IMPAIRED DRIVING COALITION OF CANADA

Using Social Media to Strengthen Initiatives

TRAFFIC INJURY RESEARCH FOUNDATION, DECEMBER 2023

Introduction

Social media tools create unique opportunities to reach target audiences with tailored messages to increase awareness about impaired driving and strengthen educational initiatives. These platforms are ideal for delivering brief, informative, and personally relevant information at critical moments which can help change behaviour. This fact sheet answers common questions about social media tools that are available, who uses them, optimal strategies to post and promote content as well as strategies to engage with social media influencers, track impact on audiences, and develop messaging. For any of the tools mentioned, YouTube is a great resource to source short how-to training videos.

What is social media?

Social media comprises various online platforms allowing users to connect and share news, ideas, images, and videos. Nearly 33 million Canadians actively use social media, equating to 85.7% of the total population.[1] The list of social media sites is growing, and well-known platforms are constantly adding new features. As traffic safety stakeholders, integrating social media into our impaired driving campaigns is crucial.

How do I choose which platforms to use?

Different sites specialize in different kinds of engagement and targeted audiences. For example, social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, allow individuals and businesses to interact in various ways. Everyday actions include tagging, sharing, using #hashtags, commenting, direct messaging, and reacting to posts. Media Sharing Sites, including Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, share moments through pictures and videos and link them to other social networking platforms. Video hosting sites (e.g., YouTube, Vimeo) allow users to upload, share, and track longer videos. Other sites include blogging/

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community sites (e.g., Reddit, Tumblr) and audio/podcast platforms (e.g., Spotify, Apple Music, Apple Podcasts). It's worth noting that some content formats designed to increase reach and engagement are intended to only last for 24 hours (e.g., Snapchat and stories on Instagram & Facebook). This is a more advanced use of social media and may require more specific skills to implement and manage. Organizations can also consider using Linktree (e.g., Linktr.ee/TIRFCanada) to link their social media sites in one place and track clicks to each site.

A brief overview of some of the most common platforms is below along with guidelines to use them as a tool to share knowledge, research, educational tips and resources.

> **Facebook |** Facebook is a popular site among middle-aged and older adults. Users can develop a profile, connect with others, share content, join groups, and follow pages of interest. It also offers features like Stories, where users can share content that lasts for 24 hours.

  » **Potential use |** Create a dedicated page or group to share educational content, resources, and stories about impaired driving prevention. Engage with followers through posts, comments, and promotion of events.

  » **Recommended format & length |** Posts can include text, images, videos, links, or a combination of these elements. Aim for concise and engaging posts. Keep it under 80 characters for better visibility, but longer posts (around 40-80 words) can still perform well.

> **Instagram |** This photo and video-sharing platform permits users to post content, follow other users, and engage with posts (e.g., likes, comments, direct messages). It is the most-used platform by American social media users aged 12-34.[2] Users can also post Stories, which usually disappear in 24 hours (unless saved by the user).

  » **Potential use |** Share visually appealing graphics, infographics, and photos. Use captions and hashtags to increase reach and encourage discussions.

  » **Recommended format & length |** It's best to keep captions concise and captivating. Aim for 125-150 characters to maintain engagement.

> **LinkedIn |** This professional networking site is designed for career-related connections. It allows users to create professional profiles, connect with colleagues, share updates, join industry groups, and search for job opportunities.

  » **Potential use |** Use LinkedIn to target professionals, organizations, and influencers in law enforcement, public health, and transportation. Share articles, research findings, and professional insights about impaired driving education.

  » **Recommended format & length |** Posts should be informative and professional. Aim for 50-100 words or around 3-5 lines to maximize engagement.

> **Snapchat |** This multimedia messaging app allows users to send photos, videos, and messages that disappear after a short period. Snapchat also offers Stories, which disappear in 24 hours.

  » **Potential use |** Utilize Snapchat's Stories feature to share time-limited content related to impaired driving prevention. Use creative filters, stickers, and geolocation tags to engage and educate the Snapchat community.

  » **Recommended format & length |** Snapchat Stories can be up to 60 seconds in length. Consider using text overlays, filters, stickers, and augmented reality effects to enhance your content and make it more interactive.

> **TikTok |** This is a short-form video platform that has recently gained immense popularity. Users can create and share 15-60-second videos set to music, explore trending content and engage with other users' videos. The TikTok algorithm is a recommendation system that determines which videos will appear on user *For You* pages. As TikTok continually monitors trends, it generates suggestions for users, such as using 60-second videos because they are increasingly popular and are more likely to

be viewed. These prompts from the platform are automatically generated and adapted as needed to match the user's engagement habits.

- » **Potential use |** Utilize short, engaging videos to raise awareness about impaired driving prevention in a creative and relatable way. Use popular audio tracks, challenges, and trends to reach a younger audience. Example: Toronto Police Traffic Unit.

  *Note that due to recent privacy and cybersecurity concerns, several Government agencies have banned TikTok on federal/ provincial/ municipal devices, and some industries have adopted similar restrictions for use.

- » **Recommended format & length |** Videos are limited to 15 or 60 seconds. Aim for quick and captivating content that grabs attention within the first few seconds.

> **X (formerly Twitter) |** This microblogging platform enables users to share short messages, photos, and videos.

- » **Potential use |** Share news, statistics, links, and tips. Engage with other community groups and authorities (e.g., police, politicians, partner organizations) through likes, retweets, and replies.

- » **Recommended format & length |** The character limit is 280, but shorter tweets (around 70-100 characters) tend to attract more attention. Use photos to gain viewers' attention.

> **YouTube |** This video-sharing platform is most popular among males over the age of 18.[3] It enables users to upload, view, like, comment on, and share videos. It offers a wide range of content, including music, tutorials, vlogs, documentaries, and more.

- » **Potential use |** Create and share educational videos and PSAs about impaired driving prevention, personal stories, interviews with experts, and informative animations. Encourage viewers to subscribe, like, and share the content.

- » **Recommended format & length |** Video length can vary depending on the content. Try to be concise and engaging, keeping in mind the average viewer's attention span is less than 10 minutes. Aim for 7-15 minutes, but it can be longer for in-depth content (e.g., podcasts).

How can I utilize these platforms to build engagement with audiences and stakeholders?

Engaging with key stakeholders on social media can help build relationships, gather feedback, and establish a recognized presence. Stakeholders can include partner organizations, the public, and members of the target population, including those who drive after alcohol and/or drug use. Each stakeholder is unique, so adapt engagement strategies based on their preferences and communication style. Look at data to determine the best frequency to post, check peak times and schedule resources accordingly. Below are some strategies for engagement.

> **Listen and monitor |** Monitor hashtags, keywords, and mentions to gain insights into what stakeholders say and identify engagement opportunities. Consider aligning posts with key dates, such as National Impaired Driving Prevention Week, which occurs the third week of March each year and National Road Safety Week during the third week of May. Also, consider using GoogleTrends and AnswerThePublic to explore the popularity of search queries.

> **Respond promptly |** When stakeholders engage with social media content (e.g., through comments, messages, or mentions), it should be a priority to respond promptly. Acknowledge their feedback, answer their questions, and demonstrate active listening.

> **Personalize interactions |** Tailor responses to individual stakeholders. Use their names, reference their concerns or comments, and provide personalized solutions or recommendations.

> **Create compelling content |** Develop engaging content that educates about the dangers of impaired driving and promotes safe alternatives. Examples include creating impactful videos, sharing informative graphics, providing recent statistics, and encouraging tips to avoid impaired driving (e.g., planning a safe ride home). Remember to hook people at the beginning of the post (see The 8-Second Filter), and always use visuals with text. Text-only posts typically underperform. There are several online resources to help develop compelling content | Canva, VistaCreate, VisMe, Adobe Express, Stencil, Snappa, Animoto, Unsplash.

> **Encourage user-generated content |** Encourage stakeholders to share their stories, experiences, or creative content about impaired driving prevention. For example, the YMCA's Youth Cannabis Awareness Program utilizes a Youth 4 Youth Digital Media Contest to raise awareness about the impacts of youth cannabis use.

> **Collaborate |** Partner with influential individuals or organizations in the community who have a strong following or credibility in impaired driving prevention. They can amplify your message and reach a wider audience. For example, the Impaired Driving Coalition of Canada utilizes strategic partnerships to combine the knowledge and expertise of several organizations. Likewise, Parachute Canada engages with key social media influencers to promote National Teen Driver Safety Week.

> **Show appreciation |** Recognize your stakeholders by engaging with their content (e.g., like, retweet, comment) to show gratitude and encourage future engagement.

Is it important to engage with social media influencers?

The short answer is it depends. Engaging with popular social media influencers and celebrities can amplify your content and increase reach. One important consideration is whether your objectives are simply to reach a large audience with a message versus prioritizing some level of engagement from, or action by, those reached. There are a variety of pros and cons to this paid promotional option.

Pros

> **Reach |** Influencers often have large followings which can help share the message by increasing impressions and reach.

> **Credibility |** Depending on the influencer, collaboration may enhance message credibility and trustworthiness among the target audience.

> **Targeted audience |** Influencers often have a specific niche or demographic they cater to, meaning they can target content to a relevant and engaged audience.

> **Authenticity |** Influencers have built relationships with their followers which creates a sense of authenticity and relatability. When they share content, it can resonate more deeply with their audience. Influencers demonstrating a historical interest in the topic or cause can have a greater impact as their audience is already familiar with their stance.

Cons

> **Cost |** Engaging with influencers can be expensive. They may require payment, free products, or other incentives in exchange for sharing your content, which may not always fit within organizational budgets.

> **Lack of control |** When collaborating with influencers, some control is lost with respect to how content is presented or shared. They may have their own style and voice which could affect the messaging and delivery of paid content.

> **Authenticity concerns |** While influencers can bring authenticity, there is also a risk of false endorsements. Some influencers may accept collaborations purely for financial gain, leading to less genuine content that may not resonate with their audience.

> **Limited long-term impact |** Influencers often provide a short-term boost in visibility and engagement. However, the long-term impact may be limited, as content can have a short-lasting impact if it is not constantly refreshed. This also applies without the use of influencers, but doesn't carry the same financial burden.

> **Dependency |** Content success may depend on the influencer (i.e., if they decide to discontinue their collaboration or change their content strategy). Therefore, it's best to house content on your original channels and have the influencers share/repost.

> **Public relations liability |** The choices influencers make in their personal lives may have a negative impact on your campaign. For example, the decision by an influencer to drive impaired not only harms their brand but also the brand of who they have partnered with, even if it was a previous campaign.

Is it important to track my social media presence?

Yes. Monitoring social media influence is vital to determine the effectiveness of road safety messaging and campaigns. There are several social media monitoring tools (e.g., Hootsuite, Sprout, Buffer) to allow posts to multiple sites and track metrics. Here are some of the simple, yet powerful, social media metrics.

> **Awareness |** Reach refers to the potential number of users who see your content. It often includes both followers and non-followers. Impressions are the total number of times your content was shown to users, including users seeing it multiple times. These are essential metrics if your goals are focused on increasing awareness. For videos, view count may be more suitable.

> **Engagement |** Engagements measure the number of clicks, likes, comments, shares, and retweets your content gets. Engagement rates help determine how active your audience is with your content. This also includes click-through rates, retention rates (for videos), and profile visits. Click-through rate is the ratio of clicks on a specific link to the number of times a post is shown and is used to measure the effectiveness of email campaigns. So, if a post is seen 100 times and is clicked on 5 times, that's a rate of 5%. Whereas retention assesses the ability to keep users engaged and active over an extended period, such as commenting or sharing. Both metrics are crucial to understand the effectiveness and longevity of social media content.

> **Audience |** Your audience refers to your total number of followers and/or subscribers. Building an audience is key to sharing content. Audience growth rate can be a great metric to monitor during campaigns.

How do I develop an appropriate social media message?

When developing campaign messaging, content must be engaging, informative, and impactful. The Community-Based Toolkit for Road Safety provides an overview of creating a message strategy and using hashtags. There are several aspects to consider for messaging.

> Understand your audience's demographics, interests, and concerns to tailor your messaging to generate interest and engagement.

> Determine the primary message or call to action you want to convey. It may be raising awareness, promoting responsible behaviour, or encouraging alternatives.

> Craft a compelling headline using strong language or thought-provoking questions.

> Use powerful visuals like images, infographics, or videos that resonate with your audience.

> Share relevant statistics and credible facts to emphasize the seriousness of impaired driving.

> Tell relatable stories of those affected to evoke empathy.

> Provide practical tips on preventing impaired driving and highlight the benefits of responsible choices.

> Include personal testimonials or quotes to create an emotional connection.

> Incorporate clear calls to action, such as sharing, pledging, or attending events.

> Use relevant hashtags to increase visibility and join larger conversations. Examples include #DriveSober, #SoberDriver, or #SafeRides.

> Encourage dialogue through questions, polls, and active engagement with your audience.

> Schedule posts strategically for maximum reach and maintain a consistent presence.

How do I frame my message?

Framing messages using appropriate terminology is essential when discussing impaired driving. Here are some common terms that avoid stereotypes, encourage responsible behaviour, and shift public perception.

Crash vs Accident

Using crash instead of accident is important to shift how people think about impaired driving crashes and to recognize these collisions are preventable. The term accident implies the event was unavoidable or

unintentional. However, impaired driving crashes are entirely preventable. Using the term crash creates accountability for drivers responsible for the collision, shapes public perceptions of the issue (i.e., that impaired driving is preventable and unacceptable) and influences policy discussions. To learn more, download TIRF's Let's Talk About Crashes fact sheet.

Sober Driver vs Designated Driver

The term sober driver communicates it's essential to be alcohol and drug-free when operating a vehicle. This leaves no room for confusion or misinterpretation about an individual's state of sobriety, which is often misjudged. The term designated driver may lead to misconceptions about the amount an individual can consume, whether from alcohol, drugs, or other substances, and still be fit to drive. In fact, discussions with young cannabis users reveal that *designated driver* can refer to an individual using cannabis when others are consuming alcohol. Therefore, the term *sober driver* reinforces a culture of responsible behaviour and discourages any form of impaired driving.

Impaired Driver vs Drunk Driver

Impaired driver encompasses a broader range of impairments beyond alcohol, such as drugs, medications, or a combination of substances. The term impaired describes the condition of the driver and focuses on their diminished abilities, rather than solely emphasizing alcohol consumption. The term drunk driver can carry negative connotations, including perceptions that only those visibly intoxicated or highly intoxicated are dangerous on the road. This disregards the risks posed by individuals with lower levels of impairment. It's important to understand that several factors such as food consumed, level of fatigue and other factors can produce impairment even with small amounts of alcohol.

Increasing engagement

Using hashtags as well as tagging contacts and organizations in social media posts can increase engagement and contribute to a positive return on investment (ROI) for your social media efforts. In addition, posting content daily (five days/week), even one post per day, can help increase engagement as your content is more likely to appear in your audience's stream and creates consistency.

Creating engaging content for social media is just the first step. The key is to ensure that content is discovered and then shared to increase your reach, and ideally generate authentic engagement and online conversation. Hashtags assign a category to your posts which makes it easier for your audience to understand what your post is about and also drives people to your post who are searching for content with specific hashtags to your post.

Tagging contacts or organizations in your posts can foster a sense of community and collaboration with your connections and can prompt likes, comments, and shares. It also encourages others in their network to engage with your content. Tagging is also a way to build relationships and get your content noticed by industry experts and potential collaborators.

Many social media platforms provide analytics to track the performance of your posts, including the reach and engagement generated by specific hashtags and mentions. This data helps you assess the ROI of your social media efforts.

Where can I find more information?

Additional resources designed to help prevent impaired driving are available through several organizations.

109 Social Media Demographics Marketers Need to Know in 2023
https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-demographics

Top Social Media Statistics And Trends Of 2023, May 2023, Forbes.com
https://www.forbes.com/advisor/business/social-media-statistics

Distracted Driving Technology Framework, https://tirf.ca/e-hub-category/technology

Let's Talk About Crashes, TIRF & DIAD, December 2017, https://tirf.ca/TIRFCAD17T

TIRF's Sober Smart Driving education program, sobersmartdriving.tirf.ca

Parachute, Taking the high road: campaigning for safe driving
https://parachute.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/CS11-Taking-the-high-road.pdf

CAA Impaired Driving Campaign, https://123w.ca/case-study/caa

[1] https://www.statista.com/statistics/418219/canada-digital-platform-audience
[2] https://blog.hootsuite.com/youtube-stats-marketers/#YouTube_user_statistics
[3] https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-demographics/#Instagram_demographics

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The vision of the Traffic Injury Research Foundation (TIRF) is to ensure people using roads make it home safely every day by eliminating road deaths, serious injuries and their social costs. TIRF's mission is to be the knowledge source for safe road users and a world leader in research, program and policy development, evaluation, and knowledge transfer. TIRF is a registered charity and depends on grants, awards, and donations to provide services for the public. Visit **tirf.ca**.
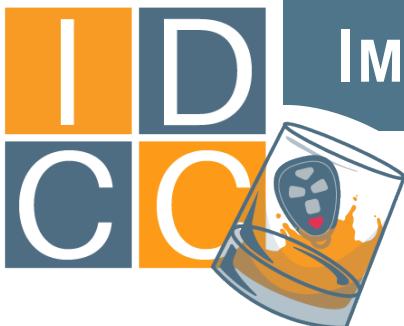
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TIRF & Diageo North America formed the IDCC to tackle impaired driving in Canada.

DIAGEO