



Texas Department of Transportation 2018 User Research

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Section 1

PROJECT KICKOFF

Communication of key
objectives and desirables





On September 7th, we meet with

Beth Hallmark

Director of Communications

Brief Summary

TxDOT is a state agency with over 12,000 employees and 25 district offices. Their primary mission is to move goods and people safely across Texas but they also want to find a way to share Texan stories, both local and state wide, with people directly. Improving upon the processes in place today.

TxDOT's 3 Main Goals

1

Keep Texans Safe

2

Keep Texans Informed

3

Keep Texans Moving Forward

1

Find a way to gain direct access to Texans.

2

Get Texans to utilize TxDOT as a primary information source.

3

Find out what touchpoints TxDOT has already harnessed and which ones they should.

4

Figure out what content would entice Texans to interact with TxDOT directly and how that content should be delivered.





AFFINITY BRAINSTORM

After our kickoff, the team got together to flesh out specific questions we needed to answer in order to accurately inform our recommended solutions to come.

This exercise is a funneling approach intended to create a comprehensive list and at the same time, narrow the teams focus.

Step 1

The team wrote out any questions they deemed vital to answer in order to inform the objective solutions.

Step 2

Then all of the post-it notes were grouped in to top level categories alongside analogous questions.

Step 3

Lastly, we edited them down and developed specific questions to investigate via various research methods.



Project Kickoff

Affinity Brainstorm

How do users consume information today?

- How are people acquiring information today?
- How do users define "useful information"?
- What is the best way to deliver content given people's short attention spans?
- How does the audience want us to convey the data?
- Do they differ in consumption methods between real-time and static content?
- What kind of information can capture people's attention?
- How can we meet people where they are to get them into the news?
- How do users find traffic/news/content?
- What are the signals surrounding news/news content?
- Does content format matter? (e.g. News on YouTube formatted differently than traditional)

Who are our users?

- Can we think of other audience groups besides the media and drivers? (Business?)
- How do info needs and preferences vary across the state?
- How do we narrow down this state?
- How do we define "drivers" in a way that is meaningful to this project?
- Could/should we capture bicyclists/motocross/etc.?
- How do we engage new users?
- How do user needs differ across rural and urban?
- Which of the user's needs do you consider to be the most important, why?
- How do different groups of people use TXDOT?
- Who wouldn't use this service?
- Are Gov't and elected officials another user group?

What are our success metrics?

- How do we analyze user's engagement in the content? (especially since they don't sign?)
- What is the indicator that TXDOT is currently engaging drivers?
- How do we measure engagement or success?
- How would you like to see user feedback/comments change?
- User subscription/view?
- What are the main data-driven evidence for the website?

How are users currently using TXDOT's news/media website?

- Are users finding the content they are looking for today?
- How do different groups of people use TXDOT?
- What are some of the pain points of the current website?
- What do their users want?
- What are the usability issues with the current website?
- On heavy traffic times (holidays), can users get the relevant information on roads from TXDOT?
- Based on past research, what does/content length do users like?
- How can we best tell the narrative of Texas who use transportation everyday?
- What is the context or situation users are in when they engage with the information?
- What is the incentive for a user to find news information on TXDOT's website?
- What are the scenarios where people are currently being directed to the news site?
- Of the existing information channels, which is most active and which is best?
- What are the top 3 type of information checked most by users?
- How is TXDOT communicating info to drivers about impacts to their commute?
- What do users like most and least about current news/content?
- What information is resonating well with users today?
- Why do drivers come to TXDOT's website?
- What information on the website and social media are people engaging with the most?
- What are the predictors of people coming to and staying at TXDOT?
- What are the top 10 keyword searches for the past 6 months?
- What are the things people search for that aren't part of TXDOT (e.g. travel, regulations, etc.)?
- What is the current obstacle keeping people from getting the information already?
- Why do TXDOT users need a newsletter?
- Stories, Comments, Road Closures...what is engaging you?

Backend Support/Processes

- What are the pain points of building and maintaining a social media presence?
- What are the challenges of running a digital newsletter?
- How is TXDOT currently creating content for the newsletter?

Information Architecture

- What is the IA of a product like this?
- How do you successfully build relationships with products and what does that look like?
- Should news content live under current TXDOT site or somewhere else?
- What should users be notified or alerted about?
- How do the TXDOT pillars integrate into this platform?

How can a TxDOT news source meet users's future needs?

- What are the day-to-day needs of Texas drivers/transportation users?
- What is the primary news for larger audience wants? (what is the secondary?)
- How does social media fit in the future plan? Push vs Pull from TXDOT's website?
- What about emergency text messages, a podcast, youtube channel?
- How do we show relevant content to drivers?
- How do we improve driver safety through the Newsletter?
- What features are critical for adoption and what can be pushed to later phases?
- What are the best ways to leverage existing content?
- Should user be allowed to submit stories, would this increase engagement?
- How do we leverage what TXDOT is already good at and move it to next-gen technologies?
- Do users prefer visually rich or simple information?
- Are there any Gov't/Federal regulations that we need to be aware of? (HIPAA, privacy, etc.)
- How do we balance the information on social media and the website?
- What does a media platform for users need?
- How should we segment the information on the social and social media?
- How to differentiate local news from educational news?
- How can we utilize existing media such as our internal newsletters?
- How can we inform drivers of unsafe road conditions?
- How can we address the lack of real-time data for users?
- How local could we make the content and should we?

Misc

- Why does TXDOT want to become its own media platform?

Brand Awareness/Image

- What is the brand awareness/perception of TXDOT among drivers (or TXDOT)?
- How can we increase the brand image?
- How would you describe the current brand of TXDOT?
- How can we change the negative connotation of a big government agency?
- How would we define a "positive image" for TXDOT?
- What does the public perception of TXDOT look like?
- Do people understand what TXDOT is?
- What does TXDOT stand for by keeping drivers safe?
- What are the current barriers around TXDOT's negative public impression?
- What are the risks of this effort besides negative publicity?

Competitors (Direct and Indirect)

- What other news sources should we look at for best practices?
- Who is doing this well now and what defines well?
- Who is doing this well now and what defines well?



Project Kickoff

Narrowing of Objectives

Assign each top-level question to one of the key objectives

1

Find a way to gain direct access to Texans.

How do users consume information today?

Research Methods

Web Analytics
Competitive Analysis
Subject Matter Expert On Best Practices
Survey Data

2

Get Texans to utilize TxDOT as a primary information source.

Brand Awareness/Image

Research Methods

Social Media Analytics
Evaluation of Current Brand Presence Through Visuals
Subject Matter Expert

3

Find out what touchpoints TxDOT has already harnessed and which ones they should.

Who are our users?

Research Methods

Review Provided Past Literature
Social Media Analytics
Web Analytics

How are users currently using TxDOT's news/media website?

Research Methods

Web Analytics
User Interviews

Competitors (Direct & Indirect)

Research Method

Competitive Analysis

4

Figure out what content would entice Texans to interact with TxDOT and how that content should be delivered.

How can a TxDOT news source meet users's future needs?

Research Methods

Competitive Analysis
Subject Matter Expert On Best Practices
Survey Data
User Interviews

Section 2

PAST LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to gain insight on the past issues, progress since, and in the name of being efficient, we reviewed past research completed for TxDOT



Applicable Insights From The 2010 Web Analysis Report

- When analyzing New York City's DOT website, the research called out two highlights that could help the current TxDOT web presence if applied;
 1. The NYC DOT site's homepage was clearly segregated between news, updates, current projects, and quick links.
 2. Quick links were action oriented rather than informational only.
- TxDOT needs to help the user understand who they are and the differentiation between TxDOT and DPS/DMV. User confusion is never good concerning brand interactions, finding ways to address this issue fast and early can improve brand sentiment.
- Icons used should be in a design system and should be similar in aesthetic (size, detail, linear or filled, whole or negative space, etc.).
- TxDOT needs to avoid using internal jargon on user facing platforms. For example, form names should have concise descriptors below them.



The user profiles utilized to inform interview screening parameters were derived from this previously provided literature. Each profile offers a different use case perspective and a different set of needs that TxDOT could attend to.



Melanie
Standard Driver



Russell
CDL Driver



Javier
Evacuee

“

Give me real-time information to help me plan the most optimal routes and stay compliant with state laws.

-CDL Driver



Melanie

Standard Driver

31

AGE



HOUSEHOLD



LOCATION

Melanie represents **7** of **26** drivers from the Sherry Mathews Advocacy Marketing 2010 research. Her needs and goals include:

- Find alerts on weather and road conditions**
- Read updates on traffic and road construction**
- Check availability of rest area**
- Keep her children calm and safe throughout the drive**
- Confirm compliance with safety regulations**

EDUCATION Bachelor's degree from Texas Tech

OCCUPATION Homemaker

INCOME \$46,000

WEB Moderate

PRIMARY USES Email, banking, social networking, DIY information, shopping

FAVORITE WEBSITES Yahoo mail, Chase, Facebook, Overstock

TXDOT.GOV EXPERIENCE Melanie has never visited the TxDOT website before, but she is confident it will have the information she needs about traveling conditions on Texas Interstates.



Russell

CDL Driver

50

AGE

Russell represents **1** of **26** drivers from the Sherry Mathews Advocacy Marketing 2010 research. His needs and goals include:

Identify restricted bridges en-route to his destination

Check traffic and road conditions

Register for Weight Tolerance Permits



HOUSEHOLD



LOCATION

EDUCATION High School diploma

OCCUPATION Truck Driver

INCOME \$38,000

WEB Moderate

PRIMARY USES Road condition updates, email, entertainment

FAVORITE WEBSITES Hotmail, TxDOT, Google maps

TXDOT.GOV EXPERIENCE Russell has recently started to use the TxDOT site to complete Weight Tolerance Permits and check for approved freight routes through the state.



Javier
Evacuee

38

AGE

Javier represents **5** of **26** drivers from the Sherry Mathews Advocacy Marketing 2010 research. His needs and goals include:

Familiarize himself on evacuation routes and shelters

Learn about how the government intends to address contraflow in the future

Find tips about how to stay safe at his home in the event of a hurricane

Create a list of supplies to take with the family in the event of an evacuation

Share information with his community and clients



HOUSEHOLD



LOCATION

EDUCATION Bachelor's degree, University of Houston

OCCUPATION Realtor

INCOME \$54,000

WEB Proficient

PRIMARY USES Email, banking, MLS services

FAVORITE WEBSITES Outlook, Wachovia, Zillow, Craigslist

TXDOT.GOV EXPERIENCE Javier is familiar with TxDOT and many state agencies, and he generally looks online to find information about work-related state programs and regulations.

Screener

Using demographic parameters based off of the 3 main user profiles, we established a screener to ask possible interview participants in order to make sure we had a representative sample including standard drivers, commercially licensed drivers, and

SCREENER FOR STUDY: TxDOT

Respondent Contact Info:

Name _____ Tele. # _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Date of Interview _____ Time of Interview _____

Phone Interviewer _____

Email Address _____

RECRUITER NOTE: Mix of rural and city

Hello, I'm _____ from _____, a marketing research firm. We're looking for individuals to participate in a paid market research study. Your individual answers will not be divulged to anyone, nor will you be asked to purchase anything. Your opinions are very important and we would appreciate your cooperation.

Note to Recruiter: Try to get an equal mix of gender

1. Are you willing to participate in an interview and would you be able to do so in the next week?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No (**TERMINATE**)
2. Do you have a valid driver's license?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No (**TERMINATE**)
3. Have been driving in Texas for at least six months?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No (**TERMINATE**)
4. What means of transportation do you have personal access to?
 - a. car
 - b. bus
 - c. public transportation other than the bus

Section 3

WEBSITE ANALYTICS

Accessible analytics synthesized
into digestible content.





Special thanks to,

Jacob Copple

2nd-year Doctoral Student in the Stan Richards School of Advertising and Public Relations

Jacob Copple took all of the accessible web data and synthesizing it into digestible content. Following, there will be highlighted findings from that in order to inform the suggested actions.

Time Prior to Event Report

May 1st, 2018 – October 31st, 2018

The below chart shows the user's time on the website prior to the following action over the listed **6 month period**.

Time Prior to Event	File Download Click	Link Click	Email Link Click	Outbound Link Click
1. Less than 1 min	303,583 38.6%	488,658 55.2%	183 24.0%	375,187 51.5%
2. 1–5 mins	229,143 29.1%	214,304 24.2%	227 29.8%	185,940 25.5%
3. 10–30 mins	120,389 15.3%	86,738 9.8%	160 21.0%	81,053 11.1%
4. 5–10 mins	91,770 11.7%	70,602 8.0%	136 17.8%	61,163 8.4%
5. 30–60 mins	34,401 4.4%	20,923 2.4%	46 6.0%	21,009 2.9%
6. 1–2 hours	7,053 0.9%	3,994 0.5%	10 1.3%	4,000 0.5%
7. 2–5 hours	776 0.1%	202 0%	0 0%	336 0%
8. 5–10 hours	1 0%	1 0%	0 0%	0 0%
Total	787,116	885,422	762	728,688

51.5% of visitors clicked on an outbound link within a minute of being on the site.

48.2% of visitors, within this 6 month period, completed an action in less than a minute.

33% of visitors downloaded a file within a minute of being on the website.

Site Sections Report

May 1st, 2018 – October 31st, 2018

The below chart shows the website visits, page views, and unique visitors, per each section of the website over the listed **6 month period**.

Site Sections	Visits		Page Views		Unique Visitors	
1. Inside-TxDOT	1,286,616	47.0%	2,977,458	46.7%	818,055	52.2%
2. Business	427,881	15.6%	954,145	15.0%	133,760	8.5%
3. Driver	659,144	24.1%	950,797	14.9%	521,567	33.2%
4. Home	650,507	23.8%	801,839	12.6%	392,877	25.0%
5. Blank Site Section	135,711	5.0%	305,243	4.8%	99,600	6.3%
6. Government	109,309	4.0%	182,346	2.9%	81,556	5.2%
7. Texas Department of Transportation	126,565	4.6%	155,925	2.4%	86,357	5.5%
8. Jobs	25,367	0.9%	51,597	0.8%	20,583	1.3%
9. Business-Page-Carousel	888	0%	1,036	0%	677	0%
10. Errors	179	0%	362	0%	177	0%
11. Home-Page-Carousel	64	0%	124	0%	16	0%
12. Test	9	0%	50	0%	5	0%
13. TxDOT	6	0%	6	0%	5	0%
14. Driver-Page-Carousel	3	0%	3	0%	3	0%
15. Test-Business	3	0%	3	0%	2	0%
16. Government-Page-Carousel	2	0%	2	0%	2	0%
17. Feedback	1	0%	1	0%	1	0%
18. Cost-Efficiency-Suggestions-Form	1	0%	1	0%	1	0%
19. Business Test	1	0%	1	0%	1	0%
Total	2,738,281		6,380,939		1,568,665	

Website Analytics

Findings

The most visited page on the TxDOT website (during our sampling) was the Inside TxDOT page at 47%. From there however, 30.5% of traffic exits the site.

As you can see on the right, it is a page of links about TxDOT, so we cannot assume the user got the information they were seeking and then exited.

According to the previous two pages of data, users are going to this website in order to complete a task. According to the above data, if they are overwhelmed with information and options that are not easily digestible, they leave the site.

The link copy (text making up the link) also consists of internal jargon, users may not know what these terms mean and therefore may overlook the information they are seeking here. Jargon examples:

OneDOT Data Shop

Pocket Facts

Stimulus Funding

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

A - Z Site Index | Contact Us | Español

Search TxDOT

Driver | Government | Business | Inside TxDOT | Careers

Inside TxDOT | Get Involved | Media Center | Projects | Forms & Publications | Administration | Districts | Divisions

Page Options

Inside TxDOT

Texas Department of Transportation

Fraud Hotline

This page provides a snapshot of the organization. To explore our website more thoroughly, navigate using the tabs on the blue ribbon above, to the right of the gold arrow that says "Inside TxDOT."

Headquartered in Austin, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) is organized by administration, districts and divisions.

TxDOT's workforce is made up of engineers, administrators, financial experts, designers, architects, sign makers, accountants, purchasers, maintenance workers, travel counselors and many other professions. All of our employees work together to realize the TxDOT mission: Through collaboration and leadership, we deliver a safe, reliable, and integrated transportation system that enables the movement of people and goods.

Inside TxDOT

- About This Site
- Values, Vision, Mission and Goals
- Strategic Plan
- Administrative Rules
- OneDOT Data Shop
- Pocket Facts

TxDOT Structure

- Texas Transportation Commission
- Administration
- Districts
- Divisions

Government Affairs

- Federal Affairs
- State Legislative Affairs

Financial Information

- Audit Reports Database
- District and County Statistics (DiSCOS)
- Financial Information
- Funding Sources
- Stimulus Funding
- Texas Mobility Fund

Get Involved

- Texas Transportation Commission Meetings
- Public Hearings and Meetings Schedule
- Volunteer

Media

- News
- Public Service Announcements

Initiatives

- Project Tracker
- Innovation and Cost-Efficiency Suggestions Program
- Performance Results Summary

Careers

- Current Job Opportunities

Forms & Publications

- Most Requested Forms
- Online Forms FAQs

Inside TxDOT | Connect With Us | What We Do | Contact Us

Careers | Get Involved | Media Center | Facebook | Twitter | YouTube | Texas.gov | TxTag | MY35.org | Email Us | Telephone or Write Us | Administration

The screenshot shows the TxDOT homepage with the following annotations:

- 1**: Points to the main navigation menu in the footer, which contains a dense list of links.
- 2**: Points to the search bar in the top right corner.
- 3**: Points to the 'Traffic Cameras' section, which includes a list of links for various services.
- 4**: Points to the 'News' section, which features a list of recent news items.
- 5**: Points to a 'Back' button in the 'News' section.
- 6**: Points to the 'News' section header.
- 7**: Points to a 'Read More' button in the hero image area.
- 8**: Points to the 'How Do I' section, which contains a list of links for user assistance.
- 9**: Points to social media links (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) in the footer.
- 10**: Points to the 'Connect With Us' section in the footer.
- 11**: Points to the 'Government' link in the top navigation bar.
- 12**: Points to the 'Report Poor Road Conditions' link in the 'How Do I' section.

This is a quick user interface evaluation that, if the changes are carried consistently across the site, could make drastic usability improvements without having to rebuild completely. The main goal here is to brand TxDOT as a friendly and available source for information as well as an easy-to-interact-with agency.

- One of the main usability issues throughout the site (noted in the interview feedback and past research literature) is the seemingly overwhelming amount of information per page. Specifically on this page (but it will help the others too) the footer doesn't appear to be a footer. Best practice currently is a flat colored section, full width like the gray bar below, and clear columns that are responsive and stack as the user shrinks the screen width. The information organization is accurately laid out but the section looks like it is a part of the page's main content and therefore adds to the perceived information the user would have to sift through. Making these changes (along with #9 and #10) will help simplify and organize the page.
- Due to the density of the site, the search bar should be a primary feature on most pages but especially the homepage. According to the web analytics, **38.6%** of users are downloading a document in **less than a minute** of being on this site and **67.7%** total are spending **5 minutes or less**. This along with the fact that the second most visited page on the site is the Crash Reports page illuminate two things;

 - People are coming to this site with an intended mission, not to interact with the brand.
 - If TxDOT does decide to make a digital newsroom, it would be more effective to host it on a separate domain from this site considering people are coming here task oriented and not leisurely.
- The icon imagery is inconsistent but mostly what I wanted to point out here is that these should be large clickable buttons rather than sentences with a link within. It will clearly identify what these areas are for and gives an opportunity for there to be more concise labeling and therefore less information to digest.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT). The page features a header with navigation links, a main banner for 'Texas Clear Lanes', and several content sections including 'Driver', 'Government', 'Business', and 'Careers'. There are also sections for 'DriveTexas', 'Traffic Cameras', and 'How Do I'. The footer contains a 'Connect With Us' section with social media links and a 'What We Do' section with various service links. Red boxes and numbers 1 through 12 are overlaid on the page to indicate specific usability issues.

- 4 7/10 interviewed participants tried to click this to go to a "News" page. This may be alleviated by making the links below the genres of news and not titles but the "News" part should still be clickable.
- 5 This seems like a mistake. Interview feedback implied that users thought it was "accidentally left there by the developer so [she] didn't want to touch it and mess a government site up". This flow needs to be reworked.
- 6 As I mentioned in #4, this section is not clear. There are too many words per link for users to take the time and read them to figure out that they are titles. Furthermore, if the titles don't apply to what they are looking for and they can't click the "News" link, they become frustrated and feel anxiety.
- 7 The slider section is OK but this "Read More" CTA needs to be highly visible on both light and dark backgrounds if you have different pictures filtering through.
- 8 These arrows are hard to see and add unnecessary clutter. I would advise getting rid of them and signifying separate lines through proper leading of the lines.
- 9 These icons are too complex and too pixelated to work at this size. I would advise making more simplistic one color versions that were a little larger or getting rid of them completely.
- 10 It may seem small but consistency is key when concerning a site this dense. You want to train your users from the beginning and for that to happen there needs to be a consistent design language implemented. Specifically, here I am calling out using a dotted line divider rather than the solid line dividers in the header but its a lesson to be applied to everything.
- 11 Seems like a bug/error.
- 12 The "?" is unnecessary on all of these, both grammatically and because links should be labels or fragments.

Actionable Objectives

- Start tracking the keyword searches on the TxDOT website.

Opportunity to inform language and tags on documents, stories, forms, etc., in order to make the site easier to navigate considering people are going there with an intent to complete some task.

- I suggest implementing a card-sorting research component to get a better grasp on word-associations concerning the content on this website.

The site is so dense and respondents have frequently said that they were overwhelmed. Employing a logical syntax to associate with proper content may alleviate some of this friction.

- Update functionality so users can experience proper functionality on all browsers and devices.



Currently, users cannot download forms on Chrome and according to a July, 2018, article on Tech.co, Google Chrome has 59% of the global marketshare using it's services. Nearly 4 times the amount of it's closest competitor.

- Implement either a redesign of the entire website and/or apply these UI changes across the website.



Section 4



COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

Breakdown of competitive functionality and engagement in order to distinguish industry behavior.





Competitive Analysis

Digital Touchpoints

 = The business has this component
 = The business does not have this component

	Texas Monthly	The Daily Texan	KXAN	KVUE	Google News	Reddit	NPR	Radio FM	The Weather Channel	WAZE	Apple Maps	Google Maps
Utilized Touchpoints												
Website	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	✓
iOS App	✓	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Android App	✓	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	✓
Desktop App	—	—	—	—	✓	—	✓	✓	—	—	✓	✓
TV Program	—	—	✓	✓	—	—	—	—	✓	—	—	—
YouTube Channel	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	—	—
Blog	—	—	Weather Blog	—	✓	✓	NPR Blogs	✓	✓	✓	—	✓
Podcast	✓	✓	—	✓	—	✓	✓	—	✓	—	—	—
Print	✓	✓	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Newsletter	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	—	✓	—	—	✓

	= The business has this component
	= The business does not have this component

	Texas Monthly	The Daily Texan	KXAN	KVUE	Google News	Reddit	NPR	Radio FM	The Weather Channel
Online Functionality									
Audio Content	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Video Content	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	—	✓
Global Search	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Top Navigation	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Account Based	✓	✓	—	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	Device/ Email Based
Local Events	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	—	—
Follow Functionality	✓	✓	—	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	—
Customizable Content	—	—	—	—	✓	✓	✓	—	✓
Reminder Capability	—	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	✓
Save For Later Functionality	—	—	—	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	—



Competitive Analysis

Social Media Behavior

— = The business does not have this component

Texas Monthly

The Daily Texan

KXAN

KVUE

Google News

Reddit

NPR

Social Media Behaviors

Facebook Followers

254,029

18,442

287,209

301,738

—

1,185,521

6,063,607

Posts Per Day

8

7

50

80

—

2

45

Day's Highest Engagement

Political
150 reactions
29 comments
43 shares

Culture
13 reactions
-
3 shares

Car Chase
147 reactions
385 comments
74 shares

Crime
307 reactions
89 comments
239 shares

—

Entertainment
252 reactions
56 comments
8 shares

Crime
50,000 reactions
1,900 comments
8,172 shares

Twitter Followers

181,500

56,600

180,300

201,600

235,300

584,400

7,600,000

Posts Per Day

19

13

35

100

1-2/week

5

73

Day's Highest Engagement

Retweet Political
5 comments
38 shares
49 likes

Crime
3 comments
60 shares
75 likes

Crime
6 comments
22 shares
9 likes

Retweet Political
3 comments
58 shares
92 likes

Culture
-
15 shares
21 likes

Culture
4 comments
29 shares
107 likes

Political
156 comments
95 shares
184 likes

Instagram Followers

180,000

3,420

21,100

24,000

—

264,000

1,600,000

Posts Per Day

3

1/week

2/week

4

—

4/week

2

Day's Highest Engagement

Travel
4,323 likes
96 comments

Culture
245 likes
6 comments

Local Event
685 likes
8 comments

Political
520 likes
4 comments

—

Animal
5,027 likes
46 comments

Political
28,500 likes
476 comments

JB Bird (SME)

65%–70% mobile engagement on website

Competitors Facebook Accounts



FOLLOWERS

Range

18,442–6,063,607

Average

1,351,758

POSTS PER DAY

Range

2–80

Average

32

*Please note that titan competitors like NPR will have a very different set of metrics than local entities. Be sure to set realistic goals, concerning first engagements, that are within the ranges and then adjust as TxDOT engagement grows.

Competitors Twitter Accounts



FOLLOWERS

Range

56,600–7,600,000

Average

1,281,385

POSTS PER DAY

Range

0.29–100

Average

35

Competitors Instagram Accounts



FOLLOWERS

Range

3,420–1,600,000

Average

348,753

POSTS PER DAY

Range

0.14–4

Average

1.6

- + Texas Monthly Magazine skews their Instagram content towards women. They also retweet posts with higher engagements, from other Twitter accounts, about stories they have previously posted and repost their same stories with different captions (sometimes daily).
- + Through observation, the formula as far as content type for digital news, is at least a header photo or graphic with an eye-catching caption and a title preview combination below the image if the platform allows it. From this competitive analysis, in around 1/10 posts, a static header image is replaced with a video.
- + KVUE floods their social media by sharing stories from other sources but also from reposting updates on unfolding stories, or just reposting stories with different imagery. They also cover more crime and sports than the other sources from this scope of content.
- + NPR on Twitter sometimes posts the same thing within an hour or so of each other, they may be tracking engagement time periods.



4/9 competitors provide customization functionality

The larger competitors provide customization functionality. This is an opportunity to delight the user by providing a site that has state-wide or national news along with the individuals local news on their homepage.

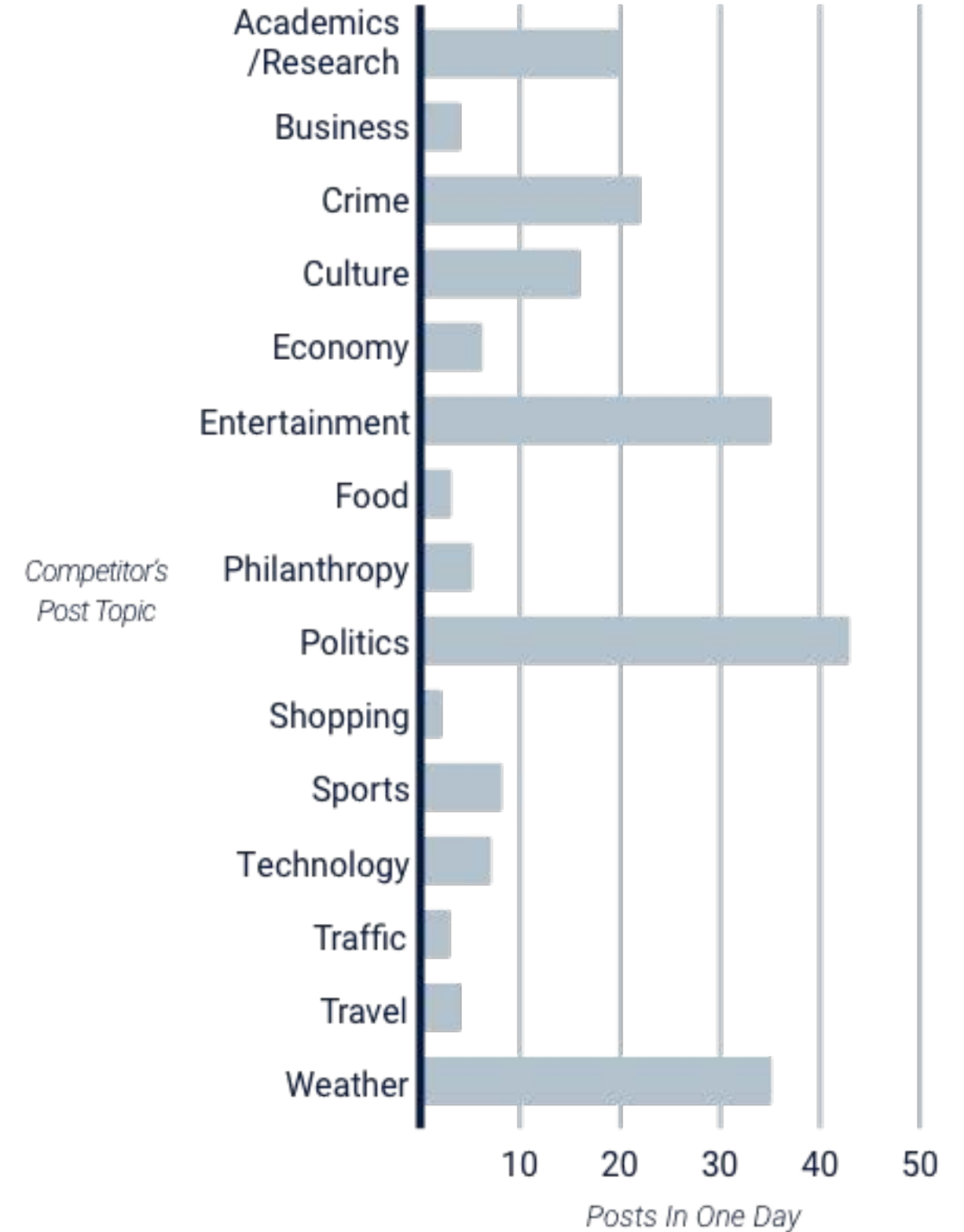
6/9 competitors provide following functionality

The ability to follow a category, author, topic, or hashtag, can provide stronger engagement due to the user feeling ownership over the content (alike when you buy something from the store and it becomes yours).

Post Topics

In order to gain topical information from the atmosphere users are interacting with currently, I mapped the cadence of topics among listed competitors over the span of a single day. The most engaged with topics are as follows:

- 6/19** posts were **POLITICAL**
- 5/19** posts were about **CRIME**
- 4/19** posts were **CULTURAL**
- 1/19** posts were about **ENTERTAINMENT**
- 1/19** posts were about **TRAVEL**
- 1/19** posts were about a **LOCAL EVENT**
- 1/19** posts were about an **ANIMAL**



Competitive Analysis

Actionable Objectives

- Utilize contributors to populate more content than time or staff may allow.



This is also an opportunity to utilize local or influential voices that have their own dedicated following, increasing TxDOT exposure.

- Consider situations where people may be more inclined to interact.

The SME, J.B. Bird, mentioned this as well, but there should be a mix of "broccoli and dessert", meaning that content should be entertaining and informative.

- Establish social media data checkpoints.

Aspirational metrics, as well as engagement topics and sentiment, should be monitored consistently but there should be benchmarks where the statistics are compared over time and goals are adjusted as TxDOT receives more information about their performance as well as their audience.

The magic numbers change and are tailored to the context and brand, therefore I advise against buying into specific numbers of posts a day, etc. Know the range and tailor for what applies to TxDOT.



Section 5

Subject Matter Experts

Insights from industry subject matter experts in order to obtain best practices and processes.





On October 10th, we meet with

JB Bird

Director of Media Relations and Newsroom
for the University of Texas Newsroom

Brief Summary

JB Bird has first hand knowledge of what it takes to implement and maintain a digital newsroom as well as an overall news presence across platforms. Through this meeting we parsed out best practices as well as some valueable tips. First being scheduling healthy proportions of content across the below categories.

Content Distribution Categories



Paid Media

A good way to acquire new readers but earned media is still the preferred avenue for that.



Direct Media

Heavy in this area including distribution through social media and our other owned channels.



Earned Media

Desired avenue to expand our reach through people sharing our content (including other news sources picking it up and sharing it).



Subject Matter Experts

SME #1 JB Bird Advice

Tips and Advice

- + Content should be balanced between entertaining and informative.
- + Content should be scheduled out in advance enough to flow through a creation, revision, and approval process but hire smart and allow autonomy for the approval part.
- + There should be an established set of standards describing what to engage with and what to leave alone as well as how to handle negative or tense situations so that everyone is on the same page and doesn't panic.
- + Do not put the same content on every channel but it is ok to overlap somewhat. Just know which audience is where and what they are interested in engaging with.

“ A social media link to a story is how people consume media, dipping in and out.

“ We have strategy pillars for the university and try to make sure we are somewhat evenly hitting all of the pillars consistently.

“ We review the editorial calendar every week and adjust where we need to.

“ We can't put out opinion pieces unless it's on a neutral topic. We can't advance political opinions with funding from the state.

JB's Last Notes

6-10

Direct Team Members

Engagement with the news site is

65%–70%

mobile.

Owned channels:

Website

Email Lists

Facebook

LinkedIn

Twitter

Youtube

Instagram

*Establish metrics to gauge success.

*Don't elevate misinformation by responding to it.



Amelia Acker

University of Texas iSchool Expert On Social Media

Brief Summary

Dr. Amelia Acker met with us to provide information on the realm of social media and how it is closely intertwined with news distribution today.

Tips and Advice

- + Even though the largest consumers of online news are tech savvy younger population, there is a lot of potential appeal for TxDOT to target an older population.
- + It is important if you are re-posting content to highlight different angles of the story with the copy to see what works.
- + Pay attention to when your audience is accessing your content and try to start piecing together what the surrounding context may be in order to better target them.
- + Facebook has the largest population but Twitter, Instagram, and Youtube provide the biggest opportunity for expanding your audience.

Research Referred To by Dr. Amelia Acker

“ According to PewResearch.org, in 2017 the “audience for nearly every major sector of the U.S. **news media fell in 2017 – with the only exception being radio**”. The overall audience for radio has been 90% of Americans (age 12 or older who listen at least once a week) for the past 9 years.

Pew Research Center(2017)

“ In 2018, **57%** of Americans (age 12 or older) **listened to podcasts at least once a week.**

Pew Research Center(2018)

“ In 2018, **90%** of Americans (age 12 or older) **listened to AF/FM radio at least once a week.**

Pew Research Center(2018)

- Consider a podcast or radio station as a viable touchpoint for TxDOT news.

Appropriate context where TxDOT could be an authority.

Less pressure on content creation considering TxDOT could sprinkle stories among traffic updates, weather updates, talk shows, and music.

Updates about the “why” and “how long”, surrounding construction projects, may create a solution for a problem people didn’t know they had. Creating integration possibilities later with leading navigation applications (resulting in greater exposure and presence).



- Establish content pillars to help maintain the attention to balance when planning content disbursement.
- Establish potential legal and PR pitfalls in order to establish a standard of how to handle possible tense situations.



Section 6

SURVEY

Analytics surrounding the survey we populated in order to poll a larger sample of Texans.



Survey

In order to gain insight about user sentiments and behaviors from a broader sample, we distributed a survey through various platforms. The following section depicts the findings.

Total Number of Respondents



Respondent Age Range

17–76 Year Olds

Mean of 37 Years Old

Respondent Gender Array



215 Female



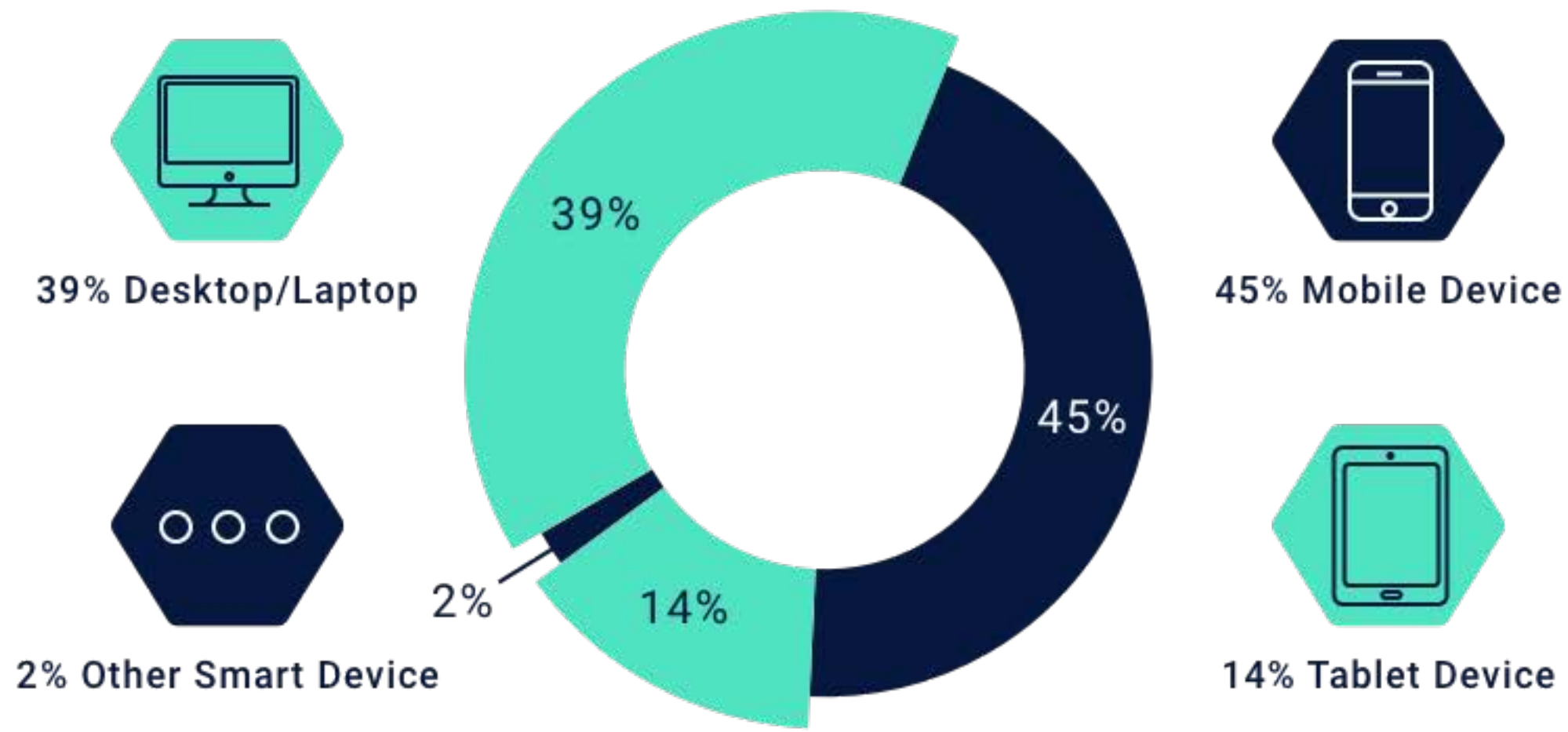
93 Male



3 Other

43 **Survey Results**
Preferred Devices

Primary Devices Used

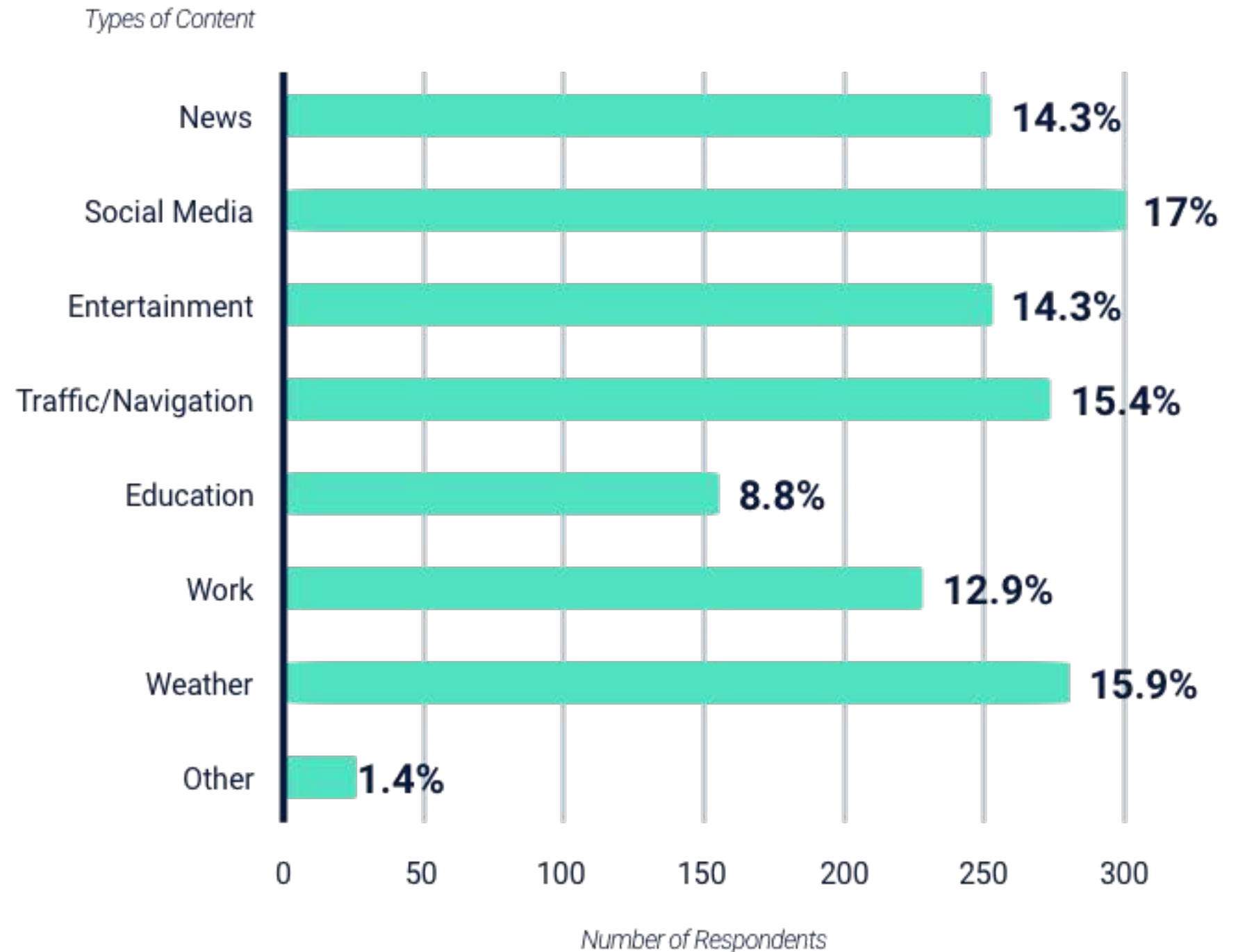


Content

It is important when considering news distribution to simultaneously consider what content will be distributed.

With this in mind, we asked respondents to choose what types of

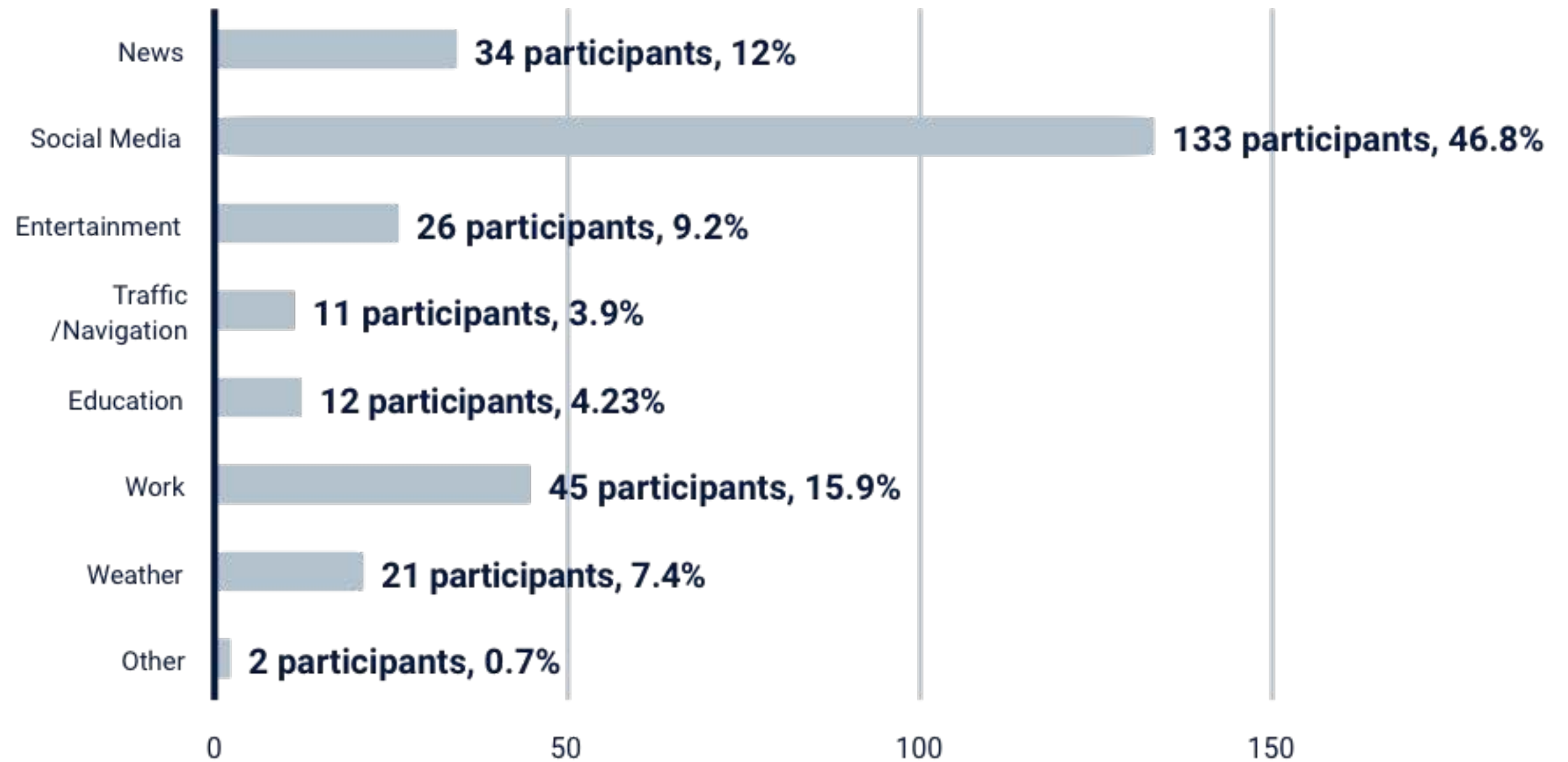
Types of Content Accessed Using Digital Devices





Ranked **1st**, Most Accessed Content

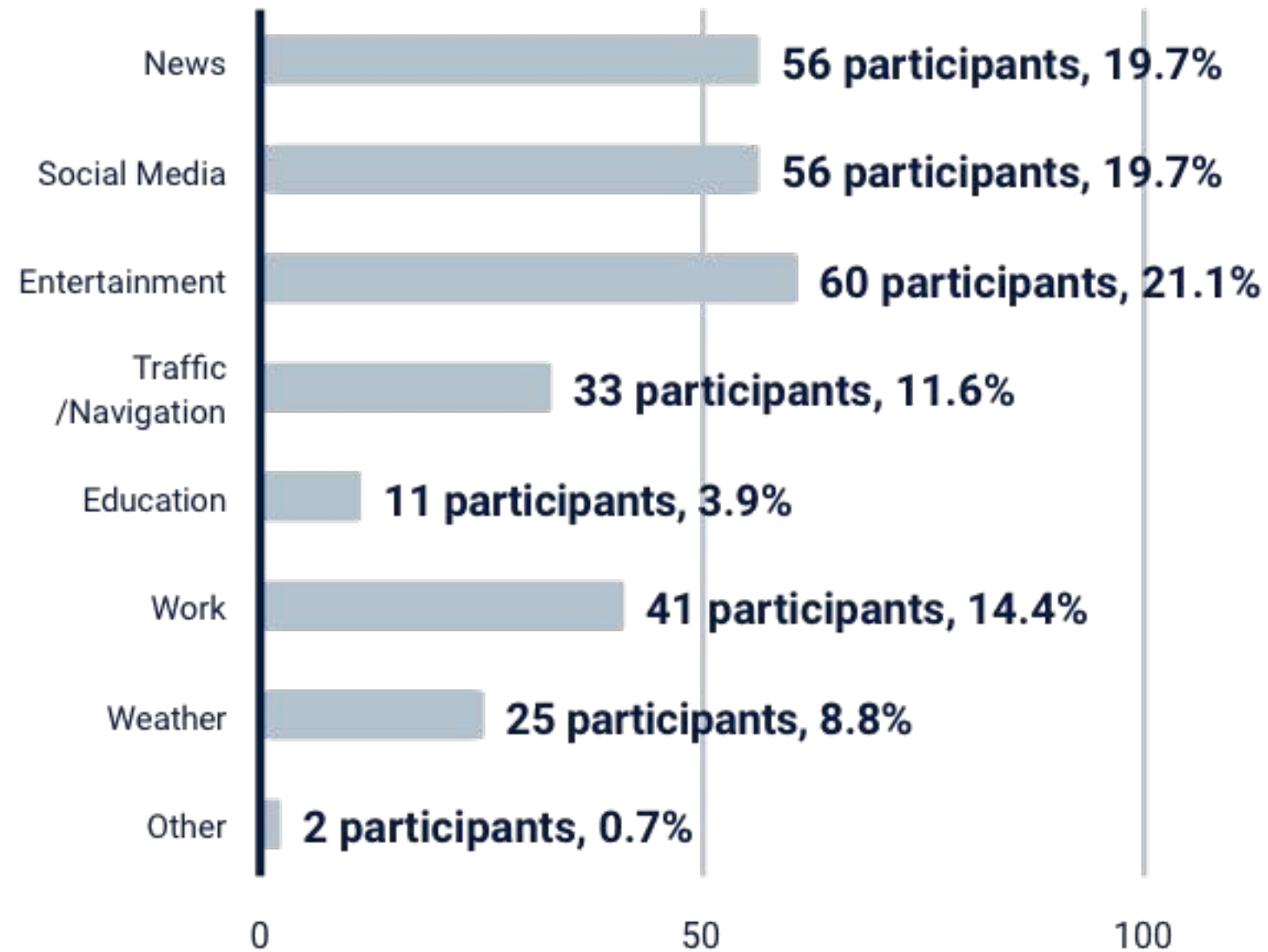
Types of Content



Number of Respondents

Ranked **2nd**, Most Accessed Content

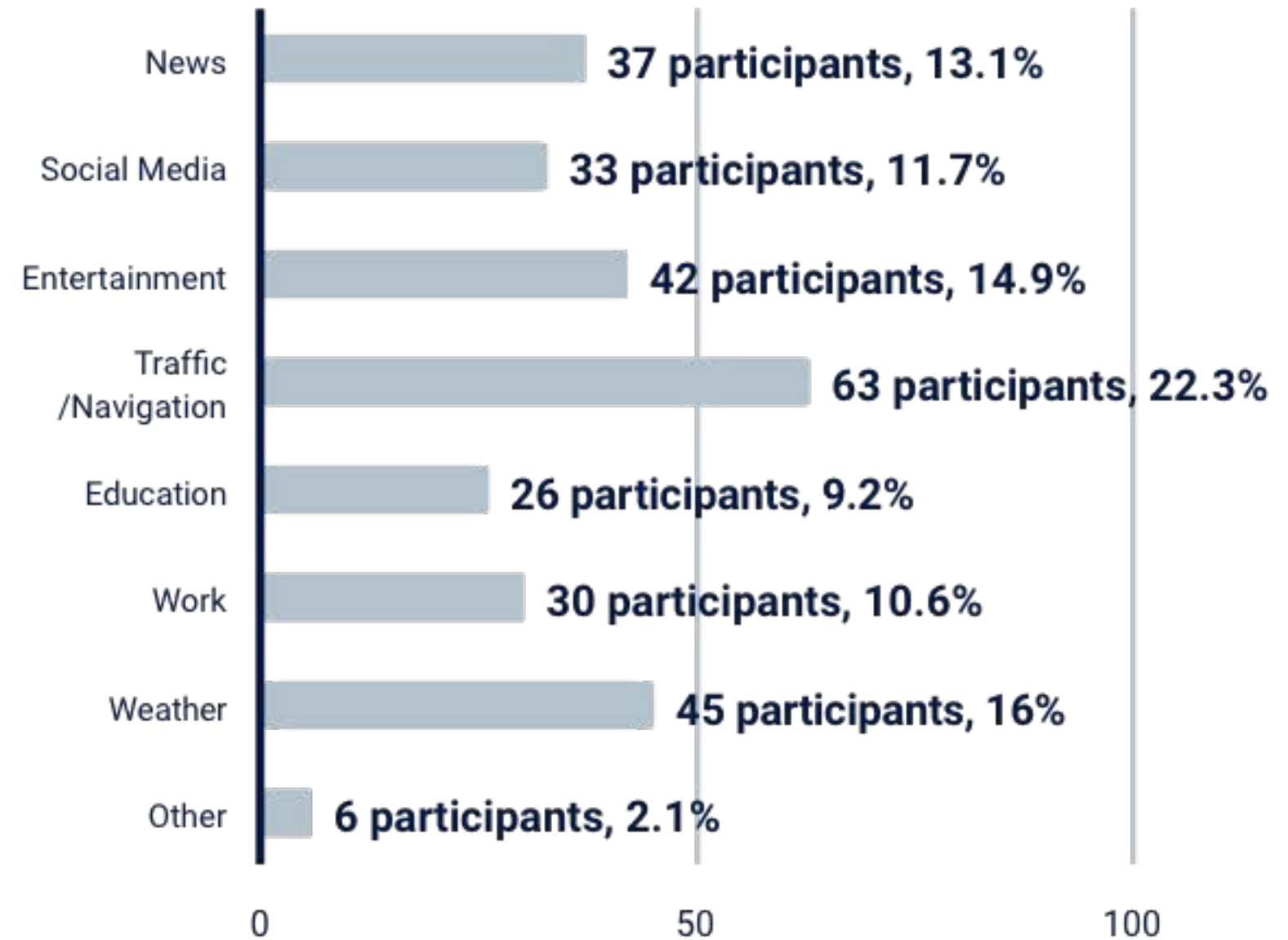
Types of Content



Number of Respondents

Ranked **3rd**, Most Accessed Content

Types of Content



Number of Respondents

Sentiment Analysis

After respondents answered whether they were familiar with the Texas Department of Transportation, we asked them what their overall

31.9%

POSITIVE

33%

NEGATIVE

29.6%

NEUTRAL

5.5%

CONFUSED WITH
DMV

“

It's a good department that cares about the safety of all drivers.

“

Are they the ones who didn't build out the infrastructure ahead of time? If so then my opinion is poor.

“

No opinion about them really.

“

Long lines, a place to get license renewed (and get TX Tags).

- Need to differentiate from DMV/DPS
- Considering the staggering percentage of users who ranked social media as their most accessed content, distributing news and brand identity through social media platforms is a must.
- Tie more than one content type together in the same story in order for it to be more accessible and sought after.



Section 7

USER INTERVIEWS

Generative and evaluative research through direct communication with Texas drivers.



User Interview Process

For the user interviews we recruited participants based off of the screener parameters we developed post literature review analysis.

From there developed a test script consisting on two parts;

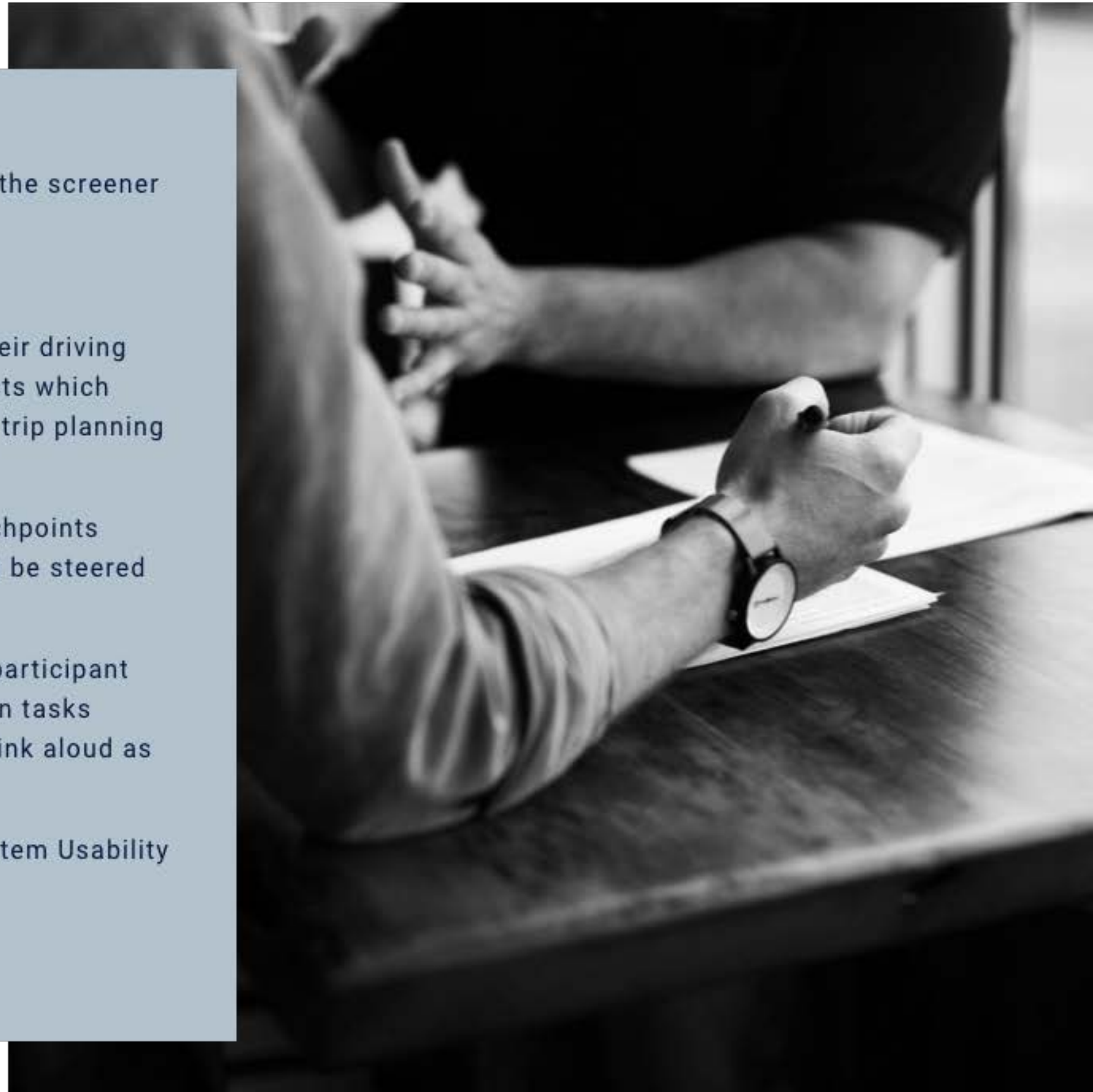
1. Generative interview where we asked participants about their driving habits, perception of TxDOT, behavior around things subjects which TxDOT is the local authority on like construction, and their trip planning behavior.

Throughout this phase we wanted to unpack any possible touchpoints being utilized currently, could be potentially utilized, or should be steered clear of.

2. Evaluative task-based interview in which we assigned the participant two separate tasks, based off of some of the most common tasks represented in the website analytics, and asked them to think aloud as they completed them.

After the participant completed each task s/he filled out a System Usability Scale (SUS).

Are findings are as follows...

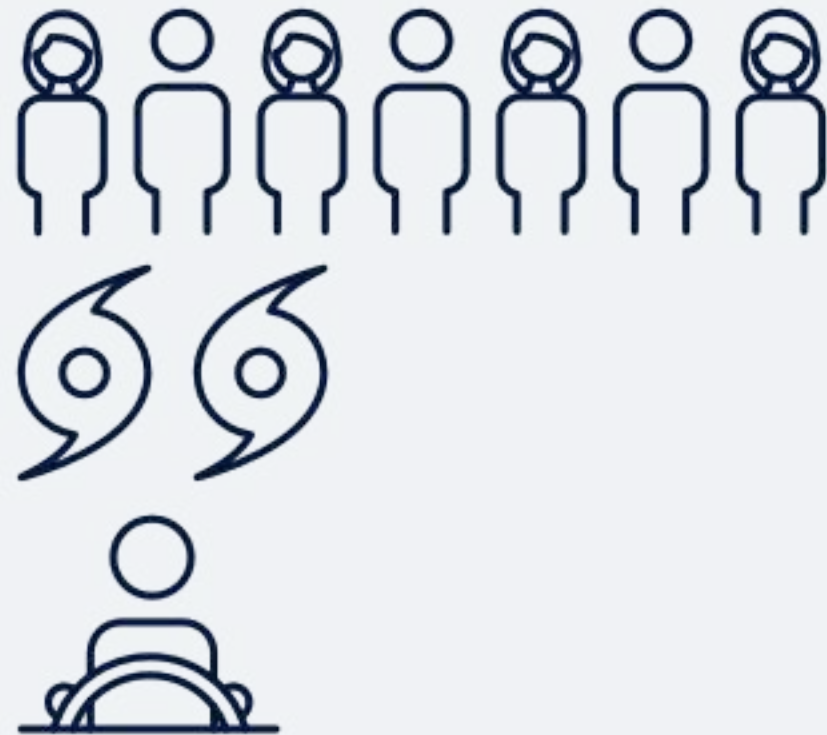


51 **User Interviews**
Participant Breakdown

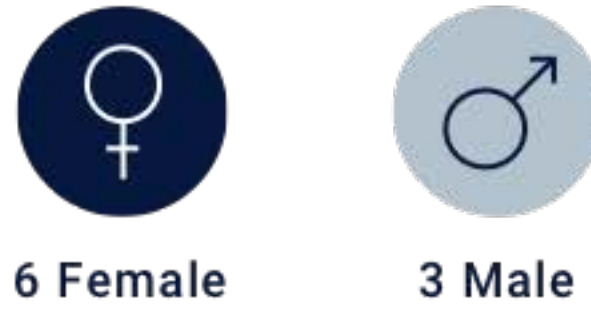
Total Number of Participants



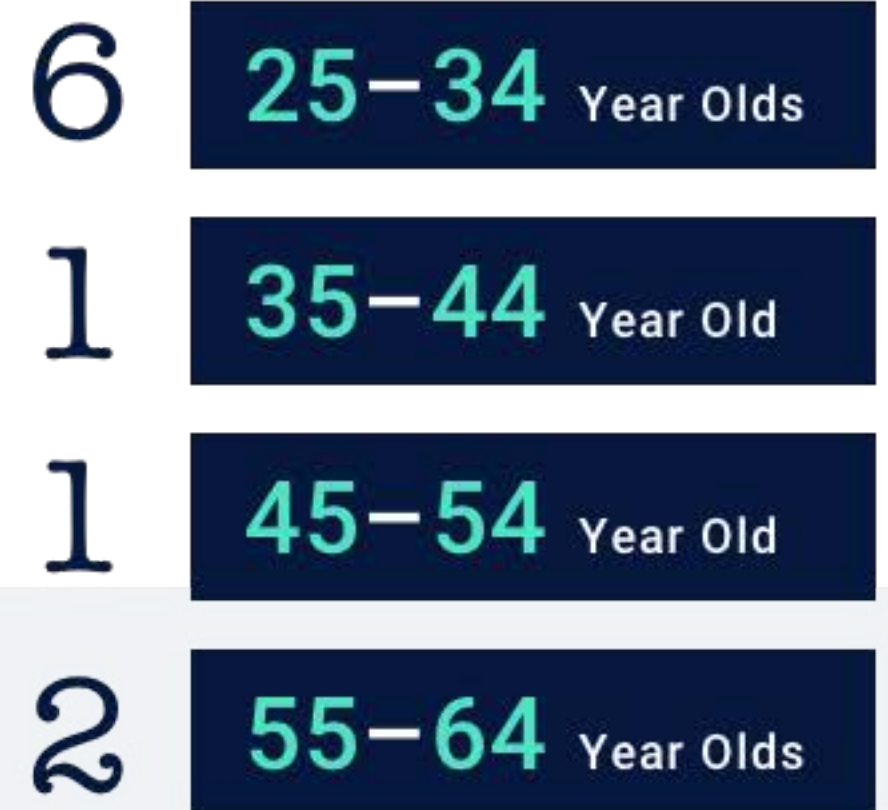
Participants



Participant Gender Array



Participant Ages



7 Standard drivers
2 Evacuees
1 Commercially Licensed Driver

10/10 participants experience construction multiple times a week

1/10 participants look into what is causing the construction

7/10 participants knew exactly where the construction they referenced was

9/10 participants stated that the construction lasted near to or more than a year.

“There is no way they can do enough roadwork to keep up with the congestion and we need to have mass transit, so yes it bothers me. I understand the necessity what bothers me is when I'm coming home from San Antonio at 8 or 9 and I will run into a traffic jam after a long day of work because that is when they start working on the roads. Maybe if they could push it back, that would help me.

CDL Driver Takeaways

Only looks into construction if it is in a context where the road regulations may change.

“I normally pay attention to places where the road goes down to two lanes with concrete barriers on either side. The truck can jump up to a foot left or right so I usually just takes up the two lanes in order to make sure I don't accidentally hit someone trying to squeeze by.

Uses Google maps, 511, the Weather Channel, and Corporate Lodging CLC

The “local driving habits” sometimes influence what routes s/he will take.

Rest stops are a part of the pre-plan due to the regulations around drivers and safety checks. Another component that influences which rest stops/hotels s/he stops is whether or not the truck can be parked there safely.

“Morning of I do a pre-check of the truck. After the first 50 miles I do a safety check and then every 3 hours or 150 miles, whichever comes first, I will stop and do another safety check/tighten all of the connections and check the lights and such.



In-Depth Look at Participant 5's App Use Feedback

(via notetaker's notes)

What tool do you use for planning a trip?

WAZE - former colleague told her about it, said it saved a bunch of time, and it has been very helpful. She got her family to start using it too.

For WAZE, what are you looking for specifically?

Uses to get best possible route. Other driving fam. members use it. Use it to notify each other where they are. There's a game element that "was amusing at first" but doesn't really use now. You can report slow downs and road hazards and cops too. She reports these things.

Do you like that process? Why/why not? What specific parts cause frustration and why?

Likes it. One thing that is a little problematic is usually needs to wait to turn it on until she's about 100 yards away from the house because otherwise it gets hung from being connected to home network.

Any thoughts on how it could be improved?

Other than that it works fine. "Interface is pretty slick." Icons are big. Nothing that she can think of to improve it "off the top of my head."
Screen reader support enabled.

68

INDUSTRY STANDARD

“

I didn't know where to start in terms of where the news tab was. Had to use the "search" function. The filter didn't help much and after a series of clicking I found the El paso page and saw the local news subcategory.

40

TXDOT WEBSITE

+

Due to the sheer density of a government website, there should be an extremely thought-out organizational system into which it is easier to know where to put new content. A lot of times without a plan or a system in place, websites are revised according to the existing content and therefore are not future proof.

- Establish an information architecture system which would be easy for both the user, and the employee adding new information, to use.
- Capitalize on the Drive Texas functionality by pairing up with existing navigational applications Texans already use like WAZE.



Drive Texas offers a unique incentive that applications focusing on catering to locals would benefit from. My suggestion is to start with WAZE because they already have the user input functionality in the app leading to user training where the user will look further into road blocks such as accidents. This way the user is already trained, the interface already exists, and TxDOT is pairing with a primary navigation application already in the hands of Texans.

- Make an effort to start fixing user sentiment by first increasing exposure about TxDOT's identity. Currently, the numbers are most-likely weighted by negative sentiment towards the DPS and then confusing them with TxDOT.



Section 8

RECOMMENDATIONS

Breakdown of actionable
takeaways from this research.



01

Find a way to gain direct access to Texans.

02

Get Texans to utilize TxDOT as a primary information source.

?

?

03

Find out what touchpoints and channels TxDOT should utilize.

04

Figure out what content would entice Texans to interact with TxDOT and how that content should be delivered.

?

?

1 Find a way to gain direct access to Texans.

Recommendation 1

EARNED MEDIA IMPRESSIONS TO GAIN NEW VIEWERS

According to the first Subject Matter Expert (SME) we met with, JB Bird, Director of Media Relations and Newsroom for the UT Newsroom, a proven way to gain access to new viewers is to strategize towards getting earned media impressions.

A person is more likely to trust sources they already engage with regularly (like their friends and favored news sources) so if those people share TxDOT news stories, new viewers are more likely to spend time with the content than if TxDOT were to post via their own channels.

Recommendation 3

CAPITALIZE ON THE DIFFERENTIATION OF DRIVE TEXAS

Capitalize on Drive Texas functionality. With some improvements, such as being more mobile friendly and fixing lag time issues, this could bring a lot of new people to engage directly and frequently with TxDOT.

According to our user interview feedback, traffic related information should be quick and easy to access and update in order to be helpful. 8/10 interviewees do not follow up as to why roadwork is being done or how long it will be there for. Along the same as the feedback that one of the participants forgets about the road closure signs because he forgets when he saw it, drivers tend to forget the information obtained while driving because there is no way to write it down and their mind eventually goes elsewhere.

Recommendation 2

PARTNER WITH APPLICATIONS/ OTHER SOURCES

Develop partnerships with the applications Texans already utilize for similar content (weather, traffic, news), such as the ones listed below from the user interview feedback.

The intent is to pair with applications that could benefit from the content you have to provide. For example, adding construction timelines to the WAZE functionality and having a "provided by" tag.

Apple Maps
Google Maps
WAZE
HOA Newsletter
FM Radio
Podcasts

2 Get Texans to utilize TxDOT as a primary information source.

Recommendation 1

EASY-TO-INTERACT-WITH BRAND PRESENCE ACROSS PLATFORMS

A news source users want to interact with daily should be easy to use and according to our SME, JB Bird, the content should be a healthy mix between entertaining and informative. Currently the brand's main interaction point is the website and essentially you're asking people to come to you for information, clarity, and anecdotes but the site is too dense and hard to sift through (according to our interview participants). In order to establish a more accessible brand identity (to entice news interaction in the future) there should be some interface changes that could help greatly with a smaller effort than redoing the whole site bottom-up.



3 Find out what touchpoints and channels TxDOT should utilize.

Recommendation 1

MOBILE FRIENDLY QUICK SYNOPSES = SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media naturally lends itself to sharing glimpses of stories for the user to then click into. The reach is further than a website and the tracking metrics are simple to see which sources are driving the most traffic.

Recommendation 2

ACCOUNT BASED ACCESS AND CUSTOMIZATION

Letting people who subscribe customize the areas they want to hear about, this provides you engagement feedback to which areas you could cover more thoroughly and it psychologically doesn't feel like bugging if they actively selected it.

4/9 competitors provide customization functionality

The larger competitors provide customization functionality. This is an opportunity to delight the user by providing a site that has state-wide or national news along with the individuals local news on their homepage.

6/9 competitors provide following functionality

The ability to follow a category, author, topic, or hashtag, can provide stronger engagement due to the user feeling ownership over the content (alike when you buy something from the store and it becomes yours).

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FOLLOWERS (range then mean)

18,442–6,063,607 1,351,758

POSTS PER DAY (range then mean)

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POSTS PER DAY (range then mean)

.29–100 35

Competitors Instagram Accounts

FOLLOWERS (range then mean)

3,420–1,600,000 348,753

POSTS PER DAY (range then mean)

.14–4 1.6



Top-Level Recommendations

– = The business does not have this component

3 Find out what touchpoints and channels TxDOT should utilize.

	Texas Monthly	The Daily Texan	KXAN	KVUE	Google News	Reddit	NPR
Social Media Behaviors							
Facebook Followers	254,029	18,442	287,209	301,738	–	1,185,521	6,063,607
Posts Per Day	8	7	50	80	–	2	45
Day's Highest Engagement	Political 150 reactions 29 comments 43 shares	Culture 13 reactions - 3 shares	Car Chase 147 reactions 385 comments 74 shares	Crime 307 reactions 89 comments 239 shares	–	Entertainment 252 reactions 56 comments 8 shares	Crime 50,000 reactions 1,900 comments 8,172 shares
Twitter Followers	181,500	56,600	180,300	201,600	235,300	584,400	7,600,000
Posts Per Day	19	13	35	100	1–2/week	5	73
Day's Highest Engagement	Retweet Political 5 comments 38 shares 49 likes	Crime 3 comments 60 shares 75 likes	Crime 6 comments 22 shares 9 likes	Retweet Political 3 comments 58 shares 92 likes	Culture – 15 shares 21 likes	Culture 4 comments 29 shares 107 likes	Political 156 comments 95 shares 184 likes
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Posts Per Day	3	1/week	2/week	4	–	4/week	2
Day's Highest Engagement	Travel 4,323 likes 96 comments	Culture 245 likes 6 comments	Local Event 685 likes 8 comments	Political 520 likes 4 comments	–	Animal 5,027 likes 46 comments	Political 28,500 likes 476 comments



Top-Level Recommendations

4 Figure out what content would entice Texans to interact with TxDOT and how that content should be delivered.

Recommendation 1

COLLECT CATEGORY INPUT FROM CUSTOMIZABLE SITE

Recommendation 2

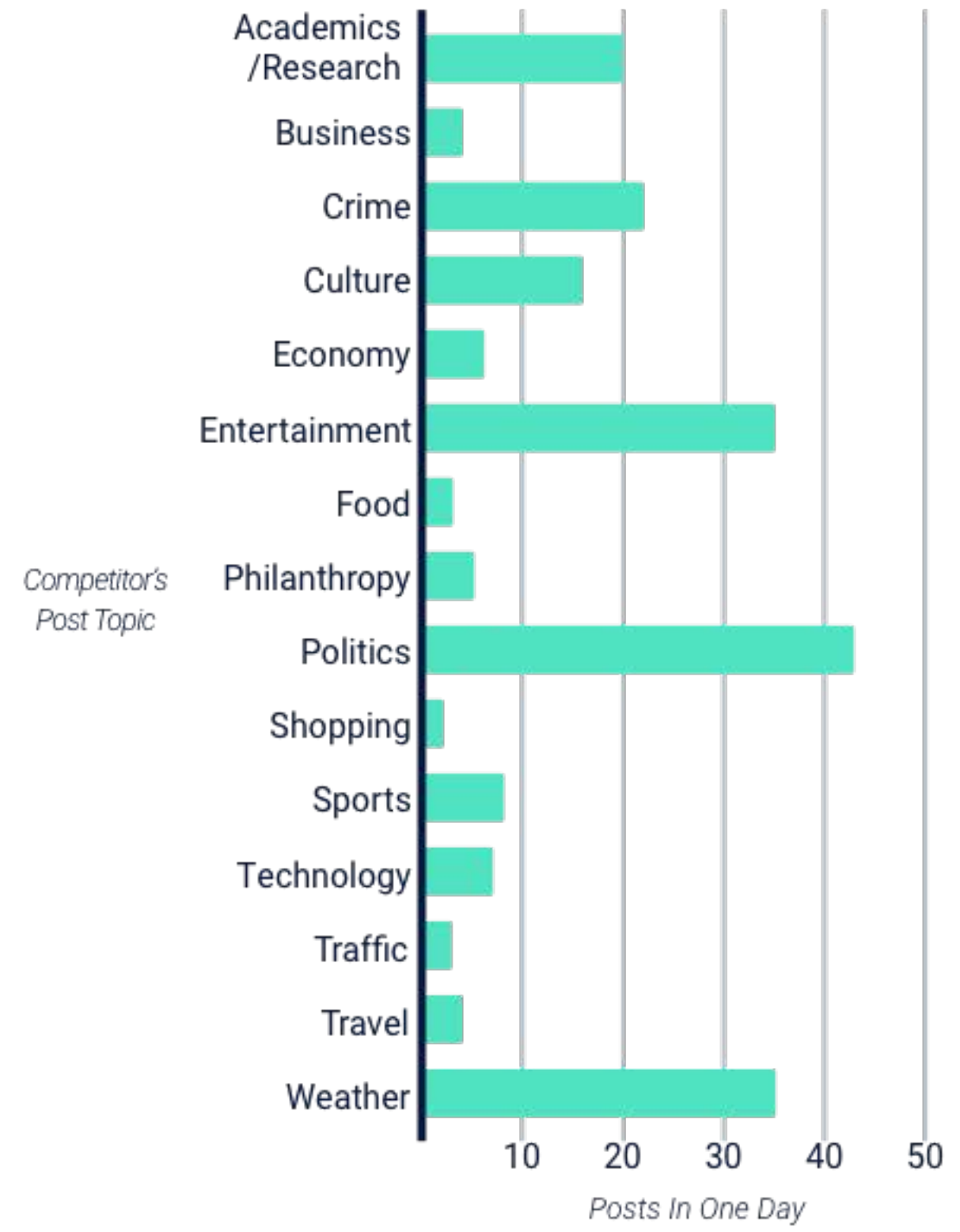
BRIEFLY REFERENCE LINKS TO OTHER STORIES WITHIN STORIES

This encourages the user to explore other content and develop a relationship with the brand (Refinery 29, Medium, NPR, all use this technique as a way to keep their stories shorter and let the user unpack what they want.

There is also an argument for tying other areas of content with topics that are seen to be engaging (via TxDOT engagement analytics) such as the speed limit post in the web analytics section of the report.

Recommendation 3

REFERENCE HIGHLY ENGAGED TOPICS FROM COMPETITOR POSTS



01

Find a way to gain direct access to Texans.

02

Get Texans to utilize TxDOT as a primary information source.

01

Strategize towards earned media impressions

Partner with applications Texans already use

Capitalize on the differentiation of Drive Texas functionality

02

Hone an easy-to-interact-with brand presences across all platforms and channels starting with revising the TxDOT's website interface.

03

Find out what touchpoints and channels TxDOT should utilize.

04

Figure out what content would entice Texans to interact with TxDOT and how that content should be delivered.

03

All news content should be created *mobile first*. TxDOT should also use social media as one of, if not the, main disbursement platform of news.

Implement account-based customization to incentivize users.

04

Collect post topic input from the customization flow from the website (refer to 3).

Link stories within stories by briefly referencing content within the linked story.

Keep track of competitor engagement metrics.

Actionable Objectives

Website Analytics

- Start tracking the keyword searches on the TxDOT website.

Opportunity to inform language and tags on documents, stories, forms, etc., in order to make the site easier to navigate considering people are going there with an intent to complete some task.

- I suggest implementing a card-sorting research component to get a better grasp on word-associations concerning the content on this website.

The site is so dense and respondents have frequently said that they were overwhelmed. Employing a logical syntax to associate with proper content may alleviate some of this friction.

- Update functionality so users can experience proper functionality on all browsers and devices.



Currently, users cannot download forms on Chrome and according to a July, 2018, article on Tech.co, Google Chrome has 59% of the global marketshare using it's services. Nearly 4 times the amount of it's closest competitor.

- Implement either a redesign of the entire website and/or apply these UI changes across the website.



Actionable Objectives

Competitive Analysis

- Utilize contributors to populate more content than time or staff may allow.



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- Consider situations where people may be more inclined to interact.

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- Establish potential legal and PR pitfalls in order to establish a standard of how to handle possible tense situations.



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- Considering the staggering percentage of users who ranked social media as their most accessed content, distributing news and brand identity through social media platforms is a must.
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Texas Department of Transportation 2018 User Research

Thank you!

