

THE DESIGN AND EVALUATION OF ROAD SAFETY PUBLICITY CAMPAIGNS

INTRODUCTION

This note discusses some basic principals of the data-led design of publicity campaigns, the main issues that need to be considered at each stage, and the need for evaluation. It is not intended to be exhaustive, but gives some guidance in this area.

Road safety publicity can be used to achieve various aims and objectives. In general, the aims of such publicity are to change the road users behaviour, attitude or knowledge in order to increase road safety. However, usually, “road safety campaigns can succeed if advertising is only one of the elements in the campaign and usually not the key element” (Elliott, 1989). According to Elliott, mass media campaigns can achieve the following:

- increase awareness of a problem or a behaviour;
- raise the level of information about a topic or issue;
- help form beliefs, especially where they are not firmly held;
- make a topic more salient and sensitise the audience to other forms of communication;
- stimulate interpersonal influences via conversations with others (e.g. Police, teachers, or parents);
- generate information seeking by individuals; and
- reinforce existing beliefs and behaviours.

One of the problems in using publicity measures is that people, on the whole, are resistant to change, especially when there is no apparent personal gain for them to do so. A driver who has operated a vehicle after drinking alcohol on many occasions without incident does not perceive the reasons why he/she should not drink and drive as urged by a poster or TV commercial. An additional difficulty to be overcome is that there is not usually the opportunity for face-to-face interaction.

The design and evaluation of publicity campaigns can be summarised in the flow diagram reproduced as Figure 1.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM (DATA-LED APPROACH)

Historically, in many countries road safety publicity campaigns have not been approached in a scientific manner. While they were not entirely guesswork, they were often not far short. An individual would decide on the campaign message and how it would be approached using a combination of guesswork, intuition and experience.

It is essential that campaigns are data-led. Unless the target audience and behaviour are known it is impossible to develop effective campaign methodology. There are various types of data that can be utilised, for example:

Crash and casualty data: Gives the broad picture. May give an indication of the road user group, gender and age group most at risk. Crash data should be used as a starting point, and

may be sufficient if detailed data is available or there are constraints on other data. Crash data from the previous three years are normally accepted as giving a fair indication of the problem.

Observation: Observation of the type of road users involved in crashes highlighted in the data may give an indication of the behaviour(s) that should be targeted. For example, if a lot of casualties are pedestrians, observation may give some indication of the behaviour that needs to be modified to reduce conflicts.

Attitude Testing: A person's attitude can affect the way they behave. By changing attitudes it is possible to change the resultant behaviour. Attitude testing needs to be done properly to be valid. It may be possible to involve University students to carry out the work as a piece of research.

Knowledge Testing: It could be that road users are not behaving in a safe way because of lack of knowledge. For example, if many crashes occur because of drink/driving it may be that the drivers concerned do not know the effects of alcohol. Knowledge testing can be more easily carried out than attitude testing by means of a questionnaire or survey.

One of the advantages of using such methods as those listed above to determine the behaviour, knowledge or attitudes that may contribute to crash causation, is that the same measures can be applied at a later date to help determine effectiveness of the campaign.

CAMPAIGN PLANNING

Once the problem has been identified, it is necessary to consider the following when planning the campaign.

Target behaviour: This should already be apparent from analysis of crash data, or one of the other data sources mentioned above.

Target audience: The target audience is not necessarily the people who are behaving in an inappropriate way. It is often more effective to target other people who influence the road user in question. These 'significant others' may be parents, partner or peers.

Audience motivation: Consideration needs to be given to the factors that will motivate an audience to act in the way required, or to change their behaviour.

Message content: The message must be clear, unambiguous and directional. Avoid general messages such as "Drive safely".

Media selection: The media used will depend largely on the target audience. It is necessary to consider where the targeted road users are likely to see a message, e.g. what newspaper do they tend to read, and issues such as literacy rates. Appropriate media for road safety campaigns may include, but are not limited to:

- Leaflets;
- Posters;
- Radio;
- TV;
- Cinema;

- Billboards;
- Puppet/theatre shows; and
- Give-aways.

Campaign timing: Timing needs to be considered in terms of length of the campaign and also the time of year that it is most appropriate to run it. Campaigns should not generally be too long as impact is lost and the message becomes diluted or ignored. It is not appropriate to, say, run a campaign about winter driving in the heat of summer.

Once the road safety professional has an idea of the issues and the campaign required, a clear campaign brief should be developed to ensure that everyone involved, in each step of the campaign, works towards the same objectives. It is often useful, if funding allows, to appoint an advertising agency to design the materials, to buy media space and to arrange distribution. The campaign brief should be given to the companies tendering for the business because it will form the basis for the eventual campaign, but also allows choice of company to be based on what they can deliver, the design ideas that they present and value for money. A campaign brief should include items such as those shown below.

SUGGESTED CAMPAIGN BRIEF

1. Outline of problem area;
2. Specification of objectives of the campaign - what it is to achieve;
3. Specification of strategies to be adopted;
4. Specification of the role of mass media campaigns in the total mix of campaign activities such as increased enforcement or engineering measures;
5. Specification of other non-media activities;
6. Specification of what activities will continue after the end of the campaign;
7. Precise specification of what changes are aimed for, preferably in terms of behaviour;
8. Specification of target audiences and rationale for it;
9. Suggestion of approaches to motivate audience;
10. Specification of content area of the messages (based on qualitative research);
11. Suggestions for audience activation;
12. Specification of the media to be used;
13. Campaign timing, duration and budget;
14. Role of further qualitative research, and who should conduct it;
15. Expectations regarding assessment - who, what, when, how;
16. Additional expectations (e.g. preparation of reports by agency on what was done, why, what changes are recommended;
17. Constraints (if any);
18. Contractual arrangements; and
19. Appendix - any technical data or summary research reports.

Pre-campaign research is essential. It is easy to assume that the intended message is being received. In order for a campaign to be effective, it is necessary to research this aspect. Market research techniques can be used to find out if the message is understood, or which of several designs is the most memorable or eye-catching. It is also necessary to have a clear understanding of the target audience. A wide range of knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and

behaviours should be studied including the availability to individuals of alternative behaviours to avoid suggesting actions that are not feasible.

The campaign design can then be finalised. It should be noted that, in general, a one-off campaign is unlikely to result in any long lasting behavioural changes. Especially when a change in attitudes is required (e.g. drink/driving, speeding) it is necessary to plan a sustained campaign over a long period of say five, or even ten years.

EVALUATION

In order to decide on the most appropriate method(s) of evaluation, it is necessary to first know the objectives of the campaign. In most cases the overall objective will be to reduce crashes or casualties. It is necessary to use appropriate means of evaluating publicity campaigns. If crash prevention/reduction is to be used as a measure, then the time interval must be great enough to pick up any effects. While use of crash or casualty statistics may be appropriate, especially in the case of long term (five or ten year) campaigns, in the shorter term it is not appropriate to use crash data alone. The use of crash rates as a measure can be awkward for all kinds of reasons such as under-reporting, time scale, influence of other factors. Instead there are other measures that can be used. Wherever possible multiple measures should be used. These may include the following:

- popular liking for a message;
- popular opinion of message effectiveness;
- expert opinion of message effectiveness;
- the numbers and types of road users reached;
- recall of the message used;
- change in traffic knowledge;
- change in attitudes;
- change in behaviour as reported by the individual;
- change in observed behaviour;
- change in violation rates; and
- change in crash rates.

If the assumption is made that some of the items (a to j) are causally related to crash likelihood, they can be used as a measure. Care must be taken in assuming that if there is an improvement in one of these variables, there will automatically be an improvement in crash rates. There is also the possibility that 'risk compensation' will occur. This is when an improvement in one behaviour leads to more risk taking in another area. For example, it has been seen in some cases that increased seatbelt wearing leads to less injuries to car occupants, but more crashes involving vulnerable road users.

In general, going down the list above, the methods become more reliable, and more likely to be correlated to crash rates.

If only crash data is used as a means of evaluation, only the stimulus i.e. the publicity, and the end result are known. It can be very informative to have information on the pathway to achieve the end result. In other words, use of attitude and knowledge measures may help to indicate why successful programmes were successful and why ineffective programmes failed. The

information gained should be fed back into the design of future campaigns so that there is a dynamic process of improvement.

There are now various tried and tested methods available in this field. The consensus of professional opinion is that road safety initiatives should be data-led and evaluated to determine their effectiveness.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As mentioned at the start of this document, one of the problems with addressing road safety issues is that the target audience often do not see the benefits of changing their behaviour. People are naturally resistant to change, and will often look for an excuse to dismiss the message. It is therefore, important not to provide such excuses, for example, if people see the message as being irrelevant to them.

It is better not only to avoid general messages, but to suggest desirable alternative behaviours. Clear, specific and simple messages are better and positive appeals should be used rather than negative as they have been found to be more effective. Simply showing a crash scene will not be effective, as unless they have direct experience, or someone close to them has been involved in an crash situation, crashes are not relevant to the majority of people. Avoid showing any undesirable behaviours, even as a comparison.

In general, it is better not to use fear, shock, horror or threat tactics. These should only be used carefully and when there is enough information to be able to predict how the audience will react.

Using advertising alone, will not result in desired change. It should be seen as only one part of a wider campaign, involving enforcement, legislation, engineering and other strategies. The behavioural change being aimed for should be realistic and not too large. However, publicity is an essential, but long-term, part of any strategy to reduce the number of people killed and injured on roads.

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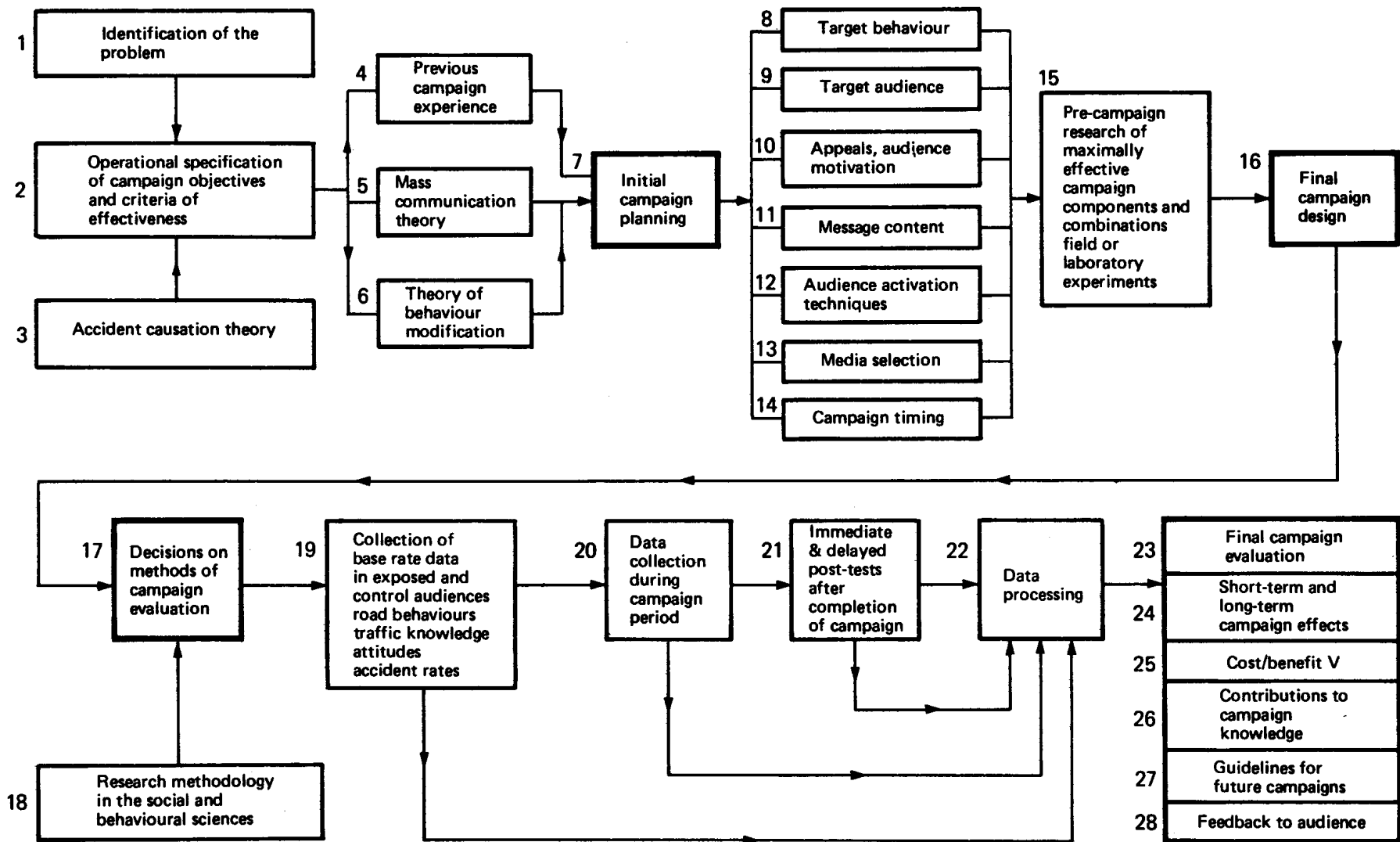


Fig. 1 DIAGRAM OF DESIGN AND EVALUATION OF MASS MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS FOR THE PROMOTION OF TRAFFIC SAFETY
(from Wilde, L'Hoste, Sheppard and Wind, 1971)