2018 SUPERCHEAP AUTO BATHURST 1000

Social Media Campaign Analysis

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Introduction

The Bathurst 1000 is Australia's most iconic annual motor racing event. While only a single race within the larger Virgin Australia Supercars Championship, it is referred to as 'The Great Race' of Australian Motorsport (Noonan 2017). Bathurst 1000 is a 1000 kilometre race held at the Mount Panorama race track in Bathurst, New South Wales. In 2018, the Bathurst weekend ran from 4 October to 7 October with the title race occurring on the final day.

The social media campaign for the 2018 Bathurst 1000 was conducted by competition's official Supercars accounts (Supercars 2019). The campaign includes the pre-event period from 17 September to 3 October 2018 and the event weekend. The main purpose of a social media campaign is to interact directly with fans who are the primary consumers of the sport (Parganas, Anagnostopoulos & Chadwick 2015, p. 562). This analysis will frame the Bathurst 1000 social media campaign as a branding strategy by Supercars.

Following a brief look at each channel, this report will look at how content that emphasises the sports history, traditions and topophilic spaces strengthen ties of long-term supporters. These tie in with a masculinised narrative of the race shared through social media. Finally, sponsor marketing will be evaluated to see how it fits in with this narrative. Fan engagement will be understood through these themes.

Social Media Overview

Supercars uses a variety of digital channels to promote its brand and events to its audience. They have a website, a smartphone app, and social media. Supercars has four social media accounts, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Youtube. This analysis will explore the two most popular channels, Facebook and Instagram. There were 139 posts across these two channels.

The following section will provide a brief overview of these accounts and the content shared. Content will be categorised using the adapted sports branding model used in Parganas, Anagnostopoulos and Chadwick's (2015) analysis of the Liverpool Football Club. This model breaks content up into product related posts that are core to the sport's performance, and non-product related posts that facilitate consumption and brand image. Product related posts include team success, star players and head coach. Non-product related posts are brand mark, club/sport history and tradition, club/sport culture and values, management, stadium/venue, fans, sponsors and event's image. Star players in this analysis will refer to the teams, drivers and their cars.

Image 1: Screenshot of 16 pre-event videos on the Supercars Facebook page.
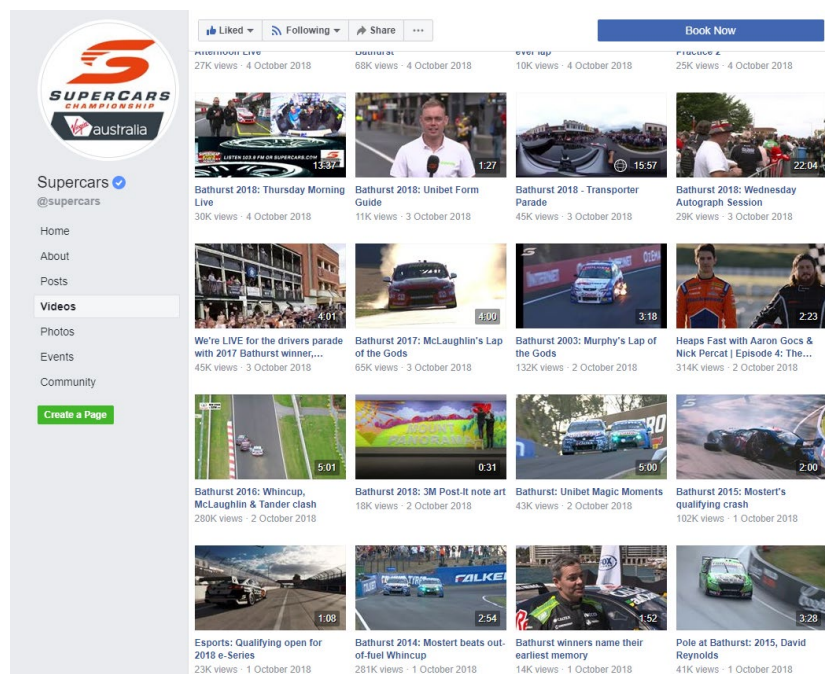
Facebook

The Supercars Facebook page has 915,000 likes and 910,000 followers. During the entire campaign there were 110 posts. Three quarters were videos (Image 1), with the remaining being images. During the promotional period, the most common topics were history and tradition (28 posts) and sponsors (14 posts). There were also posts about the venue, fans, and star players. During the four day event, team success (27 posts), star players (16 posts) and sponsors (nine posts) feature prominently. Venue and culture also appeared.

Instagram

The @supercarschampionship Instagram page has 184,000 followers. Supercars shared 29 posts during the campaign; eight during the promotional period and 21 during the event. Surprisingly, there were no posts during the six hour race. While Supercars presently uses 24 hour Instagram stories, it is impossible to retroactively determine if and how they used stories in the 2018 Bathurst 1000 campaign. Content pre-event was star players (four posts) and venue (two posts). There was a single post for fans and history. Event content was heavily focused on the product with star player again featuring prominently in more than half of these posts (12 posts). Team success (eight posts) and venue (two posts) were the remaining posts (example of venue in Image 2).

Image 2: Bathurst 1000 start line on race day
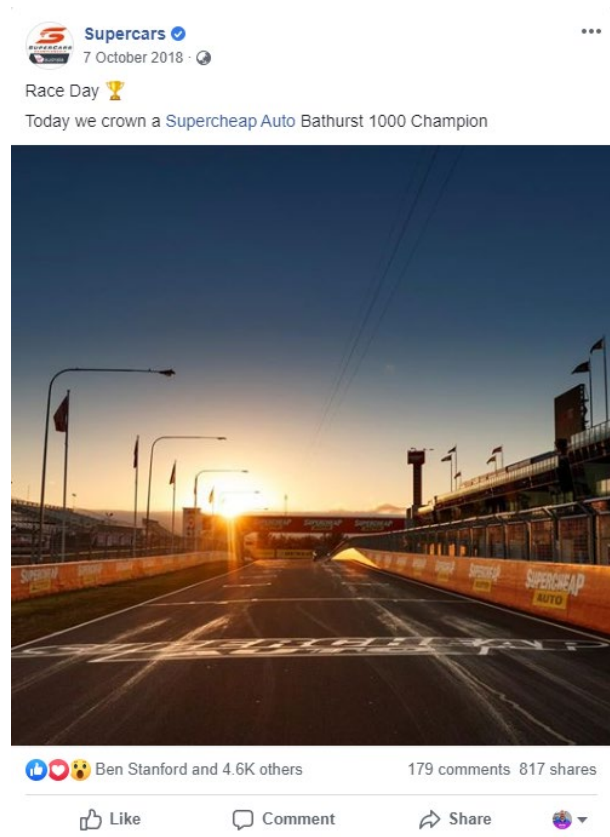
Analysis

The first social media post launching the campaign was a photo of the sun rising over the start line at Mount Panorama, an image that recurs throughout this campaign (Image 3). Accompanying this image is the caption, "Next Stop. The big one [Mountain Emoji] #bathurst #vasc". The post does not directly say much about the race or venue. It's meaning can be interpreted from the familiar starting line, the emoji and the hashtag #bathurst - The Great Race is back.

Image 3: Campaign launch post

In an analysis of football spectator identities, Giulianotti (2002, p. 33) describes supporters as those who have a "long-term and emotional investment" with a sport. These appear to be the core target audience. Non-product related brand marketing such as history, tradition and venue appeal to these types of fans. Bathurst 1000 supporters have a topophilic attachment to Mount Panorama, intimately know every section of the track by name. Each part has its own history contributing to the collective memory of supporters. A strong sense of identity is reinforced through the celebration of the site and its history shown prominently throughout this campaign (Giulianotti 2002, p. 34).

This symbolism of this sacred site is built into the larger narrative surrounding the sport. In a semiotic analysis of televised motorsports in the UK, Kennedy (2000) identified motor racing narratives as inherently masculine. A short video posted to Facebook on the morning of 7 October titled 'This is Bathurst' is the most overt example used in this campaign. Opening with the iconic sun rising over the start line, four time Bathurst champion Jamie Whincup narrates "Bathurst is the holy grail". The following six minutes emphasises the importance of manning up, absorbing the pressure, and being aggressive in the pursuit of success. Mount Panorama itself is used to signify an obstacle to be conquered throughout the campaign. With a predominantly working-class male audience who are twice as likely to be car enthusiasts (Roy Morgan 2016), supporters are likely to identify with this narrative.

While not traditionally associated with supporters, branding is used to complement the sport and its narrative. In every other Instagram post, the hashtag #vasc was used, denoting Virgin Australia Supercars Championship. Supercheap Auto branding features prominently in images of the start line with the brand's logo painted on the racetrack, and the side bunting featuring the logo (Image 3). Supercheap Auto has been the race's title sponsor since 2005 (Noonan 2017). More than a dozen other sponsors such as 3M were also featured during the campaign – 3M tied itself to the cars and venue (Image 4 & 5).

Image 4 & 5: 3M sponsored posts

Fan Engagement

Campaign performance can be determined by the number of interactions fans had with posts on social media. Interactions on Facebook include likes, comments and shares. Comments are the only indicator of engagement on Instagram. Likes are the simplest form of interaction, performed by pressing a single button. Comments and shares demonstrate stronger levels of engagement as they require more effort and are often motivated by thicker ties with the brand (Parganas, Anagnostopoulos & Chadwick 2015, p. 563).

Nielson reported that the Bathurst 1000 competition received 509,600 interactions across all the social media accounts of Supercars, Channel 10 and Fox Sports during the four day event (Mediaweek 2018). The most engaged with post on Facebook was an image of the winning car (Image 6). This image had 23,600 reactions and 1,300 comments and 5,500 shares. This was more than twice as many reactions and comments than the second most successful post - a photo of the winners drinking out of their shoes (Image 7), in an Australian ritual known as a 'shoey' that is popularised by motorsport (Morlidge 2016).

Image 6: Bathurst 1000 winner

Image 7: Winners celebrating with a 'shoey'

The most successful Instagram post was of distraught driver David Reynolds (Image 8). Reynolds was the defending champion of Bathurst and had to quit the race due to fatigue. Despite being seemingly contrary to the masculine narrative, Australian's are known for celebrating losers on the condition they are otherwise successful, put in sufficient effort, and are 'battlers' as opposed to 'quitters' (McKay & Roderick 2010, p. 301). Almost all the 229 comments were supportive of Reynolds.
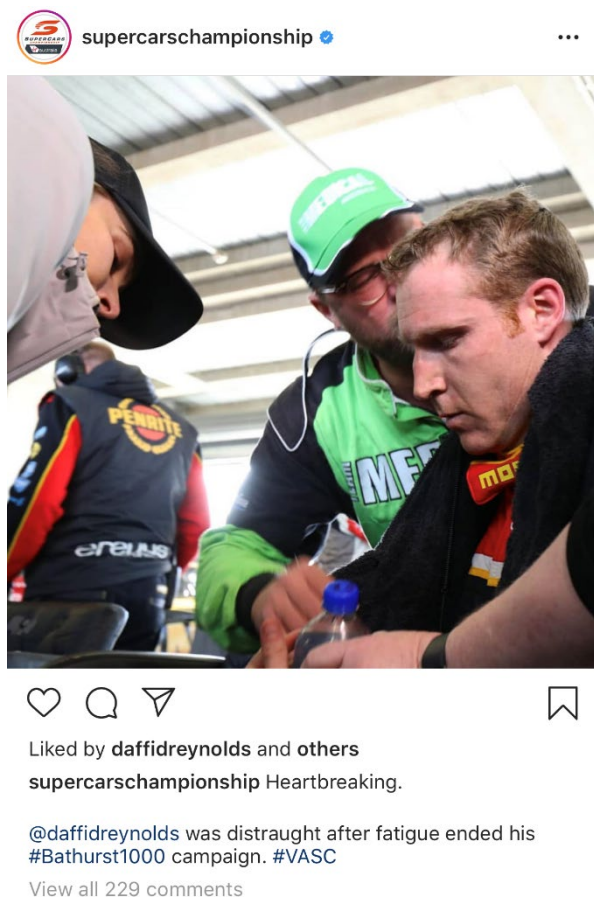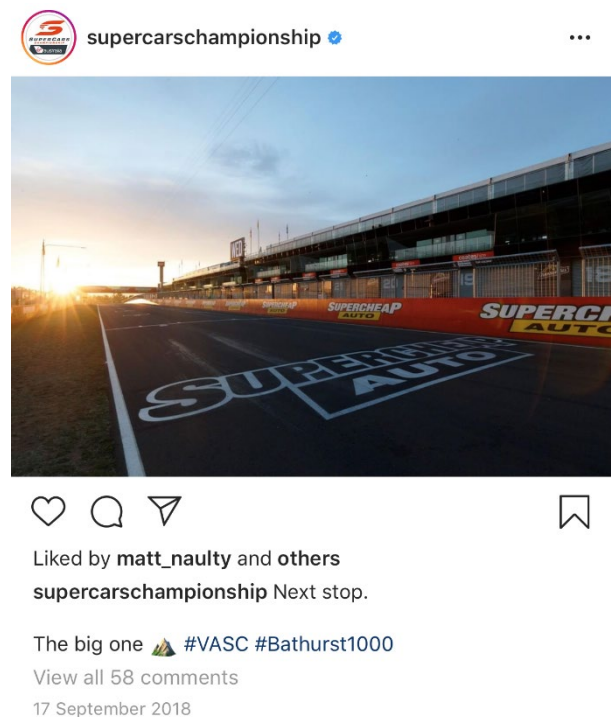
Image 8: Reynolds withdraws from race

supercarschampionship ✔   ...

Liked by **daffidreynolds** and **others**
supercarschampionship Heartbreaking.

@daffidreynolds was distraught after fatigue ended his
#Bathurst1000 campaign. #VASC
View all 229 comments

Image 9: Venue featuring on Instagram

supercarschampionship ✔   ...

Liked by **matt_naulty** and **others**
supercarschampionship Next stop.

The big one 🏔 #VASC #Bathurst1000
View all 58 comments
17 September 2018

Campaign Strengths

The 2018 Bathurst 1000 social media campaign's understanding of its key audience was the greatest strength. Content of posts was strategically used appeal to the event's core audience. Non-product related content strengthened the ties of supporters with the sport (Parganas, Anagnostopoulos & Chadwick 2015, p. 562). The third most engaged with post on Facebook and the fourth and fifth most on Instagram were images of the venue (see Image 9). The celebration of history and venue, particularly pre-event, encouraged supporters to reminisce and reaffirm their existing identity with Bathurst 1000. During the event, focus was on the teams and performance which led to greater engagement by fans.

Sponsoring brands align closely with Bathurst 1000's brand and its audience. Recent Roy Morgan research shows that brand recognition of sponsors featured during Bathurst 1000 is 2.5 times higher than that of the Formula 1 which features global brands such as Mercedes (Roy Morgan 2019). Supercheap Auto's association with the Bathurst 1000 was recalled by

48% of respondents. Supercheap is a cheap car part retailer matching with the car enthusiast audience. While statistics are not available for people who consume the sport via social media, higher recall suggests the successful alignment of sponsors and consumers.

Campaign Weaknesses

While focusing on the sport's existing supporter audience, Supercars is neglecting to attract new fans to watch the Bathurst 1000. Supporters are already allegiant to the sport and their fandom requires little maintenance (Funk & James 2006, p. 192). Future campaigns should build awareness of Bathurst 1000 amongst new demographics and use strategies to attract them to the sport. By increasing investment in the sport, new fans will begin to align their identities to the sport and in time become allegiant. Allegiance will ensure long lasting ties with and consumption of Bathurst 1000 and Supercars.

One way for Supercars to target new consumers of the Bathurst 1000 brand is to bring Instagram to the forefront of its strategy. During this campaign there was a small number of posts compared to Facebook and not a single post during the main race. Supercars is neglecting the younger, majority female user base of Instagram - a demographic who are less likely to use Facebook and Twitter yet are critical for the future of the sport (Yellow 2018, p. 14).

There was a notable gap in the 2018 Bathurst 1000 campaign with no posts promoting tickets to attend the event live. There was also no advertising of merchandise. Both are important in building allegiance towards the Bathurst Supercars brand (Funk & James 2006, p. 192).

Conclusion

The 2018 Bathurst 1000 social media campaign used Facebook and Instagram to promote online engagement and strengthen Supercars supporters' allegiance with the brand. Strategies included appealing to the history and topophilic spaces that supporters identify strongly with, weaving a masculine narrative, and sponsor marketing strongly aligned with the Bathurst 1000 and its audience. Supporters engaged well with this content. Future campaigns should target younger demographics and promote more opportunities for fans to spend on the brand.

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