

*A study of the Road Safety Authorities use of fear  
appeals to communicate a public health message*

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## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that my thesis titled ‘A study of the Road Safety Authorities use of fear appeals to communicate a public health message’ is the result of my own work and effort and that it has not been submitted anywhere else. Where other sources were used they have been acknowledged.

I declare that this thesis is 15000 words excluding references and appendices.

Signature:

Date:

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation provides an insight into the Road Safety Authorities (RSA) use of fear appeals to communicate a public health message. The RSA use fear appeals such as shock, threats, scare tactics and emotion to communicate a public health message. A fear appeal is a means of persuasion that threatens the audience with a negative physical, psychological or social consequence that is likely to occur if they engage in a particular behaviour. This dissertation provides an insight into:

- The factors that contribute to road safety
- The effectiveness of fear appeals as a method of communicating a public health message
- The impact gender and age has on the effectiveness of a fear appeal advertisement
- The ethical concerns relating to fear appeal advertising
- The wear-out effect of fear appeal advertising, and
- The fear appeal models used to evaluate the effectiveness/ineffectiveness of a particular fear appeal advertisement

This study comprises a two stage data collection process. Two focus groups were conducted. One focus group consisted of females and the other of males; the participants were college students between the ages of 18-27. The objective of the focus groups was to gain an insight into the attitudes and opinions regarding the effectiveness of the RSA's fear appeal advertising from the viewpoint of the target audience. Four in-depth interviews were conducted with road safety experts to identify the effectiveness of RSA fear appeal advertisements from their viewpoint.

## Chapter 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

The primary objective of an advertisement is to gain the target audiences attention, (White 2007, cited by Zeb 2011). On average individuals are exposed to approximately 3000 advertisements daily, therefore marketers are finding aggressive means of targeting viewers. Fear appeals are one of the most frequently used methods to communicate important health messages and encourage people to change their behaviour. 'A fear appeal is a means of persuasion that threatens the audience with a negative physical, psychological or social consequence that is likely to occur if they engage in a particular behaviour', (Algie, 2010 pp.264/5). Fear appeals are also known as 'threat appeals', fear appeals rely on threat appeals to an individual's well-being that motivates them towards action to prevent an unwanted outcome, threat appeal is also known as 'appeal to force'. However, the term 'fear appeal' is justified if the appeal can be shown to arouse fear', (Thornton, 2005, p.1). Arousal of fear is believed by many practitioners to be necessary to motivate and persuade people to undertake a certain activity that is beneficial to themselves or others. The RSA is renowned for its use of fear appeals such as shock, shock advertising is one that deliberately rather than inadvertently startles and offends the audience, (Gustaeson *et al.*, 1994). A typical RSA advertisement consists of a negative consequence being presented such as graphic imagery of a drivers dead body in a crumpled car, with viewers either being told or assuming for themselves that they too are susceptible to such consequences, (Algie, 2010).



Evidence has suggested that fear appeals are effective in gaining the audience's attention and communicating messages. However, conflicting evidence suggests that fear appeals are ineffective, young males are subject to psychological biases; they believe the advertisement to be irrelevant and aimed at someone else, (Lewis *et al.* 2007a). This paper clarifies how effective the RSA advertisements are from the viewpoint of road safety experts and the target audience. The RSA use fear appeals in television advertisements and radio advertisements as well as marketing materials such as posters to create awareness regarding road safety and the dangers of dangerous and illegal driving. However, this dissertation focuses primarily on the RSA television advertisements.

## **1.2 Research aim and objectives:**

The aim of this research was to:

*Explore the Road Safety Authorities (RSA) use of fear appeals to communicate a public health message.*

The five objectives of this study were to:

1. Explore the marketing and advertising approaches used to communicate public health messages.
2. Identify the principle approaches of evaluating marketing and advertising approaches.
3. Establish the benefits of using fear appeals in advertising.
4. Identify the suitability of using fear appeals in road safety awareness campaigns.
5. Analyse if the RSA uses fear appeal advertising effectively from the viewpoint of the target audience and the viewpoint of road safety experts.

Objectives one, two and three were achieved through the examination of literature and secondary research. This involved researching public health campaigns (in particular the campaigns of the RSA) to identify the principle approaches used to communicate public health messages, the principle approach identified was fear appeal advertising. By examining previous dissertations, studies and books the principle approaches to measuring advertising effectiveness were the focus group and in-depth interview approach. Previous studies were examined to gain an understanding in relation to the benefits of using fear appeal advertising in road safety campaigns. Two pieces of qualitative research were conducted to fulfil objectives 4 and 5. The qualitative research methods comprised of in-depth interviews and focus groups. These methods provided an insight into the effectiveness of the RSA fear appeal advertisements and their suitability for communicating a public health message.

### **1.3 Context**

Road trauma is one of the most significant global public health issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Studies undertaken by the World Health Organisation (WHO) projected that by the year 2020 road crashes will inhabit third place in the leading causes of death and disability in the world, (Sanchez, 2001). The target audience of the RSA advertisements is young males between the ages of 17-25. There are concerns surrounding the effectiveness of fear appeals in communicating road safety messages to young males. Literature suggests they are subject to psychological biases, such as optimism bias, they consider the fear appeals to be irrelevant and aimed at someone else, (Harre, 2005). ‘Hard-hitting advertisements rolled out by the RSA ,

which depict the devastating consequences of dangerous driving are “a waste of time” when it comes to targeting young men most at risk on Irish roads’, says the chairman of the RSA Gay Byrne, (Nolan, 2009,p. 20). The psychological and psychiatric personalities of young males make them particularly dangerous and exposed to fatal road accidents. Whilst there is evidence to support that individuals ‘better remember and more frequently recall ads that portray fear than they do warm or upbeat ads or ads with no emotional content’, (Snipes, 1999, p. 273) there are concerns in relation to the long-term effects of the advertisements. ‘It is unlikely that the response to fear appeals remains static’, (Williams, 2011a, p. 16). The wear-out effect is a major concern regarding RSA advertisements; evidence suggests that modern society is no longer affected by scenes of carnage because these tactics are now commonplace, (Lewis *et al.*, 2007a). ‘A number of brands now seem to acknowledge the limitations of shock, so rather than road-safety ads based on a gratuitous car crash or anti-smoking campaigns showing stomach-churning images of fat-filled arteries, agencies have begun to take a different approach. Highlighting the emotional consequences of the issues - how it will affect your conscience or your loved ones - is the new trend’, (Williams, 2009, p.20).The RSA began using emotional fear in a campaign called ‘crashes lives’. One emotional line in this campaign is from a medical consultant, ‘if you are a young road user, in love with life and fun, you don’t want your mum to meet me doing my job, do you’?, This line intends to leave the viewers feeling guilty and remorseful, and recognising the affect their dangerous driving could have on loved ones.

This study identifies the effectiveness of the RSA’s fear appeal tactics in creating awareness about road safety and changing driving behaviours. The RSA’s use of fear appeals are not universally accepted due to graphic and explicit imagery. This study also identifies the ethical concerns associated with the road safety advertisements. Previous research conducted on road

safety and fear appeals include, ‘the role of fear appeals in improving driver safety: a review of the effectiveness of fear-arousing (theory) appeals in road safety advertisements’, (White, 2007), ‘fear appeal theory’, (Williams, 2011b), ‘fear patterns: a new approach to designing road safety advertisements’, (Algie, 2010), ‘fear patterns in anti-speeding advertisements: effects on simulated driver behaviours’, (Thornton, 2005) and ‘improving fear appeals ethics’, (Williams, 2011a).

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Overview of Literature**

The literature review features authors who have published articles in the area of road safety and advertising, including, ‘ the role of fear appeals in improving driver safety: a review of the effectiveness of fear-arousing (theory) appeals in road safety advertisements’, (White, 2007), ‘fear appeal theory’, (Williams, 2011b), ‘ fear patterns: a new approach to designing road safety advertisements’, (Algie, 2010), ‘ fear patterns in anti-speeding advertisements: effects on simulated driver behaviours’, ( Thornton, 2005) and ‘ improving fear appeals ethics’, (Williams, 2011a).

From studying literature on RSA advertisements it was identified that the RSA exploit fear appeals to communicate their message, therefore, fear appeal advertising is the focus of this paper. Section one of the literature review provides an insight into the main factors that contribute to road safety. These factors include advertising, enforcement and incentives. This section helped fulfil objective 1 as it provided an insight into the approaches used to communicate public health messages. Section two provides an insight into fear appeals. This sections explains what a fear appeal is and the benefits of such appeals in communicating a public health message, this helped fulfil objective one as it gave an insight into the approaches used to communicate a public health message, it also helped fulfil objective four as it gave an insight into the suitability of using fear appeals in public campaigns. There is belief that males and females respond differently to fear appeals, section three provides an insight into the effect that gender and age has on the acceptance of fear appeal messages. This helped fulfil objective four as it provided an insight into the suitability of fear appeals in gaining the attention of certain viewers, it also fulfilled objective two in indentifying the benefits of fear appeals. Even though

fear appeals are widely used there are still ethical concerns regarding their use, section four is dedicated to this. There are growing concerns that fear appeals are losing their effect due to compassion fatigue and their overuse, section five is dedicated to this argument. Section six provides an insight into the fear appeal models and this fulfilled the objective to identify the principle approaches to evaluating marketing and advertising approaches, these models demonstrate the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of fear appeals.

The researcher studied various materials on different aspects of road safety advertisements, such as drink driving, driver fatigue and driving without the required skills. Many papers have used focus groups and in-depth interviews to gain insights into road safety issues. Findings highlighted issues such as;

- Females were more positively affected by fear appeals containing graphic content than males
- Males were subject to the classic third-party effect whereas females were subject to the reversed third-party effect
- Fear appeals were subject to the wear-out effect
- Viewers tend to ignore or forget road safety message
- Males were more positively affected by social threats and enforcement than fear appeals
- There are ethical concerns regarding the use of fear appeals

This study examined the validity of previous findings and uncovered new findings in relation to fear appeals.

## **2.2 Factors that contribute to road safety**

Fear appeal television advertising was identified as the RSA's main method of communicating a public health message is. Road safety advertisements aim to leave the viewer feeling scared with the intention to change driving attitudes and behaviours positively. There is growing evidence that traffic law enforcement programs such as random breath testing and speed cameras are effective in reducing illegal high risk behaviours, mass media advertising also plays a part in this. Breath testing is a major contributor to improved road safety; it helps save lives and prevents serious injuries, (Mc Carthaigh, 2011). Other contributing factors include better roads, speed cameras, compulsory driving lessons, Gardaí presence, higher fines, penalties and mobile phone bans. Literature suggests that young males are affected more by social threats such as the threat of losing their driving license.

The social stigma associated with losing their driving license is more effective than fear appeal advertisements alone, (Lewis *et al.*, 2007b). A law enforcement or penalty can aid the effectiveness of a fear appeal advertisement. Messages highlighting financial consequence such as fines for speeding and lifestyle consequences such as the loss of a driving license may be more effective in conjunction with fear appeals than the use of fear appeals alone. Literature suggests that rewards encourage an audience to change their behaviour. A supportive message or reward may produce more favorable results in awareness as well as attitude change (Williams, 2011a). According to Job (1988) rewards reinforces whereas punishment extinguishes responses. In contrast to this Lewis *et al.*,(2007a) stated that the possibility of using more positive enforcement and rewards in road safety initiatives generally, as well as in advertising more specifically, represents a rather contentious issue. The RSA teamed up with IRadio and the

Guardai Siochana to reward drivers who were caught driving under the speed limit with 100euro to encourage drivers to slow down. This study identified the effectiveness of rewards in changing attitudes.

### **2.3 Fear appeals: a method of communicating a public health message**

Fear appeals emerged primarily from the clothing industry, in particular Benetton, Calvin Klein and Richard James in the early 1980s. Benetton and Calvin Klein used shocking content in their advertisements and won awards for heightening public awareness and social issues. This inspired public health campaigns including road safety, AIDS prevention and anti-smoking to use this approach (Dahl, 2003). Fear appeals confront people in a rather hard and often shocking way with the negative consequences of risky behaviour with the expectation of changing undesirable behaviour. 'A fear appeal is a means of persuasion that threatens the audience with a negative physical, psychological or social consequence that is likely to occur if they engage in a particular behaviour', (Thornton, 2005). From studying literature it became apparent that fear appeals are also referred to as 'threat appeals', 'shock tactics', or 'emotive campaigns'. The persuasive message which evokes fear or concern is meant to motivate people to pay attention to the message and to then adopt the recommendations in the message. A fear appeal frequently uses personal words combined with tough or painful pictures. The RSA uses graphic imagery such as a dead or injured driver in a crumpled car, the desired outcome for such advertisements is that the audience recognise the danger possibilities and avoid such dangers by improving their driving habits.' Fear appeals motivate adaptive danger control actions such as message acceptance and maladaptive fear control actions such as defensive avoidance or reactance', (White *et al.*, 2000). A fear-based message captures and holds peoples' attention and thus meets one of the requirements of successful information dissemination. Williams (2009) suggests that



individuals better remember and more frequently recall advertisements that portray fear than they do to warm or upbeat advertisements with no emotional content.

Threat evokes fear; threat relates to communicating messages such as 'if you drive like this you will die'. Threat is used in health issue advertisements such as AIDS prevention and anti-smoking. However, the RSA is particularly renowned for its use of physical threats by showing drivers and passengers who are injured or dead at a car crash scene in a graphically explicit manner. Young males are subject to psychological biases, such as optimism bias, they perceive themselves to be better drivers than the average driver, they believe that they are not subject to bad outcomes and as a result they believe the advertisement to be irrelevant and aimed at someone else, (Lewis *et al.*, 2007a). They are not persuaded by appeals involving physical threats, perhaps because they feel invulnerable to such threats.

There are various scientific opinions about how fear appeals exactly work. However, researchers agree that a fear-based message starts two opposing mechanisms (Ruiter *et al.*, 2001). There is the mechanism to reduce evoked fear by means of psychological defense mechanisms that oppose the message. Such defense mechanisms can take various forms, such as denial where the viewer believes the message not to be true. This mechanism will result in the fear diminishing and the message not being taken seriously. In contrast, there is a tendency to cope with the message by actually adopting its recommendation; this is the desired outcome of fear appeal advertisements. In both cases fear is the motivating factor, but this motivation can be either negative or positive for the acceptance of the message, (Lennon *et al.*, 2010).

Fear appeals are composed of three main components, these components are fear, threat and perceived efficacy (Williams, 2011a). Fear is a negative emotion that is usually accompanied by

heightened arousal. Threat is an external motivation which provides viewers with the perception that they are susceptible to the same negative situation or outcome. Many of the threats conveyed by the RSA show how drivers negative behavior can effect others, one particular RSA advertisement shows a drunk driver crashing into a garden and killing a young child as the child's father watches in despair. The aim of such advertisements is to illustrate how dangerous driving behaviours can affect others. Fear appeals can evoke a range of negative emotions other than fear such as guilt and remorse, (Lewis *et al.*, 2007b). Fear arousing messages can be persuasive when the audience have high self-efficacy and perceive high response efficacy (Woolley, 2010). Perceived efficacy is a person's belief that the message recommendations can be implemented and will effectively reduce the threat depicted in the road safety message, (Gore *et al.*, 1998). White and Allen (2000) concluded that fear appeals must contain both high levels of threat and high levels of efficacy. Thornton and Rossiter (2004) found that high threat/high efficacy anti-speeding advertisements reduced drivers relative speed choice on a driving simulator.

Elliott (2003) concluded that fear appeals can present both facilitating and inhibiting effects and lead to defective coping mechanisms. Whilst the aim of RSA fear appeal advertisements are to encourage individuals to engage in safer driving and thus may be regarded as positive content, the fear elicited in the advertisements may have negative outcomes and often result in maladaptive behaviour, (Tay and Watson, 2002). A fear appeal may amplify the dominant response and may actually increase the tendency to speed if the target audiences are habitual speeders (Algie, 2010). Evidence suggests that positive emotional appeals are more effective for males than females and vice versa for fear-based negative emotional appeals, (Lewis *et al.*,

2008). Brennan and Binney (2010) show that negative appeals are more likely to invoke self-protection and inaction than an active, positive response. Sibley and Harre (2009) compared the effects of positive and negative framed drink driving advertisements on young drivers. They found that the positive advertisements were more effective than the negative advertisements in reducing explicit overestimation of self-enhanced bias. A study that examined how young adults responded to six fear appeal advertisements revealed that while fear arousal was the most significant predictor of fear appeal effectiveness for both males and females, graphic content was also a significant predictor of the effectiveness ratings by males and perceived likelihood of consequences was a significant predictor for females.

#### **2.4 The impact gender and age has on the effectiveness of a fear appeal advertisement**

Studies were conducted on the third-person effect to explore its association with the extent to which male and female drivers report intentions to adopt the recommendations of road safety advertisements depicting high physical threats. Given that young male road users, relative to their female counterparts, are at much greater risk of being killed or injured in a road crash (Tay, 2002; 2005), it is crucial that persuasive appeals targeting this group of road users are designed with the greatest likelihood of being effective. Surprisingly the impact of gender on the acceptance of physically threatening road safety advertising, has received limited empirical attention (Elliott, 2003). As a result the current study comprised of two focus groups, one with males and one with females.

Studies suggest that gender and age play a significant part in the acceptance and effectiveness of fear appeal advertisements. Lewis *et al.*, (2007b; 2008) stated that females believe they are

subject to the consequences displayed in road safety fear appeal advertisements, whilst White and Allen (2000, p.602) stated that ‘individual differences do not appear to have much influence on the processing of fear appeals, generally, studies have found no effect on acceptance of fear appeal recommendations due to gender, age, ethnicity or group membership’. Studies suggest that frightening road safety information has less positive effects on males and young people (Tay, 2002). The classic third-party proposes that individuals exposed to fear appeals perceive the message as being more relevant to and a greater influence on others, it is suggested that males are subject to the classic third-party effect. (Woolley *et al.* 2010). Males are therefore less likely to adopt the recommendation in a fear appeal advertisement (Das, 2001). In contrast to this, literature suggests that females are subject to the reversed third-party effect which proposes that individuals believe that the threatening and fearful message is aimed at them and they are subject to the negative consequences (Lewis *et al.*, 2007b;2008).

Goldenbeld *et al.*, (2008) found that anti-speeding fear appeals had a positive or neutral effect for females but evoked counterproductive negative reactions from males. After viewing fear appeal advertisements males had less positive attitudes to speed zones, they were less likely to perceive speeding as a problem and had weaker intentions to comply with speed limits in comparison to the females. Male drivers dissociate their own speeding behaviour from a social problem, essentially a defensive self-justification response to the fear appeal, (Woolley, 2010). Lewis *et al.* (2007b) conducted an experiment examining pre-exposure and post-exposure driving intentions and perceptions of anti-speeding and drink driving advertising depicting high physical threats. Females reported that the messages would have more influence on themselves than

others while males reported the messages would have more influence on others. Males reported more unsafe speeding and drink driving intentions than females after viewing the advertisements.

Fear appeals may fail to reach and influence the most relevant target group for which they were developed, (Lewis *et al.*, 2008). In contrast to the views that individuals do not believe they are vulnerable to the consequences displayed in road safety advertisements a study conducted by Lewis (The Relationship between the Third-Person Effect and the Acceptance of Fear-Based Road Safety Advertisements) found that most individuals perceived themselves as more vulnerable to being persuaded by threat-based road safety advertisements than other drivers in general. A study by Lewis *et al.* (2008) suggested that positive emotional appeals may be more persuasive for males than fear-based negative emotional appeals. Lennon (2010) found that males were positively affected by advertisements containing graphic content.

The RSA are unsure about the effectiveness of their fear appeals. 'Hard-hitting advertisements rolled out by the RSA, which depict the devastating consequences of dangerous driving, are a "waste of time" when it comes to targeting the young men most at risk on Irish roads says the Chairman of the RSA Gay Byrne', (Horan, 2012). The RSA has begun to use emotional appeals such as grief and guilt, in the campaigns 'he drives, she dies', and the 'crashed lives campaign' which consists of parents telling the story of losing their child in a road traffic accident. This study identifies the effectiveness of emotional content in encouraging vigilant driving.

The frontal lobe is an area of the brain that provides executive functions such as the ability to recognise future consequences resulting from current actions and remember memories associated

with emotions, (Stuss, 2002). Literature suggests that the frontal lobes are not fully developed until the age of 25, (Blakemore *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, individuals under the age of 25 do not fully understand the consequences of their actions. This suggests that the target audience of the RSA do not truly understand or believe road safety fear appeal messages. Smerecnik and Ruiters (2010) studied the role of cognitive beliefs (i.e. attitude, subjective norm, anticipated regret, and self-efficacy) in explaining the effects of a fear appeal on behavioral motivation. They revealed that in order to act upon the message the viewer must have strong feelings and emotions about the message and understand the consequences, thus have developed their frontal lobe.

## **2.5 Ethical concerns related to the use of fear appeals**

Despite their widespread use and the intent to give positive results, the use of fear appeals remains contentious, there are ethical concerns regarding its use. Ethics generally focuses on whether the focus on an individual or a group is deemed as morally right or wrong, if it is acceptable or unacceptable. While fear appeals generally increase advertising effectiveness, little attention has been given to their ethicality (Snipes *et al.*, 1999). There are ethical concerns associated with deliberately evoking fear and anxiety in the attempt to persuade, (Hastings *et al.*, 2004). Fear is an unpleasant emotional state characterised by anticipation of pain or great distress and accompanied by heightened autonomic activity especially involving the nervous system, the state or habit of feeling agitation or dismay, something that is the object of apprehension or alarm (Merriam-Webster, 2002) and this poses ethical concerns. The existing point of view among some behavioural scientists and health promotion professionals and practitioners is to avoid threat appeals or to use them with great care, (Elliott, 2005).

Public health campaigns are the object of public scrutiny due to norm violation. ‘The use of fear appeals are not universally accepted and can backfire or have unintended negative ethical effects on consumers’, (Williams 2011b, p.2). Fear appeals have been condemned as being unethical, manipulative, exploitive, eliciting negative and unhealthy responses from viewers thus exposing them to unpleasant images against their consent ‘Ethical concerns about fear appeals include maladaptive responses such as chronic heightened anxiety among those most at risk and, paradoxically, complacency among those not directly targeted, and increased social inequity between those who respond to fear campaigns, who tend to be better off, and those who do not, who tend to be the less educated and poorer members of society’, (Hastings *et al.*, 2004). A balance between persuasiveness and ethics is important because individuals who dislike the advertisement are likely to resist the adoption of the desired behaviour or recommendation and ignore the message, (Williams, 2011a). Unethical advertisements can have very negative short and long-term effects, (Thompson, Barnett, and Pearce, 2009; Eckart, 2011; Palmer-Mehta, 2009). Therefore in order to produce effective fear appeals an understanding of ethics is required.

Due to ethical constraints and concerns alternatives to fear appeals have been suggested in studies. Appeals can be based on positive emotions such as love, excitement, hope, and humor. Williams’ states that reward appeals also work to gain viewers attention and change their attitudes and behaviors as does empathy appeals. Post-modernism is another non-fear approach that is characterized by relativism, irony, surrealism, and hedonism. These appeals treat the consumer as knowing and worldly wise. Post-modernism seems to be very effective with a younger audience, (Hastings *et al.*, 2004). Fear appeals can be viewed as being too dramatic, graphic, manipulative, and targets vulnerable individuals. In spite of the potential usefulness of a

fear appeal, the causing anxiety for the target audience seems inherently unethical, even if the fear appeals outcome is hoped to result in positivity. As a result, fear appeals must be used with great caution and discretion.

## **2.6 The wear-out effect of fear appeals**

The wear out effect is evident when a fear appeal has lost its persuasive effect, (Thornton, 2005). Shocking advertisements traditionally had an impact because the message became so deeply wedged in the viewers conscience that they felt accountable and guilty, therefore they were eventually forced to act upon it. However, if the same message and tactics are used incessantly then they will no longer have the desired impact they once had, they become common to the viewer and they simple learn to ignore the advertisement or block it out. Drivers are becoming increasingly tired of the shock approach in road safety advertisements, modern society no longer is shocked by scenes of carnage because it is now commonplace, (White, 2007). Given that it is unlikely that individuals will be persuaded by advertisements that they do not attend to, the possibility exists that such appeals are likely to be the less effective overall, irrespective of how well they are designed (Lewis *et al.*, 2007a). Young adults who have been exposed to graphic and violent images in video games, movies, and television may be desensitized to the images used in fear appeals; it is normality to most young people nowadays, (Lennon *et al.*, 2010). Fear is still effective. However, new effective and innovative ways are necessary to maintain its effectiveness, (Williams, 2011a). According to Williams (2009), agencies have to continuously look for new approaches to behavioural change issues. Different types of fear appeals can be



used to communicate an important health message. The RSA recognised this and launched emotional fear campaigns featuring disabled car crash victims to show the long-term effects of dangerous driving.

## **2.7 Fear models: a method of evaluating fear appeals**

Fear appeal models evaluate the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of fear appeals. There are three main fear appeal models. The Parallel Response Model developed by Leventhal, 1970, states that there are two separate paths to persuasion, an emotional fear control response, and a cognitive danger control response. The cognitive response by controlling the danger or threat is more likely to promote acceptance of the message as opposed to the emotional response which involves controlling the fear by either maladaptive means such as ignoring the threat or rejecting the message. However, the model failed to clearly specify the circumstances under which danger control or fear control responses would be initiated, (Woolley, 2010).

The Extended Parallel Response Model was developed by Witte as a framework to explain not only when threat appeals are successful but also why they fail. Specifically, the EPPM posits that an individual's response to a potentially threatening message involves two distinct appraisals. The first appraisal relates to the degree to which the message is perceived as being threatening. If the individual perceives that they are personally vulnerable to the message, a coping appraisal occurs. The extent to which they fear the threat, determines whether they are motivated to continue processing the message. In turn, the coping appraisal may initiate a danger control process, a fear control process, or the ignoring of a message. The Protection Motivation Theory

developed by Rogers, has a strong focus on cognitive factors. It incorporates four variables: the perceived severity of the threat, the perceived probability that the threat will occur, the perceived efficacy of the recommended response and the perceived efficacy of individuals to enact the recommended response, (Lewis *et al.*, 2007b).

## **2.8 Summary of the literature and implications for this study**

A fear appeal is a means of persuasion that communicates the consequences of certain actions with the aim of changing negative behaviour. The RSA is renowned for its use of fear appeals and graphic advertisements. Some studies suggested that the use of fear appeals are effective at gaining attention and positively change the driving behaviour of viewers, whilst others suggested that fear appeals are not effective at changing attitudes and that alternatives methods to fear appeals should be used such as emotion, coping and humour appeals. Literature suggests that males are subject to the classic third party effect in that they perceive the advertisements irrelevant to them; they therefore ignore the fear appeal message or block it out. Females are subject to the reversed third-party effect, they believe that the fear appeal advertisement and its message are relevant to them.

Despite the widespread use of fear appeals there were ethical concerns identified regarding their use. Literature suggests that fear appeals are unethical, manipulative, exploitive, eliciting negative and unhealthy responses from viewers thus exposing them to unpleasant images against their consent. Fear appeals must be used with great caution and discretion. Literature suggests that fear appeals are subject to wear-out, therefore it is important that advertisers develop new innovative fear appeals to ensure they are effective in gaining the audience's attention.

There are three main fear models that are used to evaluate the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of fear appeals; these are the parallel response model, the extended parallel response model and the Protection Motivation Theory. Evidence suggests that fear appeals be used in conjunction with law enforcements. Literature stated that males were more affected by social threats such as losing their driving license than they are by fear appeals alone. The literature review determined the focus of this paper, the research objectives and the data collection methods. It provided the researcher with an insight into fear appeals and acted as a guide for studying the theory in more depth. The literature suggested that males and females react differently to fear appeal advertising and therefore this study comprised of two focus groups, one consisting of males and the other of females. Two studies also indicated that in order to analysis the effectiveness of fear appeal advertisements the differences in effects between males and females should also be examined (Lewis et al., 2007b; Goldenbeld et al., 2008). In-depth interviews with road safety experts were chosen as the second method so as the information obtained could be discussed with experts and an expert view on fear appeals obtained.

## **Chapter 3 Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This study comprises a two stage data collection process, focus groups with the RSA target audience and in-depth interviews with road safety experts. Prior to the primary research, the researcher applied for ethical approval from the ethical board at Letterkenny Institute of Technology and received consent to conduct the research. The focus group method was conducted first and the results acted as an incentive to encourage the road safety experts to participate in the study. The focus group and in-depth interview approaches were chosen as the data collection method as they proved successful for similar studies which were conducted previously. These studies are outlined in the section below.

### **3.2 Previous research**

The focus group and depth interview methods were applied previously in relation to road safety advertisements, a study done on ‘fear patterns’ showed road safety advertisements to a group of students to identify attitudes and reactions to new road safety advertisements, a CRM device was used to obtain reactions, (Algie, 2010). Focus groups were previously used in relation to public messages such as anti-smoking warnings and road safety. A focus group was conducted to examine how young adults responded to six fear appeal public service announcements and assessment sheets with likert scales were used to capture the attitudes and feelings, (Lennon et al., 2010). This has impacted the chosen methods for this study. A similar study was conducted in 2008 regarding the ethical dilemma of advertisements; the title was ‘the effect of sex appeal and emotional appeal on adolescence’, (Habbat, 2008). Two pieces of exploratory research were conducted for this study also, which were focus groups and depth interviews. Habbat (2008) conducted two focus groups for both genders separately to avoid any kind of bias or discomfort;

four in-depth interviews were also conducted with marketing experts to gain insights into opinions and attitudes toward television advertisements. The focus groups were shown advertisements and their attitudes towards the advertisements were recorded through an open ended discussion similar to the way in which this study was conducted. The focus group and depth interview method has proven successful for similar research and therefore the same methods were applied for this study.

### **3.3 Focus group method**

A focus group is a group interview on a specific topic. It is an open-ended group discussion which the researcher guides, typically extending over at least an hour, possibly two or more, (Robson, 2011). The main purpose of focus groups is to gain insights by listening to a group of people discuss the topic at question, (Malhotra, 2006). Opinion varies on the optimum size of a focus group. While some marketing research texts advocate convening focus groups of 10-12 members others have stated that for social and sensitive topics focus groups of 6-8 members are more sufficient to ensure that the participants are comfortable discussing the topic, (Barbour, 2008). This study consisted of two focus groups. The main objective of the focus group method was to identify if the RSA uses fear appeal advertising effectively from the viewpoint of their target audience. If used effectively then the fear appeal advertisements should create awareness of the importance of safe driving and also encourage the audience to drive more carefully, therefore changing attitudes to road safety positively. This method was also conducted to identify if the participants could recall road safety advertisements, identify what type of advertisements they were able to recall, gain an insight into their attitudes towards road safety advertisements, identify if the advertisements affected the driving behaviour of the participants, gain

recommendations as to how road safety advertisements could be improved and gain an insight into their attitudes to road safety in general.

### **3.4 Focus group sampling framework**

Probability sampling was used to select the focus group participants. The sampling frame was the Motor Club from Letterkenny Institute of technology (LYIT). It was evident from talks with LYIT staff members that the Motor Club members had reasonable knowledge and interest in driving and the advertisements of the RSA. The president of the Motor Club suggested twelve participants who agreed to take part. Members of a focus group should be homogeneous in terms of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, (Kruger, 2000). The motor club members were homogeneous in that they shared the same interest and were all students from LYIT. The focus group participants were between the ages of 18-27 which fitted the criteria of the RSA fear appeal advertising target audience with is 17-24, (Noel Brett, RSA CEO, 2011). Two focus groups were conducted, one of the focus group consisted of 6 males and the other of 6 females. Literature suggested that females and males react differently to fear appeals; it stated that males were subject to the classical third party effect whereas females were subject to the reversed third party effect (Lewis *et al.* 2007b). The researcher wanted to test this phenomenon.

### **3.5 Focus group design**

Each of the focus groups was conducted in an identical manner with each lasting approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes and following the same sequence. Firstly the participants were provided with an information sheet which outlined the focus group process, (see appendix 1). Once the participants were satisfied with what the process entailed they signed a consent form (see appendix 2). The focus group consisted of two stages.

**Stage one:**

The focus group participants watched seven road safety advertisements which had been chosen by the researcher. The advertisements were sourced from other countries other than Ireland (Britain, America and Australia) to limit the chance that the participants had previously seen the advertisements. The researcher was concerned that advertisements may not have the same impact the second time they are viewed, therefore, the advertisements were sourced from other countries to identify the first time effect. However, a shorter version of one of the seven advertisements had been aired in Ireland; the participants were shown the full version of the advertisement to identify if the advertisement was effective even if the participants had been exposed to a similar version before, which they all had been.

Descriptions of the advertisements which were shown to the focus group participants are presented on the following page.

**Table 3.1 Focus group advertisements<sup>1</sup>**

Advertisement	Description
1	Advertisement 1 showed the graphic imagery of a car crash with teenage girls. One of the girls was driving distractedly and crashed into another car on a motorway. The advertisement provides a graphic insight into what happens at the scene of a car crash and shows the graphic injuries sustained by the teenage girls.
2	Advertisement 2 highlights the consequences of speeding. A teenage girl is driving over the speed limit when a small child runs out in front of the car on her way to her father who is across the road, the girl is killed instantly. It shows the emotion and fear experienced by both the father and the girl who killed the small child. The advertisement shows the driver at the police station and this highlighted the consequences that she will have to face.
3	Advertisement 3 highlights the graphic injuries sustained by someone who was driving under the influence of alcohol. The advertisement then shows a simple solution to how these injuries could have been avoided and therefore turns the advertisement into a positive and informative one.
4	Advertisement 4 shows the lifelong effect that dangerous driving can have. It does so by following the main events in a man's life, a man who had killed a small child by driving dangerously when he was a teenager, he is now in his seventies and still recalls the accident each day.
5	Advertisement 5 features a father who lost his son in a road traffic accident. The father provides an emotional account of what his life is now without his son.
6	Advertisement 6 features the death of a young girl who was killed in a car crash due to texting whilst driving. The girl is contacting his parents as a spirit and asking for their forgiveness and asking them to ensure that young people recognise the consequences of driving distracted.
7	Advertisement 7 features a traffic guard who is demonstrating the importance of not driving above the speed limit; he demonstrated how driving 5 miles under the speed limit could turn a fatal injury into a minor one.



These fear appeal advertisements were shown in order to compare and contrast the different reactions and attitudes to the different type of road safety advertisements. After each advertisement the participants were provided with an assessment sheet consisting of six short questions. The questions related to how the participant was left feeling and how effective they believed the advertisement would be at changing their driving habits, (see appendix 4 for assessment sheet). Once the participants had seen each of the seven advertisements and had completed the assessment sheet on each advertisement, they then answered an open-ended question in relation to which advertisement they found to be most effective at encouraging them to drive vigilantly.

### **Stage two:**

Stage two consisted of the actual focus group process. The moderator (researcher) led the discussion with a theme sheet (see appendix 5). The moderator asked questions and allowed the participants to discuss their answers in a group setting, with the moderator ensuring that the discussion was answering the relevant question and focus was remaining on the research topic. The participants were asked to recall and discuss RSA advertisements. They discussed their attitudes towards the RSA advertisements, whether they found them effective or ineffective at changing driving behaviours. They discussed recommendations as to how the RSA fear appeal advertisements could be improved to ensure wear-out effect was limited and the advertisement was effective at encouraging safer driving and creating awareness about the dangers of driving. The discussion was recorded with the consent of the participants on a Dictaphone. A good insight into the attitudes regarding the RSA fear appeal advertisements was obtained from the focus groups which consisted of the RSA target audience.

### **3.6 Expert Interviews**

The second part of the methodology consisted of four in-depth interviews with road safety experts. An in-depth interview is a direct personal interview in which a single respondent is probed by a highly skilled interviewer to uncover underlying motivations, beliefs and feelings on a topic, (Malhotra, 2006). The in-depth interview method was chosen as it offers the possibility of modifying one's line of enquiry, following up interesting responses and investigating underlying motives (Robson, 2011). In-depth interviews are also a good mechanism for measuring attitudes, (Creswell, 2010).

### **3.7 Expert interview sampling framework**

The interviewees were chosen through snowball sampling, one individual was chosen from the population of interest, which were individuals that work in conjunction with the RSA and have good knowledge regarding the RSA fear appeal advertisements, these are referred to as road safety experts throughout this study. The first individual selected was then used as an informant to identify three other members of the population, (Farquharson, 2005).

### **3.8 Expert interview design**

The in-depth interview style chosen was semi-structured, in that 'the interviewer had an interview guide that serves as a checklist of topics to be covered and a default of wording and order are often substantially modified based on the flow of the interview, and additional unplanned questions are asked to follow up on what the interviewee says', (Robson, 2011, p.280). A theme sheet was used to guide the interviews. The questions asked were subject to change as the interviewees had different knowledge and information to share which led some of the questions in a different direction and thus led to additional unplanned questions, (See appendix 6 for theme sheet). The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes each, this was

justified from studying literature on in-depth interviews. Johnson (2010) stated that an in-depth interview should last between 30 minutes to one hour. The main objective of the in-depth interview process was to analyse if the RSA uses fear appeal advertising effectively from the viewpoint of road safety experts.

Each of the four interviewees had different employment positions regarding road safety. One interviewee was a facilitator for road safety and driving education throughout secondary schools in Donegal, as well as a driving instructor and someone who is heavily involved with road safety workshops throughout Donegal. This interviewee had conducted research for the RSA regarding the attitudes of secondary schools students towards road safety and the RSA campaigns. The second interviewee was the national road safety engineer who works for the National Roads Authority, the interviewee's job consists of attending road accidents and constructing a report on the accident, the report is then forwarded onto the RSA. This interviewee also provides the RSA with solutions and recommendations to improve road safety and road safety advertisements through the data collected at road traffic accidents. This interviewee completed a paper on the future of road safety. The third interviewee was the sergeant in charge of the traffic unit in Donegal, this interviewee was currently working on a road safety campaign consisting of road safety advertisements and workshops called 'wrecked', he also worked in conjunction with the RSA to improve road safety and educate the public in relation to road safety. The fourth interviewee was the road safety officer for Donegal county council who had extensive knowledge in relation to the RSA advertisements and had been involved in road safety campaigns such as 'safe routes to schools', in conjunction with the Department of regional Development and the Department of education.

Each of the four interviewees expressed extreme passion regarding road safety and was eager to take part in the research process, they provided extensive knowledge regarding road safety and in particular the RSA fear appeal advertisements. The sequence of the in-depth interview was chosen from Robson, 2011. It consisted of five main parts:

1: Introduction: the researcher introduced themselves, explained the purpose of the research, the main objectives and provided some findings which were obtained from the focus groups (see appendix 7). The researcher asked the interviewees permission to record the interview on a Dictaphone and assured confidentiality.

2: Warm up: the warm consisted of easy, non threatening questions to settle the researcher and the interviewee. These questions related to the current employment position of the interviewee and a general discussion about their job entails.

3: Main body of the interview: this involved the actual semi-structured interviewing. The interview was led by a theme sheet. However, it allowed for additional questions and querying or answers. The questions asked related to:

- Road safety in Donegal
- Attitudes to road safety throughout Ireland
- The effectiveness of the RSA television fear appeal advertisements
- The effectiveness of other RSA advertising
- The ability to recall an RSA fear appeal advertisement
- The wear out effect of the RSA fear appeal advertisement
- The contributing factors of the RSA fear appeal advertisements
- Recommendations as to how the RSA fear appeal advertisements could be improved

4: Cool-off: this stage usually consists of a straightforward question at the end to diffuse any tension that may have been built up. The researcher asked the interviewee about their next road safety project and their targets for the next year, this allowed the interviewee to share their own aims for the future.

5: Closure: the interviews ended well, each of the interviewees asked that the final paper be sent onto them as they were all interested in the final report. The interview ended with thank you and goodbye. Useful information was obtained from each of the interviews.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

The data collection methods fulfilled the research objectives. On entry the male focus group participants appeared slightly uncomfortable. However, once assured that the information would remain confidential and that a female focus group had also been conducted the males relaxed and were willing to participate. The focus group participants met the required criteria; they were forthcoming with information regarding their driving behaviour and attitudes toward the RSA's fear appeal advertisements. Each of the focus groups watched the advertisements and gave a thorough insight into their attitudes and feelings towards each advertisement in the assessment sheet. The advertisements had been chosen by the researcher who had no method of identifying if the participants had seen the fear appeal advertisements beforehand, fortunately the advertisements were viewed for the first time by each of the focus group participants with the exception of the first advertisement which had been aired as a shorter version in Ireland previously. The researcher chose this advertisement to gain an insight into the wear-out effect. Each of the participants watched the advertisements and filled out the assessment sheets autonomously without interaction with one another, this insured that their opinions and attitudes were free from bias. The open discussion was successful in that the participants were

capable of answering each of the questions. From observation the participants were comfortable and relaxed discussing the research topic. Each participant gave their view and there was no one dominant party. Good information and insights were obtained from the focus group method. The focus groups lasted approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes which had been the desired time. The participants stated at the end of the session that they enjoyed the discussion and felt that they have achieved something from it.

The in-depth interviews were conducted on separate days so as the researcher was focused solely on the road safety expert being interviewed. Each of the interviewees were eager discuss the research topic. They were provided with various findings which had been obtained from the focus groups. They were each very forthcoming with information and provided great insights into their opinions and views on road safety and the RSA fear appeal advertisements. The interviewees provided the researcher with literature and shared facts about road safety in Donegal. The conversation was constant and followed a good sequence. The theme sheet constructed by the researcher allowed for additional questions and this led to new insights and information. The interviews were all conducted in a comfortable and relaxed manner. The interviews lasted approximately one hour which was the desired length of time. Each of the interviewees exchanged their email address with the researcher and asked that a copy of the final study be emailed to them as they were all interested in the final results.

Overall, the two data collection methods were successful in gaining an insight into the opinions and attitudes of the RSA's target audience and road safety experts regarding the RSA fear appeal advertisements. The results of the focus groups and in-depth interviews are analysed in chapter four. The findings provide information regarding the type of RSA advertisements that the focus groups found most effective at encouraging vigilant driving. The findings obtained from the open

discussion are also presented. The results obtained from the males and females are compared and contrasted throughout chapter four as is the information obtained from the interviewees.

## **Chapter 4 Findings**

### **4.1 Validation of findings**

The focus group and in-depth interview findings were validated by the research and development department of the RSA. The validation is presented in appendix 8.

### **4.2 Introduction**

The findings both compliment and criticise the information presented in the literature review. The findings indicate similarities and differences between the male and female focus group participants in relation to their view on RSA fear appeal advertisements. However, it was evident from conducting the research that there was a broad similarity between both genders regarding attitudes towards the RSA advertisements and road safety in general. Overall the focus group participants and the road safety experts provided a similar view towards the RSA fear appeal advertisements.

### **4.3 Focus group findings**

#### **Part 1: Assessment of Advertisements**

The focus group participants were shown seven road safety advertisements as described in chapter 3. Each of the seven advertisements was viewed for the first time by each of the twelve participants with exception to the first advertisement. After each advertisement the focus group participants filled in an assessment sheet with questions relating to how the advertisement left them feeling and what element of the advertisement would encourage or not encourage them to



drive more vigilantly. After having viewed each of the seven advertisements the participants were asked to state which advertisement they felt would be most effective at encouraging them drive more vigilantly. The male participant opinions in relation to the most effective advertisement differed somewhat. Two participants stated that they found advertisement 2 to be most effective, whilst two stated they found advertisement 3 to be most effective and the final two participants found advertisement 4 to be most effective at encouraging road safety and vigilant driving.

Two male participants stated that they found advertisement 2 to be most encouraging and effective at ensuring safer driving as *'it shows how unpredictable and fragile small children can be'*, and *'the advertisement is very effective due to the shocking and unexpected content, it is also much more heart wrenching to see a small child being harmed than it is to see an adult being involved in an accident'*. It was evident that the males were affected emotionally by advertisement 2. In contrast to this, the common response amongst the females in relation to advertisement 2 was, *'it highlights the consequences that the driver will have to face'*. The females were not emotionally affected by the death of the child; they were affected more by the consequences that the driver would experience.

Two male participants stated that they found advertisement 3 to be most effective at encouraging vigilant driving because, *'It illustrates how simply an accident can be avoided by taking advice from someone'* and *'it illustrates the positive effects of driving legally and shows simply how such a tragic accident could be avoided'*. In contrast to this the majority of the females stated that advertisement 3 would not encourage them to drive any different as they do not drive while under the influence of alcohol. However, one female stated, *'I do not drink drive. However, I*

*would consider the same result to be aimed at driving whilst using a mobile phone and therefore the advertisement may encourage me to avoid that habit’.*

Each of the six females stated that they found advertisement 1 to be most effective at encouraging them to drive more vigilantly even though each of them had been exposed to a shorter version of the same advertisement previously. Their reasoning for this consisted of: *‘This advertisement would encourage me to drive more careful as it shows the injuries sustained by the car passengers and drivers. It is a graphic advertisement that leaves a feeling of fear, shock and disgust’*, and *‘This advertisement would encourage me to drive more careful, it was very life like as it showed the ambulances and fire brigades arrive at the scene’*.

In the open discussion (stage two of the focus group process) the females stated that they believed advertisement 1 to be the most effective of the seven advertisements because the advertisement was very realistic and contained graphic imagery. They stated that *‘the graphic visual element is very important to communicate a road safety message’*. The males did not find this advertisement to be overly dramatic or graphic as the females.

From the assessment sheet it was evident that both the emotional and positive advertisements were most effective at encouraging the males to drive more vigilantly whereas the females were targeted more effectively by the advertisement containing graphic imagery of a car accident.

## **Part 2: Open Discussion**

When asked to recall RSA advertisements each of the focus groups recalled the same five advertisements. These advertisements were from the RSA’s ‘mess’ campaign and ‘crashed lives’

campaign. The advertisements recalled consisted of both graphic and emotional advertisements. Both genders stated that when an RSA advertisement appears on the television they tend to watch the advertisement. However, the males stated that they, *'only watch it if it is a new advertisement'*, if the advertisement is one that they previously seen then they tend to turn it over or ignore the advertisements message. The males stated that, *'the advertisements are no more gruesome or graphic than the content shown in television programmes such as CSI'*. The females stated that they tend to, *'watch the advertisement but turn away if the advertisement features a car crash taking place or an injury'*. The females also stated that, *'once you watch an RSA advertisement it becomes easier to watch it the next time'*, one female stated, *'it is only easier to watch because you know exactly when to look away from the television screen, you know when the gruesome part is about to appear'*.

The males stated that when they watch an RSA advertisement they do not pay attention to the actual message. One participant stated that, *'I know I am subject to the consequences shown in RSA advertisements, every driver, passenger, walker and cyclist is. However, I ignore the message and forget that I am subject to the consequences until I hear of an actual road accident, I then remember the messages of the RSA advertisements but only for a short period and then I block the message from my memory'*. Each of the other participants (both genders) agreed with this statement and stated that the same applied to them. They stated that, *'when you are in a hurry to get somewhere you believe that the consequences in the RSA advertisements are not subject to you because you do not want to believe that they are'*.

The females stated that, *'once exposed to an RSA advertisement the message remains with me for a short period, perhaps a day or two but I eventually forget about it and continue driving as usual'*. Two females stated that, *'sometimes whilst driving I may realise I am driving too fast and*

*an RSA message or advertisement will come to mind, but I then intentionally forget about it and think that I will not be involved in an accident today and continue driving as I did before the message came to mind*'. This presents the theory that the message of an RSA fear appeal advertisement remains subconsciously with the audience.

Both genders stated that the RSA advertisements are good at creating awareness and educating the dangers of driving. However, they stated that they do not change the attitudes and behaviours of drivers. It was noted that, *'the RSA advertisements are good at creating awareness but it is enforcement that changes attitudes and behaviours to road safety'*. The enforcements noted by the participants were speed cameras, penalty points and financial fines.

The males stated that they found the emotional RSA advertisements from the crashed lives campaign to be more effective than the graphic advertisements from the mess campaign; the females' opinion was reversed. The males stated that *'the slogans form the emotional advertisements are very memorable and hard-hitting such as, 'a spinal injury is not for the weekend''*. The males also stated, *'these advertisements are more realistic than advertisements containing a car crash scene'*. Whereas, the females stated that *'the graphic imagery of an actual car crash is important to gain the viewers attention'*.

The male participants stated that RSA radio advertising was more effective than television, they stated that:

*'It would be more effective if you were to hear an RSA advertisement when actually driving, the message would be more realistic and drivers may be encouraged more effectively to drive vigilantly'* also, *'the message would be fresh in the mind of drivers,*

*they would not have time to forget the message before setting of in the car if they were to hear it whilst in the car’.*

In contrast to this, the females stated:

*‘Radio may be useful for providing information on weather conditions that may hinder driving conditions. However, to encourage safer driving in normal conditions the graphic television advertisements would have a better effect. The graphic imagery is an important element to create awareness’.*

The males also stated that:

*‘The RSA teamed up with i102 and the Gardai. They were offering a reward of 100 euro to drivers who were caught driving under the speed limit. Incentives such as these are effective at encouraging drivers to slow down’.*

The females stated otherwise:

*‘Incentives such as those only last for a short period, eventually drivers begin to slow down only when they see an actual speed camera’.*

There were no ethical concerns regarding the RSA advertisements uncovered, both genders stated that it is important to communicate road safety advertisement in whichever manner is deemed most effective. None of the participants felt that they were overexposed to RSA advertisements, they stated:

*‘The same RSA advertisement is shown often for a period of time and then there is a period of time when there appears to be no RSA advertisements on television’.*

The participants also stated:

*‘The RSA should update their advertisements regularly and ensure that there is a good mix of road safety advertisement on television each month to avoid the wear-out effect’.*

Throughout the focus groups discussion there was general consensus that the RSA fear appeal advertisements are effective at creating awareness about road safety and dangerous driving. However, it is enforcement that changes the attitudes and behaviours of drivers.

#### **4.4 In-depth interview findings**

The interviewees were as follows:

Interviewee 1-the Donegal road safety officer

Interviewee 2- a facilitator for road safety education and a driving instructor

Interviewee 3- a road safety engineer

Interviewee 4- the Sergeant in charge of the traffic unit in Donegal

Each of the interviewees stated that road safety is a significant problem in Donegal, Ireland and throughout the whole of Europe. It is a worldwide problem. Interviewee 1 stated that in 2011 1.2 million people died in the world from road traffic collisions, (this does not include injuries) Europe contributed to 39000 of those deaths. Donegal is highlighted throughout Ireland as a county with a significant road safety problem, each of the interviewees highlighted that this

stereotypical view of Donegal is due to the fact that Donegal is a border county and therefore Donegal receives many visitors, this adds to amount of traffic on Donegal roads. Interviewee 2 and interviewee 3 stated that *'Donegal is widespread which means that many of Donegal's young people travel long distances to work and to socialise therefore Donegal people are prone to driving fatigue'*. Interviewee 3 stated that *'driving fatigue is Donegal's main road safety problem'*. This phenomenon was also highlighted in the focus group discussion as nine out of the twelve participants stated that they drive regularly whilst tired.

Each of the interviewees stated that *'although road safety is a significant problem in Donegal it is improving'*.

Interviewee 3 stated:

*'Last year there were 6 deaths in Donegal, the lowest since records began in 1959'*.

Interviewee 4 stated:

*'Road safety is improving in Donegal as a result of the economic downturn. The amount of people travelling to and from work had decreases and the young people cannot afford to be driving recklessly, they cannot afford the petrol or the expense of new tyres'*.

Each of the interviewees agreed with this. However, interviewee 3 stated:

*'Even through the Celtic tiger era road deaths in Donegal were decreasing'*.

Each of the interviewees made reference to vision zero. 'Vision zero' is the aim to have zero deaths on Donegal roads in 2015. It was stated by interviewee 4 who was leading the vision zero project that:

*'Even if vision zero is achieved huge emphasis must remain with road safety and the message of road safety still must be communicated'.*

Interviewee 1 stated:

*'The amount of road accidents always have the ability to increase and therefore emphasis must remain on communicating road safety'.*

When asked about Donegal people's attitudes to driving and road safety,

Interviewee 1 stated that:

*'because people are not in as much of a rush as they were during the Celtic tiger era they are taking their time on the road and they have time to think about road safety'.*

Interviewee 2 stated that:

*'Over the past 7-8 years there has been an improvement in driver's awareness through advertising, education and enforcement'.*

Interviewee 4 stated that:

*'Attitudes towards road safety are improving because people no longer have the money to pay for fines for speeding and the maintenance of cars'.*



Interviewees 2 and 3 stated:

*'The attitudes to road safety throughout all of the Irish counties are broadly similar'.*

It is evident from the road experts responses that road users, particularly in Donegal are becoming more aware of the importance of road safety. This awareness has been created through the optimisation of advertising, education and enforcement. It was also suggested economic circumstances have an impact on road safety.

Each of the interviewees stated:

*'It is difficult to quantify how effective the RSA fear appeal advertisements are at changing attitudes and behaviours of drivers'.*

In comparison to section 2.2 interviewee 1 and interviewee 4 stated:

*'The advertisements are part of a larger toolkit which consists of education, enforcement and engineering'.*

Interviewee 2 stated:

*'Fear appeal advertisements are more effective at changing the attitudes and behaviours of females rather than males'.*

This finding is similar to the evidence in the literature review which states that females are affected more positively by fear appeals than males.

White (2007) stated that viewers have learned to simply ignore fear appeal advertisements and block the fear appeal message from their memory

In comparison to this interviewee 4 stated that:

*'The audience tend to turn off the gruesome and graphic road safety advertisements and this has been deemed the advertisement as being ineffective'.*

However, interviewee 3 stated:

*'Perhaps the audience turning the advertisement off is actually an achievement for the RSA, the message may be strong and effective and that is the reason it is being turned off because the audience find it too powerful and hard hitting to watch'.*

Interviewee 4 stated:

*'The RSA fear appeal advertisements should be on the radio on a Friday and Saturday evening when young drivers are getting ready to go socialising'.*

Interviewee 1 stated:

*'Driver fatigue advertisements should be played on the radio at 3 o'clock in the morning when people are returning home after socialising, before 9 o'clock in the morning when people are driving to work and in the evening when they are returning home from work tired'.*

This recommendation was also identified throughout the focus group discussion as nine of the twelve respondents stated that they regularly drive whilst tired after working and socialising.

Each of the interviews uncovered the belief that:

*'Males are subject to psychological bias and therefore the females should be targeted through the RSA fear appeal advertisements as they will influence the males'.*

Interviewee 2 stated:

*'Young males are subject to psychological bias. However, they are no longer as prone to peer pressure as they were in the past and this has helped them to understand the importance of road safety more effectively'.*

The literature review provided the same phenomenon as interviewee 2 in that males are subject to psychological bias. However, the focus group discussion provided the theory that both males and females are somewhat subject to psychological bias. It is also suggested that young males are becoming more cautious in relation to road safety.

Each of the interviewees stated that fear appeal advertisements are subject to the wear-out effect.

Interviewee 1 stated that:

*'Compassion fatigue is a condition characterised by a gradual lessening of compassion over time, media has caused widespread compassion fatigue in society by saturating newspapers and news shows with often de-contextualised images and stories of tragedy and suffering. This has caused the public to become cynical, or become resistant'.*

Interviewee 4 stated:

*'Video games and television programmes have lessened the impact that fear appeal advertisements have on today's youth'.*

Both the interviewees and the literature suggested that young people have become desensitised and as a result it has become much more difficult to impact them emotionally.

When asked to recall some RSA fear appeal advertisements the experts recalled the same advertisements as the focus group.

Each of the interviewees stated:

*'A good RSA advertisement consists of reality and fact'.*

Interviewee 2 stated:

*'A good quality RSA advertisement must show the realistic scene of an accident, it also comprises of information and solutions in relation to how to avoid road accidents'.*

Interviewee 4 stated:

*'The poor driving behaviours must be linked to the consequences. The long-term effect must be shown as realistic as possible as must the actual accident'.*

Interviewee 1 stated:

*'The RSA advertisements must link the reality with the behaviour. It cannot be preached, reality must be shown. Young people are not longer affected as easily as they were'.*

*therefore it is important for the RSA to play on their emotions as best they can. The advertisements need to be tested on the target audience’.*

There was general consensus that reality and fact are the key elements to an effective fear appeal.

Interviewee 4 stated:

*‘One of the main problems the ambulances and fire brigades are facing at the scene of road collisions is keeping young people away from taking pictures and videos of the accident. Therefore, how effective are the advertisements if seeing it first hand is not affecting them? They are experiencing it on TV programmes and video games therefore fear appeals may be losing their effect*

Interviewee 2 stated:

*‘The RSA should not be over reliant on advertisements; they are an element of a wider toolkit’.*

Interviewee 2 also stated:

*‘From conducting surveys after road safety classes and workshops it is evident that the emotional stories told by parents who have lost a child affect males more positively than females’.*

A similar finding was indentified from the focus group as four of the six males stated they were more likely to drive vigilantly after being exposed to emotional content in road safety advertisement in comparison to the females that found graphic content more effective.

Each of the interviewees stated:

*'The advertisements should be on radio so as individuals think about road safety whilst on the road'.*

Interviewee 3 stated:

*'Ireland has the best accident database in the world outlining how accidents happened, the speed the cars were travelling, the weather conditions and the actual cause. Information should be derived from this database to create high quality, real life accidents. There are very few advertisements outlining driving fatigue-this issue needs to be targeted. The majority of drivers are subject to driver fatigue. The accident database highlights the most common times and dates of accidents; this can help the RSA identify the times to air campaigns and the issues to highlight in them. The fatigue advertisements should be aired on the radio early in the morning and late at night, after a night out, when people are getting into their cars in the morning. The advertisements should highlight the issue, show the consequences and provide a solution'.*

Each of the four interviewees stated that research should be conducted to identify the effect of each RSA advertisement. It was identified that Lyle and Billie produce the RSA advertisements and they evaluated the advertisements also.

Interviewee 1 stated:

*'A number of road safety organisations have been very critical of the RSA and the DOE for not getting independent evaluations of their advertisements'.*

Interviewee 3 stated:

*‘The measured quality and effectiveness of RSA advertisements is subject to biases’.*

It was suggested by each interviewee that the RSA obtain an independent evaluation of their fear appeal advertisements. The road safety experts were asked about their future goals in relation to road safety. Interviewee 3 stated they were currently working on the project ‘vision zero’. Interviewee 1 was currently working on the Donegal road safety plan 2015 which involved evaluating Ireland and Europe’s national roads safety plan. Interviewee 2 was designing a project for educating parents of school children in relation to road safety. Interviewee 4 was working on a road safety programme called ‘wrecked lives’, a campaign which aimed to highlight the impact of losing a loved one to a road accident and the consequences of being left with a lifelong disability as a result of dangerous driving.

#### **4.5 Summary of findings**

Advertisements containing emotional content are more effective at encouraging males to drive more vigilantly whereas the graphic gruesome advertisements are more effective from the viewpoint of females. There is general consensus that the RSA fear appeal advertisements are part of a wider toolkit which consists of education, engineering and enforcement. Fear appeals alone create awareness, when teamed with enforcement they change attitudes and behaviours toward road safety. RSA messages tend to remain with the viewer subconsciously. However, fear appeals are subject to the wear-out effect and therefore the RSA must find new innovative methods of communicating a public health message.

## **Chapter 5 Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter consists of a depth analysis of the qualitative research findings. It provides validations and contradictions between the focus group findings, the in-depth interview findings, previous findings and literature. It also provides new information regarding the RSA's use of fear appeals to communicate a public health message.

### **5.2 Discussion**

The research findings indicated that the attitudes of males and females differ in relation to the effectiveness of particular fear appeal advertisements. The male focus group participants stated that they were more likely to drive vigilantly after being exposed to advertisements containing emotional or positive content rather than gruesome and graphic imagery. Interviewee 2 also stated that *'from conducting surveys after road safety classes and workshops it was evident that the emotional stories told by parents who had lost a child affected males more positively than females'*. A study by Lewis *et al.* (2008) suggested that positive emotional appeals may be more persuasive for males than fear-based negative emotional appeals. Lennon (2010) found that males were more positively affected by advertisements containing graphic content whilst this current study found that males were more positively affected by advertisements containing emotional or positive content.

In contrast to the males, the females found fear appeal advertisements containing graphic content to be more persuasive at encouraging safer driving and communicating a public health message. In comparison to this finding, previous studies found that strong physical threats (i.e., where



death of a passenger was the aversive outcome) were more effective with females than males (Lewis, Watson, & Tay, 2007, Tay & Ozanne, 2002).

The female participants stated that *'once exposed to a fear appeal advertisement for the second time it becomes less effective at encouraging safer driving'*. However, when shown seven road safety advertisements each of the females ranked advertisement 1 as being the most effective at encouraging safer driving even though each of the females had been exposed to a shorter version of that advertisement previously. Therefore, this study suggests that whilst viewers may believe an advertisement is becoming less effective, the impact of the first time effect remains in the viewer's subconscious and when the advertisement is seen for the second time, although easier to watch it unnoticeable triggers the first time effect of being exposed to the advertisement. Interviewee 3 similarly stated that, *'viewers find fear appeal advertisements easier to watch the second time. However, if the RSA receive the desired effect in their fear appeal advertisements the first time it is viewed then the second viewing may act as a reminder of how the viewer felt the first time they became exposed to the advertisement'*.

Each of the twelve participants stated that they tend to forget the message communicated in an RSA advertisement, *'once exposed to an RSA advertisement the message remains with me for a short period, perhaps a day or two but I eventually forget about it and continue driving as usual'*. White (2007) stated that viewers have learned to simply ignore fear appeal advertisements and block the fear appeal message from their memory. However, when asked to recall road safety advertisements each of the twelve participant were able to recall details from road safety advertisements, they recalled the people involved, the vehicles involved, the music being played and the slogan or message. This assured the researcher that whilst viewers believe

they forget fear appeal advertisements it is evident that the message remains in their subconscious and memory quite vividly.

The assessment sheet results indicated that the majority of participants believed they were subject to the consequences highlighted in the seven road safety advertisements. Literature suggests that males are subject to the classical third party effect whereas females are subject to the reversed third party effect; therefore females believe that the advertisements are aimed at themselves whilst the males believe the advertisements to be more relevant to others, (Lewis *et al.* 2007b). The open discussion revealed that both genders were subject to the reversed third-party effect, both the males and females stated that the RSA advertisements were relevant to them and they were subject to the consequences shown. The females stated that they *'do not drink and drive. However, many people are aware of individuals who do drink and drive and therefore those advertisements are relevant to all viewers as they must encourage those people not to drink and drive'*.

Both genders made a similar comment:

*'I know I am subject to the consequences shown in RSA advertisements, every driver, passenger, pedestrian and cyclist is. However, I ignore the message and forget that I am subject to the consequences until I hear of an actual road accident, I then remember the messages of the RSA advertisements but only for a short period and then I block the message from my memory.'*

It was evident from the focus group discussions that both genders are subject to the reversed third party effect; they know they are subject to the consequences of dangerous driving. However, they do tend to ignore the consequences and although they feel subject

to the consequences both genders admitted to suffering from psychological bias. Studies have indicated that males were prone to psychological bias such as optimism bias; they consider the advertisements to be irrelevant and aimed at someone else, (Harre, 2005). Each of the road safety experts who were interviewed also stated that, *'males are subject to psychological bias and therefore the females should be targeted through the RSA fear appeal advertisements as they will influence the males'*. The interviewees believed that the females were not subject to psychological bias. However, the focus group results have indicated otherwise, the females stated that *'sometimes whilst driving I may realise I am driving too fast and an RSA message or advertisement will come to mind, but I then intentionally forget about it and think that I will not be involved in an accident and continue driving as I did before the message came to mind'*.

Evidence has suggested that young males appear to be affected more by social threats such as the threat of losing their driving (Lewis et al., 2007a). Each of the interviewees agreed that *'a law enforcement or penalty can aid the effectiveness of a fear appeal advertisement'*. Each of the focus group participants stated that *'the RSA advertisements are good at creating awareness but it is enforcement that changes attitudes and behaviours to road safety'*. In comparison to this finding, the interviewees stated that *'the advertisements are part of a larger toolkit which consists of education, enforcement and engineering'*.

Evidence suggests that a supportive message or reward may produce more favorable results in awareness, liking as well as attitude change and attempts to quit the undesired behaviour (Williams, 2011). However, Lewis (2007a; 2007b) stated that the possibility of using more positive enforcement and rewards in road safety initiatives generally, as well as in advertising more specifically, represents a rather contentious issue. The male participants stated that *'the RSA*

*teamed up with i102 and the Gardai. They were offering a reward of 100 euro to drivers who were caught driving under the speed limit. Incentives such as these are effective at encouraging driving to slow down'. The females stated otherwise, 'incentives such as those only last for a short period, eventually drivers begin to slow down only when they see an actual speed camera or for the time period that the reward is being offered'.*

‘A fear appeal is a means of persuasion that threatens the audience with a negative physical, psychological or social consequence that is likely to occur if they engage in a particular behaviour’, (Algie, 2010 pp.264/5). The main objectives of the RSA’s fear appeal advertisements are to create awareness about road safety and to encourage drivers to change their driving behaviour positively. However, there was general agreement amongst the focus group participants and the interviewees that *‘fear appeal advertisements are good at creating awareness. However, it is difficult to quantify how effective they are at changing attitudes and behaviours to driving’* and *‘it is enforcement that changes the attitudes and behaviours of drivers towards road safety and dangerous driving’*.

Evidence suggests that young adults who have been exposed to graphic and violent images in video games, movies, and television may be desensitized to the kinds of images often used in fear appeals’ (Lennon *et al.*, 2010). The focus group discussion uncovered that *‘RSA advertisements are no more gruesome or graphic than the content shown in television programmes’*. It was also identified from the in-depth interviews that *‘media has caused widespread compassion fatigue in society’*

### **5.3 Overview of discussion**

Previous research indicated that males were affected more positively by advertisements that contained positive content. The current study provided a similar result; positive content and emotional content were identified as the most powerful content for encouraging males to drive more vigilantly. Similar to previous studies, the current study indicated that females are effective more positively by graphic content in fear appeal advertisements than females.

Previous studies specified that male were subject to psychological bias, this study identified that both males and females are subject to psychological bias. The literature suggested that females were subject to the reversed third party effect whereas males were subject to the classical third party effect; this study found that both genders were subject to the reversed third-party effect, both genders understood that they were subject to the consequences portrayed in road safety advertisement. This study found that viewers retained road safety messages subconsciously; each focus group participant and interviewee was capable of recalling a road safety advertisement and describing the advertisement in detail.

It was evident from the findings that fear appeals are subject to the wear-out effect; therefore it is important that the RSA ensure their advertisements are realistic and believable. Evidence suggested that it is difficult to quantify if fear appeals change attitudes and behaviours. There was general consensus from the qualitative research that the RSA fear appeal advertisements are a good at creating awareness about road safety. However, in order to change attitudes and behaviours the fear appeal advertisement need to be used in conjunction with a wider toolkit which consists of engineering, education and enforcement.

## **Chapter 6 Conclusion**

### **6.1 Conclusion**

Road trauma remains one of the most significant global public health issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The number of road deaths in Donegal is decreasing. However, road safety experts stated that road safety remains an important issue, experts have stated that road deaths have the ability to increase and therefore the RSA and road safety organisations must continue to communicate road safety messages regardless of the number of road deaths. Fear appeals are one of the most frequently used methods to communicate important health messages and encourage people to change their behaviour and the RSA is notorious for its use of fear appeal advertising in television campaigns. Fear appeals are a means of persuasion that threatens the audience with a negative physical, psychological or social consequence that is likely to occur if they engage in a particular behaviour. The RSA's fear appeals include the graphic display of car crash scenes, injuries sustained from car crashes and the impact that dangerous driving can have on others.

The main objectives of this study were to:

- Explore the marketing and advertising approaches used to communicate public health messages.

This objective was fulfilled by examining RSA campaigns as well as campaigns relating to anti-smoking and charities. From studying such campaigns it became apparent that the main approach to communicating a public message was fear appeal television advertising. It was evident that the RSA are notorious for their fear appeal advertisements.

The RSA are beginning to use radio advertising somewhat more in the past few weeks, they have begun a radio campaign featuring endorsers who have pledged to drive carefully and is

encouraging the listener to do the same. However, it is evident from examining road safety campaigns that fear appeal television advertising remains the RSA's main medium of communicating with its audience at present.

- Identify the principle approaches to evaluating marketing and advertising approaches.

This objective was fulfilled by exploring previous research dissertations and studies. It was evident that the common approaches to evaluating marketing and advertising approaches were the focus group method and the in-depth interview method. The focus group and depth interview method has been applied previously in relation to road safety advertisements, a study done on 'fear patterns' showed road safety advertisements to a group of students to identify attitudes and reactions to new road safety advertisements, a CRM device was used to obtain reactions, (Algie, 2010). As a result these methods acted as the main data collection methods for this dissertation.

- Establish the benefits of using fear appeals in advertising.

This objective was fulfilled by examining previous literature and studies that were conducted in relation to the use of fear appeals. The primary benefits found in relation to fear appeals were:

1. They capture the attention of the audience
2. They are good at creating awareness about road safety and the possible dangers of dangerous driving
3. The messages become lodged in the viewers' subconscious although they may not realise
4. Identify the suitability of using fear appeals in road safety awareness campaigns.
5. Analyse if the RSA uses fear appeal advertising effectively from the viewpoint of the target audience and the viewpoint of road safety experts.

To fulfil objectives 4 and 5 focus groups were conducted with the target audience and in-depth interviews were conducted with road safety expert's .One focus group consisted of males and the other of females so as the impact of gender on the acceptance of fear appeal messages could be analysed. The interviewees were:

- The sergeant in charge of the traffic unit in Donegal
- A facilitator for road safety education and a driving instructor
- The national road safety engineer
- The road safety officer for Donegal county council

The main finding from the primary research was that the RSA's use of fear appeal advertising is effective at creating awareness about road safety. However, fear appeals do not change the driving behaviours and attitudes of viewers. It is enforcement that changes the attitudes and behaviours. Females were more positively affected by fear appeal advertisements that contained graphic imagery whereas males were more positively affected positive or emotional content. Overall, this study found that gender does not have a major impact on the acceptance of fear appeal messages. Both genders recognise that everybody is subject to the consequences displayed in the RSA fear appeal advertisements. However, they continue to drive whilst tired, distracted and using a mobile phone. It is therefore suggested that both genders are prone to psychological bias. Due to compassion fatigue it is evident that fear appeals using graphic imagery are becoming less effective, for males in particular. It was identified that the messages form RSA fear appeal advertisements do remain with viewers subconsciously.



## 6.2 Recommendations

It is recommended that the RSA:

- Receive an independent evaluation of their fear appeal advertisements to ensure they are effective.
- Show all aspects of a car crash situation over a series of a few weeks. For example, in week one the campaign should show a group of young friends travelling in a car dangerously. In week two the car has crashed and the graphic content is shown. In week three, the funerals of some of the passengers are taking place. In week four an injured party from the accident is featured telling their story and in week five the friends and family of the persons dead are telling their story. This campaign would incorporate many different elements and would capture the attention of both the male and female viewers.
- Use the country accident database to identify when advertisement should be shown and what type of content should feature in the advertisements
- Use radio advertising late at night and early in the morning when commuters are prone to driving fatigue
- Target primary school children and their parents through road safety education

The RSA's fear appeal advertisements are a vital element for communicating a public health message when used with the wider toolkit which consists of education, enforcement and engineering.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Information sheet**

The topic that will be discussed throughout the focus group process is the Road Safety Authorities fear appeal advertisements. The objective is to identify if you the participant believe that the advertisements of the RSA are effective/ineffective at encouraging you to drive more carefully and to gain a general insight into your attitudes and opinions towards the advertisements.

This focus group will last approximately 1 hour. It involves three stages as follows.

1. Firstly, participants will be shown a variety of road safety advertisements. (approx. 10 minutes)
2. Secondly, participants will be given assessment sheets to fill in about the advertisements that they have just seen. (approx. 10 minutes)
3. Thirdly participants will engage in an open discussion about road safety advertisements in general. ( approx. 40 minutes)

The discussion will be recorded on a Dictaphone but will only be heard by the researcher and will be stored on a password secured storage device that only the researcher will have access to.

Students are not to disclose any personal information such as names. This will ensure the information remains confidential.

Your time is greatly appreciated



## Appendix 2

### Consent form for focus group and in-depth interviews

Project title: *'an analysis of the road safety authorities use of fear appeals to communicate a public health message'*.

Principle Investigator: *Katie Sweeney*

The aim of this research is to identify if the road safety authorities advertisements are effective at conveying positive behaviour and attitudes towards safe driving. The primary data collection strategy involves 2 focus groups with students from LYIT and interviews with road safety experts.

The identity of subjects will remain anonymous and information used for the purpose of the research only. The focus group and depth interviews will be recorded and all data gathered will be stored securely and accessed only by the principal researcher and supervisor.

Declaration: I \_\_\_\_\_, acknowledge that:

- I have been informed about the research and have an opportunity to ask questions
- I consent to partake in this study
- My participation is voluntary
- I can withdraw at any time
- I consent to the publication of results.

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact

Details: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature (if over 18): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 3

### Advertisements

These are the advertisements which were shown to the focus group participants

**Advertisement 1:** <http://adland.tv/commercials/gwent-police-psa-texting-while-driving-2009-416-uk> 4.15 minutes

**Advertisement 2:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5EyOnccJLg&feature=related> 2.26 minutes

**Advertisement 3:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUUX77Uzds4&feature=related> .51 seconds

**Advertisement 4:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0s033MjVR7o> 1.01 minutes

**Advertisement 5:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIJcXEXbEvY&feature=relmfu> .30 seconds

**Advertisement 6:** [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_krbxXawoAU&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_krbxXawoAU&feature=related) 1.31 minutes

**Advertisement 7:** <http://www.coloribus.com/focus/samaya-strashnaya-i-shokiryuschaya-reklama/9845505/> 1.00 minutes

## Appendix 4

### Assessment sheet

Before the focus group process began the participants filled in an assessment sheet about their own driving behaviour as follows:

Q1. Are you male/ female? Male  Female

Q2. What age are you? \_\_\_\_\_

Q3. Do you drive your own car? Yes  NO  drive someone else's car often

Q4. what type of licence do you have? Provisional licence  full licence

Q5. Do you engage in any of the activities listed below? *Tick all relevant answers*

- Drink driving
- Using a mobile phone whilst driving
- Speeding
- Driving without insurance
- Driving without tax
- Driving without passing an NCT test
- Not wearing a seatbelt while driving
- Driving whilst tired
- Driving after consuming drugs
- Driving distracted

Q6. Which of these are most effective at influencing you to drive safely? (*Tick your top 3 answers*)

- Newspaper articles about road safety/accidents
- Signs/posters outlining road safety issues
- Driving instruction lessons
- In-car safety systems (E.g., seat belt reminders, freezing conditions)
- Speed cameras
- Road safety television advertisements
- Road safety radio advertisements
- Visible guard presence
- Speed bumps
- Threat of prosecutions/penalties
- Family
- Friends
- Other (please state other) \_\_\_\_\_

This is the assessment sheet which the focus group participants filled in after viewing each advertisement. They were presented with the same assessment sheet for each of the seven advertisements.

a) Have you seen this advertisement before? Yes      NO

b) On a scale of 1-10 how likely would you be to drive more vigilantly after seeing this advertisement? *1 being very likely and 10 very unlikely, Circle appropriate number*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

c) Please state why this advertisement would encourage/not encourage you to drive more vigilantly

d) How did this advertisement leave you feeling?

Emotional (sad, upset)     

Positive     

Scared     

Shocked

Relieved

Guilty

Other \_\_\_\_\_ -

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e) Would you consider the consequences of the advertisement to be relevant to you or more relevant to someone else?

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f) What do you think the main message of this advertisement is?

## Appendix 5

### Focus group theme sheet

1. When asked about road safety advertisements which ones come to mind first?
2. How do you react when a road safety fear appeal advertisement appears on TV? (Turn it over, turn down the sound, look away)
3. Do you pay attention to RSA advertisements or do you tend to ignore them? Why?
4. When watching an RSA advertisement do you consider the message to be aimed at you or someone else? (Do you believe that you are subject to the consequences expressed in the RSA fear appeal ads?)
5. After watching an RSA fear appeal advertisements does the message remain with you for long or do you immediately try to remove the thought from your memory?
6. Do you consider the fear appeal TV advertisements used by the RSA to be effective in changing attitudes and behaviours to driving?
7. Do the fear appeals advertisements encourage you to drive more vigilantly?
8. After seeing an RSA fear appeal advertisement do you tell your friends/family about it? (Do you discuss it?)
9. After being exposed to an RSA fear appeal advertisement do you encourage your friends/family to drive more vigilantly?
10. Do you believe that the RSA fear appeal advertisements give a good insight into the dangers of driving?
11. Do you believe that the RSA fear appeal advertisements work well in isolation or are there other contributing factors?



12. How do you feel about the emotional RSA advertisements (crashed lives), do you find them more effective/less effective than the graphic fear appeal advertisements at changing driving behaviours and attitudes?
13. What are your attitudes towards the use of humour in road safety advertisements?
14. What are your attitudes towards the use of informative content in road safety advertisements?
15. Do you believe there are any ethical concerns regarding fear appeals; do you consider them to be inappropriate or manipulative etc?
16. Do you find RSA radio advertisements to be more/less effective than the television advertisements? Why?
17. How often do you think you are exposed to RSA advertisements?
18. Do you believe the effect of road safety advertisements are becoming less effective?
19. Have you any recommendations as to how the RSA could better improve their advertisements?

## Appendix 6

### Theme sheet for in-depth interviews

1. What is current position?
2. What encouraged you to get involved in this position?
3. From your experience do you believe road safety is a significant problem in Donegal?
4. Is road safety in Ireland getting better or worse?
5. Are people's attitudes in Donegal and throughout Ireland changing towards road safety, are they becoming more or less aware of the significance of road safety?
6. Do you think that the road safety authority TV advertisements are effective in changing the attitudes and behaviours of drivers?
7. Are there any good RSA TV campaigns that you can think of?
8. What do you believe a good RSA ad consists of?
9. Have you any recommendation as to how the RSA could improve their TV ads to ensure attitudes and behaviours to driving and road safety are positively changed?
10. Do you think that the ads work well in isolation or they need the assistance of enforcement or other elements?
11. Do you have any goals or targets for the next year in terms of road safety?

## **Appendix 7**

### **Information provided to the road safety experts (interviewees)**

**Thesis title:** ‘A study of the Road Safety Authorities use of fear appeals to communicate a public health message’

### **Research aim and objectives:**

The aim of this research is to:

Explore the Road Safety Authorities (RSA) use of fear appeals to communicate a public health message.

The five objectives of this study are to:

1. To explore the marketing and advertising approaches used to communicate public health messages.
2. To identify the principle approaches to evaluating marketing and advertising approaches.
3. To establish the benefits of using fear appeals in advertising.
4. To identify the suitability of using fear appeals in road safety awareness campaigns.
5. To analyse if the RSA uses fear appeal advertising effectively from the viewpoint of the target audience and the viewpoint of road safety experts.

### **Literature review**

- Fear appeals as a method of communicating a message
- The Third party effect (TPE)- reversed TPE V classical TPE

- Ethical concerns relating to the use of fear to communicate a public message
- The Diluted impact of fear appeals
- Contributing factors that make fear appeals effective
- Fear models: A method to evaluate fear appeals

### **Methodology:**

- 2 focus groups
- 4 interviews with road safety experts

### **Focus group data:**

Two focus groups were conducted. One consisted of 6 females between the ages of 20-24 and the other of males between the ages of 19-27. All obtained a driving licence.

The focus group participants were students from LYIT (some of whom are members of the LYIT motor club).

The participants were shown 7 Road Safety advertisements. These adverts were sourced from the UK and Australia.

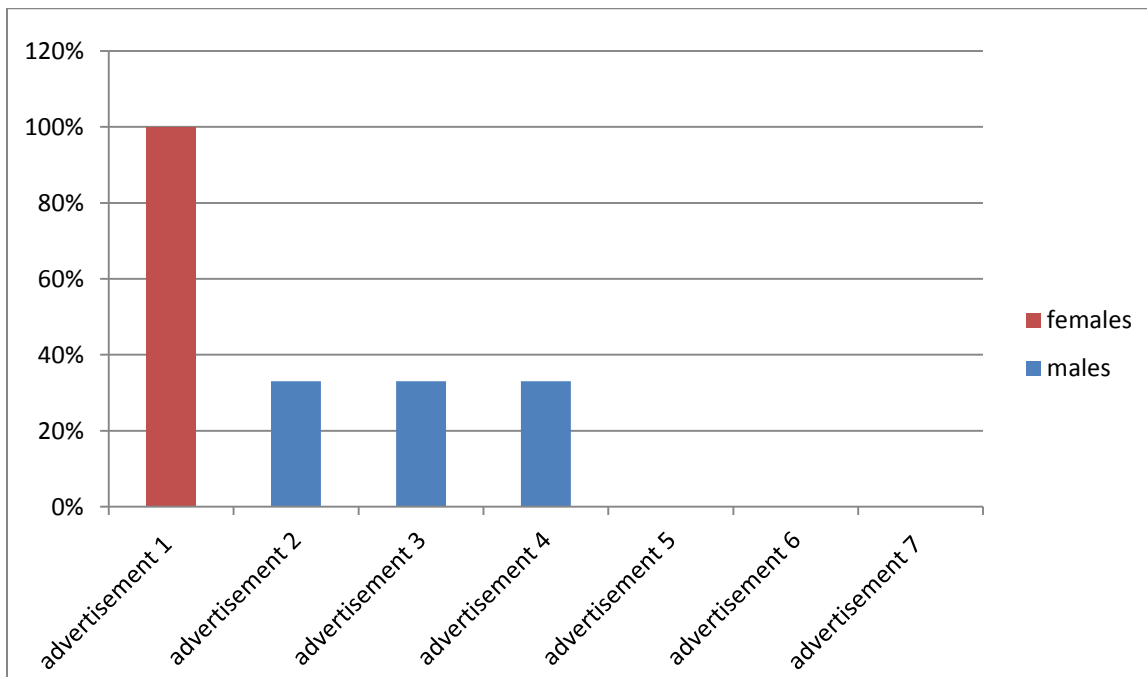
- Advertisement 1: This is a graphic fear appeal advertisement that was developed by the Gwent police department to show the consequences of driving and texting.  
<http://adland.tv/commercials/gwent-police-psa-texting-while-driving-2009-416-uk>
- Advertisement 2: This is a fear appeal advertisement that uses shock very well to communicate the dangers/possible consequences of speeding.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5EyOnccJLg&feature=related>

- Advertisement 3: This advertisement shows graphic imagery of an injury but cleverly highlights how this injury could be avoided. It offers a coping strategy.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUUX77Uzds4&feature=related>
- Advertisement 4: This advertisement shows the guilt felt by someone through their lifetime as a result of killing a young boy by drink driving.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0s033MjVR7o>
- Advertisement 5: This advertisement features the father of a boy who got killed in a traffic accident. It is an advertisement from the campaign ‘everybody hurts sometime’. It is similar to the RSA in Ireland’s ‘crashed lives’ campaign.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plJcXEXbEvY&feature=relmfu>
- Advertisement 5: This advertisement is called ‘dear mom and dad’; this ad contains emotion and informative content.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=krbxXawoAU&feature=related>
- Advertisement 6: This advertisement shows the positive effects of slowing down  
<http://www.coloribus.com/focus/samaya-strashnaya-i-shokiryuschaya-reklama/9845505/>

The participants filled out an assessment sheet for each advertisement. An open discussion was then held which was aided by a theme sheet.

### A brief analysis of focus group findings

Once the participants had watched each of the seven advertisements they stated which advertisement they found to be most effective at encouraging vigilant driving. From the graph below it is evident that each of the females believed advertisements 1 was most effective. Advertisement 1 showed a car crash with graphic content. In contrast to this, the males opinions differed somewhat. Two of the males found advertisement 2 to be most effective, whilst two believed advertisement 3 to be most effective and the other two believed advertisement 4 was most effective. Four of the males found the advertisements containing emotional content to be most effective, whilst two found the advertisement with positive content to be most effective at encouraging vigilant driving.



The main finding from the focus group process was that the RSA fear appeal advertisements are good at creating awareness. However, it is enforcement that changes attitudes and behaviours to driving.

Each of the focus group participants were able to recall RSA adverts which they had seen. However, they stated that the RSA advertisements do not impact the way they drive.

The participants stated that they felt that they were subject to the consequences shown in the adverts. However, they stated that they tend to ignore the consequences and did not improve their driving behaviour.

Each of the participants believed that in order for an RSA fear appeal advertisement to be effective it must work alongside other factors such as speed cameras and higher penalties. However, each participant also stated that the contributing factors only work to a certain point (they only slow down where they know there is Guardai presence or a speed van/camera and then speed up again).

A minority of the participants stated that RSA radio advertisements would encourage them to drive more carefully if they were continuously on the radio whilst they were driving (the males in particular).

Each of the male participants stated that the RSA fear appeal advertisements are no more graphic than content in television programmes.

## **Appendix 8**

### **Validation of findings**

The research findings were validated by a member of RSA research and development department.

The respondent agreed with the finding that males are affected more positively by advertisements containing emotional content rather than graphic imagery. The RSA has previously identified this finding and it has been the motive behind the ‘crashed lives’ campaign.

The respondent also agreed with the theory that although fear appeal advertisements are criticised for being subject to the wear-out effect they are successful in that the message is lodged in the audience’s subconscious.

The respondent stated that the RSA has not previously identified that females were also subject to psychological bias. This finding is a piece of information that the RSA can examine in more depth.

The respondent approved the research recommendations and stated that the RSA would benefit from independent research to ensure that their use of fear appeals is effective at gaining the attention of the target audience.

The respondent believed that the research methods chosen which were in-depth interviews and focus groups are the most effective at evaluating the effect of fear appeal advertisements, the RSA have used these techniques in previous studies to evaluate their advertisements effectiveness.



The respondent was satisfied with the finding that the RSA advertisements work successfully in conjunction with education, enforcement and engineering.

Overall, the department stated that the research would benefit them in future projects.