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Parental communication and involvement with young drivers

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Parental Communication and Involvement
with
Young Drivers

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of
the requirements for the award of the degree

Masters By Research

From

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

By

MARY PAPAKOSMAS

B.A.(Comm.), Hons Lit., M.Com(Mktg)

SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING

2008

CERTIFICATION

I, Mary A. Papakosmas, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Masters by Research, in the School of Management and Marketing, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Signature

M.A. Papakosmas

24 August 2008

ABSTRACT

This research aims to contribute to young driver safety strategies by focussing on the role of parents, that is, their influence on and communication with novice drivers. In the ongoing efforts to address the issue of young driver safety, parents are a vital resource as, in the majority of cases, they assume the role of supervising driver when their children formally obtain a learner's permit. A qualitative methodology was adopted in order to effectively gather data and explore the issues. A series of focus groups was conducted to document the experiences of parents and the sons and daughters they were teaching to drive.

The study found parents modelled negative behaviour in the years leading up to the learner's permit and during the learning phase, which conflicted with the safe driving habits they attempted to teach the novice. Parents' efforts to communicate with young drivers about safety were largely unsuccessful. Research findings also highlighted parental teaching issues, specifically confidence and competence.

In terms of young drivers, the research found dissonance in relation to two areas: when under parental supervision they drove with less risk than when driving solo or with peers; and the safety information they admitted needing was different to indications they gave their parents. They also had poor driving competence after licensing, yet regarded their licence as a major social milestone which, when reached, gave them a strong sense of maturity and independence.

The findings are discussed in terms of their application to social marketing theory's principle of positive behaviour change for social benefit. This discussion highlighted a

number of practical interventions designed to promote safe driving practices among novice drivers. The interventions utilise both upstream and downstream strategies. They include enhancing driver training and testing in order to address skill and behaviour deficiencies, interventions to address parental driving behaviour, and support for parents as driving teachers. Finally, the implications for further research are also addressed.

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Dedication

for

John, Daniel and William

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