

e-cigarettes **& HEALTH**

a report that surveys the social media landscape of @BluCigs



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SM ANALYTICS

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project **INTRODUCTION**

We chose e-cigarettes because of the controversy surrounding them, and how heavily social media has played into that controversy. We noticed all of the vaping memes that were prevalent online; we remembered how the picture of Leonardo DiCaprio smoking an e-cig went viral; and we were mostly confused by all of the argumentative conversation surrounding the health benefits and dangers of e-cigs. We looked at various e-cigarette manufacturers, but decided on Blu for its consistent social presence and reputable brand image in the cigarette community. The company was started in 2009 and today, it holds a significant portion of the retail market share. Even celebrities like Jenny McCarthy have done promotion on Blu's behalf, and we thought we could effectively survey the e-cigarette conversation through Blu's lens, since it claims to be a "lifestyle" brand.



executive **SUMMARY**

Although e-cigarettes have been credited as a healthier substitute for traditional smoking and their popularity has dramatically increased over the last several years, many health experts advise against using them. We want to investigate public sentiment regarding e-cigarettes by identifying influencers across all social media platforms and analyzing topics of discussion as well as several other factors. In this report, we will analyze insights from both earned and owned data from Blu, a well-established e-cigarette brand. We will also analyze the social media influencers that are strongly in favor of or against the product.

data sources

- **Crimson Hexagon**
- Owned Data Scope:
- For engagement by day: 16,104 tweets with identifiable locations were analyzed.
- For tweets with highest engagement: total number of tweets that Blu had to date, equaling 125,041 tweets.
- Earned Data Scope: 49,816 total posts between December 15, 2016 and January 15, 2016. Number of influential Authors: 50
- **NodeXL**
- Scope: 18,000 tweets over 1 month time period (March-April 2016)
- **FollowerWonk**
- **Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Forums, Tumblr**

outline of key insights

Owned Data

Peak engagement times: What caused this?

Engagement by time of day? When do people engage?

Earned Data

Sentiment: What are people's attitudes across different platforms?

NodeXL

Who are key influencers?

What are the most-discussed topics?

What are different "clusters" discussing?

main recommendations

- We would like to make recommendations to Blu to engage more with users on social media. Not only with their customers, but with people who speak negatively about e-cigarettes to provide them with informative, engaging content about the product and brand that may cause a shift in attitude.
- We recommend that Blu take insights such as peak engagement times and peak engagement tweets to better communicate with its followers and find what sparks conversations.
- We thought it would be interesting for Blu and a health organization such as the CDC to go head-to-head on social media and debunk the rumors, stereotypes and health concerns surrounding e-cigarettes. We feel that this would cause engagement to go through the roof, and it would likely garner attention from media sources and popular contributors to the e-cigarette conversation.

background of data

- According to the CDC, the rise of e-cigarettes began occurring in 2011, with a sharp increase between 2013 and 2014. Since each account that we will be monitoring was started at a different point in time, we will examine based on the starting dates of those accounts, as long as they were created after 2011. Many of our findings come from shorter time periods within this time frame and will be indicated as such, accordingly.
- In order to better understand our data, we will first give a little background on our client, Blu e-cigarettes. Blu currently has 3,337 fans on Facebook; 24,378 followers on Twitter; 5,564 subscribers on Youtube; and 9,614 followers on Instagram. As we touched on before, we chose Blu because of the controversy behind e-cigarettes, and Blu is a major player in the e-cigarette industry. Blu was consistently active on social media and engaging with users, so we felt that it would provide us with some interesting content to work with.

business **PROBLEMS**

Several challenges and controversies are tied to the topic of e-cigarettes. At the beginning of their existence, they were primarily thought to be a healthy way to help people stop smoking. As time passed, several health organizations and other related businesses began to find negative health consequences, either potential or proven. Because of this, there are now those who are pro-ecigarette and those who are anti-cigarette. Not only that, but “vaping” has become part of youth culture and is trending among many teenagers and young adults.

suggested **GOALS**

The goal of our research is to discover the “buzz” about e-cigarettes. Specifically, here are questions to be answered throughout the analysis:

Who is talking about e-cigarettes?

Health organizations, News outlets, e-cigarette accounts (advocates), youth culture, loyal users, e-cigarette antagonists

Who are advocates?

Users, youth, advocate accounts
Who thinks they cause harm?
News sources, health organizations

Who are the key influencers sparking interest and engagement? A single person? Big Companies?

@stopvaping, @CNN, @Clivebates, @fctofficial, @fcafortc, @cjsnowdon

When are people most engaged? Time of day? Broader time periods of peak engagement? why?

Peak periods: August 17, 2015 and October 15, 2015

Time of Day-

Central Time: between 12am and 6am

Eastern: between 12pm and 6pm

What is different about the the topics of conversation across different social media platforms?

Addressed in Key Insights

keywords & KPIs

Key words included in our search for data include:

e-cigs, e-cigarettes, #vapelite, vape, vaporizers. The boolean search used to export data from Crimson Hexagon is as follows: (e-cig OR e-cigarette OR e-cigs OR ecig OR vape OR vaporizer) AND (health OR cancer OR explosion OR nicotine OR Death)

The Key Performance indicators we use to measure our goals for are all of those tied to engagement:

Followers

Likes

Shares

Comments

Mentions

Retweets

insights OWNED DATA

Owned data sounds like its name: it's data owned by a particular company. It is content that the company puts out directly in hopes of engaging with consumers.

We found several actionable insights when examining our owned data, but one of the most interesting came from examining the peak engagement times of Blu's followers on Twitter using Crimson Hexagon. We found the top two tweets that caused the highest engagement across the entire time span that Blu has been on Twitter, and those screenshots can be seen below.

It's important to look to see if there was one tweet that sparked the high engagement, or if it was multiple users tweeting about a common cause. On August 12, 2015, engagement was high because of a contest that Blu was promoting on Twitter, which earned them numerous mentions from people interested in the contest.

However, October 15, 2015 is an example of when one tweet, which happened to be back on September 23, 2015, skews the rest of the data. This one tweet by Blu did not have anything to do with the brand or its products, simply the fact that people could not follow them on Twitter. This garnered many retweets and boosted that particular day to the highest engagement to date.

The insight we can gain from the first tweet is that promotional contests on Twitter are a great way for Blu to interact with its followers and boost engagement and reach.





blu ecigs®
@blucigs

 Follow

#FYI: If you have trouble following us, try following from a different device. Sometimes the age verify glitches, and that tends to work!

12:06 PM - 23 Sep 2015

  1,137  148

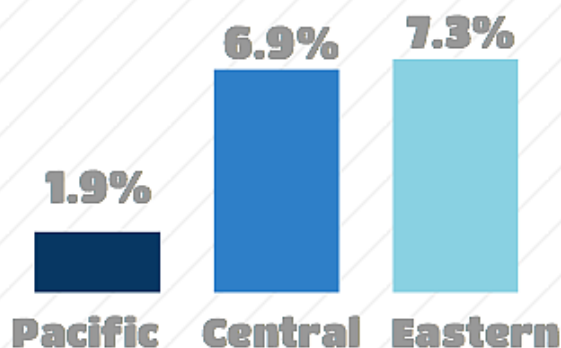
We can also gain valuable actionable insights from the owned data we collected when examining engagement by time of day. In order to calculate this data, we looked at the pool of all tweets by Blu followers from the top ten U.S. cities with the highest engagement. We then stratified these tweets by time zone. The results can be seen below.

The results are crucial for understanding when Blu e-cigarettes' users like to engage on social media. Blu can use this data to decide when to post content in hopes of garnering the most attention from its fans. For example, the vast majority of east coasters are active after noon, and the majority of those in the central timezone like to post in the middle of the night. It could be interesting to use this time of day activity to find insights into the behavior of these users, but that could be an interesting topic for a sociological turned social media experiment.

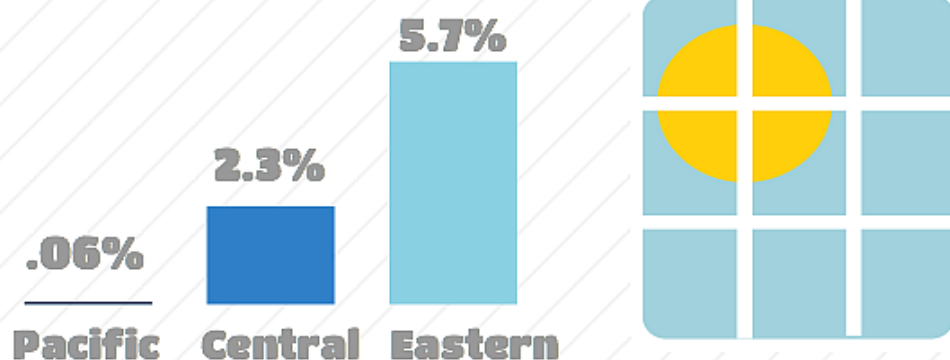
Engagement throughout the Day



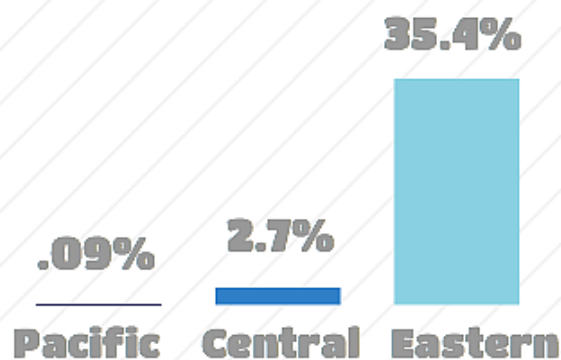
Posts between 12-6a.m.



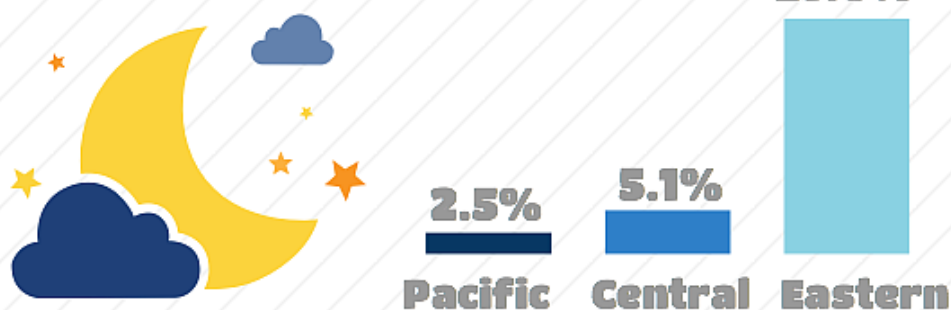
Posts between 6a.m.-noon



Posts between noon-6p.m.



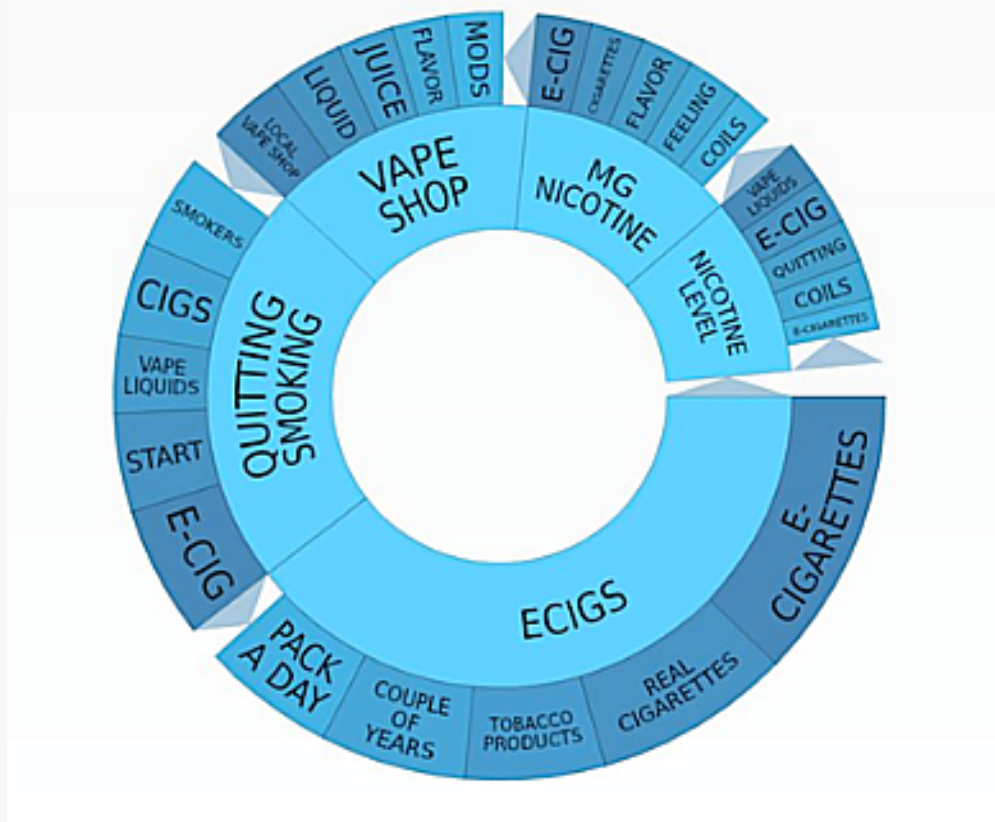
Posts between 6p.m.-12a.m.



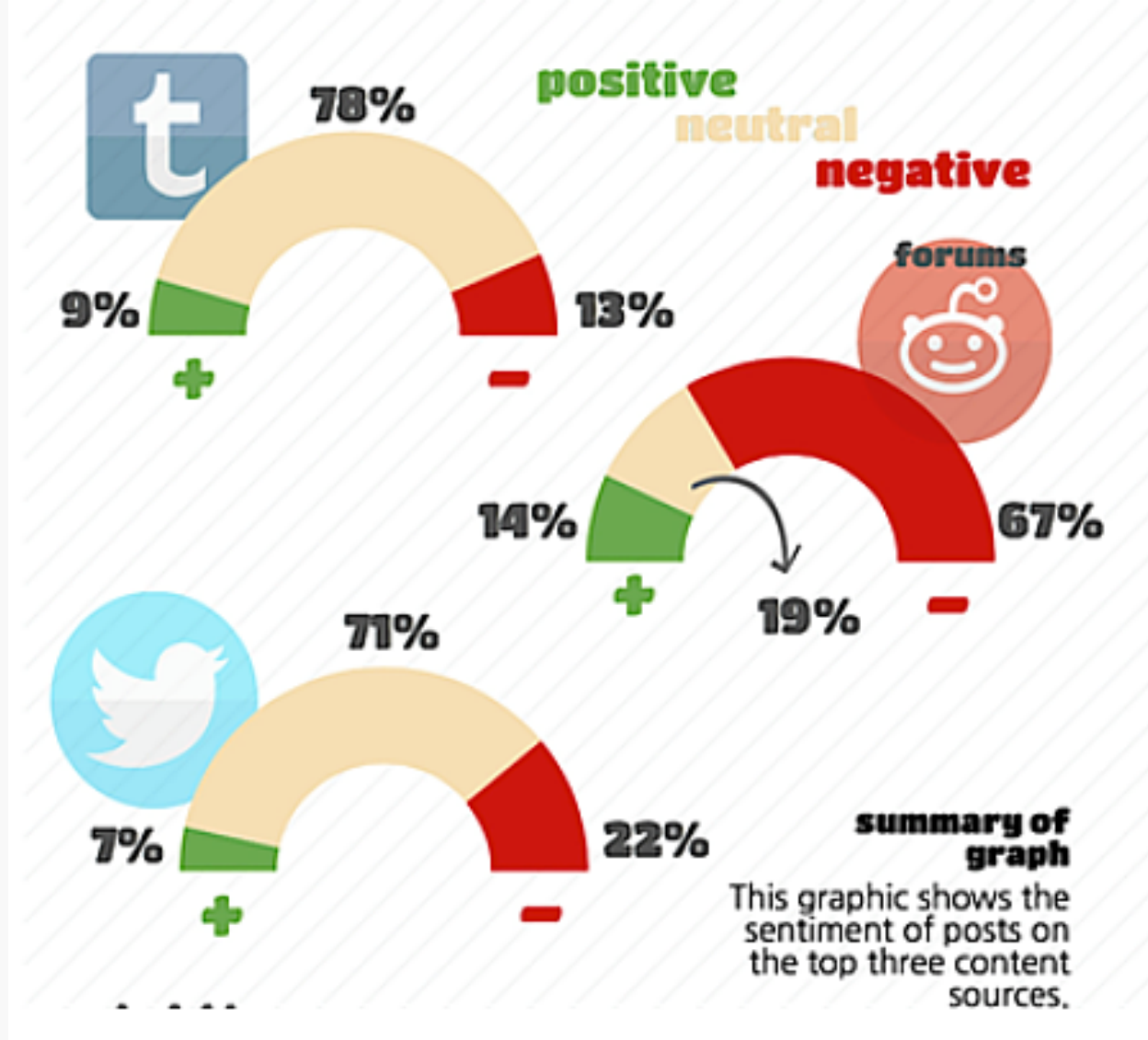
insights EARNED DATA

Earned Media is when people speak about and share your brand or product, either in response to content you've shared or through voluntary mentions. Through our analysis, we found some interesting patterns about cross-platform sentiments.

Below is the Crimson Hexagon topic wheel for forums. As shown, most words and phrases are neutral.



The infographic below represents data found on Crimson Hexagon. As shown, the majority of posts on forums have a negative sentiment at 67 percent. However, The negative sentiment is does not include negativity about e-cigarettes. Rather, it's the user being negative about those against the use of e-cigarettes.

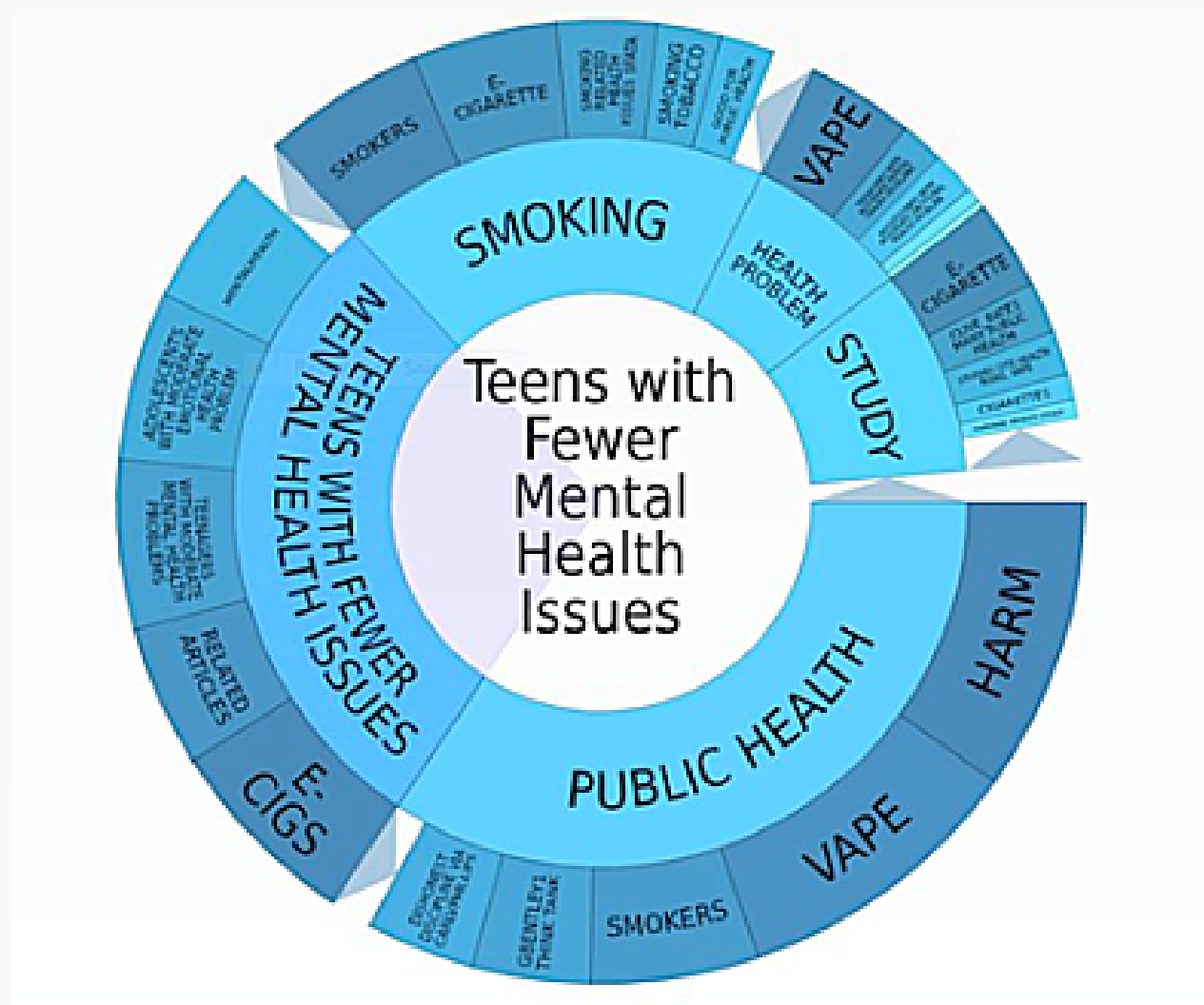


To put this into perspective, an example of a negative forum post from www.e-cigarette-forum.com is as follows:

"Here's the important part folks: "The damage occurred even with nicotine-free versions of the products." It's on now. They don't want us vaping anything. ...ever! All the counter arguments we make about reducing nicotine or vaping nic-free juice to begin with are going to be systematically dismantled with garbage like this. Look for this "study" to be quoted ad-nauseum."

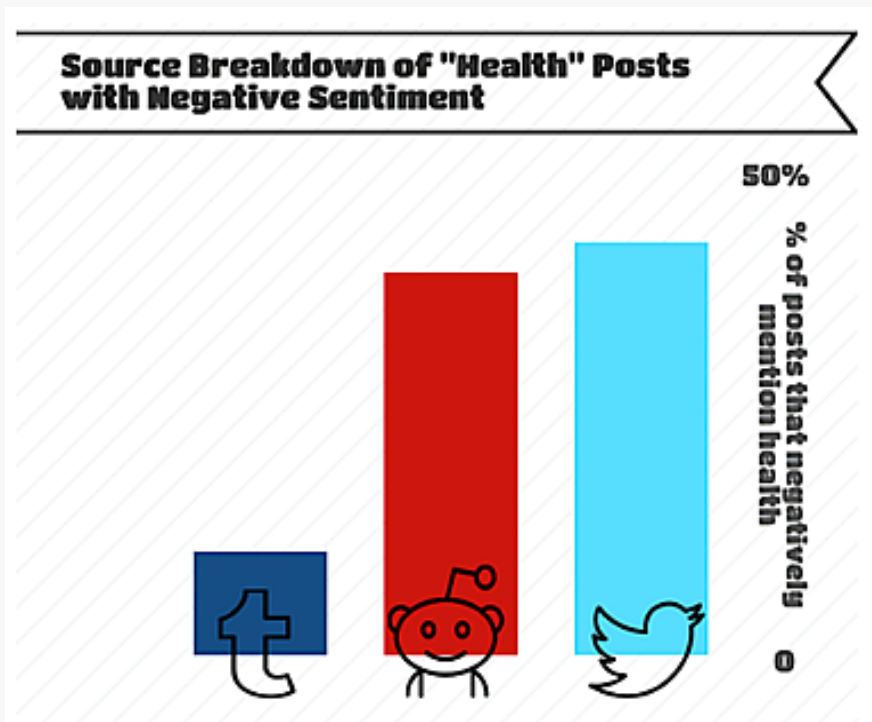
Even though this user is clearly an advocate for e-cigs being unharmed to health, Words like damage and garbage are considered terms the user is using to describe e-cigs when actually it's the opposite.

The topic wheel below shows key words from posts on Twitter that contain the word “health”. Many of the keywords and phrases are negative, such as health problem and harm.



The infographic here indicates that The majority of negative posts about e-cigs that contain the word “health” come from Twitter.

In contrast with forums, the negative sentiment on twitter actually is negative toward e-cigs.



A large portion of tweets, as shown on the topic wheel earlier, retweeted or referred to a Science Daily report that states, “Teenagers with moderate mental health problems who may not have considered smoking conventional cigarettes are turning to electronic cigarettes, a new USC study has found.” The tone of the study is negative toward the use of e-cigs, stating that “Electronic cigarettes could be bringing a population of lower-risk teens into nicotine use” and that it is dangerous to their health.

Forums vs. Twitter

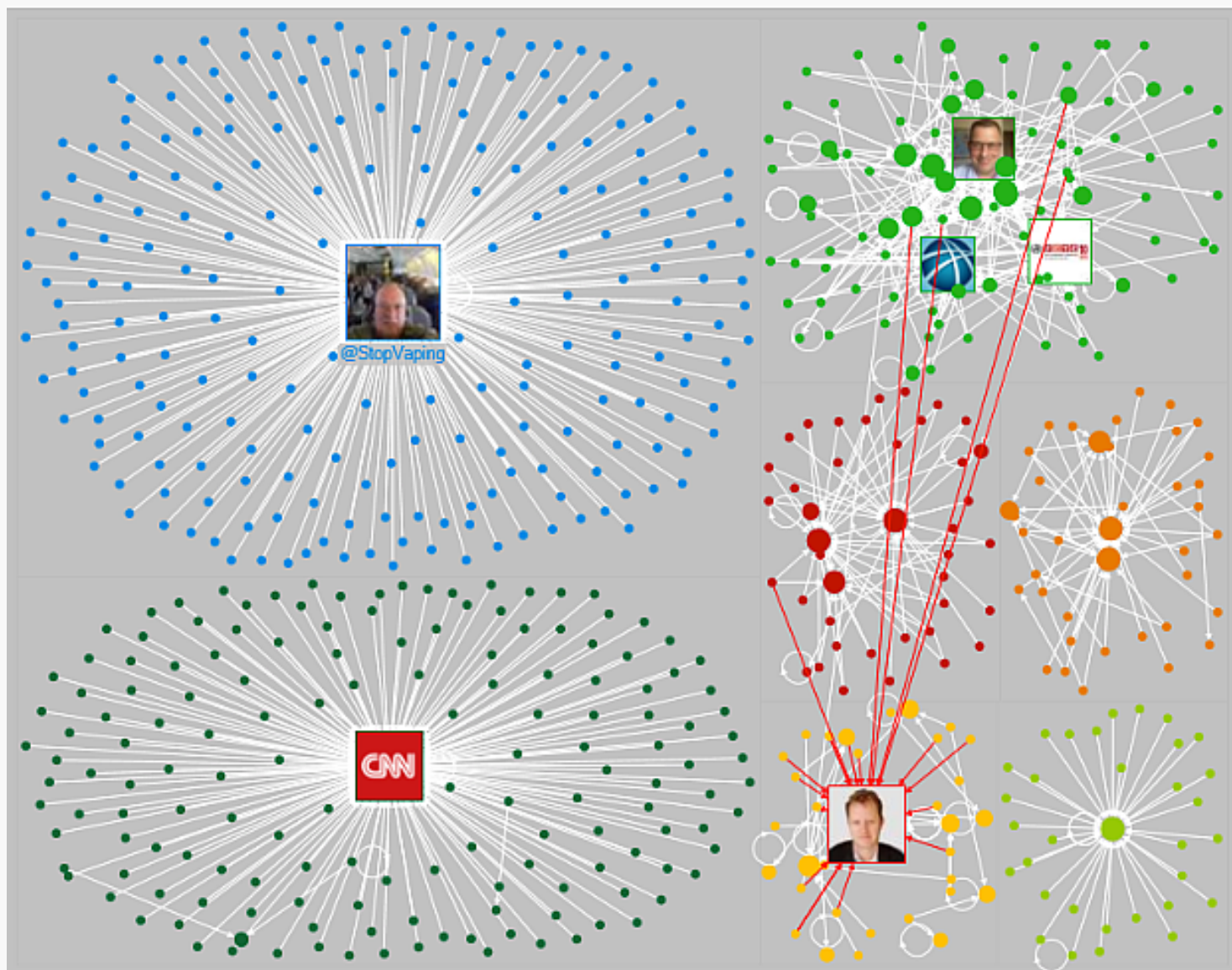
Based on the information from the posts found on Crimson, we can infer that sentiment varies between platforms. Twitter is a platform for direct interaction between users where people discuss and argue about controversial subjects and express their opinions. As Drake puts it, “Trigger Fingers turn to Twitter fingers.”

Forums are created to discuss specific topics with members of a community. These discussions are more in-depth because there are typically no character limits. They are one-sided being that they are part of a community, so the negative comments are typically aimed toward the opposing side. With this information, it is important to analyze other forum discussions, such as anti-e-cigarette forums to avoid skewing and bias.

insights **NODEXL**

There were several significant clusters arising from the e-cigarette Twitter conversation, which we surveyed in NodeXL. The conversation with the highest in-degree centrality was surrounding a Twitter user with the handle @StopVaping, whose bio explicitly warns against the dangers of vaping. He interestingly includes his age in the bio, and it's notable that he is much older than the stereotypical vaping crowd (mainly teens trying really hard to be trendy). The other large, singular cluster surrounds a CNN article about the rise of e-cigarette use among teens. These two findings introduce an age dynamic that make the e-cigarette conversation even more interesting and complex. Kids are becoming heavier e-cigarettes users, and adults have taken to Twitter to stop them. In an important side note: our Followerwonk research of Twitter accounts with "e-cig" mentioned in the bio showed that two of the top four accounts with the highest social authority belonged to middle-aged fathers who were in favor of vaping. So even though we couldn't measure age in most of our Crimson Hexagon research, through followerwonk and NodeXL, we discovered that it's not just teenagers discussing e-cigs online.

The green conversation in the top corner of the NodeXL graphic mainly involves the following users: @clivebates, @fctofficial, @fcafortc. The top word that is mentioned in this cluster is HEALTH, and the URLs that are being engaged with are from news sources with articles about e-cigarettes. @FCAforTC is the Framework for Convention Alliance, a global alliance that is working to free the world from tobacco. The articles that are prevalent in the conversation are split in their sentiment, with one being about health improvements in the long term for vape users and another from an outlet called "tobaccofreekids.org." The conversation as a whole is dominated by health organizations and activists, like @clivebates. Largely, our findings showed that this conversation was in favor of stopping vaping and the use of tobacco products as a whole. This cluster is connected to the orange cluster at the bottom of the graphic, as evident with the red lines. The main user in the orange cluster is CJ Snowden who tweeted an article from the UK entitled "public health should step aside. vapers are now leading the fight against smoking." This user has a heavy presence in the UK health scene. Overall, our NodeXL findings show that both sides of the e-cigarette fight are in conversation on Twitter, especially with the sharing of articles linked in posts that cover some form of regulation, study or finding about e-cigarettes.



next **STEPS**

Blu has a fairly strong social media presence in terms of engaging with their customers and fans. This is effective in increasing brand loyalty, but Blu should reach out to those who do not agree with the use of e-cigarettes. They could inform them about the positives of the product in general as well as their brand in an engaging way that could potentially cause a shift in attitude.