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Recommendations for Effective Road Safety Campaigns

Formative Research: **Speeding**

Formative research is undertaken to help guide the development of road safety campaigns. This research summary presents findings from studies examining responses to road safety television advertisements on speeding. The studies were undertaken by Vital Strategies as part of the World Health Organization (WHO) RS-10 Project and Bloomberg Philanthropies Initiative for Global Road Safety (BIGRS) from 2010-2019 in 15 low- and middle-income countries including Brazil, Colombia, Ethiopia, Ghana and Vietnam.

Research Methodology

Message testing 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 get feedback from target audiences on proposed road safety television concepts or public service announcements (PSAs). This includes audience feedback on comprehension, acceptability, credibility, relevance and perceived influence on behavior.

The research also identifies aspects of the communication concepts/PSAs that could be improved, including irrelevant content and problems with the language used in voiceovers or screen text.

A professional research agency is hired to conduct this message testing research. In most cases these studies incorporate quantitative (individual rating questionnaire) and qualitative (group discussion) methodologies within a focus group structure. Typically, each study comprises 10 focus groups with 10 participants in each group. Focus groups within a study are segmented by age, gender, socio-economic level and type of road user.

Messages Selected for Testing

Message testing studies include 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 particular 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 crash and the severity of consequences associated with speeding, regardless of the driver's own perceived driving abilities.
- **Consequence PSAs** focus on the negative consequences of speeding. These include:
 - Impacts on the driver: health risks, including injury, loss of life or loss of quality of life;
 - Impacts on the driver's family: consideration of what would become of their family if they were injured or killed from speeding;
 - Consequences for vulnerable road users:

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.

consideration of the impact of guilt and regret if they hurt a child or ruined someone's future life opportunities;

- Benefits of correct road safety behavior: consideration of the benefits of adhering to traffic rules, such as saving a life.
- **Testimonial PSAs** depict the consequences of speeding from the perspective of a personal story or experience, usually with a strong emotional approach.
- **Enforcement PSAs** focus on increasing risk perceptions of being detected and punished for speeding. This is accomplished by highlighting enforcement strategies, explaining technical equipment used to detect speeding, and sharing legal and administrative consequences of violations.

Key Features and Principles of Effective Speeding Campaign Media Materials

Across countries, PSAs with strong emotional engagement and clear depiction of health consequences have been rated as highly effective in message testing studies. Lifestyle and personal testimonials have been found to be more effective than humorous and metaphoric execution styles.

For speeding PSAs there is also evidence of the effectiveness of instructional style PSAs, which have the potential to change perceptions. This includes the perception, often most prevalent among younger male drivers, that their personal driving skills allow them to avoid negative consequences of speeding.

Findings from message testing studies provide insight into the most effective way of engaging target audiences. Linking findings with the principles 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 enforcement. Over time these campaigns can positively contribute to changing social norms among road users.

PSA Execution Principles

Key features identified through message testing studies as contributing to the effectiveness of speeding road safety television PSAs include:

- Focus on consequences of speeding and generating a strong emotional response in the viewer. This can be driven by the innocence of the people harmed or the grief of the victim's family members depicted with strong emotion.
- Ensure viewers can identify with the primary character in the PSA as being potentially just like them, and avoid stigmatization of the driver. Personal relevance of the character, location and situation for the targeted drivers is critical.
- Communicate a clear causal link between the speeding and the crash.
- 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 outcomes of a crash.
- Avoid depiction of a driver highly exceeding the speed limit. Drivers can easily dismiss the message as not relevant to them if they do not believe that they speed like that.
- Ensure the depiction of a crash is credible and does not suggest the victim of the crash, such as a pedestrian, was responsible in any way.
- Use a reputable expert to present information about the consequences of speeding (instructional approach). Generally, health experts such as emergency physicians, especially if well known in the community, are seen as trustworthy sources of credible information.
- Depict the idea of a crash as preventable to increase the viewer's perceived self-efficacy to avoid crashes.
- Promote police road safety enforcement as essential to prevent crashes and beneficial for saving lives (enforcement approach).

BIGRS TV PSAs Reflecting These Principles Are Available for Adaptation

Visit Vital Strategies' Road Safety program resource page at www.vitalstrategies.org/roadsafetycampaigns