

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

Formative research helps guide the development of effective road safety campaigns. This messaging guide incorporates findings from studies examining responses to a range of road safety television advertisements designed to reduce speeding. Vital Strategies undertook these studies as part of the World Health Organization (WHO) RS-10 Project and Bloomberg Philanthropies Initiative for Global Road Safety (BIGRS) from 2010-2020 in 17 low- and middle-income countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America. This guide is designed to assist in developing future speeding 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 the relevance of group discussions.

Messages Selected for Testing

Message testing studies include concepts or PSAs with a range of types of messages, communication approaches and execution styles, to identify the most effective ways to communicate with target audiences to influence the road safety behavior that the campaign will focus on.

In speeding message testing studies:

- *Instructional* PSAs contain expert instruction on how relative levels of speeding result in different outcomes. This approach is designed to increase perceptions of personal risk of a crash and the severity of consequences associated with speeding, regardless of the driver's own perceived driving abilities.
- *Consequence* PSAs focus specifically on the negative consequences of speeding. These include:
 - Direct injury impacts: risk of injury, loss of life or loss of quality of life for the driver, passengers or other vulnerable 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 because of speeding
 - Emotional impacts: consideration of the impact of life-long guilt and regret for the driver if a child or other vulnerable road user was injured, killed, or lost future life opportunities due to the driver's speeding.
 - Benefits of correct road safety behavior: consideration of the benefits of ensuring the driver, passengers and other vulnerable road users are never endangered because of speeding.

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.

- *Testimonial concepts or PSAs* depict the consequences of speeding from the perspective of a personal story or experience, usually depicted with a strong emotional tone.
- *Enforcement PSAs* focus on increasing risk perceptions of being detected by law enforcement officers and receiving fines, license suspension or prison sentences for speeding. This may be accomplished by highlighting enforcement strategies, explaining technical equipment used to detect speeding and highlighting various legal and administrative consequences of violations.

Key Features and Principles of Effective Speeding Campaign Media Materials

Across countries, message testing studies have demonstrated that road safety PSAs, which achieve strong emotional engagement with their audiences and present a clear and compelling depiction of the health and social consequences of a road crash, are rated by drivers as being effective in motivating them to adopt road safety behaviors. Lifestyle and personal testimonials have also been found to be more impactful than humorous and metaphoric execution styles.

For speeding PSAs there is also evidence of the greater perceived effectiveness of *instructional* style PSAs, which have the potential to counter false driver perceptions.¹ This includes the perception, often most prevalent among younger male drivers, that their personal driving skills will enable them to avoid crashes and negative consequences of speeding.

Findings from message testing studies provide insight into the most impactful way of engaging target audiences and influencing 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 potential to influence drivers' road safety behaviors. This is particularly true when effectively combined with best practice road safety law enforcement. Over time these engaging campaigns can positively contribute to changing social norms among road users.

Speeding PSA Execution Principles

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

Speeding campaign communication materials should:

1. Depict a clear causal link between speeding and a crash and its consequences. It is important to avoid depicting the driver also displaying other risk behaviors such as reckless or distracted driving, not wearing a seatbelt, or using a mobile phone while driving, to ensure the crash will be attributed solely to the speeding behavior.
2. Communicate clearly that exceeding the speed limit by what may seem like a modest amount (5 or 10km/h) can significantly increase the chance and negative outcomes of a crash.

3. Use a reputable expert to present information about the science, risks and consequences of speeding (*instructional* style) to increase knowledge about speeding and counter false beliefs that personal driving skills will enable the driver to avoid a crash and its consequences. Generally, expert engineers, experienced police officers or health experts such as emergency physicians, especially if well known in the community, are seen as trustworthy sources of credible information.
4. Seek to generate a strong emotional response in the viewer when focusing specifically on the consequences of speeding (*consequences* style). This response can be driven by 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.
5. Show the speeding 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.
6. Depict the dramatization of a realistic story with an appropriately serious tone.
7. Avoid depiction of a driver obviously and dramatically exceeding the speed limit to a high degree. Drivers can easily dismiss the message as not relevant to them if they do not consider themselves to speed like that.
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 was not speeding, to increase the viewer's perceived self-efficacy to be able to avoid such a crash by not speeding.
10. Ensure the communication concludes 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.
11. Support risk communication about the science and consequences of speeding with messaging about police road safety enforcement activities to also increase perceptions of risk of detection and punishment (*enforcement* style).
12. 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

¹ Carroll, T., Cedillo, C., Morozova, I., Mullin, S., Murukutla, N. Assessing the response to ten speeding road safety advertisements in China, Kenya, Russia and Turkey. New York: Global Health Communication Center; 2013.