

When economic regulators meet, conversation rarely strays to communication. The need to communicate is often seen as secondary to the detail of regulatory decisions. Concern about imprecision or misunderstanding means that documents can run to hundreds of pages, while news releases talk of complex financial penalties, rather than headline-friendly 'fines'.

At first glance, such caution seems appropriate. Popularity expressed by 'likes' or re-tweets is hardly the right indicator of success for independent regulators. Concepts such as RPI-X rarely enter public discourse while regulatory rulings encompass detail and complexity not typically delivered in 140 characters. Emojis may be described as the UK's fastest growing language (Ofcom, 2017: 25), but expressing policy through smiley faces risks imprecision and accusations of dumbing down.

Regulators are, of course, alert to changes in consumer behaviour and the impact on the markets that they regulate. Yet they may prefer to be detached observers, leaving engagement to their communications team. As consumer habits veer from boomerangs on Instagram to vloggers on YouTube, it can be hard to see the relevance of such channels for regulatory policy. Regulators may take comfort from the assumption that a regulated sector will engage with their latest announcements, however dense the document or arcane the language.

Yet this shifting media landscape cannot be the domain of the communications team alone. At Ofwat, the economic regulator for the English and Welsh water sector, journalists ring to ask for comment on our tweets, rather than the actual policy or decision that they promote. Parliamentarians tweet us to ask about investment in regulatory assets. Our social media content is shared in minutes across the world by individuals whose personal interest in water ranges from birthing pools to ice rinks and allotments.

Three trends in particular highlight the need for a more sophisticated regulatory approach to communication. The first is falling trust in institutions, a decline that is well documented (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2017). Reuters Institute's Digital News Report (2017) shows that fewer than half of people trust the news they read. Trust has been replaced by emotional responses, where news is 'liked' rather than believed (Beckett and Deuze, 2016). Instead of relying on an editor's judgement, people are more likely to trust

news which is recommended to them by their social networks, friends and family.

As trust in news media declines, traditional channels used by regulators to communicate become less relevant. Most

in regulators may shy away from being 'Instafamous', but use of real people, their names and faces, can drive relevance and impact. Stories resonate more than facts – a water company working to fix a burst is fact, but a picture and story of the engineer who is working hard on Saturday night to restore supplies gets more response.

These are challenges for regulators more comfortable with the language of licences and codes. Social media opens up a new range of demand-side tools for regulators to connect with consumers directly and access to influencers who may be more powerful than regulators and the companies they regulate. To utilize these tools, regulators need to emulate the creative language of brands, incorporating campaign planning, storytelling, visual communication and personality. A creative approach to expressing regulatory complexity can help relate decisions back to consumers' experience, making regulation more relevant and accessible.

To achieve this, there is a need for new collaborations within regulators, among communications, legal and economics teams. At Ofwat, our communications team works alongside economists to plan campaigns, using our 'Taste, Snack, Feast' model, which enables the audience to access content most suited to their levels of interest and expertise. In our recent campaign, promoting our price review methodology, the main headlines were explained via 'Taste' – mere morsels of content, presented graphically. The opportunity to 'Snack' on more detail came via videos and short summaries online, while the most engaged audiences were able to 'Feast' on the full repertoire of our methodology documentation. Crucially, 'Taste, Snack, Feast' is not an exercise in editing, but rather a portal into different expressions of a single narrative.

The number and variety of channels provide a repertoire of choice for regulatory interventions. These range from a nudging tweet to a multi-channel campaign, produced in-house, with real time metrics allowing us to adjust and adapt our approach according to reach and response. When we see and hear companies reusing our hashtags and straplines we know we are changing the lexicon for the sector in a way that will filter through to customers.

We plan Ofwat's social media from an editorial perspective, taking our cue from a journalistic, rather than regulatory approach. This allows us to utilize a range of styles across planned campaigns, ranging from #greatplacetowork to #ofwatconsults. Members of our senior team have their own social media accounts, giving us a range of regulatory voices,