

revisit.the.couve

redefining transit culture

*A Report on our Social Media Campaign to Combat Negative
Attitudes Towards Transit in Vancouver*

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Thank You

We would like to thank our lovely instructors—Mike Smith-Cairns and Andrew Egan—for guiding us through this semester and our project. Their guidance and support through our planning, development, implementation and subtitle woes helped us to develop our project into something that we are proud of today and that we also hope will live on beyond just this semester.

We would also like to thank CityStudio for giving our group—and all of the students who participate in this incredible program—a voice in city hall and the sense of empowerment that comes with that. We are proud to be able to participate in a program that allows us to use our creativity and problem-solving skills to create novel solutions to the problems faced by city-dwellers in Vancouver.

Lastly, we would like to thank our beautiful classmates for their support and encouragement with our project, and also for the inspiration we felt as we were able to watch their projects grow throughout the semester. We are sure that all of these fantastic individuals are going to make a difference for the better in their communities!

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Introduction

Who are we: We are a student group dedicated in combating negative attitudes toward active transportation in Vancouver by highlighting voices in our community, and encouraging more Vancouverites to get out and about more actively and sustainably for the betterment of the environment.

What do we want to do:

- Feature transit users' artwork in the blank advertisement spaces found overhead on Translink buses and skytrains to foster an atmosphere of positivity in transit areas.
- Highlight reasons for active transportation that benefit the environment to get around our beautiful city.
- Provide reasons and motivations to shift away from private car ownership in favour of walking, bicycling, or taking public transportation. Perhaps people will experience the city in a new light, explore somewhere new, or even change up stagnant routines.
- Show people that Vancouver bus services are not confusing at all.
- Raise awareness about the impacts that decisions have in terms of getting around the city on the health of our environment. In the digital age, we are more susceptible to bad news, we hope to inspire/empowerment people to see that making a small choice can have a large impact in improving the health of the city, and planet in the long term.

How are we going to do it:

- Post beautiful pictures of our city and its fantastic active transportation infrastructure on our social media account—Instagram—to raise awareness of the varieties of ways to get around available to us: on foot, bus, skytrain, bicycle.
- Give our followers that nudge in the direction of making more environmentally sustainable choices by showing them the benefits in taking more active transportation, and also showing the negative impacts of driving a car in the city
- Get our followers to do the same! Hopefully we can create a network of people who are as excited as us to be using active transportation to get around and explore the city, to foster feelings of positivity and empowerment around the idea of using transit.
- Solicit our followers to submit stories, poems, artwork, jokes and more, with the eventual aim of these works being featured on the blank advertisement spaces in our transit systems. If we make just a few more people smile on their busy morning commute to work—and maybe even strike up a conversation with a fellow commuter—we will have done our job of making Vancouver transit a more positive, and preferable mode of transportation.

Background and Methodology

Our program

We are four students taking part in the CityStudio project run by the Applied Environmental Studies program with Langara College. Our task is to develop a social media campaign that addresses the anti-cycling and transit rhetoric in the City of Vancouver and aid in the development and transfer of information that improves the expansion of walking, cycling and transit.

Why focus on transit?

We all know why it is a good idea for more city residents to be making active transportation a regular part of their routine. The Greenest City 2020 Action plans wants us to take two-thirds of all our trips in the city by foot, bicycle or public transportation by 2040, and this has positive implications on congestion, residents' health, and on the city's carbon emissions (Greenest City 2020, 2015). For more information on the health benefits of using active transportation, we consulted Lachapelle and Frank's research presented in the Journal of Public Health Policy.

Why Instagram?

When looking for the best social media platform to run a campaign, we found that Instagram is the most actively used, aesthetically appealing, and easily accessible in terms of tracking followers. We have concluded that Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat are not the best platforms to use, although the project can be expanded to include them. Our decision to use Instagram comes from our choice of demographic: Millennials, with 59 per cent of Instagram users between the ages of 18 - 29, and 33 per cent between the ages of 30 - 40. We chose this younger demographic to focus on as we were aware that it would likely be easier to change attitudes and behaviours in this group, in addition to the fact that this group is more likely to be reliant on transit in the first place (Thomas, 2010).

A project Instagram account, [revisit.the.couve](https://www.instagram.com/revisit.the.couve/), was created and managed by all four members of the group as well as an email account of the same handle: revisit.the.couve@gmail.com. Flyers were distributed in hubs such as educational institutes, community centers, and local bulletins to advertise the social media campaign idea.

We have gone out to collect our own photos and videos to post as well as informative pictures as samples to post. Example of a featured video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KrDtcQ1jjfM&t=10s>.

Areas for Improvement

Planning

We had originally planned for a longer planning/research period in which we would spend time gathering content in order to have a more concentrated roll-out of the campaign at a specified time. However, the realities of the semester and the short time available to implement (and present) meant that we started posting content a little prematurely, before we had a thorough implementation plan for our campaign. This resulted in inconsistent posting and ultimately we were unable to keep our audience engaged.

Implementation

This lack of planning meant our content was perhaps not as diverse as it could have been. We did a nice job on posting attractive pictures with encouragement to get out and enjoy the city, but our posts in other areas, such as activity recommendations, sustainability facts, and features of Vancouver transit, fell short. This also meant that our content was not as engaging as it could have been.

Participation

In the end, our biggest hope was that we would see community engagement in our Instagram profile, with users posting their own content to share. This did not happen. Part of this was simply time: three months is not very long to design and implement a social media campaign, particularly starting from a platform which had no preexisting social media presence. However, a way to have received more submissions would have been to model the kind of submissions we wished to receive. It might have been helpful to get some artists on board with the project and start creating the bus doodles, transit poems, and Vancouver stories we wished to receive. We also attempted to garner interest by flyer-ing in areas which were trafficked by our target demographic, using an appropriately “doodle-y” style to get their attention. The results of this campaign was inconclusive.

Conclusions

We feel that our campaign was a great start, and has potential to move forward and continue to foster more positive interactions with all forms of active transportation in the city of Vancouver.

Instagram was an ideal platform to create an offbeat campaign which might be more effective in engaging a younger demographic, capable of making some of the biggest changes in their attitudes toward, and usage of, Vancouver's public transportation system. We managed to amass a small group of followers: a more sustained campaign has the potential to get a lot more people involved.

Some tweaks in design and implementation could have made this a bigger success. We expect to see a campaign like this in the future, perhaps with more funding, dedication, and manpower available, which would really allow the basic premise to reach its full potential. A campaign manager and regular contributors would mean that a more diverse range of content could be posted on a more regular schedule, hopefully increasing engagement and improving follower participation.

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