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## The impact of the **media**



# Did you know?

Road use and road safety issues are portrayed in the media in a wide variety of ways:

- Advertisements
- Publicity campaigns to raise awareness and provide advice about specific road safety issues.
- Media stories and editorial comments about road safety issues or specific accidents
- Programmes, including dramas and soaps, which show people using the road

The media can influence people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. Advertisements target particular groups of people, for example, car manufacturers will use images that appeal to young drivers when launching a product aimed at that market.

Television, film, radio and the print media frequently show people driving, riding or walking on the road. These

scenes show people using the road in safe and unsafe ways, sometimes this is integral to the storyline but often it is incidental.

Positive images, showing safe behaviour, may help to prevent crashes and even save lives. Images showing poor or dangerous behaviour may have the opposite effect.

## Discussion Points

- Select a recent advertising campaign by a car manufacturer, look at the images used and discuss who you think the campaign is aimed at and how the advertisers have tried to appeal to that group and influence them.
- Discuss whether you think the campaign is effective and why.
- Then think about road safety campaigns, Do you think they change people's behaviour, and if so in what way?
- Do some techniques work better than others? If so, which, and why do you think this is?
- Should shock tactics be used? (for example gory images or scenes of carnage). Do you think that they work?
- Select a drama or soap episode where characters have been shown in cars.
- Do you think the way television and film portray driving and road use, whether good or bad, can influence how the general public use the roads?
- Do you think TV and film makers have a responsibility to show good practice?

“2002 saw a record number of complaints made to the advertising standards authority regarding car adverts. The list of complaints range from veiled suggestions of speed to misleading information.”

“a car manufacturer has decided to scrap an advert that appears to encourage speeding, following pressure from the Committee for Advertising Practice.

The advert shows a long, straight empty road stretching towards the horizon and tyre marks visible on a splashing puddle, with the line: ‘Now you see it. Now you don’t’”.

## Activities

- For 3-7 days compile a scrapbook of clippings from local or national newspapers (you can also download material from the websites of newspapers) about the way people use the road. This could be reports of crashes, sentences people have received for traffic offences or publicity for safety events. Also look at advertisements in the paper that show road users or vehicles.
- Consider the way that the issues have been dealt with, do they encourage people to be safe on the roads?
- Do some topics receive a higher profile than others? Is speeding covered more than seat belt wearing, for example?
- In a pair, discuss your findings, are they the same or different?
- Discuss whether you are influenced to behave differently on the roads by the reports you have gathered.
- Discuss whether there is a 'car culture'; are you encouraged or discouraged to travel by car by your findings?
- Agree some common findings with your partner.
- Share these with the rest of the group.
- Produce a report on your findings to present to the School Council or a Governor's Meeting or send to road safety organisations, such as RoSPA or your local road safety unit. This should be about 2 sides of A4 and summarise the main findings.
- Try to display some of the statistical information in the report in chart format. Design a form to gather some feedback on your report.
- Present or send your report to your chosen forum. Ensure that you obtain verbal or written feedback from the audience.
- Think about some ways that you can use the information you have gathered, including the feedback, and decide if you want to do more with it, for example present it to the local media and try to influence them to change the way they report crashes if you think this would help.

# Past and present campaigns

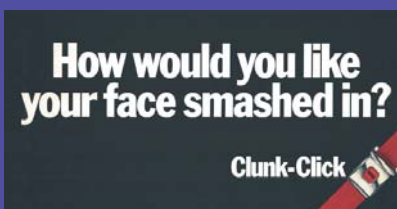
- Seat belt commercials were shown from the 1960s to highlight the dangers of being thrown through the windscreen, the 'Clunk Click' campaign started in the 1970s often supported by celebrities and have run each year since.
- Drink drive campaigns have run every year since 1976 using different

mechanisms to get the message across.

- Speed campaigns began at the beginning of the 1990s with the 'Kill Your Speed Not a Child' message and continue to date.

## Discussion Points

- Should celebrities help with road safety campaigns and if so how?
- Do catch phrases help, e.g., clunk click, switch off before you drive off and if so, how?



Above: Images from road safety campaigns produced since 1976.

## Activities

- Find out whether your parents and other adults remember these older campaigns. Do they think these campaigns made a difference to them personally, did it affect the way they behaved? Do they think these campaigns made a difference to the public in general?
- Find out whether these adults feel that the current THINK! campaigns on drink/drive, seatbelt wearing and speeding are more or less effective than the older campaigns and discuss the reasons for their views with them.
- Produce a timeline to show the campaigns and plot total casualty numbers against it. Do this for the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and since 2000 then put them all together.

Information on current and previous campaigns can be found at [www.thinkroadsafety.gov.uk](http://www.thinkroadsafety.gov.uk) and at [www.rospa.com/roadsafety/info/campaigns.pdf](http://www.rospa.com/roadsafety/info/campaigns.pdf). Data on road casualty numbers is available in the Transport Statistics section of [www.dft.gov.uk](http://www.dft.gov.uk).

- In a pair, take 2 road safety campaigns and see if there are any common messages, or major differences.
- Which one is more effective to you and why?
- Plan a road safety campaign.

### Consider:

- Which issue do you want to focus on, for example, seat belt wearing, drink/drug driving, driver fatigue or distraction, for

example using a mobile phone whilst driving.

- Is this a local or national campaign?
- Who would be your target audience?
- Which medium do you want to use? TV, radio, newspapers?
- What format do you want to use? Celebrity presenter, character, shock tactics?
- Run your campaign either in school or in your local community, make sure that you establish a way to evaluate the success of the campaign. Set a time limit for the campaign, this could be a couple of days or a week or more. You will need to draw up a plan of action to ensure the smooth running of the campaign and resource all the materials that you need to set it up.



### Take it further...

- Choose a storyline from a TV soap opera which involves a road safety issue.
- Discuss how the storyline addresses the safety issues, if at all.

- Produce your own plot for a soap that includes a road safety topic, possibly involving a road safety crash.
- Discuss how you would portray the road safety issue to show safe behaviour or the consequences of unsafe behaviour.



### Useful links

[www.highwaycode.gov.uk](http://www.highwaycode.gov.uk)  
[www.rospa.com](http://www.rospa.com)  
[www.thinkroadsafety.gov.uk](http://www.thinkroadsafety.gov.uk)  
(The Government's road safety campaign)  
[www.asa.org.uk](http://www.asa.org.uk) (Advertising Standards Agency)

[www.ofcom.org.uk](http://www.ofcom.org.uk)  
(Communications Industry Regulator)  
[www.dft.gov.uk](http://www.dft.gov.uk)  
(Department for Transport, which includes a section on statistics)

[www.larsoa.org.uk](http://www.larsoa.org.uk)  
(Local Authorities Road Safety Officers Association)  
[www.rospa.com/roadsafety/info/roadmedia.pdf](http://www.rospa.com/roadsafety/info/roadmedia.pdf)

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