

## **Lost in Translation? A Humorous International Driver Sleepiness Advertisement Viewed by Australian Young Drivers**

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### **Abstract**

Young drivers have more control over the media they consume than previous generations. Humour is one strategy which may increase the likelihood of a video being watched and remembered. Advertisements available on internet sites have a global audience. Ten young, Australian drivers were asked to view and discuss an international, humorous, animated driver sleepiness advertisement that had more than 1 million YouTube views. Participants reported humour and animation to be video features which made inappropriate light of a serious topic. This negative reception was minimized if viewers were able to interpret actions of how to manage sleepiness from the video.

### **Background**

Media on demand, such as YouTube and streaming services means that consumers have greater control over what they watch, including the advertising to which they are exposed. One of the challenges for communicating road safety messages that this curation presents is the potential for advertisements to be easily skipped if not engaging for their intended audience. Humour is a way to potentially increase ‘watch-ability’ of road safety advertisements. The globalization of media means that international road safety messages are easily accessible to Australian drivers. Young drivers are both large consumers of media on demand and at high risk of crashes on the road. Driver sleepiness prevention largely relies on drivers self-managing their sleepiness because of the inability of law enforcers to test or monitor this activity in the same way as other driving impairments (e.g., alcohol). The aim of this research was to understand the impact and impressions of a road safety advertisement with proven video on demand popularity, for young drivers in Australia.

### **Method**

One focus group and seven individual interviews were conducted with young Australian drivers (5 female, Mage= 25.9 years, range= 23-30 years). Participants were shown an animated road safety advertisement depicting a car full of anthropomorphic critters that, one by one, fall asleep until the driver falls asleep and swerves off road over a cliff causing everyone to bounce and roll, followed by Korean language text. The selected video was identified in a previous study as being the most viewed driver sleepiness related video on YouTube in 2014 (Hawkins & Filtness, 2017). Participants were asked to take a moment to reflect on what they had seen and then share their thoughts and reactions. Thematic coding of transcripts was carried out by author AH and emerging themes were discussed by the research team for confirmation.

### **Results**

Participants frequently discussed previously seen road safety advertisements. This gave some participants expectations that a road safety advertisement ‘should’ be shocking. An advertisement that violated this expectation was viewed as inappropriate. One participant remarked, “I was just thinking about ...campaigns that I have seen previously and comparing

them to that and I just didn't find that was doing the same job as ...the scare tactic ones." Many participants expressed that a light hearted approach was inappropriate for the subject matter.

Participants who did not find the humour inappropriate interpreted prompts from the advertisement as to how to avoid driver sleepiness. These included being a responsible passenger, speaking to friends about road safety, self-awareness of driving late at night with friends and educating children to wake up driving parents.

### **Conclusion**

Humorous advertisements may be appropriate for some road safety topics (e.g., anti-drink driving messages; Lewis, Watson, & White, 2008). However, this small sample study suggests a need for more research to determine if this approach is appropriate for driver sleepiness advertising. Using humour to increase 'watch-ability' may limit the effectiveness of a driver sleepiness advertisement if drivers dismiss the video due to it failing to meet their expectations of road safety messages. It is possible that it is the juxtaposition from expectation rather than the humour per se which results in dismissal. Drivers who dismiss an advertisement because of its humour appear unable to extrapolate positive calls to action.

### **References**

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