



SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT  
*Te Kura Kāwanatanga*

## **E-Government Chair Research Project 'The use of social media for effective public engagement'**

### **Case Study - NZ Transport Agency: Drugged drivers**

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#### **Summary**

New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) uses a range of communications media, including YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, to converse with drivers about driving while under the influence of drugs: is there a problem; what are some of the specifics of who drives while drugged, with what drugs; and who thinks this might be a problem?

#### **Problem**

What evidence there is suggests that New Zealanders drive while under the influence of prescription drugs, and other legal and illegal drugs. Unlike alcohol, there are no prescribed limits for the multiplicity of substances people take and drive with and little is known about the dimensions of this problem, or if it is a problem at all, and who thinks so.

#### **Context**

NZTA is responsible for the New Zealand government's Road Safety Strategy 2010 -2020: *Safer Journeys*. The strategy's vision is a safe road system increasingly free of death and serious injury. Driver impairment is identified as an area for concern.

Preliminary results of a study of the blood of deceased drivers under 25 show a number of trends that are of concern to road safety:

- 52 percent of drivers had used alcohol and/or drugs
- 31 percent of drivers had used cannabis with or without alcohol or other drugs
- 19 percent of drivers used alcohol and another drug(s)
- 14 percent had used drugs other than alcohol or cannabis, such as methamphetamine, methadone and morphine

In contrast to alcohol, less was known about the extent of drugged-driving and the level of public unacceptability was not well established. Drugs cover a multiplicity of substances, legal and illicit, and how much of each substance is dangerous for driving is unknown. Ministry of Health data<sup>1</sup> suggests that drug use is widespread in the population. High proportions of frequent drug users

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Health, 2003: 14% of the population used cannabis in the past year; 2.5% used amphetamines; 2% ecstasy. P did not exist in 2003.

report speeding, losing concentration, driving through a red light, or nearly hitting something while driving under the influence of a drug.<sup>2</sup>

## Solution

Research convinced NZTA that drugged driving is a social problem which affects road safety and is more complex than drink-driving. Their initial aim was to raise awareness of drug-driving by capturing attention and intriguing the audience as a means to create conversations about drug-driving among New Zealanders and encourage public debate.

NZTA commissioned and aired a series of television advertisements depicting drivers affected by a range of legal and illicit drugs, and the reactions of their passengers. These ran at a lower frequency and for longer than a typical television campaign because NZTA wanted to provoke an audience response. The series of advertisements were also made available on YouTube (see Figure 1).

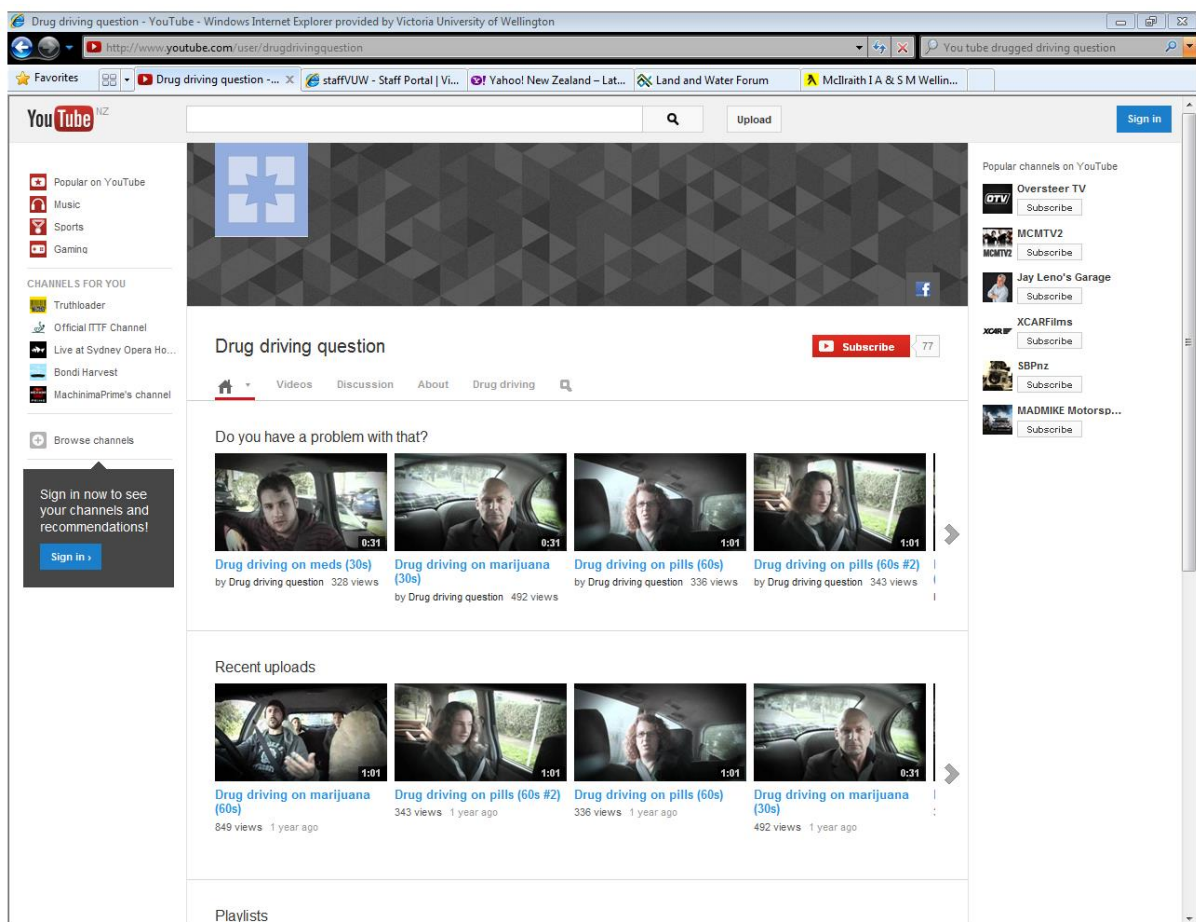


Figure 1: YouTube *Drug driving question*

<sup>2</sup> NZ Drug Foundation Survey, 2009: found that driving under the influence of drugs was relatively common; 88% of methadone users; 70% of prescription stimulant users and 67% of cannabis users.

Each advertisement concluded with the tag line 'Drug driving. Do you think it's a problem?' and invited people to respond to this question via a web forum, Facebook or SMS message.<sup>3</sup> Over 64,000 votes were received to the questions asked in the first phase: 71% of these were via the Facebook poll.

The television advertisement were accompanied by street posters, central city digital billboards (see Figure 2), a Facebook page, YouTube, U TV<sup>4</sup> discussion and internet screens at Z service stations, all bearing the branding 'The drug driving question' and inviting responses to the question 'Do you think it is a problem?' through, for example, SMS, You Tube or Facebook poll.

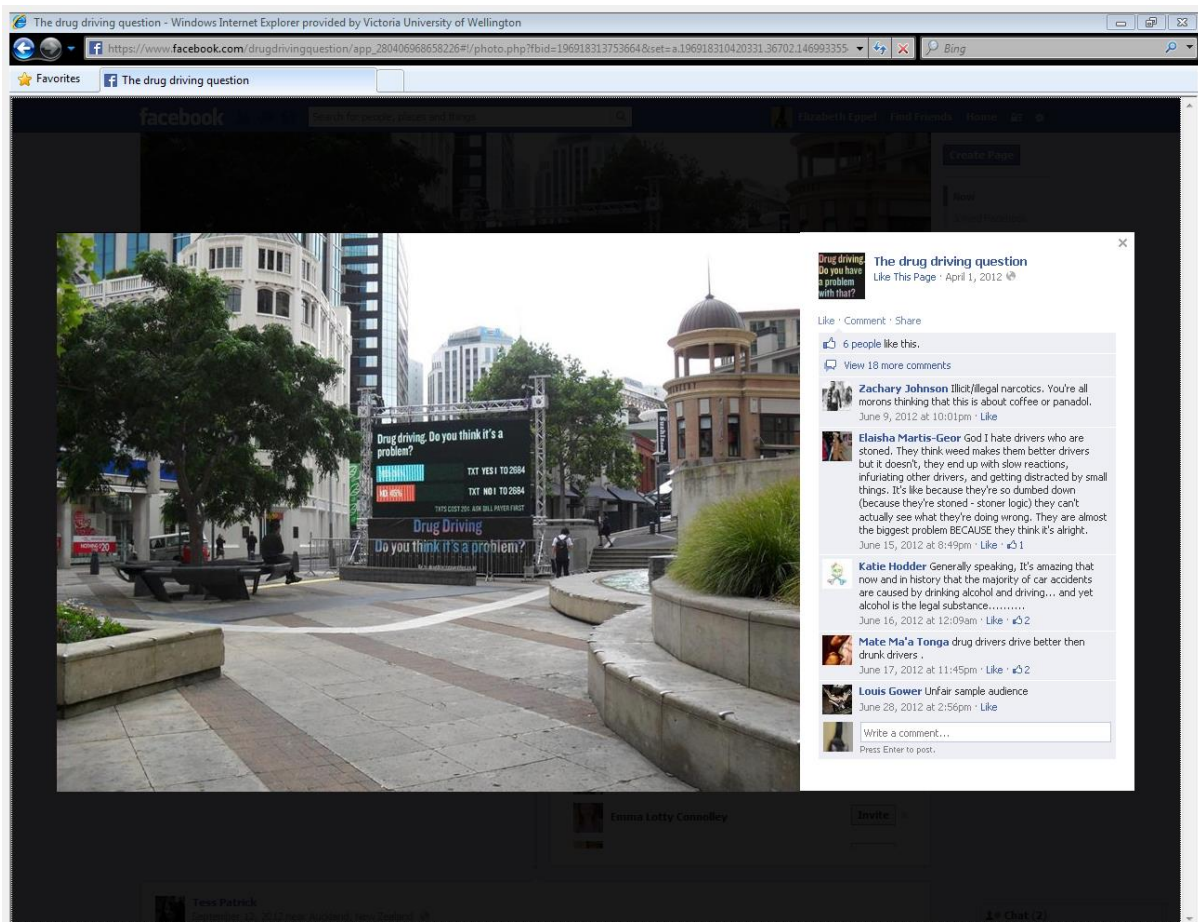


Figure 2: Digital billboard on a central Wellington street with high density pedestrian traffic

In the second phase of the campaign, responses received in the first phase were played back to the public as additional information at the end of the advertisement. For example, *56% of New Zealanders think drugged-driving is a problem. Do You?* And then further responses were invited, again via Facebook poll (see Figure 3), YouTube, screens at Z service stations or SMS message.

<sup>3</sup> You can see the advertisements at: <http://nzta.govt.nz/about/advertising/drug-driving/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> A free-to-air television channel aimed at younger audiences.

All phases of the campaign were closely monitored by NZTA’s research agency to gauge public interest. Detailed statistics were provided to NZTA on who was engaging, where and what responses were being given.

*“We weren’t doing this to find out the answers on those questions. We were doing it to provoke a conversation on the subject. We just wanted to pose that question and see what conversations developed from the question. What we got was a whole lot more. 19000 responses to a particular question... People wanted to talk about it and to have their say.”*  
*Principal Scientist, NZTA*

As well as over 5000 ‘likes’ on the drug driving Facebook page, the maximum number of people engaging with the page content reached nearly 17,000. Twitter and blog sites were monitored for mention of the drug driving question. Information from the campaign was retweeted and mainstream media such as talkback radio and news items on radio, newspapers and television mentioned the questions and the responses being received from the public.



Figure 3: Facebook Page *The drug driving question* and poll results

## Tactics

### **The focus on drug-driving was strategically driven.**

Drug-driving is one of the serious causes of driver impairment identified in the Road Safety Strategy 2010–2020, *Safer Journeys* (see Figure 4). The Safer Journeys Road Safety strategy is agreed to by Cabinet. Action plans which stem from the Strategy are agreed by the National Road Safety Committee. Road safety strategies have been in place for more than a decade and therefore the drug-driving work was able to draw on significant corporate capability and experience built up over that time. Within NZTA there was a hard-nosed focus on the effectiveness of whatever was done. This was combined with openness in NZTA to new ways of connecting effectively with drug-using drivers and the people they share the road with.



Figure 4: Safer Journeys 2010-2020

### **The approach to drug-driving was based on research.**

The evidence suggested that people are driving when they have taken drugs but the extent of the problem, its demographic and distributional dimensions, and public opinions about drugged driving were largely unknown. Therefore NZTA's approach was to create a social conversation involving

those who use drugs when driving, and the wider public, and to do so in a way that would keep the conversation in motion. A number of realistic scenarios were created to capture the reactions of New Zealanders when they perceived that their driver was driving while on drugs.

### **Social media were used as the lead media channel**

The campaign made use of multiple media channels such as low intensity television advertising, street advertising, YouTube, web forums and stationary digital billboards in high pedestrian areas to create awareness of drug-driving. Through each of these other media, the public were invited to engage in discussion on the questions posed and offer their opinions on the Facebook site or via Twitter. 71% of responses to the questions were received through the Facebook poll and nearly 10% through YouTube. The responses provided by people engaging with the drug driving question sites on Facebook or YouTube were used to update the information being shown on the digital billboards or the Facebook page creating a dynamic, real-time element (see Figure 3). This tactic enabled a more interactive debate on the social media sites and NZTA gained more qualitative information about drugged-driving and public attitudes to it.

### **Responses were closely monitored**

The contracted agency provided regular, in-depth monitoring reports to NZTA such as the numbers of people engaging with the questions through the various media and how they were voting as well as more qualitative analysis of what people were saying. These were mined by NZTA for new information and insights, which were also fed back to the public through subsequent iterations of the campaign.

### **Responses were used to shape future engagement**

Because the extent of the drug-driving and citizens views about it were unknown at the beginning, the information generated by the interactive responses invited became a new source of data which could be iteratively used to shape the campaign as it ran. As a result the campaign was constantly refreshed by this feedback.

## **Resources and Benefits**

The NZTA drug-driving campaign costs around \$1.5m - \$2m annually. NZTA have funding for communication with the public related to the Road Safety Strategy. Use of that fund is bid for internally and externally and allocations are made on the basis of priority under the Safer Journeys Strategy. NZTA's contract with its research agency involves regular reporting of statistics on the chosen campaign tools, and mediums used to reach the target audience and measure the audience responses.

*"We have to apply for funding for everything we do ... we are only eligible for funding for high and medium priorities in Safer Journeys.... we have to show what we are going to get for our money.... There is quite a robust process starting with how we use evidence and research*

*to put the brief together, to developing the campaign and then ongoing monitoring of what the campaign delivers.” Principal Adviser, NZTA*

Officials from ACC, Ministry of Transport, NZ Police and the Health Promotion Agency (previously ALAC), agencies whose own focus is on outcomes which overlap with NZTA’s focus on promoting road safety, meet regularly with NZTA to share their work, track results, discuss future directions and prevent duplication of messages or inadvertent undermining of each other’s work.

It takes about nine months to go from deciding on a particular result to be targeted to launching a campaign. This time includes assembling the research and evidence to inform the brief, developing and assessing advertising briefs, and producing and then testing the campaign materials to be used before they are put into operation more widely.

## **Lessons learnt**

- **The choice of communication medium is determined by the audience to be reached**  
NZTA has a number of campaigns and their decisions about when to use social media such as Facebook is driven by the audience they want to reach and the response wanted. Their use of Facebook and YouTube in the drug-driving campaign was driven by the objective of creating an ongoing conversation. This particular choice of medium was guided by the evidence gathered by NZTA’s research agency about which audiences were most likely to be found through a particular medium.
- **Rigorous research and testing**  
NZTA work with a research company that develops proposals to meet NZTA’s own research-based brief. The chosen proposal is tested with sample audiences to demonstrate its performance against the requirements of the brief before the final agreement to proceed to production is given.  
*“Our advertising is evidence based and research-driven. TV ads get tested twice before they ever go to air. They get tested as a concept, to ensure that it is working as planned, and then post-production, prior to on air, it gets tested again against the results we are trying to achieve to ensure that we haven’t missed anything in the production process.” Principal Adviser, NZTA.*
- **Organisational capability is important for effective planning, execution and monitoring of the use of social media**  
NZTA prioritises problems affecting road safety through the Safer Journey’s Strategy and the Action Plans. They focus on the effectiveness of a particular approach to achieving the result they want and monitor for this. NZTA are also alert to unexpected results.
- **Be prepared to respond to the unexpected**  
The existence of social media, whether a government agency uses it intentionally or not, creates the potential for unexpected, community-generated comment and responses

relevant to a public agency's business. Other NZTA campaigns, such as *Ghost Chips*, which targeted drink-driving by young Maori males, did not set out to use social media, but when YouTube content generated unanticipated social media re-use and comment, then NZTA responded by allocating a person to monitor and respond to the public-generated content and new Facebook pages created by the public, and supported it with information and new material.

- **Social media can be particularly effective for obtaining information from the public**  
Using social media to make connections with and between members of the public can generate very rich data to inform what agencies do and how they might more effectively achieve their outcomes. Effective listening, like effective communication, requires resources dedicated to analysing what is heard, or not heard, and also what is not being talked out. As well as in-house NZTA staff involved in initiating the campaign consisting of a research analyst and a communications specialist, the research agency provided a person who was able to extract performance statistics and qualitative data from the various media.