



# Insights into targeting young male drivers with anti-speeding advertising: An application of the Step approach to Message Design and Testing (SatMDT)



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## ABSTRACT

In Australia, young drivers aged 17–25 years comprise 13% of the population yet account for 22% of all road deaths with young males over-represented in such trauma. Speeding represents a major contributing factor and advertising campaigns have long focused on promoting anti-speeding messages in the effort to reduce drivers' speeds. Positioned within a larger program of research aimed at developing, piloting, and evaluating a range of theoretically-informed anti-speeding messages, the current study reports results relating to the final phase of the research, the evaluation. Six messages were devised in accordance with the guiding framework, the Step approach to Message Design and Testing ([SatMDT]; Lewis et al., 2016) and based on the findings emerging from earlier qualitative and quantitative studies within the program of research. N = 938 licensed drivers (n = 455 males, 48%) aged 17–62 years completed an online survey. To ensure a controlled test of the persuasiveness of the message content, the messages were presented in an audio-based format and thus were devoid of potential confounds, such as images. The messages sought to address a particular belief (i.e., behavioural, normative, control) and to focus either on emphasising the positive aspects which make speeding less likely or challenging the negative aspects which make speeding more likely. Thus, key to this evaluation was to test the persuasiveness of the message content in terms of the particular belief and focus it was addressing. Participants were randomly assigned to either the Control condition (i.e., no exposure to a message) or the Intervention condition (i.e., exposed to one of the six messages presented as an audio-recorded message within the survey). Persuasiveness was assessed via a range of outcome measures including both direct (i.e., third-person perceptions, message rejection) as well as indirect measures (i.e., intentions, willingness to speed). Age, gender, and message type were independent variables (IVs), together with issue involvement as a covariate (or IV) in the study's analyses. Overall, positive persuasive effects, and a relative absence of any negative, dissuasive effects, were found for two messages, *Glass Cars* and *The Lift*. These messages addressed the same salient belief, control beliefs, with the former emphasising the factors which discourage speeding and the latter message challenging those factors which encourage speeding. The implications of the findings are discussed in terms of the insights they offer for the key content of future anti-speeding messages.

## 1. Introduction

In Australia, young drivers aged 17–25 years comprise 13% of the population yet account for 22% of all road deaths (Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics BITRE, 2013). This

overrepresentation of young drivers in road trauma is mirrored in crash statistics of other developed nations around the world (Elvik, 2010). Within the young driver cohort, males relative to females are at particular high risk of being seriously injured or killed (BITRE, 2013; Elvik, 2010). Evidence from across the decades has found that males are

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more likely to report, as well as to have been observed as, engaging in risky driving behaviours including speeding (Elvik, 2010; Fleiter et al., 2006; Harré et al., 1996; Wasieleski, 1984). Such gender differences have been shown to remain even when accounting for driving exposure (González-Iglesias et al., 2012). Coupled with this tendency to engage more in risky behaviours and to be involved in road crashes, young males (16–29 years) relative to same-age females have also been found to consider themselves as more skilful drivers than their peers (Harré et al., 2005). Among the risky behaviours representing major contributors to young drivers' involvement in road trauma is speeding, with the behaviour contributing to both crash severity and frequency (Aarts and van Schagen, 2006; Conner et al., 2007; Fildes and Lee, 1993; Kloeden et al., 1997). Speeding is the most widespread traffic violation among all drivers (Åberg et al., 1997; Conner et al., 2007) and represents one of the long-standing “road safety problems” (Elvik, 2010).

Collectively, such findings highlight some of the challenges confronting efforts to improve road safety for the young and, in particular, the young male driver cohort in terms of motivating them to reduce their driving speeds. Anti-speeding advertising campaigns represent an on-going component of Australian governments' investments in road safety countermeasures to target young drivers. Although many of these campaigns may be devised with an intention to address speeding in young male drivers, evidence suggests that males may not always be influenced (Tay, 2002; Tay and Ozanne, 2002). Evidence dispels the notion of a ‘one size fits all’ approach to message design, instead offering support for the importance of market segmentation (Rotfeld, 1999) and the need to acknowledge that the type of advertising matters (Donovan et al., 1999).

Among key findings to emerge from extant evidence is that, despite Australian road safety advertising having a rather long-standing reliance upon strong physical threats of injury and death resulting from car crashes, such approaches are unlikely to influence males (Lewis et al., 2007; Tay and Ozanne, 2002). Tay and Ozanne (2002) examined the extent to which physical threats influenced crash rates among members of both the intended and non-intended audience with young males aged 18–24 years representing the former. They found that crash rates remained unaffected for the target audience; however, there were improvements for both older males, aged 35–54 years, as well as for young females aged 15–34 years.

Other evidence, based on self-report measures, has made similar conclusions in terms of males reporting less influence to strong physical threats in messages than females (Goldenbeld et al., 2008; Lewis et al., 2007). For instance, Lewis et al. (2007) investigated the extent to which the third-person effect ([TPE]; Davison, 1983) influenced males' and females' responses to strong physical threats in messages addressing speeding and drink driving. The TPE is derived from the communications literature and relates to a perceptual disparity whereby individuals are known to consider persuasive stimuli not only in regards to the extent that it will influence them personally but also the extent to which it will influence others (Davison, 1983). Lewis et al. found that following exposure to anti-speeding (and anti-drink driving) advertisements, which depicted the death of characters as a result of a driver's engagement in speeding (and drink driving), males reported classic third-person perceptions whereby they perceived such advertisements would have a greater influence on other drivers in general than themselves. In contrast, females reported reverse third-person perceptions whereby they considered that the advertisements would influence them more than other drivers. The authors also found that such perceptions were associated with the extent of future intentional change (to improve one's driving behaviours) the participants reported. Specifically, males were found to report significantly less intention to change their future driving behaviour than females.

The aforementioned findings prompt the question of what type of advertising approach may be more effective in attempts to influence young males. Even within early literature, there were suggestions that

young male drivers may be influenced by other types of threats, such as social threats where a driver may be disapproved of by important others for having engaged in a risky behaviour and been caught, fined, and/or lost their licence (e.g., Kohn et al., 1982; Pechmann and Knight, 2002; Pechmann et al., 2003; Rotfeld, 1999; Schoenbachler and Whittler, 1996; Wiley et al., 2002). In attempting to find alternative approaches which may influence males, Lewis and colleagues (Lewis et al., 2008a) extended their research into the TPE. They examined not only participants' responses to strong physical threats which evoked negative emotions (e.g., fear) but also responses to advertisements which incorporated positive emotions including humour. For instance, one of the humorous messages, “Taxi” 8221<sup>1</sup>, showed humorous conversations that a taxi driver had with his intoxicated passengers. By modelling of the correct or safe behaviour in regards to taking a taxi rather than driving after drinking, the advertisement offered a useful strategy to avoid drinking and driving and thus was coded as an advertisement incorporating high levels of response efficacy (Witte, 1992). It concluded with a humorous play on words based on a tagline from a well-known Australian anti-drink driving campaign; instead of the original tagline, “if you drink and drive, you are a bloody idiot” the humorous advertisement quipped, “if you drink and get a taxi, you're a bloody genius”. Among some of the key findings to emerge were, similar to previous research (Lewis et al., 2007), that a strong physical threat-type advertisement (also with high levels of response efficacy) was associated with classic third-person perceptions for males (i.e., significantly more influence reported for others than self) and an attenuation of classic third-person perceptions for females with no significant difference in perceived influence on self and others reported. For the positive, humorous “Taxi” advertisement, although the results were not significant, inspection of the mean scores revealed some interesting trends. In particular, the results were contrary to those found for the negative, physical threat-based advertisement; specifically, females scores tended towards classic third-person perceptions while males' scores reflected an attenuation of such perceptions, suggesting that males rated themselves and others as equally likely to be influenced by the advertisement (Lewis et al., 2008a).

In another study examining the effects of positive and negative emotional appeals, Lewis et al. (2008b) purposefully designed audio-recorded anti-speeding messages. The study included a follow-up self-reported measure of speeding behaviour, assessed 4 weeks subsequent to exposure to one of the messages. The study examined the extent to which future driving behaviour could be predicted by one's acceptance of the message and their past speeding behaviour (the latter two constructs were assessed in a survey at the time of exposure to one of the messages). The results revealed contrary findings for the negative, fear-based messages and the positive, humour/pride-based appeals. Specifically, for the positive messages, the most important predictor of males' future driving behaviour was the extent of message acceptance that they had reported for the message they had been exposed to. In contrast, for the negative messages, past behaviour was the only significant predictor of males' subsequent behaviour, suggesting that the negative messages had relatively limited impact upon males and that the best determinant of their future behaviour was what they had done previously.

Collectively, the findings from the aforementioned studies suggest that positive emotion-based advertisements may be persuasive for males (Lewis et al., 2008a,b) and, therefore, that they warrant further attention to better understand the persuasive effects of a range of emotions. The current study thus extends upon this evidence base by evaluating anti-speeding messages that were designed to include a range of emotion-based appeals. Thus, the messages did not rely principally or solely upon fear and/or graphic negative images but also were designed to include a range of emotions including positive

<sup>1</sup> A New Zealand Police and Land Transport Safety television advertisement.

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