

## **Thanks for the memories. Better driver behavior, one laugh at a time**

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### **Abstract**

Images on social media can be likened to theatre's tragedy/comedy masks when applied to road policing and road safety. While there are many factors which influence road user behavior, can any link be established between a popular social media post and their influence on driver behavior?

#### ***What does a picture really say?***

Images in social media can be likened to theatre's tragedy/comedy masks when applied to road policing and road safety.

Can introducing a humorous image or concept to road safety allow for a serious message to be absorbed and retained by the public?

The use of lighter themed imagery such as memes to convey a more serious message was a strategy adopted by the NSW Police Public Affairs Branch for the main corporate Facebook page in early 2017.

The NSW Police Force Digital Media Team targeted common offences among motorists such as incorrect use/non-use of indicators and keep left when overtaking. Drivers detected travelling at more than 45km/h over the speed limit were targeted using a series of posts featuring the hashtag "#roasted".

#### ***Let me give you an indication***

The popularity of these posts touched a chord with road users as one indicator themed post in May 2017 resulted in an audience reach of 19 million people, 25K likes and 16K shares. (Source – NSWPF Facebook - 11 May 2017)

In May 2016 legal action was taken against 105 people in relation to indicator offences. This figure peaked at 181 in January of 2017. In May 2017, this figure was 134 and the number of people detected was 134.

Data since has shown the number of people detected has stabilised and showing signs of decline. This could be attributed to more awareness of the behaviour from drivers (in not committing the act to begin with) and road policing personnel in detecting the offence.

#### ***Do you really feel the need for speed?***

On 29 May 2017, the NSW Police Force published the meme – "'Bae is home alone.'" This is not a valid excuse for speeding. #slowdown" The post generated a reach of 2.1M users, 41K likes, 9.5K comments and 9.7K in shares. NSW Police Force data for actions taken against people exceeding the speed limit by 45km/h or more shows 293 people detected in April 2017 with a drop to 243 and 227 people detected in the following months.

Another key feature of the posts targeting drivers travelling above the speed limit was the element of peer pressure appearing in comments for the posts grouped under the hashtag of "#roasted". One post from May 2017 quotes "If they don't want to be shamed, they shouldn't speed."

Again, based on offence data and social media analytics, it could be argued the use of memes was an initial factor in the downward movement for this offence category in the months following publication.

### ***Which way do we go?***

Works highlight the teaching method of John Hopkins University nursing professor Ron Berk, PhD, who uses humour to convey dry statistical principles that allows him to tap into a variety of learning styles to allow a serious message to be conveyed. While there are some elements of road safety and road policing that should never be treated lightly, other sectors can certainly derive benefit from the use of lighter text and imagery as an educational tool.

### ***Citations:***

- *All social media data and post references:* NSW Police Force and Traffic and Highway Patrol Command Facebook pages.
- *All offence data – NSW Police Force Traffic and Highway Patrol Command.*

### **References**

Definition of "bae" – used by people on the internet who think it means baby, sweetie etc. *Bae* I love u so much. Source: [www.urbandictionary.com](http://www.urbandictionary.com)

How Laughing Leads to Learning, American Psychology Association. (2006). <http://www.apa.org/monitor/jun06/learning.aspx>: Zak Stambor.

Definition of meme - A meme is something such as a video, [picture](#), or phrase that a [lot](#) of people [send](#) to each other on the Internet. [www.collinsdictionary.com](http://www.collinsdictionary.com).