

Effective Communication Message Strategy for Enhancing Traffic Safety in Fresno County: The Role of Time Horizon, Regulatory Focus, and Perceived Personal Control

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The safety of a community for all active modes of transportation (i.e. walking, biking, and driving) depend crucially on safety-related behaviors and practices such as following traffic rules, driving unimpaired, and using crosswalks. Within communities as well as across the nation, reducing road fatalities is a key objective of transportation authorities. Positive behavioral changes to enhance traffic safety can be enhanced by effective messaging strategies. This research informs decision-making on transportation-related issues on how to effectively design communication messages capable of inducing attitudinal and behavioral change (e.g., monitoring drinking when driving,

speeding behavior, crossing cautiously) that impact the safety of active transportation modes.

Study Methods

This research experimentally studied the differential effects of time horizon and regulatory focus framing on advancing traffic safety throughout effective messaging. Participants were randomly assigned to see one of four messages, displayed on their screen in an online survey, designed to include either promotion vs. prevention focus and either expansive vs. limited time horizon. After reading the message, participants completed a set of related transportation safety appeal, attitudinal, and behavioral-intentions

questions and scales to determine the messages potential effects on any changes in attitude and behavior regarding traffic safety.

Communication messages that promote people to think that time is expansive (e.g., life is long) and focus on attaining positive consequences can lead to more favorable effects when it comes to road safety practices.

Findings

When compared to prevention-focus, promotion-focus message framing demonstrated more positive perception of the message's ability to reduce pedestrians' and cyclists' accidents. Motorists under the promotion-focus (vs. prevention-focus) condition indicated higher perception of the message's ability to deter others from speeding. Pedestrians under the promotion-focus (vs. prevention-focus) condition expressed more likelihood that the message would make them exercise more caution while crossing. Motorists' agreement that the message would make them monitor drinking when planning to drive was higher when presented with the expansive (vs. limited) time horizon framing.

The message framing with both the promotion-focus and expansive time horizon showed the highest perceptions of message effectiveness and credibility.

Thus, perceived personal control for participants using all active modes of transportation showed significant positive correlations with the message's ability to reduce pedestrians and cyclists accidents in general, deter other drivers from speeding, ability to make participants exercise more caution while crossing, monitor drinking while driving, and improved perceptions about the overall message effectiveness.

Policy Recommendations

This research shall benefit the public, transportation authorities, city administrators, and policymakers. Messages aimed at enhancing traffic safety need to adopt a promotion-focus framing and emphasize attaining positive consequences of safe behaviors. Also, to increase message effectiveness and

perceived credibility, transportation authorities can combine promotion-focus message framing with promoting a long time horizon view (future focus).

About the Authors

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To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/research/1908



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