

@pigspotter hogs news media attention

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Controversial Twitter account was big news in September, garnering well over half a million rand worth of editorial news coverage in just one week says brand, reputation analysis and intelligence house Ornico.

Some people love him. Some people hate him. What's certain is that the much debated traffic tweeter exploded into South Africa's national consciousness after hitting the news headlines mid September. The Gauteng based @pigspotter garnered R615,918 worth of editorial media coverage in only a week according to Ornico. The period tracked by the brand and reputation analysis and intelligence company was 15 to 21 September 2010. Ornico tracks agenda setting titles, newspapers, magazines, online sites, broadcast brands and other media that influence the national discourse.

"Media coverage on this Twitter phenomenon pretty much began mid September after 702 Talk Radio 'trafficologist' Aki Anastasiou wrote a column about @pigspotter in The Star," says Oresti Patricios, Chief Executive Officer of Ornico. "The issue was covered incredibly well on radio and in the daily and weekly press with coverage on the likes of 702, Kaya FM, EyeWitnessNews as well as influential news brands like Business Day, City Press, Mail & Guardian, The Daily Maverick and TimesLIVE. The news item even garnered international coverage on the likes of BBC."

Patricios said 132 news articles or news items appeared featuring @PigSpotter the anonymous traffic Tweeter who alerts Gauteng drivers where Metro police are stationed and where speed traps and roadblocks are located on heavily trafficked roads. "The surge of interest after the news broke was significant, and the consumer reaction even more so. PigSpotter has even spawned a fan account on the micro-blog called @pigspotterweb, a PigSpotter fan page at www.pigspotter.co.za as well as Twitter accounts for spotting traffic police in the Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. The interest and conversation on Twitter and social media was massive."

The 132 mentions equalling R615,918 worth of editorial media coverage for the week from 15 to 21 September 2010 includes first editions of all press, excludes later editions and excludes community press. "It takes time to receive and process all the community press, a time factor which would affect the relevance of the research so the stated figure excludes community newspapers. The idea was to look at the volume of news coverage rather than total media coverage, and because of this we excluded DJ banter on radio which would have influenced the figures heavily. The news value was deduced using advertising rates from South African Rates and Data," Patricios said.

Ornico analysed the media coverage and reports that of the 132 articles or broadcast items 81 were objective or unbiased, 23 were positive and 28 were negative. "The most mentions were by TimesLIVE which had 12 articles on the subject, then EyeWitness News which ran 9 separate stories, followed by IOL which covered the subject 8 times."

"The high volume of coverage is because of the relevance of the news, because the phenomenon is a first and because it is controversial in that the subject touches on very sensitive social, economic and legal issues," he says. Africa has the highest incidences of road traffic deaths in the world, and South Africa is in the top 25 countries in the world that have the highest road fatalities per population count according to the World Health Organisation. "Drinking and driving remains a problem in South Africa, more so in the festive season when the number of accident on the roads increase and fatalities rise. Then there's the matter of corruption in the various traffic departments which are a sore point. That's in part why @pigspotter has become the fuel for hot debate on Twitter, on blogs, in the news and of course on talk radio. It's an issue that touches all of our lives and that most people have a very strong opinion of."

The head of Ornico added that another reason that drove @pigspotter's media appeal was the fact that he interacted with the media. "The man we know as 'Pig Spotter' and who also calls himself Cliff went on air to defend his actions and to offer insight as to why he refers to Metro Police as pigs, which refueled the debate."

Patricios says that the fact that @pigspotter is being hunted by the long arm of the law makes the user an underdog, an outlaw or a cyber type "robin hood". "People who love the service and are angry with the Metro Police for whatever reason strongly support what this Twitter account is doing, then there's the people who say it undermines the law. Of course it is also a very useful and interesting exercise in social media and online debate, which makes it interesting to the media and social media pundits," says Patricios.

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