SELF AFFIRMATIVE DISCOURSE ON FEAR APPEALS AS A STRATEGY FOR EFFECTIVE ROAD SAFETY CAMPAIGNS IN NIGERIA

Ezekiel S. Asemah
Department of Mass Communication, Novena University, Ogume, Delta State, Nigeria
E-mail: asemahezekiel@yahoo.com +2348035053713
and
Samson I. Omosotomhe
Department of Mass Communication, Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi

Abstract
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; fear appeal is one of the strategies that can be used in behaviour change communication. Thus, this study was designed to discuss fear appeal as a strategy for effective road safety campaigns in Nigeria. Anchored on agenda setting theory and elaboration likelihood theory of behaviour change, the researchers discussed fear appeals and effective road safety campaigns. It was discovered that effective use of fear appeals in road safety campaigns have the tendency to put fear in the minds of drivers and making them to drive carefully. Thus, the researchers concluded that fear appeals have a crucial role to play in road safety campaigns because such appeals can go a long way in creating fear in the minds of drivers who drive recklessly. Thus, there is the need for the use of fear appeals in road safety campaigns. There is need for the campaign planners to use enough graphics and give explicit reasons for behaviour moderation to be effective; this is because people tend to accept a change in behaviour or of attitude if they know what could be gained or lost.

Keywords: Fear appeals, strategy, effective, road safety, campaigns

Introduction
Governments and public institutions attempt to protect the population from the consequences of unhealthy behaviour by way of social marketing campaigns. So-called fear appeals are often used to influence health-related behaviour (Suckfull and Reuter, 2013). The primary objective of any campaign is to positively affect the behaviour of the target audiences’ attention. Various methods are often used to communicate behaviour change messages across to the target audience and one of the methods that can be used is fear appeal. Algie (2010), cited in Sweeney (2012) sees a fear appeal as 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. 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 (Sweeney, 2012). Fear appeals have is one of the communication strategies that are often used in health education practice. Fear appeals are prevalent in health communication campaigns and advertisements where they are used to convince audiences to adopt protective and healthy behaviours (Levine, Muthusamy and Weber, 2009). Thus, Fear appeals are usually used on the grounds that people will be attentive to messages and be persuaded to change their risky behaviour if their related fears are activated (Schneider, Gruman & Coutts, 2005).

Road safety campaign connotes organised or planned activities intended to raise citizens’ awareness of the need to make the roads free of dangers, of causing harms to or constituting risks to the people using them. This is one of the supposedly functions of the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC), not less as challenging as the others. Creating awareness of how to make safe roads in Nigeria, that are made dangerously, from all perspectives, requires ingenuity and strategies less commonly used in this country (Nwainyinya, 2012). Safety is used widely in the context of protection from personal harm. It can be described as an experience of personal security, freedom from danger and situations that can cause harm, injury or health-related problems (Lawal, 2008, cited in Oyeyemi and Balogun, 2009). It is a protection against injury and traumatic issues (Miller, 1982, cited in Oyeyemi and Balogun, 2009). Accidents on the road are caused by interaction of human, vehicular and environmental factors which the driver may find incomprehensible at the moment (Balogun, 2006, cited in Oyeyemi and Balogun, 2009). This is because the victim might have committed the offence more than 1000 times uncaught (cited in Oyeyemi and Balogun, 2009).
The risk of dying as a result of a road traffic collision is highest in the African region at 24, 1/100 000 population (the global rate is 18/100 000). Nigeria and South Africa have the highest road traffic death rates (33, 7 and 31.9/100 000 respectively) (WHO, 2013, cited in Okafor, Odeyemi, Dolapo, Ilika and Omosun, 2014). No countries have comprehensive road safety laws on five key risk factors: drinking and driving, speeding and failing to use motorcycle helmets, seat-belts and child restraints (WHO, 2013, cited in Okafor et al, 2014). In 2012, there were 13,262 reported road crashes, which caused the deaths of 6,092 persons, 1% more than in 2011; in 2013, there was a 2% increase in road traffic crashes, a 2% increase in injuries and a 6% increase in fatalities when compared with the 2012 figures (Federal Road Safety Commission of Nigeria, 2014). Road safety mass media campaigns play a valuable role in improving road safety by promoting safe behaviours. Given the costs associated with mass media advertising, it is important to understand what elements make a road safety mass media campaign effective and how future campaigns might be made more effective (Wundersitz, Hutchinson and Woolley, 2010).

Judging by the number of road safety campaigns that make use of fear appeals, there is a firm belief in the ability to “scare people straight.” The idea is that when fear is aroused, people will become more motivated to accept the message and recommendations presented in a campaign. Implicitly, the way people sometimes react to these types of campaigns (shock, horror or even tears) is taken as a sign that the message got through to people. The belief that this is somehow indicative of the effectiveness of this approach supposedly is that when people are thus affected by the campaign, they are certain to comply with the dispensed advice (Hoekstra and Wegman, 2011). It is in line with this that the researchers explain fear appeals as a strategy for effective road safety campaigns in Nigeria.

Road safety publicity can be used to achieve various aims and objectives. In general, the aims of such publicity are to change the road users’ behaviour, attitude or knowledge in order to increase road safety. However, road safety campaigns can succeed if advertising is only one of the elements in the campaign and usually not the key element (Elliott, 1989, cited in Smith, n.d). Several lives have been lost to road accidents in Nigeria and most of the accidents are often caused by reckless driving on the road. This may be as a result of over speeding, wrong overtaking, driving in a drunken situation. Thus, most of the accidents are avoidable only if the drivers would have exercised some caution. This has made the road safety of Nigeria to embark on several campaigns in order to dissuade the drivers from engaging in such habits that might likely lead to accident when driving and which may in the long run lead to death. One of the cardinal goals of the Federal Road Safety Commission of Nigeria (FRSCN) is accident prevention and loss reduction on all public roads in Nigeria.

Road trauma is one of the most significant global public health issues of the 21st 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, cited in Sweeney, 2012). All over the world, road safety continues to be a significant public health issue as loved ones and individuals that could contribute to national productivity lose their lives through road accidents. Since the first documented motor vehicle death in 1899, over 30 million people are reported to have died worldwide through road accidents (Noyes, 2013, cited in NKANSAH, 2013).

It is in line with the above that several organisations have partnered with the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) of Nigeria to initiate a nationwide Public Enlightenment and Intervention Campaign on Road Safety programme, which aims to support the agency’s target to reduce national road accidents rates by 50 percent and attendant fatalities by 20 percent. Some the organisations that have partnered with FRSCN are: Mobil Producing Nigeria (MPN), Guinness Nigeria Plc, Manufacturing Association of Nigeria, Beer Sectoral Group, Nigerian Breweries Plc and ExxonMobil. All these campaigns are aimed at positively affecting the attitudes of drivers when it comes to driving, so as to reduce the rate of accidents in the country. Despite these campaigns, there seems to be increase in the rate of accidents in Nigeria. This therefore, raises a fundamental question as it concerns the road safety campaigns. Thus it becomes pertinent to ask about the effectiveness of these campaigns and whether advertising fear appeals are well utilised in the campaigns. Therefore, the problem this study investigates is the relevance of fear appeals in road safety campaigns in Nigeria.
Conceptualisation of fear appeals
Fear appeals may simply be defined as persuasive messages that arouse fear (Witte and Allen, 2000). Fear appeals are built upon fear. 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 or something that is the object of apprehension or alarm (Merriam-Webster, 2002).

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, cited in Sweeney, 2012). 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 (Sweeney, 2012). Threat evokes fear; threat relates to communicating messages such as if you drive like this you will die.

Fear appeal is a type of persuasive information in which evoking fear or concern is meant to motivate people to pay attention to the message and to then adopt the recommendations in the message. Fear appeals are persuasive information messages that are meant to frighten people by describing the negative or painful consequences that will occur if they do not obey the message (Witte, 1992; Knobbout and Van Wel, 1996, cited in SWOV Fact Sheet, 2011).

Theoretical underpinning and review of previous studies
The study is anchored on agenda theory and elaboration likelihood theory of attitude change. Agenda setting theory was propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in 1972/1973. The major assumption of the theory is that the media set agenda for the public to follow. The theory holds that most of the pictures we store in our heads, most of the things we think or worry about, most of the issues we discuss, are based on what we have read, listened to or watched in different mass media. The media make us to think about certain issues: they make us to think that certain issues are more important than others in our society. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2003), cited in Edegoh (2015) agenda setting theory of the media proposes that the public agenda or what kinds of things people talk about, think or worry about is powerfully shaped and directed by what the media choose to publicise (Edegoh, 2015). One of the most critical aspects in the concept of an agenda-setting role of mass communication is the time frame for this phenomenon. In addition, different media have different agenda-setting potential. Agenda-setting theory seems quite appropriate to help us understand the pervasive role of the media (University of Twente, 2012, cited in Asemah and Omosotomhe, 2015). The theory is relevant to the study because road safety campaign messages in the media form the basis of what the public, including drivers, would be thinking about and discussing. The media, therefore, set health agenda for the public to follow thereby placing before everyone messages that could dissuade them from engaging in behaviour patterns that could make them (drivers) have accidents.

Elaboration likelihood theory of attitude change suggests that people can alter their attitudes in two ways. First, they can be motivated to listen and think about the message; thus, leading to an attitude drift. Or they might be influenced by characteristics of the speaker, leading to a temporary or surface shift in attitude. Messages that are thought-provoking and that appeal to logic are more likely to lead to permanent change in attitude (Kendra, 2010, cited in Edegoh, 2015).

Okafor et al (2014) investigated the effectiveness of a post-license road safety education intervention programme in terms of increased knowledge and self-reported behaviour among commercial minibus drivers in Lagos, Nigeria. Their study was a quasiexperimental study conducted in three phases. The findings of the authors showed that adherence to speed limits did not improve. The control group showed no significant changes and post-license road safety education significantly improved knowledge, but not self-reported adherence to speed limits. Janssens and De Pelsmacker (2007) investigated the impact of the intensity of a fear appeal, the valence of the medium context and the individuals’ trait anxiety and personal relevance on the
responses of 197 individuals to anti-speeding advertisements. Their findings showed that a high level of fear attracts more attention; a negative valence context leads to a more positive anti-speeding attitude. Their results were largely replicated for drivers, but not for non-drivers for whom there was only an attention-getting effect of high fear appeal. Walton and Mckeown (2001), cited in UK Essays (2015) investigated drivers’ biased perceptions of speed and safety campaign messages; their findings showed that fear appeal advertisements are subject to attitudinal biases, in that some participants viewed the message of safety as belonging to others, rather than themselves. Woolley (2001), cited in Wundersitz, Hutchinson and Woolley (2010) found out that mass media campaigns have a role to play in road safety, but are unlikely to produce large behavioural change in isolation and that mass media should play a supporting role to other campaign activities (enforcement).

Similarly, Wiley, Krisjanous and Hutchings (2002), cited in UK Essays (2015) investigated the effectiveness of physical and social fear appeals in influencing intention to drive safely with regard to youths in New Zealand. The scholars found out that with regard to driver responsibility, social appeals were systematically more favourable than physical appeals. The authors also discovered that there was a significant indirect effect of emotionality with regard to driver responsibility for the physical appeals. Sibley and Harré (2009) conducted a study investigating the impact of different styles of traffic safety advertisement on young drivers explicit and implicit self-enhancement biases. They found that positively framed driving advertisements were most effective at reducing self-enhancement biases in driving ability. Furthermore, the study found that exposure to driving advertisements either negatively or positively did not significantly alter implicit, automatic self-enhancement biases.

Thornton (2005) also carried out research on patterns within fear appeal anti-speeding television commercials. Thornton (2005) notes that many road safety advertisers used fear appeals, such as “shock” advertising, that result in fear arousal, leaving the viewer feeling extremely tense. Thornton’s findings indicated that television advertisements that employ fear-relief patterned messages; that is, fear arousal, then a clear visual and verbal recommendation to slow down, were more effective than fears only patterned messages, that is, fear arousal and a brief warning only to reduce driver speed.

Witte and Allen (n.d) in their study examined the implications of fear appeals for effective public health campaigns. In their study, fear appeal literature was examined in a comprehensive synthesis, using meta-analytical techniques. The meta-analysis suggested that strong fear appeals produce high levels of perceived severity and susceptibility and are more persuasive than low or weak fear appeals. The results also indicated that fear appeals motivate adaptive danger control actions such as message acceptance and maladaptive fear control actions such as defensive avoidance or reactance. Consistent with previous meta-analyses.

Lewis, Watson, Tay and White (2007) in their study, examined the role of fear appeals in improving driver safety. The results of the review highlighted the mixed and inconsistent findings that have been reported in the literature. While fear arousal appears important for attracting attention, its contribution to behaviour change appears less critical than other factors, such as perceptions of vulnerability and effective coping strategies. Furthermore, threatening appeals targeting young males (a high-risk group of concern) have traditionally relied on the portrayal of physical harm. However, the available evidence questions the relevance and hence effectiveness of strong physical threats with this group. Delaney, Lough, Whelan and Cameron (2004) investigated the effectiveness of road safety public information campaigns conducted through the mass media. The scholars found out that persuasive or emotional campaigns were more effective than rational or informational style campaigns; furthermore, the use of theoretical models to guide campaign development, and the use of public relations and associated publicity are also associated with more effective campaigns.

A discourse on fear appeals and road safety campaigns
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). An abundance of empirical evidence has suggested that fear appeal can work for a variety of persuasion endeavours such as anti-smoking messages (Henley and Donovan, 2003; Smith and Stutts, 2003; Wright, French, Weinman

Fear appeal increases viewer interest in any campaign and the persuasiveness of the advertisement (Mediabistro, 2015). Schneider, Coutts and Gruman (2012), cited in (2012) says that fear appeals are based on the idea that people will be more likely to pay attention to a message and to subsequently act to change their health behaviour, if their related fears are activated. Fear appeals contribute to raising awareness about unhealthy behaviours or potential dangers (Lewis, Watson, Tay and White, 2007). There is quite a substantial body of opinion, based on evaluations of individual campaigns, that advertising campaigns will not usually improve driver behaviour (Wundersitz, Hutchinson and Woolley, 2010).

When fear appeals are used in road safety campaigns, drivers are likely to change their negative way of driving because the use of fear appeals will create that fear in them that something terrible is likely to happen to them if they do not drive carefully. This is in line with Delaney et al (2004) who noted that persuasive or emotional campaigns are more effective than rational or informational style campaigns. The fact remains that the media can set agenda for the public to follow (agenda setting theory). When the media continue to use fear appeals to carry out road safety campaigns, drivers will begin to think along that line and begin to take precaution and avoiding risky behaviour that may lead to accidents. Risky driver behaviour such as speeding and drunk driving continue to represent significant contributors to road trauma, reflecting the perennial involvement of road user behaviour in road traffic injury, but effective use of fear appeals in road campaigns have the tendency to put fear in the minds of drivers and making them to drive carefully. This submission is not far from that of several scholars whose works were earlier reviewed, who have noted that fear appeals have a crucial role to play in road safety campaigns. For example, Janssens and De Pelsmacker (2007) noted that a high level of fear attracts more attention; a negative valence context leads to a more positive anti-speeding attitude. Walton and Mckeown (2001) concluded that fear appeal advertisements are subject to attitudinal biases, in that some participants viewed the message of safety as belonging to others, rather than themselves. Woolley (2001), cited in Wundersitz et al (2010) found out that mass media campaigns have a role to play in road safety. Wiley et al (2002), cited in UK Essays (2015) discovered that there is a significant indirect effect of emotionality with regard to driver responsibility for the physical appeals. Thornton (2005) notes that many road safety advertisers used fear appeals, such as “shock” advertising, that result in fear arousal, leaving the viewer feeling extremely tense. Witte and Allen (n.d) noted that fear appeals motivate adaptive danger control actions such as defensive avoidance or reactance.

These shock-based, fear appeals or fear-arousing threat appeals present individuals with the negative outcomes that they may experience as a result of engaging in the depicted unsafe and/or illegal behaviours. It is expected that the threat will evoke fear at the prospect of experiencing the aversive outcomes, which will in turn motivate the audience to align their attitudes and/or behaviours with those recommended in the message (Maddux and Rogers, 1983; Witte, 1992, cited in Lewis et al 2007). 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. A typical fear appeal advertisement consists of a negative consequence being presented such as graphic imagery of a driver’s dead body in a crumpled car, with viewers either being told or assuming for themselves that they too are susceptible to such consequences. Evidence suggests that fear appeals are effective in gaining the audience’s attention and communicating messages (Hastings, Stead and Webb, 2004; Brennan and Binney, 2010, cited in Connacht Ulster Alliance Libraries, n.d).

Since 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, it can, therefore, go a long way in having positive effect on drivers. This is because as noted by Sweeney (2012), 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 desired outcome
for such advertisements is that the audience recognises the danger possibilities and avoids such dangers by improving their driving habits.

**Conclusion and managerial implications**

Fear appeals are frequently used to communicate important health messages and encourage people to change their behaviour. Fear appeals have a crucial role to play in road safety campaigns because such appeals can go a long way in creating fear in the minds of drivers who drive recklessly. Thus, there is the need for the use of fear appeals in road safety campaigns. There is need for the campaign planners to use enough graphics and give explicit reasons for behaviour moderation to be effective; this is because people tend to accept a change in behaviour or of attitude, if they know what could be gained or lost. More so, the campaigns should be carried out on a regular basis because the more the campaign is carried out, the more the target audiences are likely to be affected positively. Furthermore, to bring about change in attitudes and behaviours, fear appeal must be used together with other toolkit like education and enforcement.

**References**


