

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

Formative research is undertaken to help guide the development of effective road safety campaigns. This guide incorporates findings from studies of a range of road safety video advertisements designed to increase correct helmet wearing for motorcyclists and passengers. 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 to 2020 in nine low- and middle-income countries including Brazil, India, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam. This guide is designed to assist governments and civil society in developing helmet-wearing campaigns.

Research Methodology

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

The goal of this type of research is to gather 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 generally comprises 10 to 12 focus groups with about 10 participants in each in-person group and four to six participants per online group. To maximize relevance of group discussions, focus group participants within a study are segmented into groups by age, gender, socio-economic level and type of road user.

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*, with expert instruction on how not wearing a quality helmet, or not properly fastening the helmet, results in greater risk of significant negative outcomes in a motorcycle crash. This approach is designed to increase perceptions of personal risk if driving or traveling as a passenger on a motorcycle without a properly fastened helmet, regardless of the driver's own perceived driving abilities.
- *Consequence* concepts or PSAs, which focus specifically on the negative consequences of experiencing a motorcycle crash while not wearing a properly fastened, quality helmet. These include:
 - Direct impacts: risk of injury, loss of life or loss of quality of life for the motorcycle driver or passenger.
 - Impacts on the driver's or passenger's family: consideration of what would become of the families following injury or death after not wearing a helmet.
 - Emotional impacts: consideration of the impact of lifelong guilt and regret for the motorcycle driver if a passenger is injured or killed when not wearing a helmet; loss of future life opportunities resulting from the driver's or passenger's serious injury;
 - Benefits of correct road safety behavior: consideration of the benefits of ensuring the driver and passengers have the protection of wearing a properly fastened quality helmet when traveling on a motorcycle.

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.

- *Testimonials* depict the consequences of a motorcycle road crash when not wearing a helmet from the perspective of a personal story or experience of a crash survivor or victim's family, often portrayed with a strong emotional tone.
- *Enforcement* concepts or PSAs focus on increasing risk perceptions of being detected by law enforcement and receiving fines or other penalties for not wearing a properly fastened helmet when traveling on a motorcycle. This may be accomplished by highlighting enforcement strategies and explaining various legal and administrative consequences of helmet violations.

Key Features and Principles of Effective Helmet-Wearing 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. Lifestyle and personal testimonials have also consistently been found to be more effective than metaphorical or humorous PSAs. For helmet-wearing PSAs, research also highlights the greater perceived effectiveness of instructional-style PSAs that demonstrate the severity of consequences for a driver or passenger being in a crash when not wearing a proper helmet, or not having the helmet effectively fastened, compared with someone who is wearing a quality helmet which is properly fastened. These PSAs can increase risk perceptions for motorcycle drivers and passengers about wearing a properly fastened, quality helmet.

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' behaviors. This is particularly true when effectively combined with best-practice, high-visibility road safety law enforcement. Over time, these engaging campaigns can contribute to changing social norms among road users.

Helmet PSA Execution Principles

The following are guidelines identified through helmet-wearing message testing studies to improve the effectiveness of campaign communication messages and executional styles.

1. Clearly demonstrate the difference in severity of outcomes from a motorcycle crash when a driver or passenger is properly wearing a quality helmet, in contrast to when not wearing a quality helmet or not wearing a properly fastened helmet. These outcomes can include serious head injury or fatality for a driver or passenger, their loss of future opportunities, the impact of a person's death or injury on their family, or the guilt of the motorcycle driver allowing the passenger to travel without wearing a helmet.

2. Depict the dramatization of a realistic, culturally relevant story, including common excuses for not wearing a helmet such as discomfort in hot weather and impact on hair, contrasted with the serious consequences experienced in a crash when traveling without wearing a helmet.
3. Model how to identify a quality helmet, and how to properly fasten a helmet, including an audio cue of "clicking" the helmet strap fastener.
4. Communicate clearly that crashes can occur even when traveling only a short distance and when traveling at a moderate speed.
5. Avoid depicting a motorcycle driver who is not wearing a helmet also displaying other risky behaviors such as speeding or reckless driving, so that the focus of PSA remains on the consequences of not properly wearing a helmet.
6. Show the motorcycle driver or passenger who is injured in a crash as being an ordinary person that viewers can relate to, and ensure the depiction of location, vehicles and road conditions are relevant to the intended campaign audience and setting, with an appropriately serious tone.
7. Depict the head injury consequences to the driver or passenger in a motorcycle crash as being preventable if they had been properly wearing quality helmets, to increase the viewer's perceived self-efficacy to be able to avoid such consequences by wearing a helmet.
8. Use a reputable expert if presenting information about the consequences of experiencing a motorcycle crash without properly wearing a quality helmet (*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.
9. Conclude with a clear and specific behavioral "call to action" about always wearing a properly fastened, quality helmet; the call to action should be consistent with the logic of the story being depicted and the campaign's behavioral objective.
10. Support risk communication about consequences of riding a motorcycle without wearing a properly fastened helmet with messaging about police road safety enforcement activities to increase perceptions of risk of detection and punishment (*enforcement* style).
11. Promote police road safety enforcement activities as making a key contribution to preventing crashes and saving lives.

See PSAs reflecting these principles at Vital Strategies' Road Safety Program resources page:
www.vitalstrategies.org/roadsafetycampaigns.

These videos are available for adaptation provided proper credit is given.