

PUBLIC TRANSIT AND THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19

LeftTurnRightTurn

WHITEPAPER

Group 1

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CLIENT ASK AND OBJECTIVE

Trust Factor Research

To identify factors that would foster trust between riders and the transit system to effectively bring back pre-pandemic ridership levels in Ontario.

Sentiment Analysis

- To assimilate an in-depth understanding of Consumer pain-points during COVID-19 in Ontario.
- To determine the general feeling of the public towards the transit system's COVID-19 response in Ontario

Fear Factor Analysis

To explore possible alternatives for the portion of the population that can not wear masks due to medical reasons but heavily relies on public transportation as their means to get to their work or run essential errands.

Private Transit Analysis

To compare the difference in ridership attitudes between public transit and private alternatives such as Uber, Lyft etc. during COVID-19.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

The research uses primary and secondary data to analyse and report the findings.

Personal Interviews

10 personal interviews via phone call.

Online Surveys

Survey using Poll-fish with 100 participants who regularly used Public transit before COVID-19.

Social Listening

Using Meltwater we sifted through 161K unique conversations about Public Transit in Canada.

Secondary Research

Found relevant Secondary research information through database such as Mintel, Euromonitor, Statista and more.

The combination of these research methodologies has allowed us to uncover the salient topics, nature of the conversation and pain points around Public transit with special focus in the time frame of COVID-19.

**WHAT DID WE GET TO
KNOW?**

Findings #1

PAIN POINTS RELATED TO SOCIAL DISTANCING ISSUE

Infrequent services in Busy Routes

In busy routes as the services get cut down its causing people to **cram** into available buses.

46M

Impressions on TTC based Tweets with "No service" - found via Social Listening.

56%

Stopped using public transit due to safety concerns - found via Survey.

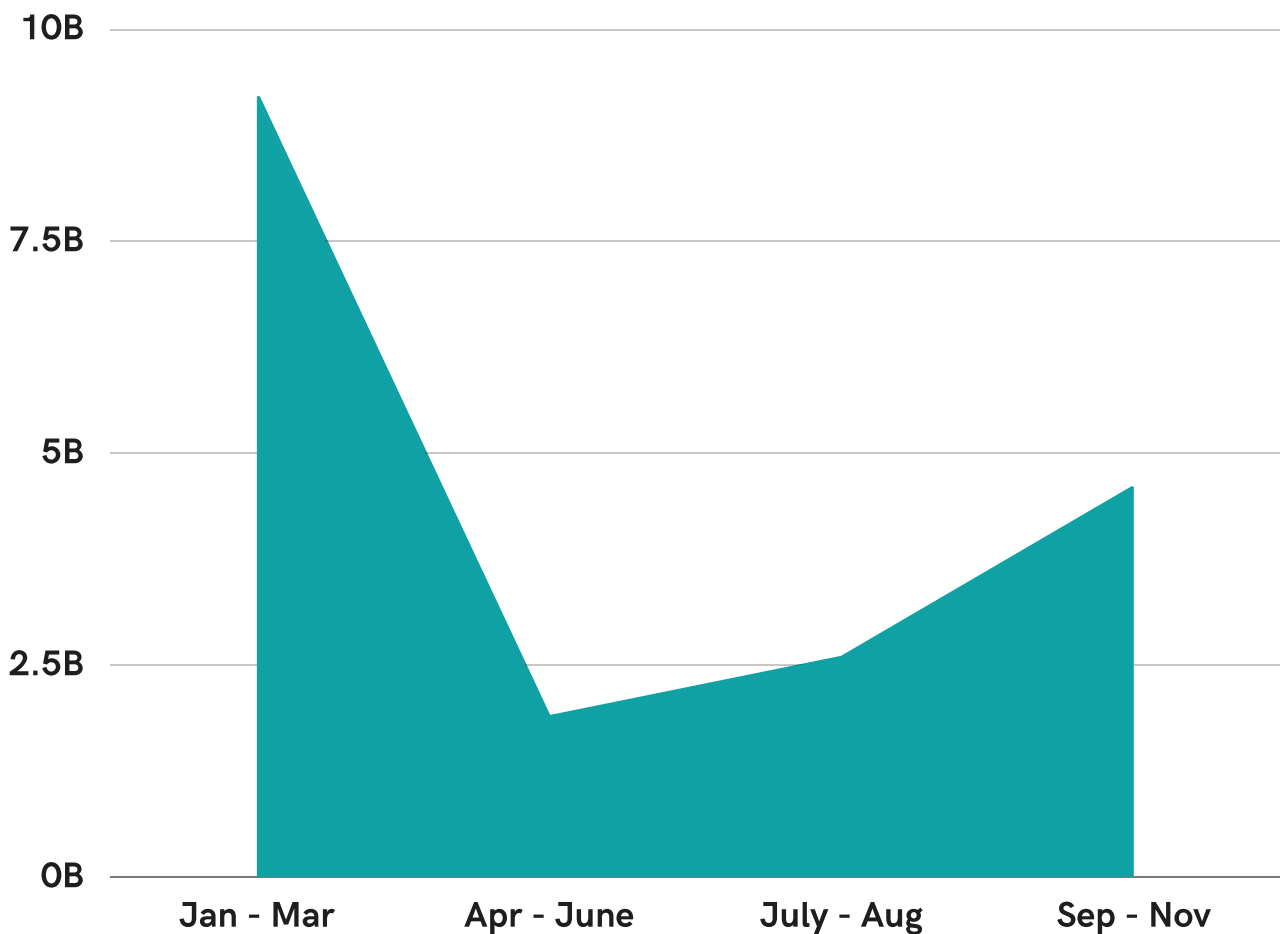
6%

Especially stopped due to infrequent or cancelled services - found via Survey.

When transit system starts cutting all-day and all-week service, by reducing frequencies, they start to dramatically reduce the usefulness of network, and this drives riders away. They also **trigger social justice impacts, because lower income riders tend to be all-day, evening, and weekend riders, not just peak riders.**

Even though some routes during peak hours, have always been crowded, riders **no longer want to tolerate that.** As ridership is slowly bouncing back, they are extra skeptical about crammed buses and in turn expect more frequent services than usual to make social distancing possible.

This affects them the most. Transit based Twitter Conversations on "No service" "Slow Service" shows us that it is on the rise.



TTC's response to covid related losses has affected its image and aids to the problem of overcrowding.

One Toronto resident, posted a video from the inside of a TTC bus Wednesday afternoon, and the footage shows a vehicle packed with people without any physical distancing at all.

So laying off 1000 of #EssentialWorkers is the answer to reducing overcrowded buses right?"

Some Angry riders took it to twitter calling out TTC on their Layoffs which will cut down more services resulting in overcrowding. Some are even calling this a social injustice impact.

Insensitive Twitter Response by TTC

On October 13, a TTC rider tweeted a picture of the crowded bus they were travelling in and wrote ..

For which TTC simply responded "As the city re-opens, social distancing will no longer be possible on our vehicles. As such, if you feel that a vehicle you are on is overcrowded, I would suggest getting off and boarding the next one. Apologies for the inconvenience."



Curious as to how we're supposed to social distance here? Can you help @TTChelps? @JayeRobinson?

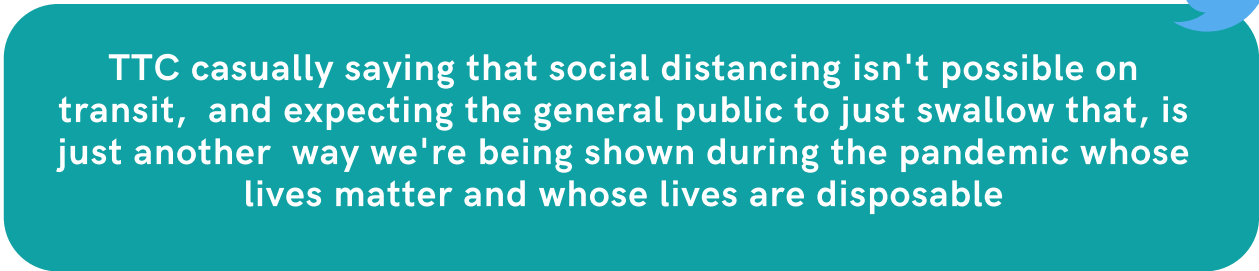
1.8K

Unique conversations following this twitter thread (Negative)
Found via Social Listening

9.22M

Negative Impressions on "social distancing" tweets around TTC
Found via Social Listening


This response from TTC was considered rather insensitive and irresponsible. It sparked 1.8K unique conversations and led to almost 9.22M negative impression on twitter. An angry twitter user responded saying ..




TTC casually saying that social distancing isn't possible on transit, and expecting the general public to just swallow that, is just another way we're being shown during the pandemic whose lives matter and whose lives are disposable

Some even took it to the internet with memes.



 **Poynter_Marcsman** #DEFUNDTHEPOLICE
@poyntermarcsman

Society if TTC actually cared about free public transit and actually were competent.



10:45 PM · Oct 13, 2020 · Twitter Web App



HOW IN THE
CHRIST ARE
YOU STILL
EMPLOYED

@EFFINBIRDS

LIMITATIONS AND TAKEAWAY

Limitations

Due to COVID-19 and social distancing regulations, the component of in-person primary research was limited. Due to how unprecedented these times are projections on ridership coming back to transit is unknown.

Take away

- Some routes have always been crowded but during a global pandemic that seems like too much of a risk. This calls for **better funding from the government to increase buses in certain routes.**
- In April, TTC lost almost 90million per month due to loss in ridership this only makes the problem worse as they had to layoff employees which will further make the services infrequent. After the TTC announced it was temporarily laying off 1,200 workers due to revenue loss from the COVID-19 pandemic, **the transit union said it will "fight" government to ensure the TTC gets the emergency funding it needs prevent the layoffs.** This could be an added reason as to why TTC needs emergency funding to make sure it can provide better service to riders who depend on it everyday.
- As winter approaches, private transit prices rise, which makes people more reliant on public transit. **A clear-cut winter operations plan with the pandemic in mind will reinforce trust among riders who are solely dependent on public transit.**
- Ridership has only returned to 37 per cent of what it was before the pandemic began. The TTC has added 100 buses to its busiest bus routes and is now operating at 95 per cent of its pre-pandemic capacity, and up to 92 per cent of all buses are running half-full or less. A very few routes get too busy and TTC will work on fixing that. This should have been part of the response to the tweet that went viral. This is an opportunity for **TTC to humanize their brand and put it forward that they are doing everything in their power to help working class Torontonians commute safely.** Instead of getting people enraged they should turn this around by getting people to empathize with them.

ACTIONABLE OPPORTUNITY

PR Campaign

It has been a frustrating and frightening experience for riders to continue using public transit during the pandemic. Many users have mentioned public transit being the only transportation possible for them. Adding to the stress and fear, many riders do not follow mask etiquette and social distancing, putting others at risk. Even with multiple PSAs around masks, sanitation and distancing guidelines, TTC is facing challenges to implement all measures effectively. But even with full service frequency, it will not be always possible to socially distance while using the public transit. Acknowledging the riders efforts in complying and keeping fellow riders safe is crucial for public relations.

One of the actionable solutions for public relations is a PR campaign celebrating the riders and instilling trust. The campaign will thank the riders for their efforts in maintaining social distancing and mask etiquette. The campaign will also assure riders that TTC is doing its part in ensuring a safe transit experience for the riders.

Considering the recent conversations on twitter where TTC had failed to acknowledge the social distancing issue, the campaign will be useful in regaining trust and maintaining clear communication regarding TTCs current efforts.



PR CAMPAIGN VIDEO

**WHAT DID WE GET TO
KNOW?**

Findings #2

PAIN POINTS RELATED TO MASK WEARING ISSUE

Some riders not wearing mask

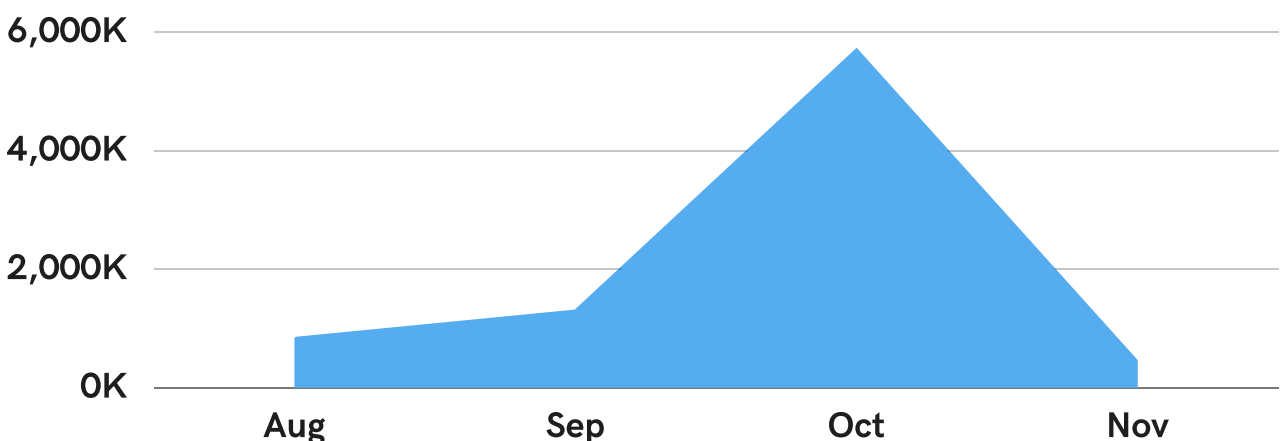
Riders are extremely unhappy with others not wearing masks in public transit. After TTC introduced a bylaw to make masks mandatory for all riders except those with a medical condition, most riders have been compliant and wear masks regularly. Their primary concern is some riders not wearing masks. This has caused serious concerns and even **triggered verbal and physical altercations** among riders and with TTC personnel. Although compliance is high among riders, they are fearful of using transit with others that do not wear any face coverings.

96%

Compliance with the mask bylaw - Found via Secondary Research.

22.6M

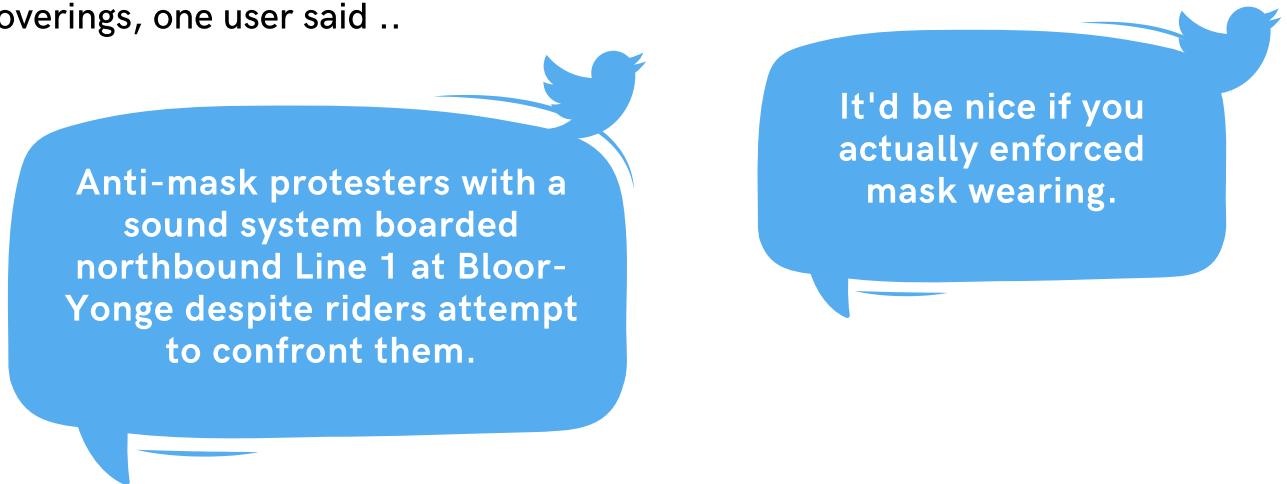
Impressions on tweets about "masks" and TTC - Found via Social Listening.



Tweets on "mask wearing" - Found via Social Listening.

The mask bylaw has 96% riders wearing masks, but that still makes riders feel vulnerable using the public transit. As ridership is returning to pre-COVID levels, public transit riders face greater risks of infection and have been vocal in expressing their concerns. Whether it is in the bus or online on social media. [Multiple twitter users have tweeted their concern about how riders are not wearing masks or any other form of face covering.](#)

In a reply to a tweet from TTC Customer Service requesting to use face coverings, one user said ..



Another user tweeted added about an incident where anti-mask protestors boarded a subway train.

TTC has reached at a critical point where communicating about wearing a face covering and some form of enforcement system would make riders feel safer.

LIMITATIONS AND TAKEAWAY

Limitations

Due to COVID-19 and social distancing regulations, the component of in-person primary research was limited. Due to how unprecedented these times are projections on ridership coming back to transit is unknown.

Take away

One of the opportunities for public transit agencies is to have an enforcement system to identify riders with medical conditions that prevent them from wearing a mask. **A small tag or a badge (that cannot be easily duplicated) to let other riders know that a rider has been verified by the transit agency to have a condition, without revealing personal or confidential information.**

Another way to ensure the feeling of security among riders is to have a **sanitation mist checkpoint** that riders pass through before entering the vehicles. This way, all riders are confident that everyone they are riding with is safe to travel with.

ACTIONABLE OPPORTUNITY

Mask Exemption Badge

The majority of riders are concerned about others who do not wear masks, causing increased apprehension and hesitance in riding the TTC. In order to counter the apprehension, TTC could take action to solidify trust in the system's safety. The TTC has already made mask-wearing mandatory as per its recent by-laws but could explore an opportunity to take this further. TTC has made an allowance for those with a medical condition to not wear masks. These users can obtain a card/ button that works as a "pass" under the present system but the same is not mandatory.

Actionable solutions would ensure that this card/ button is made mandatory for those unable to wear masks because of a medical condition. The card/ button would be more serviceable in the form of a badge, making it easier for commuters to comply. A badge would be much more visible and would carry individual specific information via a QR code. This badge should be attainable at any TTC kiosk for all commuters, or via email for those who are TTC card holders.



ACTIONABLE OPPORTUNITY



These Sanitary Gate 'tunnels' could be installed across Toronto's TTC stations ensuring sanitation of commuters who enter transit points.

Presently Sanitary Gate has an established market only in Europe which opens up a whole new opportunity to expand its markets in a booming, populous, metropolitan city such as Toronto. TTC witnesses 1.2 million commuters on any given day allowing brand partnerships to make an effective impact with just as many impressions.

The partnership is mutually beneficial as TTC riders will be assured of safety due to a shared experience by all commuters who enter the TTC and in return Sanitary Gate gets to promote its brand via applicable identity branding in major transit stations across Toronto.

ACTIONABLE OPPORTUNITY

The badge will be provided on request along with a submission of photo identity proof and a valid medical attestation of the underlying health condition. The badge would ensure that riders are made to feel safe, while also empathizing with those who truly cannot afford to wear a mask at all times. This would smoothen any anxiety that commuters face during transit.

TTC would also immensely benefit from communicating the by-laws that have been put in place to ensure mask-wearing and the implications it has in place for those who attempt to break the rules. Effective communication of the rules and methods by which TTC is ensuring its implementation would increase public trust, lessen apprehension and ensure a safer environment.

Brand partnership with Sanitary Gate

TTC has an immense opportunity to cement public trust by placing systems that not only benefit it's own brand image but also ensure public safety. TTC could explore a brand partnership with 'Sanitary Gate'.

Sanitary Gate is a tested, safe, and effective method to sanitise people and objects in just 5 seconds, killing up to 99% of any pathogenic microbes on the surfaces, including COVID-19. DROP 360° is a hydro-alcoholic sanitising solution, produced exclusively for Giulio Barbieri, which can be sprayed on people and objects.

The active ingredients of the solution have been well known for a long time and are included in the lists of authorised active ingredients of disinfectants in Italy as also reported in the ISS COVID-19 report.

Despite the proven safety of the product, as a precautionary measure for people who are allergic or hypersensitive to chemical components, the use of a mask is mandatory when crossing the tunnel.

WHAT DID WE GET TO KNOW?

Findings #3

PAIN POINTS RELATED TO CLEANLINESS ISSUE

Riders unaware of Cleaning policies

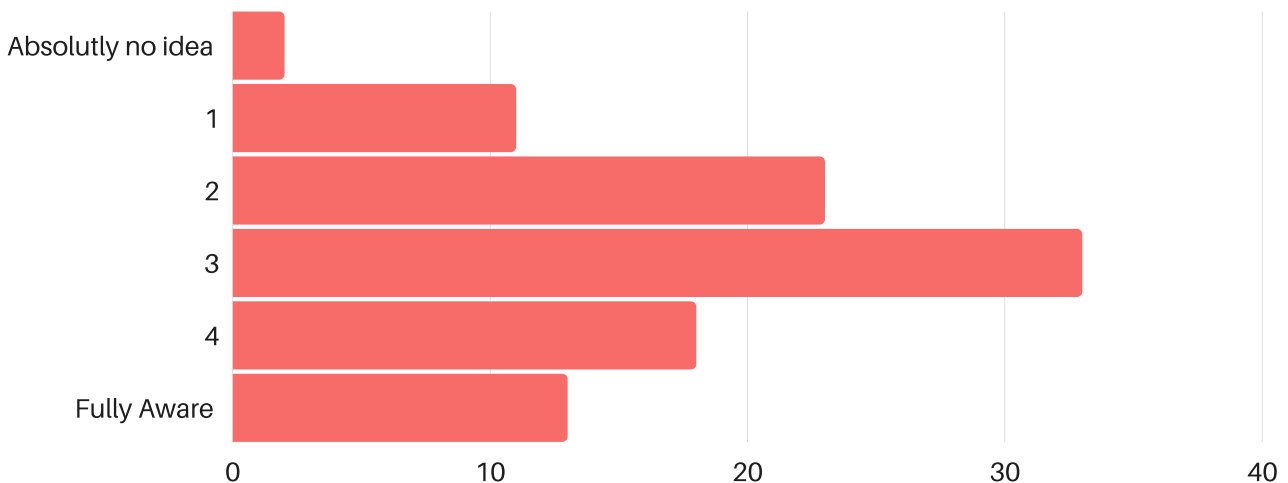
Riders are looking to be further informed about sanitation procedures undertaken by TTC. They find themselves increasingly concerned specifically when they are not aware of the hygiene and sanitation procedures that might already be in place. This results in a **perceived skepticism and concern about the lack of hygiene measures**. Riders desire to be kept more in the loop via regular updates.

813K

impressions on TTC & COVID based Tweets with "Clean" Found via Social Listening



"I didn't see any hand sanitizer at Ajax Go station today. I did see filthy handrails, door handles and elevators that have obviously never been cleaned"



When asked about their awareness on TTC cleaning policies - Found via Survey

LIMITATIONS AND TAKEAWAY

Limitations

Due to COVID-19 and social distancing regulations, the component of in-person primary research was limited. Due to how unprecedented these times are projections on ridership coming back to transit is unknown.

Take Away

- Even though taking private transit means having to be around less people, Private transits are a public service catering to a vast number of people. At least in a bus or subway you could maybe take the next one or stay a few meters away from the others which will not be possible in a private transit. **This is a great opportunity for public transit to position themselves as the most reliable transit system.** Due to management's and the public eye's scrutiny, ttc does end up being safer than private transit. And these public transit services should establish and concrete this idea
- There could be mutual benefit in raising general awareness of measures that have been taken to ensure hygiene and sanitation. Regular updates and information on the same could help build trust among the target audience and help them feel safer, which would result in increased ridership. **Updates could include sanitation log charts, and signs that detail measures taken.** Social Media could also be utilized to update the target audience (**regular tweets about ttc cleanliness, Short video posts showing the process of sanitation via Tiktok, Reels, IGTV**) about procedures undertaken in terms of disinfection and cleaning. This will ensure the audience has a general assurance of being informed.

ACTIONABLE OPPORTUNITY

Video Ad Campaign

Video AD #1

The campaign video will open up to a shot of a mother conversing with her daughter, outside at an intersection. Each fully convinced about differing points of view in regards to safety of public vs. private transit. This leads to a stand off, with each convinced as to why their choice would be best.

The video then shows two parallel journeys, one of the daughter taking private transit and one of the mother taking the TTC. The parallel journeys are drastically different. The mother experiences a safer, calmer and quieter journey. She is shown to experience the safety of walking through sanitation mists as she enters the TTC transit point, with social distancing within the subway, fellow commuters who are masked and sanitation points available as she embarks and disembarks. Mother disembarks at an already agreed upon location. She is relaxed and calm.

In contrast the daughter is seen to struggle to hail a cab, ends up with a driver who does not wear a mask and has no shield. She finds herself stuck in traffic with a driver that clearly does not host a very hygienic ride experience and is left flustered as she disembarks. Daughter disembarks at the already agreed upon point to find her mother has already arrived. She is flustered, anxious and resigned to the fact that public transit is, in fact, safer.

Mother offers the TTC "Spread Positivity Instead" sanitizer to the daughter with a slight chuckle. Text superimposed on screen "Because you deserve to travel safe" with TTC logo

Here the main focus will be to show the significant measures public transit's taken in keeping their services safe and efficient.

ACTIONABLE OPPORTUNITY

Video AD #2

Scene opens up as a POV from an intersection. The light turns red, and a private transit vehicle/ cab draws up to a stop at the intersection. The scene clearly depicts a cab driver who wears a mask that does not cover his nose, a laid-back, unhygienic car, and three passengers cramped in at the back, almost having to scramble over the other for lack of space. This is depicted as a slightly comical, suffocating picture.

A TTC bus stops at the intersection, closer to the POV, effectively hiding the view of the cab. The TTC bus clearly shows the driver following all safety protocols, wearing a mask, and passengers social distancing within a much more hygienic space.

Text superimposed on screen "We have added a 100 new buses to our busiest routes" Text superimposed on screen "Because you deserve to travel safe" with TTC logo

The objective of the commercials is to depict the safety of travelling via the TTC by amplifying the safety protocols that are in place. The commercial will depict this by comparing TTC transit to private transit and emphasizing the difference with a lighter tone of voice while carrying a much more serious message.

The commercials will instigate thought in the audience, and increase trust in the safety measures taken by the TTC to protect and safeguard its commuters while getting them to where they need to be

Here the main focus will be to show the significant measures public transit's taken in keeping their services safe and efficient.

ACTIONABLE OPPORTUNITY

Social Media Marketing

Social Media Calendar that keeps the riders updates about their Sanitation log and short video content on the same.

Monthly Calendar							Client: Toronto Transit Commission	Month: December 2020
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	IDEAS	
		1 News Update	2 Featured Tweet	3 Short Video (Wear a mask)	4 Weekly Sanitation Log	5 Thank you post		
6 City Picture + TTC	7 Merch photo	8 News Update	9 Featured Tweet	10 Short Video (Pay the fares)	11 Weekly Sanitation Log	12 Thank you post		
13 City Picture + TTC	14 Merch photo	15 News Update	16 Featured Tweet	17 Short Video (Social distancing)	18 Weekly Sanitation Log	19 Thank you post		
20 City Picture + TTC	21 Merch photo	22 News Update	23 Featured Tweet	24 Short Video (Christmas merch)	25 Christmas Post	26 Thank you post		
27 City Picture + TTC	28 Merch photo	29 News Update	30 Featured Tweet	31 Schedule Update				

**WHAT DID WE GET TO
KNOW?**

Findings #4

PAIN POINTS RELATED TO COVID-19 STRESS


Commuters experiencing COVID related stress

According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA), adverse psychological responses to an infectious disease outbreak such as COVID-19 can trigger insomnia, increased use of alcohol and tobacco, reduced feelings of safety, and physical symptoms such as lack of energy and aches and pains. (Lindberg, 2020) In general, Riders are stressed out and feel like they're risking their lives every time they step out and into a public space such as the transit.

40%

Only 40% hospital has specific COVID-19 resources for mental health support.

Found via Secondary Research



Inspite of all the fear and stress caused by #COVID—19, I've never experienced a more delightful commute on the #TTC. It's as if Mr. Clean came in a waved his magic eraser.

212M

impressions on Covid related tweets with "stress" or "insomnia" Found via Secondary Research



Keywords found via Social Listening

LIMITATIONS AND TAKEAWAY

No matter what TTC or any other public transit service does in terms of cleaning and sanitising, people are still going to be fearful about the virus. And that is simply the stress of living through a pandemic. **But the truth is that recent international data by Bloomberg show a lack of confirmed cases connected to transit use that is striking even when taking ridership declines into account.**

Some experts say this can be explained by gaps in contact tracing methodologies, but others argue the risk of transmission on public transportation may not be as severe as initially feared.

A positive and cheerful campaign that would highlight this and provide some kind of motivation to the everyday working class torontonians could be a great mood-booster. The stress of the pandemic has been draining people and a service that runs solely for the working-class people should acknowledge this and do its part in lifting their spirits. It is highly essential at a time like this for TTC to navigate between encouraging its commuters to protect the community, their families and themselves while also encouraging them to keep their spirits up.

Social Media Campaign, Monetary incentives (Freebies), offers, promotions and gamification might help.

ACTIONABLE OPPORTUNITIES

The Covid-19 pandemic has instilled a sense of fear given the rampant spread of the virus. TTC has an opportunity to change that narrative, change the notion of fear to one that instigates a sense of hope.

This campaign would come at a time when the nearing holiday season and a brand new year are being met with apprehension about the future. The proposed campaign, centered around the phrase "Spread Positivity Instead", helps TTC disrupt the narrative of fear with one that encourages goodwill. TTC will give away "Spread Positivity Instead" hygiene kits to its riders. These kits will include a specially branded mask and hand sanitizer featuring the campaign catchphrase "Spread Positivity Instead" in bold and eye catching typography.

The pandemic may no longer allow us to literally smile at a stranger on a rushed Monday morning as we stand on the subway platform but the campaign will help stoke a similar sense of hope.



OTHER EXECUTION IDEAS

Using real life tweets from TTC customers, the campaign, called '**You Said It,**' targets unsafe activities, people who use up seats for their bags, holding subway doors (we all know someone who does this), wearing backpacks on busy vehicles, and everyone's favourite person on transit, the inconsiderate Torontonian who thinks their \$3 transit fare gets them a seat for their feet.

This campaign was largely successful and received significant media attention. We could ring this back with a **#covid-19 Edition.**



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