

How an Instagram account dedicated to New Orleans' potholes is actually fixing them

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In New Orleans, a saucily named Instagram account has garnered a massive following by posting about – and poking fun at – the city’s plethora of potholes.

Now, a new study by a Tulane University doctoral student published in the national journal *Social Media and Society* reveals that the account, “Look At This F____ Street,” or more safely known by its acronym LATFS, may represent a novel approach to political engagement and play a role in fixing the problem it’s dedicated to lampooning. The study analyzed the account’s data, including direct messages, and claims that it acts as an unofficial 311 system – the city’s dedicated service request phone line.

Users submit photos and videos of potholes and other damaged infrastructure to the account, which posts the crowdsourced content, adding dramatic cuts to videos or biting snark to captions. City officials who follow the account see the posts, work to repair the damaged streets and maintain communication with the account’s anonymous administrator about ongoing or completed repairs, according to Alex Turvy, the study’s author, who researches social media culture and memes.

“The Sewerage and Water Board and Department of Public Works are using it as a ticketing system and a PR system, where they’ll send in pictures of roadwork and ask them to post it,” said Turvy. “This is a novel, interesting phenomenon in which one person is driving an essential city function, and I can’t find evidence of it in other places.”

Going forward, Turvy said he wants to more comprehensively analyze the frequency of repairs resulting from LATFS posts and the time between posts and repairs.

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