A campaign against texting and driving

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In our persuasion campaign project we are confronting the issue of the rise of car accidents due to texting and driving. Our campaign goal is to not only inform individuals about the dangers of texting and driving but to also persuade those who do text behind the wheel to change their behavior for the better. Within our campaign we researched background information as well as prior campaigns against text and driving, we analyzed the audience we would be targeting, devised a campaign strategy and communication plan, and have figured out way to try and measure the success of the campaign.

Drunk driving and talking on cell phones have always been leading causes of accidents in the past. What most people do not know is that texting while driving is said to be eight times more likely to cause a car accident, as stated by the infographics website (The Infographics Showcase, 2011). Studies have shown that driving while texting or on the phone is like being double over the limit of driving while intoxicated. Texting drivers, according to the National Safety Council, are three to four times slower in their response time than drunk drivers are (Miami Injury Lawyer Blog, 2011). Many states are trying to put a stop to texting and driving, but in the United States there are still around twenty states that have no laws against texting and driving. There are more states without laws than there are with laws against texting and driving.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration mentioned that over 5,800 deaths have occurred because of “distracted driving” (which includes texting while driving) and 515,000 people were wounded in 2008. Texting while driving involves all three of the main distractions while driving, which are the following: visual, taking eyes off of the road, manual, taking hands off of the wheel, and cognitive, taking mind off of what you are doing. Since texting while driving involves all three of these it has become the most frightening. The Department of Transportation states that there are 1.6 million accidents a year, including half a million injuries and 6 thousand deaths, due to cell phones.

There have been previous attempts to stop texting and driving. Videos of what could and what has happened have been used often. Public service announcements have been made using dark comedy to attempt to get people’s attention to stop texting and driving. There is also a pledge that people may sign saying that they will not text and drive. Along with these previous attempts to put a halt to texting and driving Oprah Winfrey, who has partnered with Sprint, has also gotten involved. Oprah is leading a campaign to educated people about the dangers that come from using cellular devices while driving. In this campaign led by Oprah there is a pledge that people may sign, called the Oprah’s No Phone Zone pledge (Oprah’s “No Phone Zone” Crusade, 2010).

AT&T is also launching a campaign about the dangers of texting and driving. This campaign uses stories from past texting and driving accidents. AT&T also uses the radio, internet, television, cell phone covers, etc. to reach drivers and attempt to stop texting and driving. AT&T also has a downloadable Texting and Driving Badge that people and businesses may put on their Facebook or websites and they also have a pledge that people can make to not text while driving (AT&T documentary takes on texting while driving, 2010). Another attempt to stopping texting while driving is a video from a police department in Wales that shows an accident that texting and driving has caused.

All of these campaigns have been heard and considered. Unfortunately there are still people who say “I realize that texting and driving is dangerous, but I have learned a way to do it safely.” There are also many logos people have used like “put it down”, “phone in one hand, ticket in the other”, and “Textecution”. Yet according to the Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau, over half of the American teens admitted to texting while driving even after hearing all the dangers of it.

Texting and driving can apply to any age group—anyone who is able to drive and has a cell phone can do so. However, in a recent article published by CNN, a case study finds that adults are just as likely as teenagers to be texting while driving. This study was conducted by the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, who found that “nearly half -- or 47 percent -- of adult texters say they have sent or received text messages from mobile phones while driving. In comparison, 34 percent of teens who text says they have done so while driving”. This information is surprising, as most people assume that teenagers would have the highest number of texting while driving incidents. A top reason that adults are texting more could be related to work issues—such as answering a quick text from their boss. Many adults are still in the workplace mindset, even after they get off work. Answering a simple text, such as one about a big work project, can have hefty consequences. Taking your eyes off the road for even just a few seconds can cause you to wreck, kill someone else, or even yourself.

As mentioned earlier, adults and teenagers are the two top age groups to commit texting while driving. These two groups also tend to be the savviest with technology. Many people that fall into these age groups know how to use cell phones, computers, and other technological devices extremely well. As a result, a new cell phone application has been invented to help put an end to texting while driving. The featured product is called CellSafety, an application that will hopefully prevent texting and driving all together. According to Allstate Insurance, the CellSafety application “works by turning off the cell phone's ability to send and receive text messages as well as the web browser when traveling faster than 10 mph”. Texting and driving simply is not worth losing your life, or someone else’s life.

Furthermore, Car and Driver magazine has linked texting and driving to be similar to drinking and driving. This is due to the fact that both drinking and texting cause slower reaction times behind the wheel. CNBC published this study, and the results were astounding. After the study was conducted, it was discovered that texting/reading an e-mail while driving took the driver the longest to brake, thus having a greatly slowed reaction time. When the driver was unimpaired, it took just .54 seconds to brake, and when they were considered legally drunk, an additional 4 feet was tacked onto this number. Reading an email caused 36 more feet to be added onto the original time, followed by a whopping 70 feet added on when the driver was sending a text message.

Additionally, most teenagers and adults are concerned with money, since many do not have sufficient amounts saved up like elderly age groups do. Adults and teenagers are both concerned with the cost of their cars, as well as their auto insurance. As we all know, insurance is much higher for teenagers and young adults, since they are less experienced drivers. If you are texting and driving, you are much more likely to wreck your car. Not texting and driving can lead to lower insurance costs, which is definitely a huge benefit to those living on a budget. Auto insurance is already expensive enough, and there is no need to make the cost even higher. Simply not texting while driving is an easy way to save hundreds on auto insurance.

Text messaging is very popular with adults and teenagers—there is no questioning that. However, both of these age groups need to realize that reading or sending a text while driving can wait. At a time when both of these age groups are most likely trying to build up their careers and become more financially stable, it only makes sense they simply put away their cellular phones while driving. Lower price of auto insurance and a person’s life are much more important than a text message. The bottom line is that texting and driving is absolutely too dangerous, and it is so easy to prevent.

If this campaign or campaigns similar to this really do make an impact on viewers that roads would be a much safer place to drive, but our goal is to inform viewers about the dangers of texting while being behind the wheel. The audiences we are targeting are drivers in general, but more so those who would be more likely to be texting while operating a car.

People may feel that they are being affected in a negative way because of lack of convenience when not allowed to text behind the wheel but they will be affected in an even more negative way if their text results in a car accident or worse, death. Everyone who is driving on the road is affected in a positive way because when people do not text and drive because they are more focused on driving. All categories of drivers could all be affected if some drivers are not completely concentrated on the road.

Through this campaign we are trying to reach those whose lives could possibly be affected due to another driver sending a simple text message and persuading drivers to not text and drive. We use various persuasive techniques in our campaign but a few that stand out are using fear, rhetorical questions, plain folks, and testimonial. In our picture ready print ad a picture of a car accident is the background of a text message asking the rhetorical question, “is this text worth this?” referring to the car accident. The fear of dying over a text message is something that could influence viewers to put down their phones while on the road. Our radio ad also uses fear by discussing a terrifying account of a girl losing her boyfriend to a car accident. Another technique used in our radio ad was plain folks and testimonial. The plain folks technique was demonstrated by the average girl that lost her boyfriend, that could be anyone. Testimonial was shown through the use of statics from Virginia Tech giving it credibility, especially in Virginia.

As long as our ad inform drivers and persuade drivers to not tweet and watch the street then this campaign can be a success.

The strategies used in our “Don’t Tweet, Watch the Street” campaign are based on three main theories; Aristotle’s theory of persuasion, the five canons or rhetoric, and fear based persuasion.

Aristotle’s idea of pathos relates to “a form of proof that appeals to the audiences emotions” (Borchers 2005 p. 37). By using statistics in our campaign and radio advertisement we are giving the audience proof that texting while driving is dangerous rather than just telling stating it. The use of the sad song and personal account appeals to the audience’s emotions.

“Research from Virginia Tech has found that text messaging increases the risk of a car crash by 23%”. “Texting while driving is eight times more likely to cause a car accident than drinking and driving”.

The five canons of rhetoric are invention, arrangement, style, delivery, and memory. In our campaign there was special attention paid to the delivery and arrangement of our radio advertisement. Delivery is the “use of voice and gesture in the presentation of speech” (Borchers 2005 p. 37). Our advertisement open with a woman giving a personal account of the night when her boyfriend was killed while texting and driving. We have a sad song playing in the background to appeal to the audience’s emotions, while her voice is low and depressing. The story is followed up by two statistics on why texting while driving is dangerous by speakers using a strong, convincing tone. Arrangement is “ordering of ideas so they will persuasive to the audience” (Borchers 2005 p. 37). Our radio advertisement is strategically arranged to make the biggest impact on the audience. During our ad, the personal account of the death while texting was placed at the beginning to catch the audience’s attention, followed up by statistics to support.

The use of fear is also used to persuade our audience. The fear appeal deals with three different dimensions; It “describes a threat, indicates that audience members are likely to experience the threat, and indicates that one way audience members can avoid the treat is by adopting the message of the persuader” (Borchers 2005 p308). Our campaign uses fear by describing the threat as being in a car accident while texting and driving. The statistics show how likely the audience members are going to be involved in one of these accidents and how often they occur. By choosing to not text and drive, audience members will avoid the chances of being in a dangerous car accident.

In the textbook, it is mentioned that Todd Gitlin wrote in his book, “The Sixties,” that a particular anti-war rally held by the Students for a Democratic Society was met with mixed success as it didn’t achieve all it set out to, but was not immediately rejected either.

While evaluating the campaign’s success, one should determine whether the campaign was seen as being something credible and worthwhile. Doing this will determine whether or not the campaign was taken seriously to begin with, because if not, then it was not a successful campaign.

Gitlin wrote, “As an impossible revolution it had failed—how could it have succeeded?” By saying this, he meant that it is not realistic to think 100% of a campaign’s goals will be accomplished. He wrote, “but as an amalgam of reform efforts, especially for civil rights (ultimately for Hispanics, Native Americans, and other minorities as well as and blacks) and women’s rights and the environment and against the war, it had been a formidable success.” By this, Gitlin was referring to how even if a campaign is not a complete success, one campaign and the impact it makes can lead to greater social movements, which can ultimately produce change.

These social movements typically follow a life cycle and fade away as support for the cause diminishes over time. Many movements are designed specifically to change people’s perspective on the issue, and are referred to as expressive campaigns. The media helps to dictate how the public feels about the campaign, by picking particular aspects of the campaign, and showing their representation of it.

In order to the effectiveness of our campaign, we would need to see what kind of impact it made on the community. National statistics on car accidents and resulting fatalities could be used to show trends, and to determine whether over time, these accidents and fatalities decrease. Surveys or questionnaires can be distributed to establish which parts of the campaign were seen as the most effective, and to get ideas on new ways of reaching out and making an impact with the campaign.

If there is a steady decline in the number of texting-while-driving incidents in the community, as well as evidence that the campaign did have a positive impact, then the success of our campaign can be established.

Persuasive campaigns become successful among individuals when they can identify with the campaign, and they see the campaign as something that others can benefit from to help them more towards success.

In our efforts to promote this campaign against texting and driving we strive to inform viewers and persuade them to, “Don’t Tweet, Watch the Street.”

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