

## **Anticipated Regret and Risky Driving: A Focus on Texting Behaviour**

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### **Abstract**

Numerous psychosocial factors have been identified in the prediction of texting while driving including attitudes, perceived norms and behavioural control. Less is known regarding the role of anticipated emotions, such as regret, which may be important and potentially modifiable influences on texting while driving. We conducted a survey of young drivers aged 17-24 years in the ACT and examined the role of anticipated emotions in sending/reading text messages while driving. Other variables, such as attitudes, norms and control were also measured. We present results regarding the influence of anticipated emotions on texting and implications for road safety messages.

### **Background, Method, Results and Conclusions**

Many studies examining intentions to engage in risky behaviours, such as texting while driving, have employed the framework of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB; Ajzen, 1991). This model proposes that behavioural intentions (such as intending to text while driving) are predicted by attitudes (how one feels about performing a behaviour), subjective norms (how one thinks significant others would feel about performing a behaviour) and perceived behavioural control (one's perceptions of how much control one has over performing a behaviour). While this model has been successfully applied to texting while driving (e.g., Nemme & White, 2010), it assumes rational cognitive and intentional decision making processes which may not apply to behaviours that are not premeditated. Likewise, this approach has been criticised for ignoring the role of affective variables. The TPB only provides a partial explanation of intentions to engage in risky driving behaviour. Importantly, variables such as attitudes, norms and perceived behavioural control may be resistant to change, providing obstacles for the design and delivery of relevant road safety messages (Koche, 2014).

The inclusion of anticipated emotions, such as anticipated regret, provides an opportunity to improve the explanation of texting while driving. These factors may be more readily modifiable than traditional TPB variables. Anticipated regret refers to prospective feelings and thoughts (often aversive) that influence decision making (Koche, 2014). It has been suggested that there are two types of anticipated regret, namely action and inaction regret. Anticipated action regret refers to the regret felt when thinking about performing an action (e.g., texting while driving) whereas anticipated inaction regret is related to not performing a behaviour (e.g., not answering a text while driving). Anticipated regret has been shown to influence health and safety decisions in a number of different domains, including road safety (see Koche, 2014, for a review). However, most studies involving anticipated regret and road safety have examined the role of anticipated regret in speeding (e.g., Elliott & Thomson, 2010). There is little research examining the role of anticipated regret in intentions to engage in texting while driving. One recent study (Gauld, Lewis & White, 2014) examined the role of anticipated regret on concealed texting behaviour. However this study only measured action regret and not inaction regret. This second form of anticipated regret is likely to be especially relevant to decisions made by young adults with respect to texting (e.g., regret at missing

out on an important message) and provides a potential target for road safety messages. We will examine both action and inaction anticipated regret in the current study.

We present findings from a recent project supported by an NRMA ACT Road Safety Trust Grant. An online survey of drivers aged 17-24 years in the ACT region measured TPB variables as well as anticipated regret. The role of anticipated regret in the prediction of reading/sending text messages while driving will be investigated to determine whether this variable provides additional explanatory power, beyond measured TPB variables, in explaining texting intentions and behaviour. Implications for road safety messages will be discussed.

## References

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