One-Way to Two-Way: Facilitating Road Safety Conversations on Social Media

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Abstract

Road safety communications have traditionally relied on one-way advertising campaigns to facilitate social changes. However, the emergence of user-centric digital platforms whereby road users can directly engage with Government has transformed communications from one-way into two-way conversations. The NSW Road Safety Facebook community provides a case study in developing a feedback loop for continuous learning for road safety agencies to communicate with their audiences. Balanced analysis of reach, engagement and sentiment data has led to greater consideration of content-crafting, influencers and community management. The ongoing use of "test and learn" approaches presents an opportunity to evolve road safety conversations.

Introducing Road Safety Conversations onto Social Media

In December 2015, Transport for NSW launched the NSW Road Safety Facebook page (http://facebook.com/nswroadsafety) to spearhead efforts in social media. The initial aims were to contribute to road user safety by engaging, educating and encouraging behaviour change, and to complement other communication channels in a timely manner. As the leading social media platform with the highest number of regular users in both NSW and Australia (Universal McCann, 2017), Facebook offered a large online audience for road safety-related communications in NSW. Content for the social community was intended to be a balance of planned and unplanned materials, ranging from corporate-centric (e.g. the latest Centre for Road Safety research) to customer-centric (e.g. behavioural campaign messaging and sponsorship content). The NSW Road Safety page was also an additional mechanism for paid campaign advertising: "boosted" and "dark" posts which are disseminated to members of particular target audiences.

Initial Community Growth and Measurement

The NSW Road Safety page accumulated a sizeable following (80,000+) in its first year of operation, regularly achieving weekly reach of more than 1 million and engagements of more than 100,000 (Facebook Business Manager, 2018). The community's growth was particularly attributable to topical content for which Transport for NSW is the leading and credible Government agency: examples included the timing of gazetted Double Demerit periods and corresponding Police operations and the introduction of the minimum passing distance regulation affecting drivers and cyclists. Content about road rules and other facts (e.g. severity of crash impacts depicted in Crashlab trials) also performed strongly across most available Facebook metrics. As a communications channel, Facebook offers a plethora of content performance measures, including reach, engagements, audience location, video view duration, click-through and many others. At first, the excess of available data led to divergent and inconsistent reporting of social media performance. Internal efforts were re-focussed to identify a more effective measurement framework for gauging the two-way exchange between road users and Transport for NSW.

Framework for Continuous Learning

The balanced analysis of reach, engagement and sentiment data provided a strong foundation for ongoing weekly and monthly measurement of NSW Road Safety Facebook's performance. This model is similar to the intent of traditional campaign tracking frameworks, which seek to balance recall with diagnostic measurement of message awareness and promotion. Monthly benchmarks have been established for these three key metrics based on statistical analysis of 2017 calendar year data:

	Total Reach	Total Engagements	Positive Sentiment Rating
2017 Monthly Benchmark	**2,847,485**	**177,821**	**69%**

Table 1. Benchmarks for NSW Road Safety Facebook page, based on means from 1 January to 31 December 2017 (Sources: Facebook Business Manager, 2018; Universal McCann, 2017)

Ongoing analysis of these three thematic areas has created a feedback loop for continuous learning, whereby the crafting of post content, its personal relevance, the role of positive influencers and community self-moderation have been identified as key levers to facilitating productive two-way conversations with greater potential to engage the community on road safety and facilitate support current road safety directions.

References

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