

From Dashboard to Data Acquisition: Charting the Social Media Monitoring Market

By Institute for Data, Democracy & Politics | George Washington University

September 9, 2025

Academic and civil society researchers increasingly require data from social media companies to better understand the information environment, technology product design, and social issues. Unfortunately, access to this data is fraught and deteriorating. Meanwhile, a large, profitable, and diverse market of commercial tools exists with the express purpose of providing brands and creators with access to data — the Social Media Monitoring (SMM) market. SMM tools analyze what's happening across social media platforms, blog posts, forums, news aggregators, review sites, podcasts, tracking mentions, measuring sentiment, flagging trends, and benchmarking content performance.

This report examines SMM company practices to better understand the breadth and scope of the market, with a particular focus on the social data they collect and how they obtain it. Through a comprehensive market analysis and 21 secret shopper interviews, we reveal a complex and opaque ecosystem that operates through a mix of privileged access and data scraping. Our findings suggest that the relationship between social media platforms and social media monitoring tools is often opaque and uneven — platforms gatekeep data access while providing specialized access to a select few SMM companies. The results also indicate a fragmented system where commercial interests are served, but public interest needs remain precariously under-supported. These findings carry important implications for policymakers and highlight the urgent need for a service that can support broader public interest by offering data in a transparent and accountable manner — especially in terms of how that data is acquired.

[Read the full report here.](#)