compiled a total of 3,732 relevant blog posts and other consumer generated discussions for the period of early January – through the end of February.

From this article universe, CARMA selected a random sample of 300 blog posts and analyzed them in-depth using CARMA's industry-leading media analysis and favorability methodology.

For the mainstream media stories discussed in this report, CARMA analyzed the results of its customized and proprietary research for its clients around the United States, including Fortune 500 companies in the financial services, pharmaceutical, automotive, energy, retail, and IT industries.