

Messaging Recommendations for Effective Road Safety Campaigns: Lessons From Formative Research for Drink Driving Campaigns

Formative research is undertaken to help guide the development of effective road safety campaigns. This guide incorporates findings from studies examining responses to a range of road safety video advertisements designed to reduce drink driving. The studies were undertaken by Vital Strategies as part of the World Health Organization RS-10 Project and Bloomberg Philanthropies Initiative for Global Road Safety (BIGRS) from 2010-2020 in nine low- and middle-income countries including Ethiopia, Brazil, Cambodia, China, Colombia, India, Mexico, Thailand, and Vietnam. This guide is designed to assist in developing drink driving campaigns.

Research Methodology

Message testing research—a type of formative research—is designed to identify the most effective messages, communication approaches and execution styles to influence changes in targeted road safety behaviors.^{1,2}

The goal of this type of research is to gain feedback from drivers on draft concepts or finalized public service announcements (PSAs) to be used in road safety campaigns. This includes assessing audience feedback on comprehension, acceptability, credibility, relevance, and perceived influence of concepts or PSAs on road safety behaviors. This research also identifies aspects of the creative concepts or PSAs that could be improved for the local setting, including removing irrelevant content and addressing any problems with the language used in voiceovers or screen text.

Typically, a professional research agency is contracted to conduct message testing research. In most cases, these studies incorporate quantitative (using an individual rating questionnaire) and qualitative (conducting a group discussion) methodologies within a focus group structure. The number of groups and participants is determined by the geographical scope and study format. Each study is generally comprised of 10 to 12 focus groups with about 10 participants in each in-person group and 4 to 6 participants per online group. Focus group participants within a study are segmented into groups by age, gender, socio-economic level, and type of road user to maximize relevance of group discussions.

Messages Selected for Testing

Message testing studies include concepts or PSAs with a range of message type, communication approach and execution style, to identify the most effective ways to communicate with target audiences to influence a particular road safety behavior. They can be broadly categorized as:

- *Instructional* concepts or PSAs, which contain expert instruction on, for example, how increasing levels of alcohol consumption result in greater levels of cognitive and driving ability impairment and correlate with increased risk of crashing. This approach is designed to increase perceptions of personal risk of a crash and the severity of consequences associated with driving after drinking alcohol, regardless of the driver's own perceived driving abilities.
- *Consequence* concepts or PSAs focus specifically on the negative consequences of driving after drinking alcohol. These include:
 - Direct impacts: risk of injury, loss of life or loss of quality of life for the driver, passengers or other road users.
 - Impacts on the driver's family: consideration of what would become of the driver's family if the driver was injured or killed after drink driving.
 - Emotional impacts: consideration of the impact of life-long guilt and regret for the driver if a child or other road user was injured or killed, or loss of future life opportunities as a result of the driver's actions.

¹ Road safety mass media campaigns: a toolkit. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2016. Available in English, Spanish.

² Road Safety Best Practice Communication Guide. Vital Strategies; 2020.

- Benefits of correct road safety behavior: consideration of the benefits of ensuring the driver, passengers and other road users are never endangered because of drink driving.
- *Testimonial* concepts or PSAs depict the consequences of drink driving from the perspective of a personal story or experience of a crash survivor or victim's family, which is depicted with a strong emotional tone.
- *Enforcement* concepts or PSAs focus on increasing risk perceptions of being detected by law enforcement officers and receiving fines, license suspension or prison sentences for drink driving. This may be accomplished by highlighting enforcement strategies, explaining technical equipment used to detect a driver's blood alcohol level, and highlighting various legal and administrative consequences of violations.

Key Features and Principles of Effective Drink Driving Campaign Messages

Across countries, message testing studies have shown that road safety PSAs with strong emotional engagement and a clear depiction of the health and social consequences of crashes are rated highly effective by drivers in promoting safer driving behaviors. For drink-driving PSAs, research also highlights the greater perceived effectiveness of consequence-focused PSAs, which generate potential guilt and regret of causing injury or death when drink driving. Lifestyle and personal testimonials have also consistently been found to be more effective than metaphoric or humorous PSAs.

Findings from message testing studies provide insights into the most effective ways to engage target audiences and influence driver behaviors. Considering these findings within the frameworks of established theories of behavior change and best practices of road safety strategic communication campaigns can increase the effectiveness of campaign design and the potential to influence drivers' road safety behaviors. This is particularly true when effectively combined with best-practice, high-visibility road safety law enforcement. Over time these engaging campaigns can positively contribute to changing social norms among road users.

Drink Driving PSA Execution Principles

The following are guidelines identified through drink driving message testing studies to enhance the effectiveness of campaign communication messages and executional styles.

Drink driving campaign communication materials should:

1. Focus specifically on the consequences of drink driving and seek to generate a strong emotional response in the viewer (consequences style). This response may be driven by depiction of the innocence of the people

harmed, their loss of future opportunities, the impact of a person's death or injury on their family, or the moral guilt of ending or ruining someone's life.

2. Depict a clear causal link between alcohol consumption and the impairment in driving ability that led to a crash and the consequences.
3. Avoid depicting the driver also displaying other risky behaviors such as speeding, reckless driving, or using a mobile phone while driving, so that the crash is attributed solely to the drink driving behavior.
4. Communicate clearly that drinking even what may seem like a modest amount of alcohol can significantly increase the likelihood and severity of a crash, particularly when an unexpected situation arises.
5. Depict the dramatization of a realistic story with an appropriately serious tone.
6. Show the drink driver as being an ordinary person that viewers can relate to rather than a stigmatized character, and ensure the depiction of location, vehicles and road conditions are relevant to the intended campaign audience and setting.
7. Avoid depicting the drink driver as being obviously intoxicated as this allows drivers to dismiss the communication as being irrelevant to them since they don't imagine themselves driving in that condition.
8. Ensure the depiction of a crash is credible and does not suggest in any way that the victim of the crash, such as a pedestrian, was responsible for the crash.
9. Depict any presentation of a crash as being preventable if the driver had not been drinking alcohol, to increase the viewer's perceived self-efficacy to be able to avoid such a crash by not driving after drinking.
10. Use a reputable expert if presenting information about the consequences of driving after drinking alcohol (instructional style). Generally, health experts such as emergency physicians, especially if well known in the community, are seen as trustworthy sources of credible health information.
11. Conclude with a clear and specific behavioral "call to action" which is consistent with the logic of the story being depicted and the campaign behavioral objective.
12. Support risk communication about consequences of drink driving with messaging about police road safety enforcement activities to increase perceptions of risk of detection and punishment (enforcement style).
13. Promote police road safety enforcement activities as making a key contribution to preventing crashes and saving lives.

See PSAs reflecting these principles, which are available for adaptation, at Vital Strategies' Road Safety Program resources page: www.vitalstrategies.org/roadsafetycampaigns