

Road safety advertising



- Encouraging road users to adopt safer attitudes and behaviour can significantly reduce transport-related injury and mortality¹.
- Determining message content to motivate appropriate action and audience uptake are two key factors⁴.

State of the Road A Fact Sheet of the Centre for Accident Research & Road Safety - Queensland (CARRS-Q)

THE FACTS

- Road safety advertising constitutes a large portion of Australian governments' annual expenditure on road safety initiatives¹.
- The broad aim of road safety advertising is to encourage safer road user behaviours².
- Road safety advertising messages usually target risky driver behaviours that are major contributors to road crashes, including speeding, drink driving, distracted driving, driving while tired, and driving without a seatbelt².
- When advertising campaigns and enforcement are combined, they have the potential to reduce crash rates more than enforcement alone or advertising alone¹.

THE PERSUASIVE PROCESS

Designing road safety advertisements

A number of message-related and individual-based characteristics influence advertising message effectiveness.

Message-related characteristics¹

Response efficacy

- Research^{5,6} has consistently shown that providing strategies is crucial in enhancing a message's effectiveness or persuasiveness. For example, encouraging drivers to monitor their speed is a strategy to avoid speeding.

Threat relevance

- The extent to which the threat is relevant to the audience, and their vulnerability to the threat, influences message effectiveness. Depending on the issue and the target audience, different messages emphasise different negative consequences, for example, legal sanctions (fines, licence loss), physical injury or death, social ostracism, or guilt or remorse from causing injury or death to another party.

Type of emotional appeal

- There has been a long-standing reliance upon negative, fear-based appeals in road safety advertising. Research^{5,6}, however, suggests that more positive emotion-based messages such as those incorporating humour may be relatively more effective for males than females, and vice versa for negative, fear-based appeals.

Individual-based characteristics¹

Gender

Young males are an important target of road safety advertising as they are more likely to be involved in road trauma. While road safety has tended to rely upon physical threats of injury and death, research⁷ suggests that such appeals may not influence young males, who may be more influenced by positive appeals (e.g., humour-based). Evidence also suggests that social threats (e.g., licence loss and the social stigma attached to it) may be more effective for young male drivers.

Evaluating advertising messages

- Message effectiveness is often measured in terms of attitudinal or intentional change and, in some instances, the degree of behavioural change achieved. Typically, message effectiveness is determined by the degree to which individuals report an intention to adopt a message's recommendations¹.
- The effectiveness of road safety advertising messages may be measured in a number of ways:
 - **Laboratory screening:** after viewing an advertisement, participants may be asked questions relating to their recall of the message, its emotional impact, as well as their self-reported attitudes, intentions, and behaviour both pre- and post-message exposure.

- **Neurocognitive methods (e.g., ERP)⁹:** assess brain activity, and, in particular, changes in specific parts of the brain (e.g., medial prefrontal cortex) that are associated with behaviour change and message effectiveness.
 - **In-vehicle devices¹⁰ and driving simulators:** assess changes in driving behaviour pre- and post-message exposure.
 - **Crash statistics:** e.g., reductions coinciding with a campaign's implementation.
 - **Message rejection assessment:** i.e., extent to which individuals become defensive to or avoid a message^{6,11}.
- The persuasive effects of different types of emotion-based approaches may vary over time and thus evaluation at varying time intervals post-exposure is recommended^{1,11}.

Road safety advertising represents an important component within the array of strategies implemented in the attempt to minimise road trauma

CARRS-Q WORK IN THIS AREA

- The Step approach to Message Design and Testing (SatMDT)^{1,12} is a comprehensive 4-step framework to guide the development and evaluation of road safety messages. The framework, developed by CARRS-Q, is based on social psychological theory, and includes rigorous scientific methodology in each step. **Figure 1** shows an abridged version of the framework. The

framework was designed to be applied in full; however, it is also possible to apply various steps of the framework, depending on the research objectives.

- Investigating the persuasive effects of positive emotional appeal types⁵.

- The importance of response efficacy in the persuasive process⁶.
- Effective advertising approaches for high-risk road users (e.g., young drivers)¹⁴.
- The role of neurocognitive measures (e.g., ERP) in assessing the persuasive impact of

messages^{9,10}.

- Examining the role of the third-person effect, gender, and age¹⁵ in message persuasiveness.

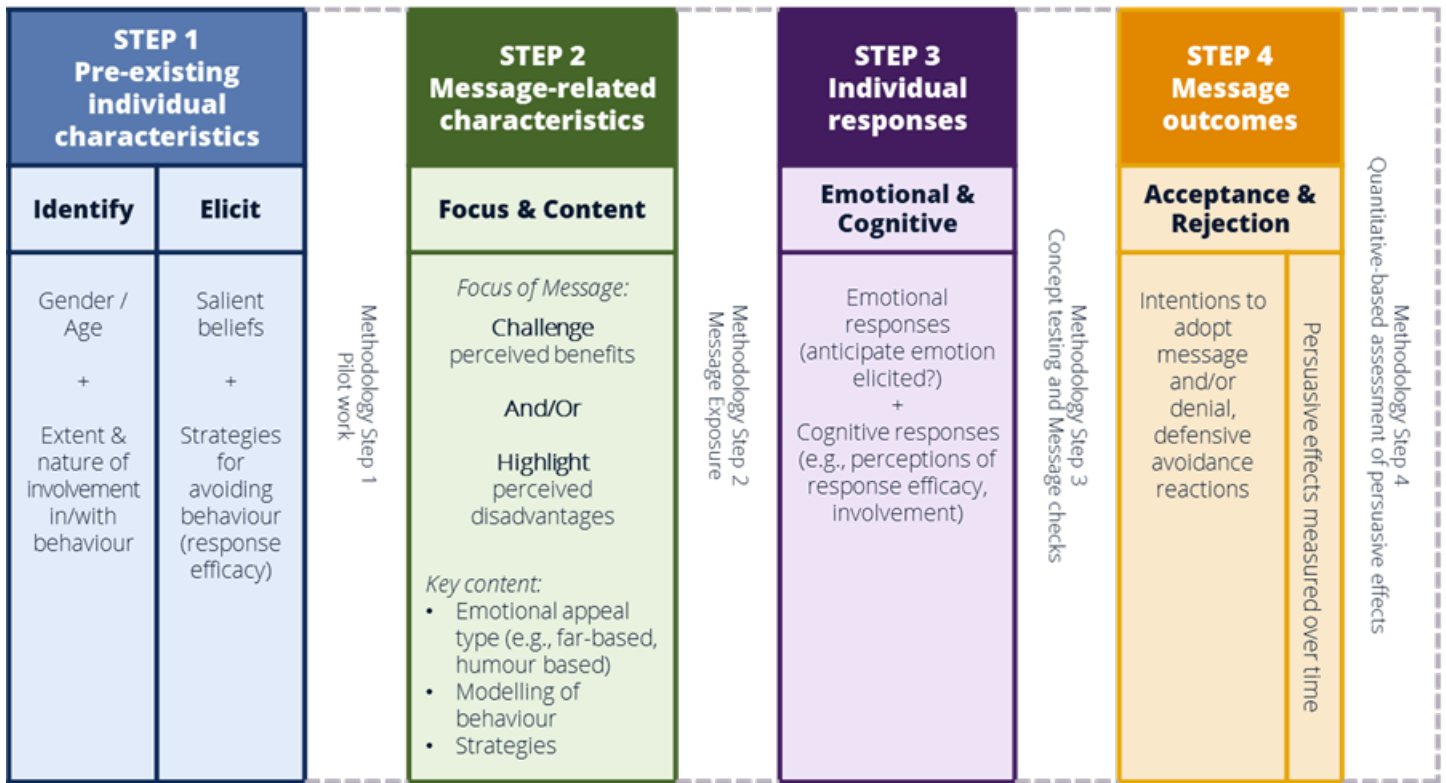


Figure 1: The Step approach to Message Design and Testing (SatMDT)¹²

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