**EFFECTIVENESS OF TAC ADS QUESTIONED**

**Lara Sinclair**

ASK most people in the advertising and marketing community if the Victorian Transport Accident Commission’s ongoing road safety advertising campaign has been effective and you’ll hear little debate.

The campaign, created by Grey Melbourne, has won a swag of international creative awards, carved a new path in terms of the emotive use of high-impact or shock advertising and, locally, been awarded for its efficacy. It is a finalist again in this year’s AFA Effectiveness Awards.

Along with the “Slip slop slap” and various anti-smoking campaigns, it is often cited as a great example of a behavioural change campaign that has worked in concert with other measures to achieve significant social changes.

But the road safety research community has been witness to a debate in recent times that has focused partly on the high level of television advertising that is one of the distinguishing factors of the TAC program.

In particular, researchers from Safety Strategy, Transport SA, who first began looking at the TAC road safety model with a view to adopting a similar program in South Australia, have questioned the role that advertising has played in the success of Victoria’s road safety initiatives.

“It is likely that millions of dollars have been wasted each year on road safety advertising in Victoria since 1989,” the researchers concluded in their most recent report, dated December 2002.

Earlier data compiled by media buying agency Mitchell & Partners focusing on the period 1992-96 comes to a similar conclusion. In fact, Mitchell has concluded that more than 80% of TAC’s television advertising spend during this period may have been unnecessary.

So has the TAC wasted millions of dollars by over-spending on road safety advertising?

It’s a complex issue, and a particularly topical one as advertisers across the board are looking for ways to reduce their media spend, and heavily-weighted television campaigns have become much rarer than they once were.

In addition, the TAC road safety approach has proliferated in recent years, due partly to its media profile and award-winning reputation within the global advertising and marketing community. It has been adopted to varying degrees in other states and other countries—notably New South Wales and New Zealand.

A US research team is currently examining the TAC model and its relevance for federal US road safety initiatives.

**The TAC campaign**

The TAC is a Victorian Government-owned organisation set up in 1986 with the joint objectives of improving Victoria’s trauma system and reducing the incidence of road trauma, promoting road safety and paying for the treatment of people injured in transport accidents.

Funded by Victorian motorists’ vehicle registration payments, the TAC found itself in the hot seat as annual road fatalities began to increase in the mid-1980s.

Fatalities had been trending downwards from 1970 to 1984 as a result of the general improvement of road and automotive standards, declining from a peak of 1,061 to 658. That trend was reversed from 1985-89, when the road toll climbed to 776.

In September 1989, the Victorian Government of the day announced a “concerted program combining enforcement and mass media advertising to tackle two of the major causes of crashes—alcohol and speeding”.

The TAC launched a new series of television ads in December 1989 beginning with the anti-drink driving execution “Girlfriend”. The following year, three new speed related TVCs—”Beach Road”, “Speed Camera” and “Tracy”—and “Booze Bus”, which supported the random breath test booze bus program—launched.

“The ads were shown much more frequently than in any previous campaigns and aroused a strong public response through their emotionally intense and graphic style,” according to the TAC’s website.

There was also a dramatic increase in police enforcement as part of the TAC campaign. The number of random breath tests performed by booze buses rose from several hundred thousand annually to more than one million in 1992 and has been maintained at 1.2 million since mid-1999. The number of vehicles checked by speed cameras rose to around 2.5 million by mid-2001.

Meanwhile, the TAC developed into a multi-million-dollar advertising account. A report from Mitchell & Partners monitored the TAC’s annual main media advertising expenditure from 1992-96 and found that, excluding outdoor advertising, cinema, some radio stations and sponsorship, it hovered at just under the $8m mark during that period, according to figures from AIM Data.

“Cumulative expenditure per capita in Victoria has been more than double that of the next highest spending state, Western Australia, and 14% higher than NSW,” the report found.

**The results**

The simplest measure of the results of TAC initiatives is Victoria’s annual road toll figure.

According to the TAC’s website, there has been “a near halving of Victoria’s road toll since 1989, with a corresponding drop in serious injuries of 27%”, attributed to “a number of factors”.

The TAC has employed Sweeney Research to monitor audience response and Monash University Accident Research Centre (MUARC) to evaluate program effectiveness.

“MUARC has undertaken twelve studies in relation to police enforcement, road safety advertising and other factors in Victoria,” the TAC website states.

“A key conclusion reached in MUARC Report Number 52 relating to the first years of the TAC campaign is that there were clear links between the levels of TAC publicity supporting speed and alcohol enforcement programs and reductions in crashes.

“The benefits in reduced TAC accident compensation payments were up to eight times greater than advertising costs.”

The TAC acknowledges the research debate over the extent to which “advertising in itself” influences the road toll, independent of police enforcement activity.

**The Sweeney Research**

Sweeney Research has conducted qualitative and quantitative research on TAC advertising over a 14-year period.

“Almost every piece of TAC communications was evaluated before and after [it ran],” Sweeney Research principal Brian Sweeney says. “There is absolutely no doubt in my mind judging from that research that it has been phenomenally successful.

“People remember it all. It’s had an enormous amount of impact. Its success is predicated on a viewer response that ‘that could happen to me’.”

Sweeney tackles the issue of ‘reality’ style emotive TVCs having a diminishing effect on an inured public over time—an issue also acknowledged by the TAC—saying making people feel a degree of discomfort is part of the campaign’s success.

“I can’t isolate the advertising,” Sweeney says. “The police presence is crucially important; [enforcement measures] with the advertising, have created an environment in which people are far more aware of road safety.

“If it’s not working, I’ll give up market research.”

**The MUARC research**

Meanwhile, from a road safety research point of view, Monash University Accident Research Centre was commissioned by the Victorian Government in 1989 to evaluate the TAC’s road safety initiatives and to determine how they related to the road toll.

MUARC director Dr Ian Johnston says MUARC concluded there were a number of factors that led to substantial drops in Victoria’s road toll in the early 90s including the economic environment, which is acknowledged to have some relationship to road safety standards in crash research circles.

“A good chunk was due to the economic downturn and a good chunk was due to the introduction of a bunch of new technologies including a massive increase in enforcement and a public education campaign that supported and legitimised the [enforcement measures],” Johnston says.

“The original MUARC work acknowledged that the economic factor was substantial—that about 25% of the road toll reduction was due to that alone,” Johnston says. “The debate is over how much is due to enforcement and education.”

Johnston says MUARC was asked specifically to quantify how much advertising alone contributed to the reduction in serious casualty crashes.

By the end of 1992 there had been 46% fewer serious casualty crashes than predicted; MUARC estimated that the TAC-funded television advertising and enforcement programs were responsible for 63% of that difference. Of that 63%, just over half was estimated to be due to TV ads and just under half was thought to be due to police enforcement.

**The SA research**

In December last year, SA researchers Dr Michael White and Dr John Walker released a report updating earlier research they and other researchers had conducted into the effectiveness of the TAC’s road safety campaigns.

White and Walker argue that “the increase in crash numbers in Victoria in the mid-1980s was due entirely to the economic boom and that the subsequent sharp fall in crash numbers was due mainly to the economic bust”, with other factors playing a small part.

“It is likely that relatively small changes in unemployment produce relatively large changes in the numbers of marginally employable young males on the road, with corresponding changes in crash numbers.”

White’s report claims that the TAC campaigns became effective only after the road toll had been substantially reduced.

White argues, among other things, that “fatality numbers started to fall many months before the enforcement campaigns were apparently becoming effective”.

“The TAC enforcement campaigns had very little, if any, role in reducing the road toll in Victoria in the late 1980s and early 1990s.”

He maintains that the advertising blitzes correlated so closely with the enforcement programs that it’s very difficult to reliably isolate the effect of the TV advertising.

He argues that drink driving did not start to fall until more than two years after road crash fatalities started to fall.

“It therefore seems unlikely that the booze-bus RBT program played a major role in the reduction of the road toll in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It is possible that the booze-bus program helped to consolidate the gains that were achieved by other means.”

“The enforcement campaigns have been moderately successful even though they had contributed very little, if anything, to the dramatic fall in the road toll,” White argues, concluding that “it is likely that millions of dollars have been wasted each year on road safety advertising in Victoria since 1989”.

This view argues essentially that “there was always an underlying downward trend in the road toll but that this underlying trend was seriously disturbed by the effects of the economic boom and bust cycle that peaked in about 1988 and that fluctuated between greater extremes in Victoria than in the other states”.

“A very good description of Victorian serious casualty crash trends can be provided without making reference to the TAC-funded road safety TV and enforcement campaigns,” White writes. “These results do not necessarily mean that [they] were ineffective, but they do show that the same crash trend data can be explained in different ways. They also cast doubt on the strength of the effects of the TAC campaigns as claimed by the MUARC researchers.”

**The media perspective**

Harold Mitchell, founder of media buying agency Mitchell & Partners, was “curious” about the level of TAC spend in Victoria in the mid-1990s and asked researcher Robert Chard to put together a report on the TAC campaign from a media effectiveness point of view.

Chard found the TAC’s cumulative main media expenditure totalled $37.8m during the period assessed, and then looked at effective frequency and the “wearout” or “switch off” factor created when a viewer is exposed to a single ad too many times.

“Since January 1996, the TAC television advertising campaign in total has been seen on average 112 times by all people 18+ in Melbourne,” Chard writes.

“In the most recent flight over September/October, the average frequency for people 18+ was 26.8 times, with 73.8% seeing the campaign more than 10 times.

“Of the total exposures of this campaign, 87% were excessive or negative exposures ie. exposure above 10 times.”

The study draws some hard conclusions, namely that per capita expenditure by the TAC from 1992-96 was “more than double that of the next heaviest spending state”, and that “more than 80% of television weight was wasted at excessive or negative exposure levels”.

Mitchell says he commissioned the research to provide an independent view about the success of the heavy television component of the TAC road safety program.

**Braking while accelerating?**

The TAC has modified its advertising tactics in recent years, lowering television advertising weights, increasing the proportion of cheaper-to-screen 30-second ads it releases and lowering the proportion of more expensive 90-second ads.

The TAC has confirmed its television spend has fallen in recent years.

Grey Melbourne creative director Nigel Dawson says that while the agency still created many 60-second ads, “there are more 30s in the mix now”.

“There are more of the enforcement and educational ads,” Dawson says, citing the current “Wipe off 5” campaign which focuses on persuading people to reduce their speed by 5km per hour.

That campaign is understood to be a finalist in this year’s AFA Effectiveness Awards.

“We’ve never said a low road toll is due to an ad campaign, or that it’s dramatically different from everywhere else,” Dawson says.

“The whole TAC campaign puts overarching pressure on Victorian drivers to do the right thing.”

TAC spokesperson De-Arnne Schmidt says while it is fair to say the TAC is “exploring new media”, using the Internet, direct mail and press in addition to television, it is not moving away from its initial emotive, hard-hitting approach.

“The recall of a number of TAC campaigns is still pretty strong, so I wouldn’t say they’ve had their day,” she says.

In response to Mitchell’s claims that more than 80% of the TAC’s TV advertising spend may have been wasted, Schmidt says the falling road toll over the past 13 years is a measure of the success of its approach.

In 2002, Schmidt says it fell a significant 11% (after a 9% increase in 2001) to 397.

Schmidt says the TAC continues to be innovative in the area of reducing road safety, citing the “Drive Right” program it launched last year, which involved asking members of the public to register to participate in a safe driving program. Around 10,000 Victorians seen by ‘spotters’ driving safely in particular circumstances received rewards from participating partners.

“When you look at the road toll, it shows that the programs have had a significant role to play and we’re continuing to build upon that strong base,” she says.

**Comparisons?**

The TAC’s website shows Victoria is tracking below most other states in terms of road deaths per 10,000 registered vehicles, recording 1.15 in the 12 months to December 2002. In comparison, NSW recorded 1.48, and the Australian average was 1.34.

MUARC’s Ian Johnston says data from other Australian states is not strictly comparable to ascertain how hard Victoria’s higher ad spend level might have worked, as other factors, such as the amount of rural roads a state has, enforcement levels and even driver affluence and median vehicle age play a large part. In the NT, deaths per 10,000 registered vehicles were 5.29 for 2002.

“Victoria is at the low end,” Johnston says, “but the differences [from most other states] are really quite small. Every state government does [road safety] in a different way.”

Johnston rejects the view that Victoria’s road toll fell largely due to the economic situation in the early 1990s, saying that theory “doesn’t pass the test of reasonableness”.

He makes the point that the TAC model had built into it from the start the goal of using a high-profile advertising campaign to “legitimise” the increasing level of enforcement.

“Victoria could not have reached the levels of enforcement that it has reached unless it had an education program to legitimise and reinforce it.” Johnston says evaluating the advertising alone is almost impossible.

“We were asked to do an almost impossible task, separating the education from the enforcement. [They] worked together,” Johnston says.

“In my mind, there is no doubt the combination of enforcement and education was effective and there was also a bonus from the economic downturn,” Johnston says.

“[White] says ‘You didn’t have to spend so much’. He might be right.

“We don’t know definitely how much education you need. But for the TAC, their liabilities have gone down and their drop in liabilities is far greater than their investment in the [road safety] program.”

**Many roads to safety**

So what might all this mean for the US National Highway Transport Safety Administration researchers and others?

The jury is still out at the NHTSA, but Johnston says there are many paths to road safety.

“[What you do specifically] is less important than that you do a lot of it and you do it well—as long as it’s [based on] scientifically selected sets of measures.”

“The Americans are against behaviour controls. They have [tackled road safety] on passive safety—improved car safety, and improving the road system.

“In Australia and Victoria in particular we focus on legislation, enforcement and education. Both have trended down. There’s nothing unique about the Victorian road safety situation in that sense.”

 **TV Advertising**

**TAC Commercials**

Question? Have these commercials influenced the audiences who watch them?

Answer – Depends on the Media Theory used to interpret or explain them.

If a Theory such as The Agenda Setting Function Theory believes the media has power to influence – then it is logical that you would argue that these television commercials have been effective

If a Theory such as The Reinforcement Theory believes the media has no power to influence – then it is logical that you would argue that these commercials have not influenced the audiences who watch them

So what would each Theory believe and then would argue about the TAC Road safety Television commercials ?

To gain an understanding of our Text read the following information about who the TAC are

**TAC**

The TAC ( Road Transport Commission) are a government insurance agency that provides medical , rehabilitation and financial assistance to victims of road accidents. Due to the rising road toll in 1989 and the increased financial costs the TAC using Grey advertising embarked on a high profile hard-hitting campaign, which employed the use of fear arousal techniques through the graphic depiction of the ramifications of negligent driver behavior. The advertisements were subsequently designed to confront drivers with the outcomes of drink driving, speed, fatigue and not wearing seat belts, using an approach that would "shock, outrage and appal. Recent approaches have targeted drug use.

Before we look at how each Theory would view the effectiveness of the TAC television commercials lets revise 2 contrasting Media Theories

The first Theory believes the media has the power to influence audiences

**The Agenda Setting Function Theory believe:**

The Media has the power to influence audiences

This theory believed that although the media can’t tell audiences ‘what to think’, it can tell them ‘what to think about’

This Theory looks at the Media as a “ Gatekeeper”, controlling information that is received by the audience

This theory believes that the media has the power to set the agenda for social, political and economic issues. E.g When the TAC released a sensitive commercial it appeared on every commercial television channel at the same time during prime time – this technique is known as road blocking

An example of this could be a news report giving one side of a story more prominence than another- or Safety Awareness Campaigns like The TAC

Argument 1

These advertisements have resulted in a dramatic decrease in the amount of road fatalities

Evidence

Statistical data shows a 30% decrease in road fatalities in the first year of the campaign

Argument 2

These television commercials have also saved the TAC millions of dollars in having to pay road accident victims compensation

Evidence

TACS financial audit showed a reduction in financial costs of 2.5 million dollars over a five year period

Argument 3

We believe the television commercials have changed drivers attitudes and behavior

Evidence

Sweeney and Associates research company – provide research surveys that suggest most people believe the television commercials have changed their attitude to road safety

Argument 4.

The commercials must have worked because they were awarded a gold medal

Evidence : Wining first prize at the New York advertising Awards

Argument 5. The Police Minister believes the campaign contributed to the decrease in the road toll

Evidence : In a statement released by the Minister he claimed that the television commercials had a high recall in drivers minds

Argument 6 ; Delegates have come from other countries around the word to examine the TAC television commercials

Evidence: These other countries have used some of our strategies in their own road safety programs. South Africa purchased booze buses from Victoria

**The Reinforcement Theory**

This theory was developed in 1960 by Joseph Klapper

Klapper believed the media had very little power to shape or influence public opinion

He believed audiences are active and audience texts are open to interpretation

He believed that groups such as family, peer groups, schooling, your job, religion and social class were far more influential than the media

He argued that the media simply reinforces what the consumer already believes about the world and society

Klapper believes that our individual response to issues depends on our upbringing, religion and class

This Theory would then argue that the media has no power to influence or effect an audience. Reinforcement Theorists would suggest that the media have little power to shape or influence public opinion. This theory interprets audiences as active and texts work to reinforce existing opinions. Reinforcement theory which emerged from Joseph Klapper in the United States believed that other socialising agents, such as family, peer group, schools, social class and occupation are far more important influences than the media

When applied to the TAC campaign, the Reinforcement Theory suggests that the advertisements are successful only if they reinforce existing beliefs towards driving safely.

The Reinforcement Theory suggests that texts are open to different interpretations, different understandings depending on who the audience is and how they read them, and what their existing values are. In interpreting the TAC television commercials this theory would argue

Argument 1.

TAC's fear arousal techniques depicting graphic road accidents will serve some peoples needs but not all people.

Evidence

Mr. Stephen Wallace, lecturer at Victoria College suggests that research internationally indicated that shock tactics had been ineffective in relaying messages, as people generally responded with one of two reactions. 'They either switch off and become more desensitised, or they resulted in increased anxiety, effecting their ability drive. Social researcher Hugh Mackay who claims "that fear reiterated by shock tactics is counter productive also supports this view.

Argument 2

The TAC advertisements cannot be attributed as the sole reason for the decline in the road toll

 Evidence

TAC's admission that "without the enormous police presence on our roads, as a more important socialising agent that the campaign may not have enjoyed such success"

RACV report in the early inception of the campaign in 1991 suggesting that the decline in the road toll cannot be attributed to one sole factor. Public awareness of speed camera's, booze buses, demerit points, compulsory bike helmets and better law enforcement served to shape and reinforce existing values in the community, rather than television advertisements.

Argument 3

If the advertisements conflicted with existing beliefs, they may serve to provoke "desensitisation", where the realistic and graphic nature lessens as the adds are frequently viewed.

Evidence

The 17-20 year old males in Dandenong, one of the primary target groups of the campaign are still documented as having similar numbers of drink driving convictions from before the campaign commenced. These figures may indicate that the campaign message conflicted with their attitude towards road safety, which inhibits the campaigns message. The State roads Authority further confirmed that the 18-25 year old target group statistics are very much the same since the years prior to 1989. The desentisation of this target group is further reflected in the road fatalities in 2003 equating to 72 deaths rising to 86 deaths in 2004**.**

Argument 4

*The* Reinforcement Theorists would look to other socialising agents such as schools, parents or peer groups. If these agents believed that responsible driving was an important value, then the TAC media campaign is actually reinforcing community attitudes.

Argument 5

The Reinforcement Theorists would reject the qualitative evidence found by Research Company Sweeney and Associates in their surveys that showed people had changed their attitudes and behavior to road safety

Evidence

The survey format collecting qualitative evidence prompting yes or no answers provide limitations for opinions to be expressed which restricts the validity of the results suggesting changes in drivers behaviour and attitudes. Many conclusions are assumed from these survey responses, and yet they cannot be conclusively confirmed. As media theorist DeFluer suggests, " account has to be taken of individual differences, since even when expected reactions have been observed, their incidence varies according to differences of personality, background, attitudes, intelligence and interests.

Argument 6

The TAC's qualitative survey analysis is that they test people's awareness, not any changed behaviour.

Evidence

The TAC's primary target audience still remaining the most significant road offenders supports this. Social Researcher Dennis McQuail's conclusion on the campaign models influence suggests that "the scope for effect or major change is thus intrinsically limited"

Argument 7

The TAC advertisements have a message that quickly “ wears out” and audiences don’t pay attention to them

Evidence

Since the mid 1990s there has only been a marginal decrease in road fatilities

**A theory that believes the media has the power to influence audiences**

**The Agenda Setting Function Theory?**

In the 1970s theorists came back to the idea that the media has potential power to influence audiences.

This theory believed that although the media can’t dictate to audiences ‘what to think’, it can dictate ‘what to think about’

This theory believes that the media has the power to set the agenda for social, political and economic issues.

An example of this could be a news report giving one side of a story more prominence than another.

Another example could be September 11th which has become ingrained in our culture through constant repetition

The Agenda setting Function Theory can be seen most clearly in times of war or conflict when news reporting usually represents on side more positively. (Pg 82 Media 2)

**2 Theories that believe the media has no power to influence**

 **audiences**

 **Use one only**

##  The Uses and Gratification Theory

This theory originated in America in the 1940s

It believed that audiences consisted of individuals who could decide the type of media they wished to consume.

The believed the Hypodermic/ Bullet theory was inaccurate because it was not based on research.

The theory believed the media had no power over audiences and audiences choose media for their own gratification

* It believes the audience creates its own individual meanings from texts
* In commercial television if a show fails to rate it may be cancelled. The audience has chosen not to watch the show. This theory argues that audiences choose what they wish to see or hear in the media.
* Criticism of this theory states that research is based on statistics (qualitative research) such as surveys and this does not adequately tell us the influence of media on the audience.

##  Reinforcement Theory

* This theory was developed in 1960 by Joseph Klapper
* Klapper believed the media had very little power to shape or influence public opinion
* He believed audiences are active and audience texts are open to interpretation
* He believed that groups such as family, peer groups, schooling, your job, religion and social class were far more influential than the media
* He argued that the media simply reinforces what the consumer already believes about the world and society
* Klapper believes that our individual response to issues depends on our upbringing, religion and class (Media 2 pg 79)

Links

<http://mumbrella.com.au/mission-to-upset-outrage-and-appal-25-years-of-the-tac-and-their-25-most-powerful-ads-121326>

<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/tac-campaign-aims-at-teen-road-safety-20121108-290n0.html>

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/law-order/tac-releases-graphic-new-ad-targeting-driver-distractions/story-fnat79vb-1226586792870?nk=08ff860812003bbbc6be34b1cc11cb55>

<https://cbrcc.curtin.edu.au/reports_journal_articles/aap%2031%20243-252.pdf>

<https://www.facebook.com/GetRealAboutRiderSafety/posts/352216371560769>

<http://www.tac.vic.gov.au/about-the-tac/media-room/news-and-events/current-media-releases/tac-drink-drive-campaign-fires-up-as-footy-finals-fever-hits-victoria>

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/road-crash-compo-blowouts-to-1bn-a-year-force-tac-into-drastic-action/story-e6frf7kx-1226630310109>

**So how would each theory interpret –or explain the effects of a media text ? –such as the TAC road safety commercials ?? what arguments and evidence would they use**

The TAC campaign approach according to Media lecturer John Swartz was based on the premise that the media does have the potential to influence and effect the audience. Such an approach can be interpreted through the Agenda Setting Function Theory advocated through sociologists such as McCombs and Shaw which emerged through the 1960s and held the belief that the media has the power to set agendas and frame terms of reference through specific selection and omission of information. The TAC campaign reflects specific graphic depictions of road accidents in the belief that shocking realism would have an impact on its audience

This model of communication suggests that the media act as a gatekeeper, where it does not tell people what to think, but what to think about The TAC, a government supported agency engaged in .sustained strategies to educate Victorian drivers in road safety. The campaigns introduction received widespread media coverage in metropolitan newspapers on 83 occasions in the campaigns first 7 weeks. This strategy has been consistent throughout the history of the campaign, In 2008, when the TAC where releasing a new advertisement, they screened the advertisement simultaneously of all commercial television channels at the same time . This is known as road blocking, in the effort to capture the audience- or framing the terms of reference. The TAC consistently review their use of media to refine their reach, In 2012 the TAC embarked on a major social network campaign Called "Home Safe, calling on teens to produce their own road safety slogans, specifically targeted intervention-style at their friends

Read more: http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/tac-campaign-aims-at-teen-road-safety-20121108-290n0.html#ixzz3Cgftf1do

Slogans such as If you drink and drive you're a bloody idiot; if you take drugs and drive , your out of your mind, Just a little bit over , you bloody idiot, don't fool yourself, speed kills, Take a break fatigue kills; Its in your hands concentrate or kill and Wipe off 5 may be interpreted through the Agenda Setting Function Theory as setting the terms of reference towards drivers responsibilities and their personal vulnerability. The messages according to research group Sweeney and Associates have maintained *a* high recall in drivers minds," they have impact, they can effect attitudes" This dominant or preferred reading suggests that the nature and extent of the campaigns influence has been high. This is supported by the statistical and qualitative data which indicates a 30% decrease in Victorian roads in its first year of broadcast.and a 60% decrease since. These figures have been maintained with the 2013 road toll at 242 indicating sustained decline from 1989.The TAC further accredits the campaign in the savings cost to the community. "The reduction in accidents since 1989 is estimated to have saved the Victorian community more than 1. 5 billion dollars.

*A* further argument reflecting the influence of the campaign was through the TAC's claim that their advertisements positively influenced driver attitudes and behaviour. The Brian Sweeney and Wallis Group research surveys have shown this change in behaviour to be a contributing factor to the campaigns apparent success in lowering the road toll. Further interpretation to the Agenda Setting Function Theory is evident through the TAC's argument that the campaign has achieved a greater level of community debate and consciousness of driver responsibility. The campaigns fear arousal techniques documented in advertisements on television, supported through the press, radio and billboards support the notion of framing the terms of reference in the onus of driver responsibility and road safety.

"The TAC believes that widespread media and public support reinforce the campaigns impact and to success. Recognition for the graphic realism of the television advertisements has been rewarded in the form of a gold medal at the prestigious New York Art director's and in 2013 won a gold lion award in Canne. The TAC also refer to the many delegations from other countries such as France, Spain, The UK, South Africa and New Zealand who adopted similar advertising for road safety. Further success attributed to the campaign is attributed to the emulation of their realism approach through the Quit Campaign, National Drug Offensive and Workcover.

So what would a Theory that believed the Media had no power argue?

However in applying minimalist communication theories an alternative interpretation emerges regarding the nature and extent of the campaigns success.

Reinforcement Theorists would suggest that the media have little power to shape or influence public opinion. This theory interprets audiences as active and texts work to reinforce existing opinions. Reinforcement theory which emerged from Joseph Klapper in the United States believed that other socialising agents, such as family, peer group, schools, social class and occupation are far more important influences than the media

When applied to the TAC campaign, the Reinforcement Theory suggests that the advertisements are successful only if they reinforce existing beliefs towards driving safely.

The Reinforcement Theorists would suggest that the TAC's fear arousal techniques depicting graphic road accidents will serve some peoples needs but not all people. The Reinforcement Theory suggests that texts are open to different interpretations, different understandings depending on who the audience is and how they read them, and what their existing values are. Therefore they would support the TAC's admission that "without the enormous police presence on our roads, as a more important socialising agent that the campaign may not have enjoyed such success"

The Reinforcement theorists would also account for the RACV report early in the campaign suggesting that the decline in the road toll cannot be attributed to one sole factor. Public awareness of speed camera's, booze buses, demerit points, compulsory bike helmets and better law enforcement served to shape and reinforce existing values in the community, rather than television advertisements.

Reinforcement theorists would also look to more recent statistics from 2013 revealing road accident compensation increased by about 30 per cent between 2007 and 2012, from $775.3 million to $1 billion. Whilst the road toll has declined the amount of serious injuries has also risen, suggesting other factors such as better vehicle safety prevented more deaths If the advertisements were having an effect it is unlikely the TAC reviewed their campaign and framed a new 10 year strategy to reduce serious injuries. Report findings from South Australian researchers Dr Michael White and Dr John Walker provide further evidence that socialising agents play a greater role in accident prevention “The TAC enforcement campaigns had very little, if any, role in reducing the road toll in Victoria in the late 1980s and early 1990s.”Dr White maintains that the advertising blitzes correlated so closely with the enforcement programs that it’s very difficult to reliably isolate the effect of the TV advertising.

"The reinforcement theorists would also suggest that if the advertisements conflicted with existing beliefs, they may serve to provoke "desensitisation", where the realistic and graphic nature lessens as the adds are frequently viewed. The 17-20 year old males in Dandenong, one of the primary target groups of the campaign are still documented as having similar numbers of drink driving convictions from before the campaign commenced. These figures may indicate that the campaign message conflicted with their attitude towards road safety, which inhibits the campaigns message. The State roads Authority further confirmed that the 18-25 year old target group statistics are very much the same since the years prior to 1989.

***(Reference to another text and regulatory bodies criteria) + (audience)***

***(Contrasting communication theories criteria) ( arguments and evidence criteria)- use your arguments and evidence notes in the booklet to include here)***

Studies examining fear arousal techniques are also debated across the two theories. Mr. Stephen Wallace, lecturer at Victoria College suggests that research internationally indicated that shock tactics had been ineffective in relaying messages, as people generally responded with one of two reactions. 'They either switch off and become more desensitised, or they resulted in increased anxiety, effecting their ability drive. Social researcher Hugh Mackay who claims "that fear reiterated by shock tactics is counter oductive also supports this view.

*The* Reinforcement Theorists would look to other socialising agents such as schools, parents or peer groups. If these agents believed that responsible driving was an important value, then the TAC media campaign is actually reinforcing community attitudes.Therefore the Agenda Setting function and Reinforcement theories employ different methodology in their approach to addressing the nature and extent of media influence.

The Reinforcement Theorists would use information from researchers from Safety Strategy, Transport SA, who first began looking at the TAC road safety model with a view to adopting a similar program in South Australia. The outcome of their research questions the role that advertising has played in the success of Victoria’s road safety initiatives. Researcher Dr Michael White

“The enforcement campaigns have been moderately successful even though they had contributed very little, if anything, to the dramatic fall in the road toll,” White argues, concluding that “it is likely that millions of dollars have been wasted each year on road safety advertising in Victoria since 1989”.

Reinforcement Theorists would also note that Nigel Dawson from Grey Advertising states We’ve never said a low road toll is due to an ad campaign, or that it’s dramatically different from everywhere else,” Dawson says

Reinforcement Theorists would look to American research which concludes that the Americans are against behaviour controls. They have [tackled road safety] on passive safety—improved car safety, and improving the road system

So what is the answer – which theory is right? - neither Theory is right or wrong. They both argue their position

Each Theory would argue against the others use of evidence and research methods

Why there remains overwhelming support for the TAC campaign affirming the Agenda Setting function theory there is also notable limitations regarding the evidence used by the TAC research group Sweeney and Associates. The survey format collecting qualitative evidence prompting yes or no answers provide limitations for opinions to be expressed which restricts the validity of the results suggesting changes in drivers behaviour and attitudes. Many conclusions are assumed from these survey responses, and yet they cannot be conclusively confirmed. As media theorist DeFluer suggests, " account has to be taken of individual differences, since even when expected reactions have been observed, their incidence varies according to differences of personality, background, attitudes, intelligence and interests.

Further evidence suggesting the limitations of the TAC's qualitative survey analysis is that they test people's awareness, not any changed behaviour. The TAC's primary target audience still remaining the most significant road offenders supports this. Social Researcher Dennis McQuail's conclusion on the campaign models influence suggests that "the scope for effect or major change is thus intrinsically limited"

The TACs fear arousal model is also criticised as being limited in its sustained effectiveness. Stephen Sutton, Social Psychologists in examing fear arousal communication concludes," A review of the vast findings of fear arousal communications yielded little support for these approaches.

However the Agenda Setting Function theorists would argue that the campaign and its messages have enormous public support, which has also assisted in provoking public debate. This acceptance and recall of the advertisement slogans suggest an impact on public consciousness about the issue of road safety. While the statistics cannot clearly measure changes in driver behaviour they do indicate a significant reduction in the road fatalities and reduced costs to the community. It can be argued further that the public debate aroused by the campaign has maintained driver awareness on the need for road safety, which draws some correlation with the Reinforcement theorist view of the influence of socializing agents.

***(Issues in assessing media influence criteria)***

However the measure of the success of the TAC campaign and its nature and extent of audience influence is still difficult to determine in light of joint efforts by the Victorian Police, Vie Roads and the lack of sufficient research data beyond the agencies working in collaboration with the TAC. While the TAC television advertising campaigns aim to inform and educate the public about driver safety, research is still inconclusive as to whether it can influence behaviour. This is representative of the broader debate where the nature and extent of the media’s influence remains inconclusive. This is because many factors contributing to the audiences responses must be assessed and evaluated. The media and its relationship to the audience are therefore complex and difficult to define. Communication studies and research approaches have endeavoured to quantify this relationship. However audience variables such as the way in which they read texts, their background, location, age, agents of socialization, points of view and modes of address suggest that audiences are individual in the way in which they interact, interpret and process information from the media

As Media Theorist, Trevor Barr suggests" A host of problems arise with attempts ) generalise about media effects, we are all different, human behaviour is extraordinary complex and experiments designed to analyse our responses to the media can possibly isolate the influences of the media from other variables which effect our lives.